“A DOG HAS FOUR LEGS BUT WALKS IN ONE DIRECTION:” MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING AND ORGANIC AFRICA-INSPIRED RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS IN ORIENTE CUBA

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

African American and African Studies—Doctor of Philosophy
Anthropology—Dual Major

2019

ABSTRACT

"A DOG HAS FOUR LEGS BUT WALKS IN ONE DIRECTION:"
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If religion is about social cohesion and the coordination of meaning, values, and motivations of a community or society, how do communities meaningfully navigate the religious domain in an environment of multiple religious possibilities? Within the range of socio-cultural responses to such conditions, this dissertation empirically explores "multiple religious belonging," a concept referring to individuals or groups whose religious identity, commitments, or activities may extend beyond a single coherent religious tradition. The project evaluates expressions of this phenomenon in the eastern Cuban city of Santiago de Cuba with focused attention on practitioners of Regla Ocha/Ifá, Palo Monte, Espiritismo Cruzado, and Muertería, four organic religious traditions historically evolved from the efforts of African descendants on the island. With concern for identifying patterns, limits, and variety of expression of multiple religious belonging, I employed qualitative research methods to explore how distinctions and relationships between religious traditions are articulated, navigated, and practiced. These methods included directed formal and informal personal interviews and participant observations of ritual spaces, events, and community gatherings in the four traditions. I demonstrate that religious practitioners in Santiago manage diverse religious options through multiple religious belonging and that practitioners have strategies for expressing their multiple religious belonging. The diverse expressions involve characteristics of centered and un-

centered models of multiple religious belonging, as well as attributes of shared reality and complementarity between religious traditions. The research contributes to a more critical understanding of the complexities of eastern Cuban religious expressions and religious traditions of the African Diaspora. Moreover, the project aims to enhance the conceptual literature around multiple religious belonging with data from the Caribbean island of Cuba.

I dedicate this dissertation to the memory of Katherine Barksdale, Robert Gopher, Andriol Stiven Portuondo, Ruth Simms Hamilton, Cedric Robinson, Vincent Harding, and to those who continue the struggle for inclusive visions of the future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are a great many people who supported the process of bringing this dissertation into fruition. I am deeply appreciative of my Graduate Guidance Committee members Jualynne E. Dodson, James A. Pritchett, Mindy Morgan, Glenn Anthony Chambers, Jr., and Mara Leichtman for their advising and persistence in helping me finish this project. I am especially indebted to Prof. Dodson, whose encouragement, guidance, and patience over nearly twenty years of committed mentorship made the dissertation possible. The many past and present members of the MSU African Atlantic Research Team also deserve special recognition for supporting and contributing to this project from its infancy. In particular, I want to acknowledge Sonya Maria Johnson, Alexandra P. Gelbard, Harry Nii Koney Odamtten, William Escalante, Mathew Pettway, Alyce Emory, and Sheyll White, as well as the council of Charles H. Long. I deeply value our time our time spent together and the excellence we brought out of each other.

Dissertation research would not have been achievable without the institutional support of Casa del Caribe and its welcoming and knowledgeable staff in Santiago de Cuba, Cuba. In particular, I am grateful to the director Orlando Vergés Martínez, Madelis Sorio Beatón, Milady, Victor, José Millet, Gladys Reyes, and Abelardo Larduet Luaces. I am also thankful to Juan "Juancho" Martín Portuondo, the Filial de la Asociación Yoruba de Santiago de Cuba, Marta Emilia Cordies Jackson and the Centro Cultural Africano Fernando Ortiz, and the many Cuban religious communities whose members shared their time, perspectives, and trust in support of this research. I greatly appreciate the dedicated fieldwork assistance of Ernesto Camué Marín,

and friendships of Isnay, Omar, Isnaysis, Joel, Neudis, El Tiburón, Adria and family, and many others in the city.

The faculty and staff of the African American and African Studies program and the Department of Anthropology at Michigan State University were enormously supportive over many years and provided key funding that enabled this project to progress. I must thank the College of Arts and Letters, College of Social Science, the MSU Graduate School, and the Alliances for Graduate Education and the Professoriate who also provided generous funding for dissertation research.

Finally, I would like to thank my family, friends, and colleagues for their consistent support. To my parents Ali Zaid and Karen Robertson, Forest Cordova, Mae, Vickie, Reise, Kalongi, Syb, Effie, Destavioun, Joevante, Carolyn, Donika, Alicia, Erika, Jimmy, Sylvia, Kit, Nathan, Anthony, Dustin, Josh, Terry, Danielle, as well as the enduring friendship of Blair Rose Zaid and to my daughter Kiluna, I thank you all for the support and love you offered in your own way.

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INTRODUCTION

AN ILLUSTRATION

Vicente Portuondo Martín was a religious leader who by 1972, while in his early twenties, was building a reputation as a respected spiritual figure in the eastern Cuban city of Santiago de Cuba. In early childhood, Portuondo had a spiritual inclination that led him to pursue ritual education among religious leaders in his Los Hoyos neighborhood. His development was equally guided by his own intuition and sensitivities to spiritual contact. He matured within the rich multi-religious environment of the neighborhood, advancing within sacred traditions of *Palo Monte* and *Regla de Ocha*. At the same time, he developed a strong relationship to a personal *muerto*, "spirit of the dead," for joint community ritual activity in the widely diverse practices of *Muertería*. Palo Monte, Regla de Ocha, and Muertería are three of roughly seven distinct religious expressions that organically developed among Cuba's African descendants. Portuondo's expanding sacred knowledge in the three traditions was put to the test at a moment of crisis in 1972.

In a story shared by his family[1], Portuondo and his elder religious mentor named Reynerio Pérez were involved in an elaborate Regla de Ocha initiation ritual process to *hacerce santo* "make saint" for a male baby. The baby became very ill during the weeklong ceremony and was quickly treated by medical doctors who were unable to stabilize his rapidly deteriorating health. The doctors considered the illness fatal, and soon after declared the child was dead.[2] Portuondo was distressed and did not know what to do. His mother and other family members implored and motivated him to draw upon his deepest spiritual sensitivities and attempt to heal the child. Portuondo and a seasoned Palo Monte practitioner invoked powerful spirits for assistance. Pa Mundo, Portuondo's personal muerto spirit in the Muertería tradition, "mounted"[3] or possessed and controlled Portuondo's body. *Brazo Fuerte,* a Palo spirit force, mounted the body of Portuondo's associate. The two spirits in physical form went to the cemetery together to collect particular materials and brought them back to the home where the child lay. They conducted ritual activity with the deceased child until he was resuscitated back to health. The spirits departed once the healing procedures were complete, and soon after, Portuondo and Reynerio Pérez finished the Regla de Ocha initiation ceremony for the child.

The veracity of the claim that a child died and was brought back to life through spiritual healing is beyond the scope of my interests. Rather, the story's comprehension as true in this community is a testament to the power ascribed to particular religious practices and figures, as

1. This story is a synthesis of accounts from two relatives of Vicente Portuondo Martín in July and August, 2005. One relative remembers the events as they happened though did not participate in the rituals, and the other related the story as told to him by those who attended.
2. I asked for clarity about this death, thinking perhaps that the child was unresponsive or limp, but was repeatedly told that the child was literally declared dead.
3. Cuban religious practicioners describe spirit possession through the verb *montar* (to mount) and the person possessed as a *caballo* (horse), invoking imagry of a spirit mounting a body as one would mount and ride a horse.

well as their capacity to combine disparate areas of sacred knowledge in everyday life. Moreover, the story raises a central concern relevant to the focus of the dissertation. The episode is an example of active engagement in what are commonly understood as different and discrete religious practices, challenging conventional notions of religion and religious boundaries. It also suggests a dynamic role of multiple religious belonging in the composition of an individual or community sacred orientation.

THE DISSERTATION PROJECT

With advances in transportation and communication, cross-cultural contact and multicultural societies are more normative than ever – especially with regard to religion. Individuals must increasingly confront a widening array of religious alternatives, as well as approaches to manage those options. More and more everyday people now view religion itself as an individual choice, as many religious communities compete for membership. The strategies used to manage religious diversity can be widely diffuse and complicate conventional ideas about the relationship between religion and society. If religion is about social cohesion and the coordination of meaning, values, and motivations of a community or society (Geertz 1993), better understanding how communities navigate a milieu of multiple or expanding religious possibilities is increasingly relevant. Developing strategies to manage a multi-religious landscape is particularly challenging for historically oppressed communities. They must navigate invented extensions of their oppression, which can accompany relationships to politically sanctioned religions and practices.

This dissertation project is grounded in African American and African studies as well as socio-cultural anthropology. In an effort to better understand how historically marginalized people navigate a multi-religious environment, this dissertation broadly explores the concept of multiple religious belonging in the African diaspora. In particular, it examines multiple religious belonging in eastern, "*Oriente,*" Cuba. Scholars have frequently studied social responses to multi-religious settings through processes of religious syncretism (Herskovits 1966). Much attention is given to either African cultural expressions applied to Christianity (Raboteau 1978) or Christian expressions involved in Africa-inspired religious traditions (Apter 1991). However, in its variety of definitions, and despite its many critiques, syncretism fundamentally stresses a process of synthesizing disparate elements into a distinctive form.

Conceptually, multiple religious belonging refers to individuals or groups whose religious identity, commitments, or practices extend beyond a single coherent religious tradition (Cornille 2002, 1-2; Dodson 2008, 169-170). The concept generally acknowledges that people may maintain respect for tradition, historical lineage, and boundaries of knowledge even as these are permeable and set within a mutually inclusive rather than exclusive vision of the sacred. Cuba's organic, Africa-inspired religious traditions include *Regla de Ocha/Ifá* (sometimes called *Regla de Lucumí* or *Santería*); *Palo Monte* or *Reglas de Congo*, umbrella designations for particular branches of practice like *Mayombe* and other variants; *Vodú,* and the related but distinctive *Arará*; the *Abakuá* secret male fraternity; *Muertería* or *Bembé de Sao*; and plausibly the variant of *Espiritismo* known as *Espiritismo Cruzado*. These traditions are regarded as "organic" and "Africa-inspired" because they developed from interactions, experiences, and circumstances particular to the Cuban land space, although Vodú's twentieth

century Haitian origins are distinctive. The project probes eastern Cuban expressions of multiple religious belonging and focuses on religious practitioners of Muertería, Espiritismo Cruzado, Palo Monte, and Regla de Ocha/Ifá.

I conducted research in the eastern Cuban city of Santiago de Cuba, a location that my prior observations suggested was an appropriate locale to examine multiple religious belonging. Santiago de Cuba is the largest city in eastern Cuba. The eastern region is geographically demarcated from central and western Cuba by the large *Sierra Maestra* mountain range. Until the twentieth century, eastern Cuba was largely socio-politically isolated due to challenges in transportation and communication. This contributed to the development of a distinctive regional character and identity. Oriente has historical importance as the starting point of Cuba's three major armed independence and revolutionary struggles. It also holds a large migratory population from Haiti and Jamaica that have contributed to its cultural composition. Historically, Oriente has also held the largest proportion of African descendants on the island, receiving West-Central Africans as early as 1522. Indeed, the influx of West-Central Africans may have contributed to the region's reputation as "*la tierra de los muertos*" ("the land of the dead"), as these laborers were known to focus ritual attention on ancestors. Despite these distinctions, religious developments and activities in Santiago and eastern Cuba have received little scholarly attention in English literature.

My research used qualitative research methods to gather data on perspectives, experiences, and events in their natural settings. These methods included directed personal interviews in semi-structured formal and informal formats, participant and field observations of ritual spaces, events, and community gatherings, as well as some oral history work to

contextualize religious community developments in the area. I selected the four religious traditions under review in this study, Muertería, Espiritismo Cruzado, Palo Monte, and Regla de Ocha/Ifá, for several reasons. First, each tradition has been informed by or born out of the intentions and creative labors of the African Atlantic Diaspora. Second, although each tradition shares some broad thematic elements, they are distinguished by ontological foci, ritual practice, and encounters with spirits. Adherents of Regla de Ocha/Ifá largely encounter spirits as royal and ambivalent forces of nature with whom practitioners create submissive but reciprocal relationships. Spiritual dealings within Palo Monte include intensive relationships to spirits of nature and the dead, and in part involve capturing and directing spiritual agency within a framework of labor exchange. Both Muertería and Espiritismo Cruzado involve personal relationships with muertos, many of whom are considered African, but approach the invocation of these spirits with divergent methods. These contrasting forms of approaching spirits offer an opportunity to evaluate the import and utility of multiple religious belonging.

Finally, this project is not meant to be exhaustive. Rather, it offers preliminary findings in an under-researched area in hopes of inspiring and advancing further study.

DISSERTATION LAYOUT

The dissertation is organized into seven chapters. The first chapter reviews in detail the qualitative research methods used in data collection for the project. I discuss how pre-dissertation research excursions with the African Atlantic Research Team to Santiago de Cuba informed site entrée and procedural decisions for gathering data. The chapter then identifies the range of interview and observational data collected, and the techniques used to ensure its

accuracy. The chapter ends with a brief discussion of my positionality in the research site, situating ways my background and presence informed interactions in the field and how I attempted to mitigate bias.

Chapter two locates the project's central focus on multiple religious belonging in literature of the two disciplinary fields of African American and African studies and anthropology. The review finds that multiple religious belonging is not well represented in the literature of either field or in Cuban religious studies, due in part to a reliance on single religious objects of study and on a conceptual use of syncretism to examine religious relationships. I then identify several works that expand the meaning of religion from centered on belief to an emphasis on ritual. The chapter then offers a closer examination of the small literature directly concerned with multiple religious belonging. The discussion notes different perspectives on how the phenomenon is expressed, and possible limitations in its expression. The chapter ends with a discussion of religious traditions of the African Diaspora and features of ritual practice that may inform multiple religious belonging.

The third and fourth chapters are both dedicated to providing historical context for the project. Chapter three situates eastern, Oriente Cuba in Cuban and Caribbean historical developments. It identifies factors that contributed to eastern Cuba's historical isolation and self-reliance in the colonial era, as well as the rise of slavery on the island. Chapter four focuses on historical experiences of African descendents in Oriente and processes involved in cultural and religious development of this group. I explore several social spaces available to enslaved Africans that contributed to ethnic group formations and review the emergence of Africa-inspired religious traditions. The chapter ends with a detailed discussion of three deceased

twentieth century religious figures important in Santiago de Cuba's religious history. Two of these figures were significant in the rise of Palo Monte and Regla de Ocha in the city, and the third is notable for his practice of Muertería and his involvement in increasing the public visibility of Organic, Africa-inspired religious traditions. However, their inclusion also demonstrates early or pronounced manifestations of multiple religious belonging in the city.

The core contemporary data of the dissertation is the subject of chapter five. I begin with a brief discussion of the four religious traditions under review in the project. Next, interviews with seven select respondents are detailed to offer a range of experiences in and perspectives on religious practices in the city. The chapter concludes with a description of three rituals in different religious traditions. These rituals provide insight into each tradition, but the position of each ritual among other religious activities of the respective practitioner community also reveals clues about how multiple religious belonging is organized.

Chapter six analyzes the data collected for its relevance to multiple religious belonging. I identify a range of the phenomenon's expressions at an individual, group, and popular level, and proceed to explore common and divergent views on how and when distinct religious traditions relate. The analysis then probes how spirit forces and spirits of the dead offer areas of mutual intelligibility across religious traditions. The final chapter summarizes the key research findings, noting how articulations and behaviors of respondents evidence a range of different strategies of multiple religious belonging expressions in the city.

CHAPTER 1:

RESEARCH METHODS

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this dissertation is to examine multiple-religious belonging as a human strategy for managing diverse religious practices within a common socio-political environment. I employed methods to investigate this topic shared by African American and African studies and anthropology that were well suited for data-gathering focused on individual interactions and investigative emersion within a social situation – i.e. field research. I gathered data in the eastern Cuban city of Santiago de Cuba using qualitative field research and ethnographic methods, which are designed to allow investigators to observe, participate, and/or conduct interviews over a sustained period of time and in a natural setting.

I used formal and informal directed and semi-structured interviews with religious practitioners in this investigation. Formal interviews were usually about one hour long in duration, while informal interviews lasted about half an hour. I also used systematic observations and observations of practitioners' ritual spaces, events, and community gatherings.

Data collection occurred between December 2017 and February 2018 during a residency of more than two and a half months in the Santiago de Cuba site. This sustained period of living, talking, working, observing, and often participating in ritual activities built on several years of pre-research.[4] It is necessary to briefly discuss the pre-research that led to conceptualizing this project and designing data-collection.

PRE-RESEARCH: COLLECTIVE AND REQUIRED

This dissertation project truly began in 2001 when I took my first trip with the African Atlantic Research Team (AART), which I joined as a freshman in 2000 during my undergraduate studies. The work was based in the Oriente region of Cuba, primarily in the city and Province of Santiago de Cuba. This earlier exposure included travel to other provinces, Pinar del Río, Habana, Matanzas, Las Tunas, Holguín, Granma, and Guantánamo, and my participation was part of AART's research agenda.

The Team is based at Michigan State University and is a mentoring collective of U.S. faculty, students, and community members of varied disciplinary, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Faculty and community leaders support students' higher education, and their research and career development. In 2001, I joined a trip to Cuba to study cross-cultural field research. In each summer after, from 2003 through 2006, I traveled with the group to the island and returned once more in 2011. Each trip from 2003 lasted for one to two months, during which time other students and I conducted individual research projects that advanced the Team's broader investigative interests in Cuba's African descendants' socio-historical

4. Research conducted between 2003 and 2011 received approval from the MSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) under IRB# 03-443; Research conducted between 2017 and 2018 was approved under IRB# x17-1026e.

development and socio-cultural production of community in the African diaspora of the Americas (Johnson 2012; Gelbard forthcoming). These early field experiences served as basis of my undergraduate Senior Honor's Thesis (Zaid 2006), which was the primary inspiration for the dissertation.

One arena of the Team's research is organic religious traditions of African descendants in the Americas. The Team has found that qualitative field research and the inductive process of Grounded Theory are exceptionally suitable and productive approaches to studying religious practices and spiritual issues in these communities. They encourage theoretical thinking that can lead to forming propositions, or at least hypotheses. They also help mitigate imposition of foreign, usually Western European and North American, hegemonic perspectives often inflicted upon communities of color who have been maligned for centuries by many scholars. The dissertation's focus on the concept of multiple religious belonging is derived from AART's use of Grounded Theory to identify behavioral patterns emergent in the research site.

Entrée

It is not easy to access Cuban religious communities and comprehend their practices of distinct, Africa-inspired religious traditions. I was able to enter religious communities and eventually gain an understanding of their practices because the participants knew Prof. Jualynne E. Dodson, AART's Founding Director well. For more than 10 years, she was known for conducting field research while maintaining the integrity of practitioners and their practices (Dodson 2008). As a Research Associate of AART, I too became familiar to respondents and was allowed entrée to several religious communities of Santiago de Cuba. I enhanced this

reputation through consistent return to Cuba, reliable community participation, and sharing of my research work and findings with site respondents.

Before AART members were allowed to travel, each had to participate in the Team's pre-departure research. An important aspect of this was identifying and assessing a target group's experiences in Cuba's long history and the epistemological core of those experiences. No data gathering could begin until a member achieved working familiarity with this information; specifically, a cursory understanding of the epistemological foundation of African inspired religious practices. This process strengthened researchers' cognitive and experiential comprehension of the investigative endeavor. It also provided us with additional abilities to discern links between practitioners' ritual practices and the epistemological core of their tradition. The Team's inductive analysis procedures also helped mitigate imposition of foreign perspectives on practicing communities by allowing patterns to emerge from data.

Dodson and other AART members developed distinctive methodological procedures for conducting cross-cultural field research (Dodson and Zaid forthcoming). The approach is characterized by in-depth on-site training in cross-culture and cross-disciplinary data-collection, collaborative data collection, consistent, systematic, and multiple site residences, and regular, often daily debriefing sessions in which we critically discuss the day's activities. The cross-cultural exposure and training led Team members to pay close attention to practitioners and their communities' epistemological issues. The experiences and preparations occurred during each island visit.

A decades-long institutional relationship between Casa del Caribe and AART facilitated the on-site work of my field research, without which I could not have accomplished this

qualitative research. Casa del Caribe has operated in Santiago de Cuba for nearly 40 years as an intellectual and cultural organization that annually publishes *Del Caribe,* a scholarly peer-reviewed journal. Casa also hosts annual international conferences, symposia, and cultural events focused on cultural production in the region and the city of Santiago. I was able to obtain a research visa because Casa supported the dissertation project, and provided me access to scholarly materials on the nation's religious and cultural traditions. In addition, the organization facilitated introductions to select research respondents and secured access to several private ritual and cultural events. My affiliation with Casa del Caribe enhanced the legitimacy and accountability of my research, because it positioned the work of my project within a recognized Cuban organization.

DATA COLLECTION

My dissertation research employed the approaches and methods I learned as a member of AART. Investigative activities of AART are collective and collaborative efforts. This means that research observations and interviews were conducted in dyad or triad groupings. During interviews, one researcher presents questions and keeps the focus as another takes notes with respondent(s)' permission. Responsibilities alternate in each interview. During systematic observations, each researcher focuses on different elements and components of an event and/or space, and share and compare notes afterward. Each day ends with a debriefing session between all Team members. This is when we share and compare experience in the day's data gathering activities. In this way, data is not merely what one researcher saw, heard, or thought but was the product of the Team's effort. This means that each individual's research

comprehensions and interpretations are incorporated in the collaborative construction of research products.

This strategy bolstered the quantity and quality of data collected because it enabled confusions or misunderstandings to be addressed through dialogue, allowed consistent and collective in-field review to heighten the precision of developmental corrections of techniques, and enhanced multi-disciplinary contributions concerning the data. Whereas long-term, intermittent research visits traditionally are seen as having disadvantages, intermittent visits also have advantages. It can provide insights somewhat akin to stop-motion photography regarding a religious community's long-term development and change of religious features. Over several years, it can demonstrate to community members a researcher's commitment to the site and their reputation.

These methodological research activities formed the foundation of my early fieldwork. They also served as a basis from which to refine research approaches during the 2017-2018 dissertation data gathering session. My pre-research experiences further afforded a greater familiarity with the site and features of religious community life, an ease of navigating everyday living, an established network of professional and research contacts, and a reputation grounded in appraisals of local figures and leaders. Such advantages informed my decision to conduct that work over nearly three months rather than a longer, immersive experience.

This dissertation research project focuses on Santiago de Cuba's African inspired religious communities to discern how practitioners navigate relationships and distinctions between discrete religious traditions. The investigation centers on religious traditions of Regla de Ocha/Ifá, Palo Monte, Espiritismo Cruzado, and Muertería, and primarily asks the following

research questions: What strategy(ies) of expression characterize practitioners' multiple religious belonging? Is participation in or practice of multiple religious traditions indicative of combining efficacious practices found in discrete religious traditions?

Ethnographic research methods proved appropriate for addressing these questions, as researchers can observe and participate in events in their natural settings. In turn, the approach can reveal how relationships and distinctions between discrete religious traditions are articulated and produced in practice.

The religious traditions in this study are communal but private – only a few ritual practices are open to the public. Access generally required a personal relationship of trust and interactions built over time. It's equally important to recognize that most Western analytical categories do not translate easily in Cuban religious fields of practice. This further necessitates qualitative research details to explore emic concepts and engage particular meanings in a local context. While surveys on religious practice or other quantitative research could prove useful to the dissertation work, is extremely difficult for non-Cubans to acquire governmental permission to collect quantitative data.

Qualitative data collection for the dissertation occurred over nearly three months, between December 2017 and February 2018, and built upon eight earlier, intermittent months of field research on religious practices in various Cuban cities and provinces. The universal subject population included all people of Santiago de Cuba, who practice or have practiced at least one of Cuba's Africa inspired or organic religious traditions. However, my focus was collecting data with religious leaders and practitioners whose past or present experiences, training, or active practice demonstrated use of more than one religious tradition. The

traditions are Regla de Ocha/Ifá and Palo Monte, Espiritismo Cruzado, and Muertería, and a practitioner in each is known as *Santero/a or Babalao, Palero/a*, *Espiritista,* and *Muertero/a*. Pre-dissertation research suggested that Santiago de Cuba communities could combine religious practices of these four traditions.

Religious leaders are defined as persons who have been initiated into religious communities, who have initiated others, and who are primarily responsible for the spiritual care of their initiates. In religious traditions where ritual initiation is not prevalent, I regard leaders as those who lead ritual and spiritual advising activities for a community. In addition to leaders, I also sought data from *religious practitioners*, a category loosely including people of varying degrees of experience who have been initiated or active in one or more religious tradition. I likewise engaged community members who have experience attending or participating in religious activities of a tradition, but may not be initiated; they are *religious participants*. I settled on initiation as a socially recognized, preliminary entrance into a religious family line, although there are multiple tiers of religious practice associated with varying degrees of responsibility and/or experience in a tradition, and each of these tiers may include an "initiation." I note other distinctions when relevant.

My data collection occurred in the natural environment of Santiago's religious practitioners, including ceremonial centers, private homes, organization offices, and other venues. The primary location for fieldwork was the Los Hoyos neighborhood, also known as Los Olmos. I selected this neighborhood because of its historical significance to the development of the city's organic and distinctly Cuban religious traditions, and its contemporary status as an active religious area. The practitioners in this area also had an enduring relationship between

Casa del Caribe, which facilitated my entrée. However, fieldwork was not limited to this neighborhood. In the course of expanding my networks, I also interviewed respondents or attended rituals or events in at least six other Santiago neighborhoods, including Santa Rosa, Sueño, Santa Barbara, Vista Alegra, Flores, and Tivolí, and locations near or outside the city, including El Canay, Abel Santamaría, San Luis, El Cobre, Palma Soriano, Pilón del Cuato, and Baranca.

I used the well-known snowball technique to identify most research respondents. Known field acquaintances, Casa del Caribe staff, my research assistant, and members of the African Atlantic Research Team referred me to additional research participants. I conducted one or more interviews with thirty respondents, including ten formal interviews and the rest were informal. Of the thirty respondents, eight were religious leaders initiated in more than one religious tradition, six were leaders initiated in a single religious tradition, eight were active religious practitioners, and eight were religious participants. Thirteen of the thirty respondents were female and seventeen were male. Five were under 30 years old, seventeen were between 30 and 60 years old, and eight were over 60 years old. The thirty interview respondents reflected a range of arrangements of religious practices that were inclusive of Regla de Ocha/Ifá, Palo Monte, Espiritismo Cruzado, and Muertería.

I used two sets of observational data for writing the dissertation. The first set was collected during 2001 and 2011 field research trips. Data were collected in sixteen observations of ritual events and eight observations of public community or cultural events related to religious traditions. From the 2017-2018 field session, I also collected observational data during ten ritual events across four different religious traditions, as well as five public community or

cultural events. Interviews from my earlier field research with ten respondents also helped provide depth to the 2017-2018 interviews.

In the 2017-2018 fieldwork excursion, I traveled alone to Cuba and used Spanish in all conversations. In the first week, I requested help from Casa del Caribe in finding the research and translation assistant who lived locally and was a native Spanish speaker. They introduced me to Ernesto Camué Marín, a 26 year-old male resident of Santiago who was pursuing graduate studies in Anthropology at Universidad de Oriente. I hired Camué and he proved a valuable resource through the duration of fieldwork. He spoke English with intermediate proficiency and was able to assist in my translation work. He accompanied me to interviews and ritual observations, assisted in locating ritual sites and other events, and performed logistical work.

INTERVIEWS

A major source of data about religious practices of the city from my 2017-2018 fieldwork came from interviews. Directed, semi-structured personal interviews in either formal or informal formats proved to be most effective. Interviews lasted no longer than an hour and a half and informed consent for participation in the research was achieved before each interview, in accordance with Michigan State University's Human Research Protection Program guidelines. After introducing the research project, I clarified that all interview participation was voluntary and respondents could choose to keep their identity anonymous, and withdraw from the interview or the study at any time. In addressing issues of religious practices that are private and secret, participants were not coerced to disclose information and were instructed

to only share information that could be made public. When appropriate, informed consent was first sought and granted from a religious community leader before conducting interviews with any single member of that community. This practice contributed to the legitimacy and integrity of the research because it demonstrated respect for local authority structures and enhanced transparency.

Formal and informal interviews were directed and semi-structured in that I memorized primary and some follow-up questions and tried to express them in a manner adjusted to contextual factors of the interview rather than use a strict sequential reading. Primary questions were open-ended, and follow-up questions included a mix of open- and close-ended questions. I used follow-up questions to probe details, address answers that appeared to veer off-topic, pursue a new area of insight initiated by the respondent, or rephrase earlier questions for internal verification of ideas.

I developed a bilingual interview instrument before entering the field, but adjusted and corrected it based on insights from the field. For instance, early attempts to ask direct questions about either how people manage religious diversity or practice multiple religious traditions proved ineffective and confused respondents. I adjusted interview questions to attend to four major areas of concern: biographical information and religious background; personal descriptions of familiar religious traditions; accounts or experiences of relationships between and among religious traditions; and notable historical figures and events in the development and practice of religious traditions in the city and region.

Some interviews proceeded in a clear question and answer format, and in quiet and private settings. However, not all respondents were receptive because formal interviews are

not normal within the culture of religious Cuban communities. When respondents resisted formality, I shifted the format to a conversational one, often using anecdotes or asking basic questions to generate thematic dialogue.

At other times, respondents were not available for a formal interview because it was logistically too difficult. To manage this challenge, I regularly positioned myself in opportunity rich environments – religious ceremonies, cultural events, a 'House-Temple' location, or religiously active neighborhoods. Chance encounters and opportunities to interact with possible respondents were more likely in such locations. I found that informal interviews could occur more easily during ritual activity "downtimes," and served two purposes. First, I was able to converse with community members while they were attending activities aligned with religious topics. Second, many respondents seemed to regard ritual settings as appropriate time and locations for discussing religious information.

I attempted to interview respondents at least twice, which generally enabled internal verification of their responses. This strategy also allowed me to probe previous ambiguities and to externally verify a respondent's information based on new information. The quality of information shared also was improved by conducting two interviews per respondent. Initial interviews with respondents, particularly those with whom I had limited previous interactions, were occasionally more of an interview and evaluation of me than the other way around. In these instances, interviewees spoke in general terms to answer my questions. They used the interview themes to probe my background and interests. One respondent even embedded a *dilogún* (cowrie shell divination in Regla de Ocha) reading during the interview in order to determine my intentions; casting shells and questioning *oricha* (spirit forces of Regla de Ocha)

about me while simultaneously discussing characteristics of Regla de Ocha in response to my questions.

By conducting a second interview, initially skeptical or cautious respondents were more open and detailed in conversations with me, especially if they had observed my presence in ritual events that conveyed a certain amount of trust gained from other practitioners. Additionally, after an initial interview, some respondents invited me to their ritual events and these occasions constituted another form of follow-up that included conversations and observable practices. No matter the processes, respondents were more comfortable and supportive of correcting my errors and sharing insights if they agreed to a second interview or interaction.

Nearly all interviews occurred with the support of my research assistant and translator. We discussed what information we knew about an interviewee and identified key areas for them to cover. We arrived at interviews together but the interview format varied in formal and informal settings. Generally, I led a formal interview in Spanish while my assistant took notes on responses. Occasionally, my Spanish proved difficult for respondents to understand and I would switch to English while he translated my questions into Spanish. There also were occasions when I needed quick clarity on a respondent's statement in order to proceed. My assistant would clarify the point and the interview would continue. In informal interviews, the research assistant would either participate in the conversation or position himself on the periphery of the conversation. On a few occasions, I conducted an interview alone.

No matter the interview format, the research assistant and I would leave and find a private area as soon as possible where we debriefed. We would discuss what we heard, note

discrepancies in our understanding or discrepancies between respondents. We noted thematic relationships to insights from other respondents and identified next steps. I reviewed notes from interviews, debriefing sessions, and if available, listened to interview recordings to produce a narrative account of each interview in my field journal.

In addition to the debriefing sessions, the research assistant and I would meet at least once a week to evaluate the project's status, identify next steps and make necessary adjustments. Next steps could constitute such activities as evaluating whether a follow-up interview was needed, if a particular line of questioning should be adjusted, or if a type of observation should be sought. We also adjusted the research plan. For example, we once noticed that we had an overrepresentation of Regla de Ocha respondents, so we adjusted to include Palo respondents. On another occasion, we found that respondents' historical accounts tended to include notable religious figures that were male. We adjusted the interview instrument to ask targeted questions about the city's notable female religious figures and female involvement in multiple religious traditions.

I utilized audio, video, and photographic recording equipment during parts of the research. I used audio recording during interviews whenever possible, and I always asked for explicit permission beforehand. Video was generally reserved for portions of occasional ritual or cultural events. I also used photography for these events, as well as to document sacred space displays, family history documents, or portraits of religious figures. In earlier, pre-research years, I used a camcorder, a portable tape recorder, and a camera. In the more recent research, I used a smart phone for recording audio, video, and photography. This proved less conspicuous and obtrusive because many Cubans own and use smart phones. Previously, most

forms of technology were inaccessible to Cubans, especially citizens living in historically marginalized neighborhoods. When working with practitioners in these areas, most of whom were my respondents, the presence of any form of technology could be flashy and distracting or, at worst, cause for suspicion. Suspicion often arose from previous experiences with outsiders, especially foreigners and tourists who often recorded practitioners' religious activities, with a focus on the camera's ability to dramatize, and then sold and promoted the images as "exotic." Indeed, I personally witnessed such behavior in pre-dissertation observations of rituals in 2004 and 2011. My research, as well as that of AART, has always been sensitive to the integrity of Cubans' suspicions regarding the use of technology within their religious activities.

OBSERVATIONS

The dissertation research also examined observable expressions that inform religious practices and relationships in the studied traditions. These included but were not limited to dance moves, placement order of members in spaces, gender comparisons, presence and incorporation of children, location of elders, food preparation and consumption, and many other components of religious activities. Such expressions were observed at or near approximately thirteen different sacred alter spaces or ritual spaces of religious events or community gatherings, and innumerable informal observation of respondents' interactions. In addition to periodic direct observation and continuous monitoring procedures, I primarily employed the use of reactive observations wherein participants knew of my presence as an

observer. These observations helped inform, corroborate, or identify inconsistencies in respondents' verbal discourse about religious practices.

Observations of sacred spaces' physicality were important for the research because these spaces are special to practitioners. They also are powerful reflections of distinct religious sensibilities regarding cosmology, practice boundaries, and religious purposes. This is in addition to the reality that ritual activities regularly occur in these spaces. Sacred alter spaces are fundamental to Cuba's distinct, African inspired religious and spiritual practices and I conducted descriptive observations of individual sacred spaces and of community centers. Observations of sacred spaces often occurred as a part of interview sessions, but sometimes independently. During interviews, I specifically asked to view the sacred space and requested respondents to share information about the space's composition, significance(s), or any information they wished to share. On ritual occasions, I usually observed sacred spaces without the benefit of a tour or discussion, but I was attentive to available elements and materials used, particularly materials normally associated with a tradition. I gave general observation to sacred elements wherever I went. For instance, if invited to visit a home, I regularly noted sacred elements that were visible and on display.

I used participant observations of ritual and community activities as a data collection method to help inform how practitioners, as individuals or as a community, simultaneously engage more than one Africa inspired religious tradition. Two factors motivated this choice. First, ritual work was inherently participatory and consistently required inclusive interaction in order to discern the reality that practitioners engaged during the ritual occurrences. Not to participate, or to use unobtrusive observation, would risk failing to record ritual activities that

are so contextually driven. The second factor that motivated the choice of participant observations was that seldom did the frequently intimate spaces of ritual action provide an unobtrusive position. To attend an event but stand apart from the activities would have been so abnormal, it would have been disruptive or suggested disrespect.

Even as a participant observer, I attempted to minimize my presence as a distraction or intrusion to ritual activities. For instance, I chose clothing that blended in rather than stood out. The attempt was to avoid dressing down in unkempt or ragged clothes or dressing up in more semi-formal or formal attire such as slacks and a button-up shirt. I usually wore clean jeans, t-shirt, and sneakers, loosely consistent with informal, outdoor wear of Cubans, and never adorned my body with jewelry or other signs of wealth. As a foreigner, I was critically aware of self-presentation that might align me with typical regional tourists and I tried to avoid those signals for which Cubans were attuned. For example, I frequently expressed gratitude and humility rather than judgment, and sometimes, to convey a non-tourist, researcher status in conversations, I would insert a Santiagueran idiom or knowledge of local history. My concern also extended to the use of technology. On occasions when I had been granted permission to record but personally felt uncomfortable doing so, my Cuban research assistant would film or photograph the event. This was normal, especially since smart phones have become more available to Cubans.

POSITIONALITY

My personal background and status are relevant to situate my presence in the field and I seek to clarify how these features may have informed my experiences. I am an African

American, heterosexual male from a mixed race family, and was over 35 years old during the last trip to do fieldwork. My light brown complexion was not particularly conspicuous. My status as a foreigner and U.S. citizen speaking intermediate Spanish proved far more influential and relevant to Cubans' perceptions and expectations of me in fieldwork interactions. I attempted to assuage the possibility of stereotypes and suspicion by earning a local reputation as a trustworthy researcher through my practice and behaviors. My association with a U.S. university and with Casa del Caribe also may have enhanced my status and reputation with research respondents.

Also of note, I was a practitioner member in a community of a Cuban religious tradition. In my fieldwork, I did not find evidence that my membership was prohibitive to conducting reliable research. Membership in a religious community can pose research risks, but I was able to methodologically adjust investigative procedures to manage the risk. I do not dismiss, disprove, or denigrate the integrity of any Cuban practitioners' cosmological orientation, epistemological value foundations, or ritual practices, and I did not leverage my Cuban religious affiliation to actively or covertly judge traditions or practitioners.

In each field research trip, I used the Cuban housing option of a *casa particular* (private house) rented room in a private residence, the location of which was separated from my research network or activities' sites. By residing outside of research sites, while spending most days and nights inside practitioner community areas, I conveyed a respectful distance from respondents and enhanced a sense of impartiality among the diverse religious communities. It also afforded a modicum of privacy and writing space to ensure field notes and other tasks could be competed.

CHAPTER 2:

LITERATURE REVIEW AND APPROACHING MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING

INTRODUCTION

Several academic disciplines informed the research and writing of this dissertation, but the primary arenas were African American & African studies and socio-cultural anthropology. It was a major challenge to incorporate literature that addresses theoretical concerns regarding the Caribbean America's African diaspora, the research population of eastern Cuban African descendants, and practitioners belonging to multiple religious traditions. The phenomenon of multiple religious belonging in Cuba concerns individuals of practice communities whose sacred activities include rituals and other behaviors associated with more than one religious tradition. For the most, the materials I reviewed helped provide theoretical insights and other clarities regarding religion and multiple religious belonging, including literature from the two disciplinary arenas of my dual degree. I also considered literature that engaged religions of the African diaspora and noted common themes and distinctive features of geographic and social complexity. With African descendants in Cuba as the center, literature on religious traditions of the island was crucial. My intent was to identify salient areas covered and those in need of further research. This chapter discusses significant literature in these three categories with an

emphasis on discerning where and how studying multiple religious belonging can contribute to the advancement of existing knowledge on topics of religion in the Americas' African diaspora of the Caribbean. The chapter also explores theoretical approaches useful in conceptualizing multiple religious belonging in African diaspora religious traditions.

RELIGION AND THE SINGULAR OBJECT OF ANALYSIS

Much of Western civilization's ideas about religion center on individuals within a single community of religious practitioners or the organization of such communities. This conception conceals the idea of individuals and communities that simultaneously practice more than one religious tradition. As a consequence, the topic is not well discussed, understood, or elaborated in either African American & African studies or anthropological literature, and is only of peripheral interest to most studies of Afro-Cuban religions. Although African American & African studies is a relatively new academic discipline, its literature draws upon a long legacy of investigations into religion in the African diaspora. However, this literature emphasizes probing qualities that distinguish primarily Christian-based African American religious practices in the United States at different historical moments (Dodson 2002; Du Bois 1963 [1903]; Hurston 1930; Pipes 1970; and Raboteau 1978). Other works examine themes in historical and contemporary religious traditions among African descendants in the Caribbean (Chevannes 1994; Taylor 2001; Henry 2003) and South American (Gibson 2001; Harding 2003), and equally rely on focal religions to center the studies. Foundational literature in the anthropology of religion also does not well explore the idea of multiple religious belonging. Influential religious thinking ranging from Emile Durkheim's (1964 [1915]) thesis of religion as societal cohesion, to

Clifford Geertz' (1993) interpretive attention to religion as the ideal model of and for reality, misses multiple belonging practices. These and other classic discussions envision religion as a bounded and singular set of cosmological beliefs that comprise a single religious tradition, with adherents viewed as committed to practicing the tradition. This academic legacy has directed most thinking toward a one-to-one correlation between religious practices and a single religious tradition.

SYNCRETISM AND RELIGIOUS RELATIONSHIPS

In addition to a strong focus on singular religious traditions, considerable scholarly attention is given to the concept of syncretism to address how marginalized people, i.e. African descendants in the African diaspora, navigate religion in multi- or cross-cultural environments. When boundaries between religions appear blurred, scholars often utilize syncretism to analyze the ambiguous relationships between religions and their practitioners. In so doing, interest usually ends at the analysis of a syncretic religion's multiple religio-cultural influences and why such integrative efforts were undertaken, which avoids continuing adaptive developments of a multi-religious milieu.

Syncretism broadly concerns a blending or synthesis of elements of different religions. Early Christian writers used syncretism to derogatively describe religious blending in Christianity, but anthropologist Melville Herskovits (1966) was among early twentieth century scholars to highlight its socio-psychological use in situations of cross-cultural contact. For him, syncretism was a process linking conceptual analogies between disparate cultures as a social adaptation within a larger acculturation process (1966, 57). He provided evidence for this

assertion by noting how African descendants equated Catholic saints with African spirits in Haiti, Brazil, and Cuba, which also facilitated retention of fragmented African homeland knowledge. While critiqued for essentializing African and European traditions and regarding African descendants' active and laborious cultural production under duress as passive resistance (Mintz and Price 1992, 9-14), Herskovitz inspired considerable scholarly interest exploring syncretic religious expressions and linking these to issues of cultural continuity in a dominant/subordinate culture interaction framework (Camara 1988; Greenfield and Droogers 2001; Lefever 1996). Syncretism has become a popular area for examining multi-religious interactions, influences, and borrowings, but still ultimately relies on the syncretic religion as a single object of analysis.

Scholars have challenged several assumptions in the concept of syncretism. The propensity to explore and identify attributes of African cultural continuity related to syncretism has received particular scrutiny. Some authors have undermined syncretism's embedded assumption of timeless and pure African ethnicities, noting dynamic historical contingencies in continental and diasporic ethnogenesis (Palmié 2008; Thornton 1998b; Peel 2003). Others stress that not all customs or practices that seem African should be presumed to have only African roots (Nicholls 1999, 49-50). A broad challenge against syncretism is leveled with the argument that all cultural expression is a process that regularly and normally borrows from multiple sources (Stewart 1999, 41). Others revive syncretism insofar as the concept becomes popularly embraced or controversial relative to strategies around notions of authenticity, hybridity, and purity (Stewart and Shaw 1994, 11). These discussions highlight problems in the

application of syncretism, particularly its focus on cultural continuity in cross-cultural blending or interaction in the religious sphere.

However, theoretical conversations about syncretism imply an antagonistic relationship between the dominant religion of those in power, and the religions of others with less power, particularly non-Christians. Much of the above literature finds at least part of its subject matter in the encounter and interactions between oppressed groups and European colonial authorities and missionaries. Consequently, major themes of these encounters concern forces of imposition and resistance. The debated cultural outcomes of this dialectic fall within a range of degrees of religious conversion, preservation, or syncretism. In each outcome, there is generally an absence of conceptual space afforded to the possibility of multiple religious belonging, or to the possibility of cooperative relations in the multi-religious environment, especially among different factions of the oppressed. These two broadly underdeveloped themes are addressed in the present research project.

Multiple religious belonging and cooperative religious relationships are largely underdeveloped themes, but are sometimes subsumed within elastic views of religious syncretism. For instance, Roger Bastide's study of African-Catholic syncretic religious movements among low-status, mixed-race Brazilians included a discussion of "magical syncretism" governed by a "law of accumulation" (2007 [1960], 277-79). The idea of magical syncretism manifests when one ritual or religious tradition fails to resolve an issue, and another is brought into play. The circumstances allow for the implementation of alternative spiritual appeals, given the existence of diverse religious traditions with a reputation for efficacy.

The idea of magical syncretism occurs and has occurred in circumstances where efficacy toward resolving a particular issue was prioritized above or without concern for exclusive allegiance to a single orthodox religion. Bastide distinguished this concept from religious syncretism (2007 [1960], 262), which is concerned with conceptual analogies between religions at the level of cosmological representation for the sake of multicultural coexistence. While the circumstances of magical syncretism do not necessarily express multiple religious belonging, they equally do not exclude it and could very well inspire practice in multiple religious traditions. This possibility was a focus of my dissertation research.

At best, religious syncretism has an ambiguous relationship to multiple religious belonging. For the most part, syncretism ultimately concerns a new synthesis of disparate sacred elements into a single tradition, either through a correspondence or appropriation of deities, or as strategic cross-cultural borrowing. However, in instances where scholars encounter people whose practice may be multiple rather than blended, syncretism is also a name given to their more accumulative attitude toward religious participation (Bastide 2007 [1960]). Syncretism thus carries the dual, if not competing qualities of a process of religio-cultural synthesis and an ethos of religio-cultural openness. These dual meanings raise questions about whether multiple religious belonging is an attribute of syncretism, if syncretism is a feature of multiple religious belonging, or if, as Rita Gross (2015, 35-36) suggests, both are somewhat distinctive approaches to belonging in the context of religious diversity. While the lines between the two concepts may not be rigid, this study finds it likely that multiple religious belonging is a phenomenon deserving of analytical distinction. In exploring the phenomenon, the research also addresses the underdeveloped area of cooperative religious relations among

historically oppressed groups and avoids centering the project on a single religious tradition or the issues of African cultural continuity therein.

CUBAN RELIGIOUS LITERATURE

Scholarship about Cuba's organic, Africa-inspired religious traditions is uneven and vastly skews in favor of elaborating Regla de Ocha/Ifá or Santería as the Africa-inspired religious tradition par excellence of Cuba (Brown 2003b, 5). The emphasis is in line with a broader trend of African diaspora scholarship favoring Yoruba diaspora developments as implicitly indicative of African experiences across the Atlantic (Clarke 2004), as well as considerable literature elaborating Yoruba history and traditions in West Africa (Bascom 1991[1969]; Barber 1981; Matory 1994; Peel 2003). Works on Cuban Ocha have provided a wealth of theoretically and historically nuanced investigations, ranging from conceptual debates around African cultural continuity in the historical development of the tradition (Ortiz 1995 [1947]; Herskovits 1966; Palmié 1993; Ramos 2003), to its influence on Cuban nationalism (Miller 2000; Ayorinde 2004) and economy (Holbraad 2004), to cultural factors enabling its remarkable expansion to the United States and other Caribbean and Latin American locales (Canizares 1994; Lefever 1996; Brandon 1997; Beliso-De Jesus 2013). Indeed, entire volumes have been dedicated to elaborating particular oricha spirit forces (Barnes 1997; Otero and Falola 2013), while other studies have explored the tradition's healing knowledge (Sandoval 1979; Brandon 1991), aesthetic qualities (Flores-Peña and Evanchuk 2010), as well as ritual language (Wirtz 2007). While the vast majority of this scholarship is centered in western Cuba, there are efforts to

elaborate Regla de Ocha in the eastern region, in both Spanish (Larduet 2014) and English (Wirtz 2007).

Cuba's other Africa-inspired traditions have received considerably less English-language scholarly attention and are most frequently included in works that offer panoramic discussions of Cuban or Caribbean traditions (Barnet 2001; Dodson 2008; Murrell 2009; Fernandez Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 2011). Palo Monte has begun to receive some English-language development, focusing on its historical development (Nodal 2001; Dianteill 2002; Monroe 2007), ritual activity (Ochoa 2010), representations of slavery (Routon 2008), and philosophical implications (Palmié 2006), which build on Cuban anthropologist Lydia Cabrera's (1954) pioneering work on the tradition, as well as that of Joel James (2006). However, Palo remains a marginal interest in scholarship even as the linguistic group to which it belongs has older historical roots in Cuba than the Yoruba. Espiritismo or Espiritismo Cruzado in Cuba has also received minor attention. Cuban scholars José Millet (1996) and Ángel Lago Vieito (2001) explore historical developments and distinctions in practice within variants of the tradition, while English-language scholarship has examined themes such as altar spaces (Bettelheim 2005), boundaries between variants (Espirito Santo 2010), and cultural memory (Pérez 2011). Muertería is largely absent from research in Spanish and English, although Abelardo Larduet Luaces (2014) does offer some discussion of it in Oriente. Casa del Caribe, the Santiago de Cuba-based scholarly organization that coined the term, has also published some practitioner testimonials that offer insight (González Pérez 1997; Portuondo 1997).

In addition to sharing an almost exclusive geographical focus around the Cuban capital of Havana or nearby Matanzas province, these and many other Spanish language works

approach Africa-inspired religious practices as bounded, isolatable, and relatively autonomous systems of worship, using a religion, or a cult in some cases, as their primary object of study. In doing so, these works offer less attention to areas of interaction, movement, or sharing between members of different Africa-inspired traditions, or how such activities between members of differing groups informs the constitution of any one tradition. Rather, most works only give generalized attention to social interactions, and these are usually concerned with historical origins of a tradition. There are dominant overlapping narratives recurring in most discussions of the origins of Cuba's Africa-inspired religious traditions, especially Ocha. One narrative describes old or new African ethnic configurations charting out and substantiating the traditions that exist today in what Palmié calls "the theme-park approach" (Palmié 2002, 159). This view stresses the ethno-cultural African heritage of traditions rather than cross-cultural interactions, linking for instance Ocha to the Yoruba, Palo Monte to the Kongo, Vodú to the Ewe-Fon or Haitians, Abakuá to the Efik, and so on (Barnet 2001). The ethno-specific character of Cuban *cabildos* (mutual aid societies) is an oft-cited historical piece of evidence in support of this view, but the focus on ethnic origins has limitations and can obscure important socio-historical elements of religious composition (Palmié 2008). Another narrative is the general acknowledgement that Cuba is a transculturative environment, with many different cultural groups interacting, competing, and influencing each other's meaning of culture on the island (Ortiz 1995 [1947], 97-103). This is the idea of a melting pot in which different cultures are mixing together. While there is conceptual space here to explore interactions among African groups, examining such interactions is usually either omitted for lack of data, or considered a generalized feature of cultural development from which isolatable cultural elements are

difficult to ascertain (Cabrera 1954). There is a recent trend in scholarship (Dianteill and Swearingen 2003; Palmié 2013) that questions the boundaries of sacred knowledge and religious traditions as objects of study. However, these works mostly challenge analytical over-reliance on African cultural continuity or emphasize a practitioner-scholar dynamic that increasingly creates a feedback loop between religious practice and the scholarship produced about it. Other sources bring attention to the flexibility of religious boundaries in shifting discourse about religious traditions among practitioners (Wirtz 2007). These works are helpful in deconstructing rigid reifications of religious traditions and highlighting fluidity and change in practice, but still tends to overlook cross-permutation or dynamic relations between different traditions or spiritual family (related through initiation) genealogies.

Where cross-cultural religious influences find the most detail is in discussions of syncretism. This view asserts the prevalence of specific cross-cultural influences between Spanish Catholicism and African cultural understandings, always citing as evidence the ways in which Africans developed a system of correspondence between their divinities and Catholic Saints (Herskovits 1966; Stevens-Arroyo 2002). While this subject was discussed above, there are a few points worth mentioning here. One is that the Cuban syncretism literature de facto underdevelops relations between different African groups in favor of the more imbalanced power relations between Africans and the Spanish in colonial Cuba. It is also largely a historical endeavor, emphasizing cultural mixture in the early development of now discrete traditions rather than their ongoing evolution. Further, conceptualizations of Cuban syncretism, whether as a condition (Barnet 2001) or as cultural politics (Palmié 1995), do not necessarily account for

multiple religious belonging, even as syncretism is invoked to describe a relatively open sense of spirituality in Cuba (Mosquera 1996, 226-227).

Cuban Literature and Multiple Religious Belonging

While there are isolated statements sprinkled throughout the literature on contemporary Cuban practices that recognize the complexity of cross-religious activity, few give sustained conceptual, or even descriptive attention to the phenomenon. Of those that do, there are diverging perspectives about the meanings or motivations undergirding what this study identifies as multiple religious belonging in Cuba. Palmié (2002, 159-200) offers the most rigorous discussion in his analysis of a growing relationship between Regla de Ocha and Palo Monte in Havana. Increasingly, he observes, practitioners engage both traditions even as there remains a general preference to maintain boundaries in rituals, leadership roles, and initiatory kinship rather than blending the two into a single practice. He eschews recourse to either syncretism or cultural origins to analyze their relationship, focusing instead on issues of religious morality in the relationship between the two traditions. Among respondents in his study, Ocha and Palo appeared related within a nature/culture dichotomy such that Ocha is a "cool," "civilized," and "refined" tradition of royal divinities largely operating within a morality of reciprocal benevolence, and Palo is a "hot," "powerful," and "violent" tradition engaging the dead within an ambivalent morality of contractual or exploitative relations. Although the moral ambivalence ascribed to Palo also occurs within Ocha, Palmié argues that the continuing relevance of the dual moralities explains the prevalence to practice both, while their contrary attributes motivates the hesitation to unify them. Palmié ultimately argues that the trend of

practice appears moving in the direction of synthesis, via the incorporation of Palo into an Oricha-dominated cosmology, but that the two have not yet converged (195-196).

Other scholars have raised additional possible explanations for multiple practice, often centering on issues of Cuban racial identity (Cabrera 1986; Wirtz 2007; Espirito Santo 2010). Carbrera offers a rare historical view through describing the nineteenth century Havana-based *La Regla Kimbisa del Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje* mutual aid society, whose "mulatto" founder sought to incorporate Palo, Ocha, Espiritismo, Abakuá, and Catholicism within a mostly "white and mulatto" religious community. The controversial group faced criticism from black Cubans for both actively blending multiple traditions, and for sharing the secrets of so many traditions with white Cubans. Yet, Cabrera suggests the founder's integration of traditions and strategic initiation of prominent whites was designed to promote racial integration, and thereby diminish religious persecution and elevate the status of disparaged African traditions in the eyes of nineteenth Cuban society. She further notes financial motives, as costs for membership and multiple initiations bankrolled the mutual aid society's purchase of freedom for several enslaved Africans. In contrast to Cabrera's instrumentalist view on racial dimensions of religious practice, Wirtz and Espirito Santo identify more expressive racial attributes in contemporary Cuban religious practices, though from different perspectives. Wirtz identifies popular attitudes that racialize Cuba's organic traditions on a scale of intensity, situating Palo as extremely African or black, Espiritismo as white European, and Regla de Ocha as an open middle ground (2007, 42-43). Alternatively, Espirito Santo describes the racial scale by way of variants of Espiritismo, positioning the use of African techniques for spiritual contact against the "scientific spiritism" of mostly white Cubans (2010, 76). The implication of both studies

suggests links between composition of a community's racial identity and its religious orientation, such that certain religious elements are incorporated to promote corresponding facets of identity.

Cunha (2013) and Vélez (2000) use biographic detail to suggest that personal experiences and factors internal to religious traditions are important in the layered composition of a religious person. Both find that experiences of illness or crisis may encourage individuals to pursue multiple traditions in seeking the most efficacious remedy, relating to a strategy of ongoing accumulation. However, the data from Cunha and Vélez also suggest the presence of another possibility in which divinatory knowledge may inform multiple religious belonging. Both note instances where spirits of one tradition, Regla de Ocha, may communicate an imperative to join other traditions, given the attributes and circumstances of the person involved. Although not described as such, this data suggest the presence of traditions or figures that act as "culture brokers" within a diverse religious field. Such a finding would be worthy of more theoretical or conceptual elaboration.

In addition to arguments regarding competing moralities, instrumental and expressive politics of racial identity, pragmatic accumulation, and cultural brokerage, Dodson argues that Cuba's "integrated religious plurality" phenomenon may also be a product of a shared epistemological foundation that characterizes an eastern Cuban regional cultural ethos (2008, 169-173). The author suggests that many Africa-inspired religious traditions of Oriente Cuba have produced interrelated and interdependent relationships, grounded in a distinctly regional ethos privileging ancestors, which has strong cultural linkages to the area's Kongo heritage and majority African-descendant population. More than ethnic particularity, Oriente Cuba's

regional distinction is fundamentally based in its semi-autonomous historical development. The historical isolation from central and western Cuba's growth initiated a distinctive historical trajectory of cultural and religious dynamics that necessitates further clarification.

This dissertation project aims to both expand a peripheral area of literature on Cuban religion and elaborate within an emerging conversation about multiple religious belonging on the island.

EXPANDING THE MEANING OF RELIGION

Western civilization largely views religions as exclusively doctrinal systems of belief that articulate ideas about truths, life, and death within a community of adherents. This places exaggerated emphasis on belief, text, and singular religious commitment, when in fact religious forms in the world are much more diverse. Several authors have questioned assumptions about religious singularity, primacy of belief, and the expectation of unique commitment. They often critique the analytical integrity and veracity of Western ideas attributed to all religions, which also informs an approach to multiple religious belonging.

For example, Charles H. Long (1995) identifies the European Enlightenment roots of religion as a concept and critiques it as grounded in a racialized and false dichotomy of civilized versus primitive behavior. Brian Pennington (2005) questions the intrusive political use of a single concept of religion in the administration of European colonialism. In each case, a narrow view of religion largely primarily consistent with Christianity problematically represented other or different religious expressions. Malcolm Ruel (1997) and Rodney Needham (1972) challenge the centrality of belief in scholarly religious discourse, because it is a projection modeled on

Western Christianity, or because it presumes a total collective acceptance of religious ideas that can actually be unstable or finite in duration. Still others have produced literature that challenges the notion that religious rituals only function to express and strengthen held beliefs, a common theme in discussions of faith-based traditions. Roy Rappaport (1999) and Karin Barber (1981) note how religious ritual enactment, or religious narration (Levi-Strauss 1963; Davis 1999), facilitate an order of belief.

More recently, Rita Gross (2015) and others (Harvey 2000) have highlighted what might be called "ethno-religions" that are tied to a particular culture and location. These traditions articulate a general lack of concern among adherents for asserting universal relevance or imperial expansion of their sacred views. In other words, they appear to have less need for exclusive claims to universal truth.

Scholarship that questions boundaries of knowledge offers a more direct challenge to generalized assumptions about religion and to the primacy of religious singularity. Talal Asad (1986) extends Michel Foucault's (1980) concern with the relationship between power and domains of knowledge into the religious sphere. For Asad, religions like Islam are not objective and singular totalities, but rather "discursive traditions" produced and reproduced through discourses of competing power interests. They draw from the past, often texts, to inform instruction of form and purpose of practices. Any sense of bounded religious singularity is not objective fact but rather the product of a discursive strategy. Such a view finds support in texts examining, for instance, the "Africanization of Christianity" (Meyer 2004) or religious traditions of the African diaspora that become discursively anchored and reproduced around notions of slavery and Africa (Scott 1991). Asad's perspective also informs how an expectation of unique

and singular religious commitment is an arbitrary ideal subject to social decisions and discursive strategy in particular religions, rather than a categorical attribute of religion writ large. Some religions may articulate a competitive attitude toward religious alternatives and enforce singular commitment under threat of exclusion, but the same does not necessarily hold for all religions. While Asad acknowledges a multiplicity, or minimally localized variation within what are often considered singular religions, he falls short of elaborating a capacity or advantage in practicing multiple religious traditions. However, the notion of discursive traditions and attention to the importance of authorizing power over sacred knowledge reveals important dimensions of the process by which interreligious practice may be produced and coordinated.

Challenges to rigid and conventional notions of religion do not directly address multiple religious belonging, but identify academic spaces in which the concept could take shape. Such literature facilitates greater appreciation of the diversity within human religious practices and portends potential approaches to multiple religious belonging, if researchers and scholars are prepared to de-center the primacy of belief and the conditionality of belief to grasp the generative capacity of ritual.

MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING

Multiple religious belonging is relatively new concept in academia, but it has strong potential for addressing contours of religious practices that involve more than one tradition. Literature in this area broadly acknowledges the possibility that humans can engage multiple religious traditions to fulfill various social or individual needs. Multiple religious belonging disrupts the binary view in which a society's religious diversity is necessarily competitive, and

enables an exploration of cooperative co-existence without defaulting to syncretism. One need not necessarily choose between one religion and another, or forsake one religious tradition to belong to another.

Although the literature on multiple religious belonging is not abundant, Catherine Cornille's Christianity-centered anthology offered an early examination focused on the phenomenon (2002). Cornille ultimately argued against the possibility of multiple religious belonging in any rigid sense of expression because religious belonging, ideally, involved a total and unique commitment to the ultimate reality articulated in a religious tradition (2002, 3-4). Consequently, multiple belonging necessarily presented as a problem or tension to be resolved among competing paths to the sacred. However, she noted that it was a larger problem among monotheistic religions with claims to absolute and exclusive truth, and that it could be less of a problem when religions seem to share a similar vision of an ultimate reality (2002, 2-6).

The views of multiple religious belonging as a problem or tension to be resolved, as well as a centering of Christian concerns in the phenomenon's expressions are themes shared by other authors. Researchers concerned with questions of belief or cosmological coherence in multiple belonging call attention to doctrinal or theological tensions. For example, Peter Phan (2003) studied a collection of Christian writers who sought insider experiences and intellectual mastery of monastic or contemplative branches of Asian religions. He highlighted that their goal was authentic insider experiences, but concluded that the tension between their Christian doctrine and their existential experiences in non-Christian traditions was difficult to reconcile. The tension resulted in the expression of a primary and secondary or auxiliary religious identity, such as a "Christian Buddhist," wherein one religious identity was subverted to or qualified by

another to indicate fundamental and supplemental belonging (Phan 2003, 509-510). In this view, multiple religious belonging operated within a core-periphery framework.

In contrast to a core-periphery model, Michelle Voss Roberts' argued that "hybrids, rhizomes, and fluids " were more useful metaphors for understanding multiple religious belonging (2010, 59). Hybrid identity, drawing influence from many sources, was a normal condition of humanity, as was fluidity in movement between religious boundaries some consider insurmountable. Humans are, as she declared, "always already multiple" (2010, 60). However, her use of "rhizome tubers" to conceptualize multiple religious belonging was particularly insightful. Rhizomes were underground tubers that grew horizontally between connected nodes and offshoots, which analogously represented multiple religious practices that were both distinctive and connected. In rhizomes, as with individuals connected to multiple religions, no single center necessarily determined its identity. This view of multiple religious belonging subverts the effort to find a single religious center and suggests that individuals can carry out religious practices in multiple traditions while also respecting discrete arenas of sacred knowledge (2010, 59). Moreover, this un-centered or multi-centered model highlighted how "multiple facets of [religious] identity intersect, not as problems to be solved…but as proliferating sites of divine encounter" (2010, 60).

The more cooperative model of Robert's is supported in research of the phenomena among everyday practitioners less concerned with doctrinal tensions. Research here finds that engaging multiple religious rituals is most prevalent, and often motivated by practical and personal concerns. Everyday practitioners regard doctrinal disparities, if present, as secondary or less important (Berthrong 1999). Forms of involvement may include seeking ritual activities

to supplement a person's core religious practice. It could occur in situations where practice of an international religion fails to satisfy ethno-cultural expectations that are embedded in local culture. Layers of religious identity can become more complex as local, national, and personal religious belongings are associated with different traditions, or similarly as one's public religious belonging and private ritual activities vary (Gilbert 1988). Researchers also reveal how practicing rituals of multiple traditions can occur within a more direct complimentary arrangement between religions. In these circumstances, ritual participation occurs relative to a practitioner's distinctive purposes or occasions e.g., marking events or guiding public and private life. Many people in Japan, for example, use Shinto rituals to mark events related to birth, marriage, and fertility, and also practice Buddhist rituals to mark or memorialize the deaths of loved ones (Van Bragt, 2002).

In delineating a meaning of multiple religious belonging for the present study, I follow Berghuijs' flexible description of a multiple religious belonger as one who "combines elements of different religious traditions in his/her life" with greater or lesser intensity (2017, 22). I find this framework elastic enough to explore a range of expressions of multiple religious belonging, without assigning arbitrary benchmarks for levels of either belief or ritual practice. The study considers "multiple" as more than one, and conceptualizes "religion" as knowledge and activities generated within groups over time that orient humans within the cosmos and in issues of ultimate significance, helping to facilitate an ordered existence. "Belonging" is a term that some have critiqued because of its connotations of property, as one's personal belongings (Roberts 2010, 55). However, I find the term accurate in its familial connotation and helpful for anchoring the phenomenon in the ambiguity of social and individual belonging, rather than in

exclusionary lines of either belief or ritual practice. My criterion for discerning boundaries between religions primarily concerns the ability of a religious tradition to function independently. The study does not presume that all religions hold an exclusive claim to superior truth, or that adherents are expected to offer total commitment and unitary belonging. The study is attentive to the multi-centered and cooperative model of Roberts, and the core-periphery model raised by Phan, as well as the shared reality and complimentary relationship expressions, as distinctive or divergent propositions useful in evaluating expressions of multiple religious belonging

There are notable geographic limitations of most multiple religious belonging studies. Most scholarship has focused on religions in Asia, particularly Japan, China, and India, or on European or Euro-American Christians with interests in such religions (Cornille 2002). However, there has been little exploration of the concept in the Caribbean, among racial-ethnic African descendants, among African diasporic religious traditions, or without centering Christianity. This dissertation aims to bridge this disconnect and evaluate the relevance of multiple religious belonging to practitioners of African diasporic traditions. With the above discussion of the analytical potential of multiple religious belonging in mind, the next section addresses scholarship clarifying features and developments of African diaspora religions.

RELIGION IN THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

While some discussion of multiple religious belonging has begun regarding religions in Asia, Europe, and North America, the concept has not been well engaged regarding religions in the African diaspora, or specifically among the diaspora in the Caribbean. The near absence is

notable because religions in the African diaspora, and indeed the cultural milieu of the Caribbean, are distinctive. Scholarship in these areas has focused on seeking strategies of belonging and survival under extreme oppression and social marginalization, as well as understanding culturally diverse and geographically mobile societies.

The term diaspora etymologically originates from a combination of the Greek words *dia* (across or apart) and the verb *spora* or *speirein* (to sow or to scatter). Literally, diaspora refers to a sowing or scattering of seeds across a distance and the growth or maturation of these seeds apart from others. When applied to the social arena, the agricultural metaphor identifies the dispersion of a people from some place of origin. Several scholars have theorized about the socio-cultural dynamics of dispersed people ranging from expelled ethnic groups (Rajak 2018) to refugees and migrants (Safran 1991) to diasporas involved with labor, business, or imperial aspirations (Cohen 2008). The late Ruth Simms Hamilton offers a useful perspective on how global historical events established conditions from which diasporic forms of culture and religion developed among dispersed Africans and their descendants. For Hamilton, the African diaspora is distinguished by a forced or semi-forced geographical dispersion from a homeland; some form of identity with a real or mythical homeland; persistence over long periods in diaspora settings with socio-cultural identities defining particularistic, cumulative historical experiences across time and space; and the ongoing experience of social oppression and struggle in hostile places of residence **(**Hamilton 2007, 2-3).

The trans-Atlantic trade in enslaved Africans was a catastrophic and prolonged event in which millions of Africans were forcibly removed from their homelands, transported across the Atlantic Ocean, and widely dispersed in multiple hostile locations throughout the Americas.

This systematic trafficking in human chattel occurred roughly from the sixteenth through twentieth centuries, and initiated a series of global transformations that radically changed the world. From the perspective of those who experienced the brutality of these transformations, the period constituted a *maafa*, a Kiswahili word referring to a major event or series of events that induce tremendous suffering, upheaval, or trauma (Hamilton 2007, 4). Africans held in bondage in the *maafa* may or may not have conceived of themselves as "African" or even of an "Africa." However, they were familiar with an ancestral homeland, which maintained an enduring presence among their progeny. A shared and protracted experience of racialized chattel slavery established conditions of common oppression and struggle, from which a level of common identity could be formed.

The concept of African Atlantic diaspora calls attention to the massive, violent displacement and dispersal of millions of African laborers into diverse locations of the Americas, from which new sacred orientations emerged to accommodate new conditions of social life. This forced movement and subsequent enslavement within European colonial and later independent polities produced societies structured to subordinate African people and value only the exploitation of their labor. As Charles H. Long (1995) reminds us, the survival of Africans as an oppressed social group depended not only upon developing a shared body of knowledge that explained their condition and affirmed their integrity as humans, but also structures that could successfully socialize subsequent generations into this mode of being. Religion provided a structure of plausibility, wherein African knowledge and experience could be composed, affirmed, and legitimated despite the powerful alternative structures of the larger political order (1995, 180-184).

Scholarship on African diasporic religious practices has engaged a number of themes within these conditions that has expanded scholarly understandings of religion. In one important area, the field has elaborated processes involved in religious production and innovation of displaced people. Early scholarship on African diasporic religion challenged the view that displaced Africans lost previous cosmological ideas. Instead, it argued that religious observance, though modified, retained homeland African qualities (Herskovits 1937). Herskovits, who observed ritual performances in Africa and the diaspora, argued that diasporic worship of African spirit forces demonstrated clear parallels to homeland ritual work and argued that such previously localized religious activity is transportable across space.

More recent scholarship challenges both the passivity implied in views that suggest religions were transplanted, and the notion that religious activities could have the same significance once no longer embedded in the original social structures. Instead, they emphasize the labor and ingenuity involved in producing new religious traditions (Matory 2009). For instance, David Brown's (2003b) historiographic review of the formation of the popular Regla de Ocha tradition in Cuba exposed complex political negotiations among a small, enslaved group to develop and authenticate a systematic collection of religious observances against several other possibilities. Indeed, these rituals were part and parcel of ethnogenetic developments that came to represent new identities, regardless of previous ethnic affiliation, which reveals their transformative power (Palmié 2002). However, others remind us that the development of diasporic traditions has not only been governed by national or local dynamics, but are also shaped through forces of perpetual transnational circulation. J. Lorand Matory's (2009) study of Brazilian *Candomblé* reveals the fundamental role that transnational

movement, including circulatory movement between Africa and Brazil, played in the production of ritual and cosmological knowledge. Moreover, he demonstrates how the diaspora played a role in making its own African religious baseline through such movements, as well as at times commercial interests and strategies, challenging the notion of an ancient African past as the basis for assessing a diaspora present (2009, 39-40).

Studies of diasporic religion have advanced scholarship on the relationships between collective identity, historical memory, and spiritual interaction among displaced and oppressed groups. The symbolic role of an African homeland in cosmological and ritual observances is a frequent theme in the literature, as the image of Africa was often related to historical beginnings and represented a place where cultural reality was publicly authenticated (Long 1995; Scott 1991). African symbolism in religious traditions was a part of both producing and authenticating forms of collective identity under historical and contemporary structural oppression. African symbolism was not necessarily limited to representing the continent of Africa alone, but could include distinctive aesthetic preferences, such as how foliage and other elements of nature may adorn ritual space. Indeed, there is a significant relationship between the composition of ritual space and collective identity in diasporic traditions. Such ritual compositions trigger what Jualynne E. Dodson calls "re-member-ing," a cognitive process linking memory and membership into the ritual time of a community of consciousness, and is inclusive of members living and deceased, near and distant (2008, 71-74). Further scholarship has demonstrated how diasporic rituals also produce familial relations as an element of collective identity. For instance, Karen McCarthy Brown's (2006) work on rural Haitian Vodou communities, Mary Ann Clark's (2003) examination of the godparenthood idiom in Cuban Regla

de Ocha, and Sonya Maria Johnson's (2012) work on spiritual family in Cuban Palo Monte reveal how religious rituals construct both consanguine and ritual family relations through initiation rites in contexts with historical legacies of racialized familial rupture. Alejandro Frigerio (2004) extends the discussion of ritual families to include expanding transnational networks and how such movement generates a multiplicity of rituals and can complicate tradition.

While the African homeland is significant in these traditions, Paul Johnson's (2007) ethnographically detailed comparative study of Garifuna rituals in Honduras and New York reveals that homeland referents can change and shift symbolic values in religious practice. In his research, the Garifuna of Honduras looked to the Caribbean island of St. Vincent as their ancestral homeland, and did not ritualize an African homeland until a tertiary migration to the United States. Thus, in developing the concept of diasporic horizons, Johnson reminds us that multiple migrations generate new symbols of homeland, and ritual productions integrative of and relevant to local contexts.

Spirit possession of human bodies is another important part of many diasporic religious traditions and raises further issues concerning how historical memory, collective identity, and spiritual interaction relate in religious observance. Joseph Murphy (1995) broadly recognizes a shared sacred orientation commitment to active, experiential spirituality in African diasporic religions. The relationship between human and spirit is not just learned abstractly, but is generated through movement and action, through ritual activity of "working the spirit" (1995, 176-180). This activity is inclusive of the phenomenon of spirit possession. The human-spirit interaction and interdependence forged in ritual encounters generates knowledge of spirits and

constitutes both a dynamic relationship between 'belief' and 'ritual' attributes of religion, as well as a active relationship between religion and a meaningful past.

In studies of Cuban practices, spirit possession generally occurs with two categories of spirits: spirits of the dead and spirit forces associated with elements of nature. Both are observed to ritually link practitioners to a distinctive sense of past. For instance, Kenneth Routon's examination of Palo Monte notes the persistent presence of a self-liberated first generation African possessing spirit type who speaks to adherents from the perspective of Cuba's early colonial era, but with memories of Africa (2008, 633-634). In this instance, participation in rituals invites members to directly interact with their past in the present, and highlights an anti-colonial position. This figure, part African but African in the Cuban context, illustrates how practitioners mediate tension between indigenous and diasporic characteristics of identity. Vodou ceremonies also include historic anti-colonial figures drawn from Haiti's struggle for independence (Bellgrade-Smith 2005; Dayan 1995). Other ritual occasions in Regla de Ocha and Candomblé entail spiritual visits from forces who are also directly linked to Africa. These cases demonstrate the value of embodying knowledge, and historical knowledge, through spirit possession or subtler sensory stimulations as a fundamental way of knowing (Csordas 1993, 142-143; 153).

Stephan Palmié argues that possession in these rituals constitutes a medium and repository for the pasts of people who were denied access to legitimate historical narratives or structures to contribute to historical narratives (2002, 5-6). Religious activity in this instance provides an alternative discourse on history that links disparate geographic spaces, but as Viarnés (2007) reminds us, this alternative history is not singular. Indeed, her research

explored an ethnographic moment in which two such alternative histories collided. In her example, an uninvited spirit from a different tradition possessed a non-initiated neighbor attending a ritual in Cuba. The response of ritual leaders was to usher her out of the ritual space and dismiss the event from the more formalized proceedings of the ritual. This case exposes cleavages between sometimes competing visions of the most appropriate spiritual associations, as well as how multiple religions sharing space can complicate spiritual interactions.

This body of scholarship on religious traditions formed in the conditions of the African diaspora significantly elaborates theoretical concerns about the importance of space, movement, spirits, and forms of belonging in oppressive conditions in religious beliefs and practices. Consequently, these factors should be considered in evaluations of how discrete Africa-inspired religious traditions relate to each other, and can facilitate practitioners belonging to more than one.

CONCLUSION

Multiple religious belonging has the potential to advance both the anthropology of religion beyond its reliance on single religions as primary objects of study, and pushes Cuban and African diasporic religion literature beyond its reliance on syncretism. Conversely, literature on Cuban and African diasporic religions and theoretical elements in the anthropology of religion can enhance literature exploring multiple religious belonging beyond its reliance on popular, universalizing religions as either a necessary subject or analytical lens. Each body of scholarship benefits from the rare elaboration of cross-religious encounter among

practitioners of distinct organic, Africa-inspired religious traditions. That is, dynamic religious relations among and between historically oppressed groups are too frequently relegated to the periphery of scholarly interest, in favor of centering Christianity, European descendants, or colonial impositions in cross-religious encounters. This dissertation aspires to address this neglected area and bring multiple religious belonging into dialogue with Cuban religious practice, in the hope of expanding our understanding of the many strategies available for managing religious options.

In that effort, this dissertation asks how multiple religious belonging may be a chosen strategy for navigating religious diversity. As the above literature demonstrates, there are myriad avenues through which to organize multiple religious belonging and even more possible motivations for doing so. However, there is an especially limited number of studies engaging these questions in Eastern Cuba. The particular contours of multiple religious belonging in this area not only addresses thematic and geographic voids in the African diaspora and religion literature, but also contributes to understanding contemporary complexities of Cuban religious belonging.

CHAPTER 3:

CONTEXT OF THE CARIBBEAN AND CUBA: SOCIO-CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL NECESSITIES

INTRODUCTION

It is impossible to describe or analyze data on multiple religious belonging in the city of Santiago of the Oriente region of Cuba without first clarifying the presence of African descendants in that region. The presence of this population was a precursor to the creation of distinct and organic Cuban religious practices in the region. This discussion provides context for my investigation into multiple religious belonging in the twentieth century.

FOUNDATIONS

Cuba was among the first islands Christopher Columbus encountered in the Americas over 500 years ago. The encounter initiated all of the Caribbean islands' deep and long historical entrenchment in the violence of European colonialism, slavery, and plantation economy (Williams 1944, 51-52). As it was among the first trans-Atlantic colonial European acquisitions, the Caribbean became what Mary Louise Pratt and others (Pratt 1992, 7; Long 2005, 9292) identify as a "contact zone." These zones were geographic locations, within the

colonial period, where cross-cultural contacts, conflicts, and innovations occurred in ongoing struggles for social and political space and power between diverse groups.

Under colonialism, socio-political organization in the Caribbean was dynamic, diverse, and fluid. Eastern Cuba and the entire Caribbean region was host to prolonged political rivalries between competing European empires that, over time, shifted colonial boundaries, nationalist interests, and composition of local and regional resistance movements. Sixteenth century Spanish imperial monopoly in the Caribbean eventually gave way to territorial claims from the French, English, Dutch, Danish, Portuguese and, beginning in the nineteenth century, United States. The three principle, interrelated phenomena that defined much of Cuban and the Caribbean's colonial era were: the rapid but not total annihilation of indigenous populations; the development of plantation agriculture; and reliance on enslaved African laborers, imported by the millions as expendable chattel, to support colonial economies (Watts 1987).

Spanish and European colonial activities in the Caribbean were predicated on their conquest of indigenous groups that occupied the islands. The Taino Arawak, Ciboney, and Kalinago, to whom the Spanish referred to as "Carib" and from which the Caribbean derives its name, were the object of Spanish violent conquests in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Palmié and Scarano 2011, 54-55; 233). The violent seizure of land was led by forces of the recently formed Spanish kingdom, forces that were fresh from *reconquista* battles against Muslims. Invasions in the Caribbean provoked fierce and prolonged resistance from several native island inhabitants and left others politically subordinated in the forced labor of European regimes.

Enslaving indigenous peoples largely proved unproductive because many of them were slaughtered in the wars and fell victim to European diseases. European conquerors needed to reorganize and repopulate the region to serve the new rulers; enslaved Africans became part of the solution. The Caribbean and Cuba were born from these ruptures of indigenous social orders and created new social structures ruled by colonial Europeans. Many scholars attribute the foundations of modernity to this period of conquest and repopulation, which led to new labor regimes organized around the mass production of crops (James 1989 [1938], 392).

The Caribbean's innovative system of slave labor only loosely paralleled previous or concomitant European colonial systems (Thornton 1998, 86-79). Atlantic Caribbean slavery was distinguished by its reliance on captured Africans shipped across the Atlantic Ocean as the primary, if not exclusive, source of plantation and other labor. Reliance on enslaved Africans ultimately resulted in a slavery system that was bounded to a series of laws that institutionalized the linkage between race and slave status, and rendered that social status hereditary along racial lines (Knight 1978, 124-126; Patterson 1982, 7; Winant 2001, 25). Some argue that this racialization emerged to justify the profitable slavery system (Williams 1944, 7), while others suggest that antecedents of European racism influenced the choice for African labor (Robinson 2000, 100). Whatever the initial motivation, one of the most enduring European epistemic contributions to the colonial period was institutionally structured racial hierarchies reinforcing the idea of European superiority.

Near annihilation of indigenous peoples and their communities was followed by massive displacement and forced migration of Africans to repopulate Cuba and other Caribbean islands. Africans were imported from a number of that continent's cultural communities, mostly from

west and west-central portions near the Atlantic Ocean. The dispersion was global, but a larger number of enslaved women, men, and children crossed the Atlantic Ocean to the Americas in what was later identified as the African diaspora (Shepperson 1966; Ruth Simms Hamilton 2007; Joseph Harris 1993).

CUBAN DEVELOPMENTS

Indigenous conquest, agricultural plantations, and enslaved and exploited labor also comprise much the major colonial foundations of Cuba, the largest of the Caribbean islands with a total landmass of over 46,000 square miles. The island's geographic location is south of the United States' Florida Keys, north of Jamaica, east of Mexico's Yucatán Peninsula, and just west of Haiti. The location produced a history deeply intertwined with developments in the Caribbean and pivotal to the trans-Atlantic trade between the Americas, Africa, Europe, as well as Asia. Immediately following Columbus' voyages, Spanish *conquistadores* led a violent conquest campaign against Cuba's three main indigenous groups, the Taino Arawak, Ciboney, and smaller population of Guanajatabeye. The fiercest organized resistance was from the Taino of Cuba's Oriente region. Within four years, the majority of indigenous groups were massacred or fell to imported diseases, and those remaining submitted to Spanish resettlement or escaped to isolated areas of Cuba's eastern mountains. Conquistadores claimed Cuban territory and founded new towns in the name of the Spanish kingdom. With the colony's first capital established in Baracoa, later relocated to the city of Santiago de Cuba in 1515, the sixteenth century was marked by this conquest of territory and the process continued to western portions of the island (Pérez 2011, 10-25).

Early Spanish settlement in Cuba was modest and consisted of cattle ranching, farming, and seeking gold. Under the empire's *enconmienda* system, conquistadores were rewarded land, titles, and rights to the conquered as laborers. However, forced indigenous labor proved difficult to sustain and was eventually abandoned as enslaved Africans were the major substituted labor for exploited assistance in developing settlements (Pérez 2011, 24, 35).

As early as 1522, Africans arrived in eastern Cuba from Portuguese traders. They were relatively few in number and arrived primarily from west-central African ports. Many, like the indigenous laborers before them, escaped enslavement to live a free but difficult life in Oriente's surrounding mountains. Although the largest concentration of Africans in Cuba remained in the Oriente region, their presence throughout the island gradually expanded as the colony pursued agricultural cultivation of tobacco and sugar. Spanish interest in developing Cuba as an agricultural center waned as the island became a "backwater" of metropole development. Spanish priorities turned to reaping gold and other valued metal and gem resources from the concomitantly colonized Mexican mainland. Cuba was relegated to little more than a strategic way-station for resupplying voyages bound to Spain from Mexico. In the early seventeenth century, Spain relocated the political capital from Santiago de Cuba to Havana, a western Cuban port city closer to the Mexican mainland. The shift of capitals belied the island's diminishing significance to the Spanish monarchy and eastern Cuba was least important in the eyes of island authorities (Pérez 2011, 29-30).

For much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Cuba continued as a marginalized Spanish Caribbean colony. Outside of Havana, economic life largely slumped and resources to satisfy basic survival needs became increasingly difficult to secure. Privateers and

pirates led numerous raids against the island and the English garnered less than a decade of temporary occupational success. However, it was the 1804 success of enslaved Haitian Africans' revolution that had a major impact on Cuba. The Haitian Revolution saw Haiti ostracized in world markets and Cuba assumed Haiti's previous title as the world's leading sugar producer. Cuba's movement to the center of international sugar markets entailed a dramatic increase in the importation of enslaved Africans to the island (Kiple 1976, 25-47).

Cuba's nineteenth century sugar production created rapid developments in infrastructure and technology. The largest Caribbean island's stature rose to be the "pearl" of the Caribbean, at least for those not enslaved. International economic demand for sugar intensified the scale and strengthened the brutality of the system that enslaved Africans. The intensity of the slavery system applied to the entire island, including the tobacco and coffee plantations of eastern Cuba to sugar production in the west. In the east, Africans organized consistent and frequent resistance against the system that kept them enslaved, including guerrilla warfare (Duharte 1986).

Spanish colonists feared a slave revolution similar to that in Haiti, and contributed to their efforts to "whiten" the island by promoting opportunities to Spanish and later Chinese laborers so as to reduce the prospects of a majority black population (Morrison 2012, 163-165). Many land owners saw their profits and autonomy strained by the island's colonial relationship to Spain and, in this milieu and debates about annexation to the United States, a movement emerged for political independence and the abolition of slavery.

The three military struggles for Cuban political independence from Spain were intimately intertwined with ending slavery on the island. Independence was achieved through

wars between 1868 and 1898: the Ten Years War of 1868-1878, the Little War of 1879-1880, and the final of Independence War of 1895-1898. Each began in eastern, Oriente Cuba and included African descendants in all military ranks (Thomas 1998).

The successful nineteenth century struggles for national independence proved bittersweet for Cuban autonomy and race relations. United States military intervention at the opening of the twentieth century severely undercut the promise of racial equality linked to the abolition slavery as U.S. racism was introduced into twentieth century Cuban institutions (Helg 1995, 198, 237). The strong U.S. political, economic and cultural influences continued until the 1959 success of the Cuban Revolution. Yet, even the success of the Cuban Revolution did not erase all racist vestiges of the earlier eras. African descendant Cubans, though more equitably included in the governing of their country, continue to experiences racial discrimination and residues of racism (Ayorinde 2004, 90-93, 142-145).

Within these historical events, and many more not presented, it was the eastern region of Cuba, affectionately known as Oriente, which became a distinctive center for practice of Africa-inspired, organic religious practices.

THE DISTINCTION OF ORIENTE

Early in Cuba's colonial history, the island was divided into provinces, and Oriente (formerly called Santiago de Cuba province until early twentieth century) encompassed the eastern third of the island. With reorganization after the 1959 Revolution, the larger eastern division was separated into five provinces of Las Tunas, Guantánamo, Holguín, Granma and Santiago de Cuba. Although no longer an official province, the title of Oriente remains

colloquially used to describe the geographic area and its distinctive historical and cultural character. The area includes about one-fifth of the nation's population and is noted for its mountainous terrain and its close proximity to Haiti and Jamaica. Divided in half between mountains and low lands, Oriente is the most mountainous area of Cuba and includes the largest mountain range, the Sierra Maestra. During the colonial era, difficulty traversing the Sierra Maestra mountains contributed to the social, political, and geographic isolation of the eastern region. However, climate and topography also enabled the region to become self-dependent and the island's most diversified economy, ranging from sugar production, coffee cultivation, cattle ranching, mining, and additional agricultural crops. In contrast, central and western Cuba pursued deeper investments in sugar and tobacco cultivation. Importantly, Oriente was also the starting point of all three of Cuba's major armed and revolutionary struggles, including the 1868-1878 Ten Years War, the 1896 War of Independence, and the successful 1959 Cuban Revolution (Pérez 2011, 10-12).

Oriente developed its recognizable character through its initial geographic location as central to migratory activities of trade and importation of enslaved Africans, and early infrastructure development, making its towns and cities the island's oldest. At the same time, as the Spanish colonial era deepened, eastern Cuba was left to fend for itself as the island receded to the margins of Spanish interest, and political protection and resources were no longer readily available. Robert Hoernel described how Havana and Santiago de Cuba, the island's two most populous cities, "might almost have been [separate] islands themselves" (1976, 217).

The neglected Oriente developed de facto independence and a sense of self-reliance. Its economy was largely based on subsistence agriculture or local market production, and the east was relatively excluded from the nineteenth century sugar boom. In fact, even when intensive sugar cane production briefly reached Oriente in the era of U.S. control, that production was foreign owned with few profits remaining in the region (Hoernel 1976, 217). The largely rural population was relatively stable across generations, with migration and international communication largely directed eastward toward the Caribbean. These factors contributed to Oriente's distinctively internal socio-cultural character with a pronounced Caribbean flair but racial-ethnic composition was equally prominent in distinguishing the region.

Oriente was the earliest destination of enslaved Africans and the place where they lived the longest. Though it did not always have the island's largest population of Africans, the region long included a pronounced black majority. As early as 1522, 300 *Bozales*, Africa-born captives, arrived in Santiago de Cuba and the number of enslaved Africans clandestinely imported swelled the African population from hundreds to perhaps more than 10,000 by the end of eighteenth century (Duharte 2001). By the end of the nineteenth century, Oriente had some 327,000 people, or just over 20 percent of the total Cuban population. The majority of that number were African descendants or racially mixed with such descendants, despite efforts to "whiten" Cuban inhabitants through promoting Spanish immigration. Nevertheless, the 1900 census reported that nine municipal Cuban districts held a majority African descendant population, and eight of them were in Oriente, including the province of Santiago de Cuba (Thomas 1998, 424, 515).

Economic under-development and exploitation, prolonged and extreme poverty, geo-political isolation, social rootedness to the land, and a sizable and historically rooted African-descendant population all contributed to a discrete regional identity. These factors not only cultivated a strong sense of independence and local interdependence, but also inspired the region's rebellious heritage in which contemporary residents find great pride.

Oriente is often regarded as a region or province that lacks sophistication or as an uneducated region of rural parochialism. Cultural tensions between eastern and western Cuba are often articulated in terms of an urban versus rural, or civilized versus wild dichotomy. Yet, historical factors that shaped Oriente's regional ethos, and likewise its broader, undeniable contributions to Cuba's national project, should not be understated. Indeed, many residents of Oriente champion eastern Cuba as a location of cultural authenticity and Cuban homeland rootedness. For this, and other reasons to be discussed later, Oriente is known as "land of the dead," land of the ancestors.

CONCLUSION

Regional tensions between eastern, Oriente Cuba and western portions of the island developed through geographic and cultural realities. Part of Oriente's cultural ethos was a people who possessed a fiercely independent, local, and national spirit; a spirit that was grounded in protracted experiences of self-reliance and self-determination. The next chapter continues an historical focus, but probes developments of Africa-inspired, organic religions in Oriente and the emergence of Santiago de Cuba as a regional center of Regla de Ocha/Ifá and Palo Monte.

CHAPTER 4:

RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS IN ORIENTE CUBA

INTRODUCTION

The dynamics of multiple religious belonging in eastern Cuba developed within a series of socio-historical transformations in Cuba that included prolonged, complex, and intensive conditions of cross-cultural contact. The following chapter explores the process of ethnic and religious formation among Africans and African descendants in Oriente Cuba. The chapter begins with a discussion transculturation and the emergence of new ethnic identities among Africans, highlighting labor areas, *palenque* self-liberated communities, and cabildos as important social spaces involved with these processes in eastern Cuba. The chapter then reviews more particular religious foundations in Oriente, offering a broad overview, before delving into the details of three religious leaders influential in establishing Palo Monte and Regla de Ocha in the city of Santiago de Cuba. I conclude with a discussion of implications of this history for multiple religious belonging in the city.

ETHNIC FORMATION PROCESS

Social groups construct themselves and others as they interact, communicate, and respond to social and environmental conditions and needs. As the cultural diversity within a geographic space intensifies over time, so do the possibilities of identity and belonging. Like the broader Caribbean, Cuba itself developed as a contact zone of cross-cultural encounters and imbalanced power relations. Indeed, Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz first coined the term "transculturation," based on the complex social dynamics of the island (1995 [1947], 97). As the Spanish empire colonized Cuba between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, several diverse and distinctive groups arrived, evolved, and contributed to the socio-cultural composition of the island. These groups included indigenous peoples who once populated the island but were relegated to small pockets that survived genocide; Spanish settlers from various regions of Spain; Africans from regions as diverse as current Angola, Congo, Gabon, a wide expanse of West Africa; as well as secondary migrants from Florida and Caribbean islands like Haiti, Jamaica, and Barbados; a relatively smaller proportion of migrant laborers from China; the Creole descendants of each of these groups; and those who belonged to multiple amalgams of social and sexual interaction that developed over centuries.

While it may be tempting to assume that Cuba's migrated groups either lost or transplanted their cultural backgrounds after arrival, neither is true. In reality, all people were required to find new ways of belonging, even Spanish elites. In the Spanish colony, race and religion became important markers of identity and status, and set conditions within which broader processes of identity formation evolved. Spain was a Catholic country and the Catholic Church dominated the politically legitimate religious landscape of Spanish colonies. The

church's cosmological interpretations of responsible social life were intertwined with political and economic practices. They carried tremendous weight as a resource for exercising social control and in legitimating oppressive conditions on the island. The colonial racial project in Cuba was similar to other European arrangements in its ethnocentric view that situated status, privilege, and even intelligence along a racial hierarchy; Spanish and European white people were at the top and Africans or black people were at the bottom. This hierarchy became so vast that dozens of racial categories emerged to identify various racial compositions. Spanish, Creole, African/black, mulatto, Indian, and Chinese became dominant racial categories involved with the social allocation of status or privilege. However, these designations did not necessarily correlate with the identities of those to whom they were assigned, as local ethnogenetic processes concomitantly evolved. Even as *Cubanidad* was promoted as a national identity during Independence and Revolutionary wars, based in an amalgam of Cuba's racial and cultural groups, the foundational politics of racial inequality remained difficult to overcome.

African Religio-cultural Formation Spaces

As the most oppressed, exploited, and politically disenfranchised social group on the island, enslaved Africans had few avenues through which to exercise self-determination or garner socio-cultural footing on the island. Previous forms of ethnic or local identity among imported people could not be sustained without the social institutions and networks in which they had been embedded on the African continent. These individuals were forced to find new ways of belonging, which was a difficult task even if they encountered familiar terminology. Africans in Cuba found it challenging to form new cultural associations because of the diversity

of languages they spoke and cultural backgrounds from which they came. In addition, the trans-Atlantic middle passage inflicted significant trauma and was a violent rupture from the familiar people and places of their homelands. Nevertheless, enslaved laborers in Cuba had access to three significant autonomous or semi-autonomous social spaces, each of which proved important in neo-African and Cuban ethnogenesis. Traditions through which a religious orientation could be organized and perpetuated were developed in these spaces. These social spaces included: labor areas and nearby *barracones*, slave barrack housing units common on agricultural plantations; *palenques*, maroon settlements of self-liberated people; and cabildos, mutual aid societies that allowed for legal social gatherings of enslaved or free members (Palmié 1993, 346). Additionally, the ships involved in the Middle Passage constituted a space relevant to identity formation, albeit more limited. These areas of activity were relevant to identity and religious formation across the island and I elaborate on them below.

Labor and Housing Spaces

Labor experiences varied in the era of slavery. Experiences on agricultural plantations varied by crop and contrasted with those of cattle herders, mineral miners and smelters, and domestic laborers. Low-skill labor generally engendered higher vulnerability to abuse and exploitation, while high-skill labor could offer leverage to negotiate for better conditions. Broadly, labor areas were a highly restrictive social space among the enslaved, offering few opportunities to express cultural creativity or to find motivation from sharing in profits or privileges from the products of their labor. Nevertheless, prolonged and collective labor experiences facilitated areas of shared familiarity that informed cultural development in rural

and urban areas. Several Cuban religious traditions use tobacco, metal works, and sugar, in the form of sweets and rum, which are among the broad legacies of labor in religion.

On occasion, particular labor experiences afforded space for cultural expressions reminiscent of African homelands. Metallurgists from west-central Africa are a case in point. The Kongo empire that spanned areas of present-day Angola and Democratic Republic of the Congo developed sophisticated metallurgy techniques for smelting high-grade iron and steel in the centuries coinciding with the Atlantic slave trade. Ironsmiths were a highly respected artisan class, whose labor was fundamental to the political order that depended on production of weapons and agricultural tools. Such knowledgeable smiths became prized laborers in the Americas because European foundries were not capable of producing such high quality steel until the nineteenth century (Ringquist 2008, 13-14). In Oriente Cuba, copper mine and foundry owners preferred to hire Kongo ironsmith laborers as early as 1540. Several foundries that employed the Kongo smiths boasted higher profits than competitors in the seventeenth century (Portuondo 2000b, 81-82). These laborers likely negotiated for favorable living conditions. Evidence from 1648 shows that in one Oriente community with a majority of Kongo laborers, over one-third were elders between 80 and 100 years old. Moreover, master smiths in this area also garnered respected reputations that anchored the formation of local cabildo associations (Portuondo 2000b, 84). Cuban Historian Olga Portuondo has speculated that the copper smelting process likely included sacred ritual dimensions among the Kongo laborers, since it was a cornerstone of their continental iron production. Further, several Kongo linguistic terms, such as *ngañga* (master, priest), which applied to foundry workers, and *Fula* or *Sula* (to forge and smelt iron), and *Songo* (copper) have endured in Cuba (Portuondo 2000b, 82-83).

Metallurgy became so fundamental among African descendent laborers that independent communities in copper-rich areas continued to locally produce, sell, and trade homemade copper bars for centuries after the copper mining industry faded in favor of sugar production. It is unlikely coincidental that Palo Monte, a religious tradition closely associated with Cuba's Kongo ethnic heritage, utilizes symbolic imagery related to forging iron during production of sacred iron cauldrons housing spirit forces, also known as *ngañga*.

In the case of copper mines, labor conditions afforded greater opportunities to utilize and integrate homeland knowledge and influenced cultural, religious, and ethnogenetic processes. Broadly, housing areas such as barracones offered more autonomy of space to facilitate authentic interactions and exchanges. There is relatively little data available that we can use to discern activities in barracones, but this social space could not be monitored at all times. Thus, social interactions in off-labor times were inevitable and contributed to the exchange and debate of ideas about Africans' condition outside of colonial authority and impositions.

Palenque Spaces

Hidden palenque communities of self-liberated laborers, as well as buccaneers in perpetual regional transit, comprised the two major groups existing beyond the parameters of colonial political control in the colonial era Caribbean (Knight 1978, 90). After the destruction of indigenous social structures, palenques were largely settled by Africans and indigenous groups and comprised the most successful alternative to colonial rule in the Caribbean until colonies themselves sought independence. The first paleneque communities of Cuba arose

early in fifteenth century Oriente, as indigenous people, and later newly arrived Africans, escaped forced labor to the dense tropical forests of the mountains. The communities were frequently organized based on principles of free labor, cooperative economics, and anti-colonialism. Despite many cultural differences between them, self-liberated zones commonly featured largely inaccessible locations, a sexual imbalance in population skewing toward male, and a reliance on raiding colonial settlements for supplies and recruits. Raids also were a form of guerilla warfare used to pressure authorities to abolish slavery and enter into formal negotiations with colonial society over trade relations (Duharte 1986).

The life of *cimarrones* (self-liberated persons who escaped from slavery) was harsh and under constant threat of colonial attack. However, palenques provided an autonomous space for ethnically diverse people to work on recomposing their identity and pursue cultural and economic stability. Palenques were a significant part of enthnogenetic and religious developments. Indeed, one of the central spiritual figures in the emergent traditions of Muertería and Palo Monte is that of the *Cimarron* (Routon 634-636). Additionally, many central-west Africans with knowledge of making and molding iron were known to escape slavery and contribute valuable weapons and agricultural tools in self-liberated zones throughout the Americas (Landers 2002). Given the success of many Oriente Palenques in repelling colonial assaults (Duharte 2001), and the value of metallurgist laborers to copper mines, it is plausible that activities contributing to a religious orientation took place in Oriente palenque sites.

Cabildo Spaces

The religious and mutual aid organizations commonly referred to as cabildos or *cabildos de nación* (nation mutual aid societies) were an additional and legal social space afforded to Africans and their Creole descendants for semi-independent activities. Although formally tied to the Catholic Church and registered with the state, these organizations came to be utilized in constructing and expressing Africa-inspired culture and religion, as well as in sociopolitical struggles for equality. While the cabildos were largely based on a Spanish model of *confradia* associations, many enslaved Africans may have already been familiar with cabildo-like associations when they gained organizational privileges in Cuba (Butt-Thompson 1929, 18-19). For instance, evidence suggests that in the case of Carabalí in Cuba, religious fraternal associations extant on the African continent strongly influenced the nature of their associations in Cuba (Brown 2003a). It is likely that Cuban cabildos emerged partly from Africans utilizing the Spanish model, and partly from Africans merging familiar group associations with available organizational forms (Howard 1998, 21-27).

While dating back to the sixteenth century, the cabildo de nación became a popular form of aggregation among enslaved Africans between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries. Membership was frequently composed of enslaved African-born Cubans, although some cabildos existed among their Creole counterparts. Often, the cabildos de nación functioned like "miniature monarchies," were led by hereditary or elected rulers with differing titles like King, Queen, Boss, and President, and were usually set in an established location under the official patronage of a Catholic Saint and associated with a local Catholic church. Cabildos de nación served several functions for members. They were structured for mutual aid

and provided for members in times of need: assisting in funerary events, managing considerations for the deceased, holding collective funds that were sometimes used to buy members out of slavery, and providing a space for social and political organizing. They also served as ethnic enclaves, allowing for reconstitution of collective identity and providing a forum for managing cultural and religious orientation (Rushing 1992, 214; Brown 2003b, 34, 287).

Despite the freedoms these spaces afforded, the colonial government originally conceived of cabildos de nación to exert control. The government needed a way to manage the widely diverse population of Africans, and legally limited cabildos to facilitate this purpose. Officials mandated that cabildos be extremely segregated, dividing black from white Cubans, Creole blacks from Africa-born blacks, and Africa-born blacks by ethnicity. By only allowing certain groups to legally associate, the government sought to divide the enslaved population and regulate and control their behavior. Further, cabildos facilitated communication between the state and local groups. Cabildo leaders served as intermediaries, and in some cases wielded political influence on behalf of their members. Churches tended to favor cabildos because they brought in revenue in the form of financial donations and facilitated recognition of the authority of church hierarchy. Additionally, a rise in rational-liberalism among Spanish elites was causing declines in church membership and power. They welcomed the emotional intensity and passion that cabildo members contributed to church services, which made those services more attractive and sustained church membership (Portuondo 2000a).

While clerical and municipal authorities had power over cabildos de nación, they broadly lacked de facto control over cabildo activities. In some cases, they were altogether

unconcerned with regulating or ensuring conformity in cultural and religious expressions in cabildos. Particularly from the close of the seventeenth century through the first half of the nineteenth century, semi-independent cabildos de nación played an important role in the process of African and African descendent ethnic and religious formation (Palmié 1993, 341; Howard 1998, 68; Brown 2003b, 34). The cabildos were an internally and externally stratified form of association capable of surviving changes in leadership and membership across generations. However, it's not entirely clear how Africans distinguished themselves, i.e. along ethnic lines as implied in *naciónes* (nations). That is, the "naciónes" constituted some form of collective identification, but the criteria for exclusion and inclusion of membership in a cabildo or ethnic group varied. The enslaved Africans in Cuba were a culturally, geographically, and generationally heterogeneous group, which made identification along ethnic lines difficult at best. As Stephan Palmié noted, "'tribal affiliation" was not the only — and maybe not even the most salient — organizational principle integrating the naciónes and their cabildos (Palmié 1993, 343). As a consequence, Africans created new forms of collective identification. Although they were largely organized along internally defined ethnic lines, members of different cabildos and ethnic groups still communicated; they were not necessarily exclusionary (Palmié 2002, 91; Brown 2003b, 63).

Cabildos de nación were the most popular form of group organization among Africans and African descendents, especially in urban areas, until the last third of the nineteenth century when a series of laws that led to the abolition of slavery prohibited them (Ortiz 1921, 22-23). Yet, cabildos de nación established a tradition in Cuba of semi-independent forms of organization available to Cubans of color. As other organizational forms emerged in the latter

half of the nineteenth century, such as the *sociedades de socorros mutuos* (mutual aid societies), cabildos de nación served as a model for their structure (Howard 1998, 177-78). However, the legal forms of association among Cubans of color came to be viewed as a threat to political and religious order and prevailing racial hierarchies, and were increasingly disbanded or persecuted by the state from the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries, forcing former cabildo members into underground networks. Cabildo associations were particularly important in initiating construction of a cohesive Regla de Ocha and Ifá community in nineteenth and early twentieth century western Cuba, and were likely influential in particular formations of Palo Monte (Brown 2003b, 51-55, 71-72).

Transatlantic Ship Spaces

A fourth notable set of social spaces involved in identity formation processes across the Caribbean are the spaces on transport ships sailing across the Atlantic from African ports to the Americas. These spaces were the earliest, though perhaps more limited in influence. The voyages marked the beginning of African American cultural development. Enslaved people on board were first forced to reconcile their cultural background, religious orientation, and knowledge about the world with their new condition and reality as not only enslaved but permanently severed from the land, people, and familiar reality of their birth. This Middle Passage, as it came to be known, induced significant trauma. Enslaved people were treated as sub-human, poorly fed and hydrated, chained and cramped in close quarters with only brief moments of sunlight, and constantly surrounded by feces, illness, and death for months on end. Yet, the trauma of the Middle Passage also induced a form of communitas among survivors

because the experiences onboard, however horrendous, were shared. There is considerable evidence that cohorts of survivors, or "shipmates," built strong interpersonal relationships on the ships that persisted, when possible, as among the most enduring and fundamental attributes of belonging after their arrival (Mintz and Price 1992, 42-45). Middle Passage ships created social spaces for interactive relationships that were brief in duration and limited in cultural impact compared to the previous three, but nevertheless comprise an element of the identity formation process.

Importantly, the development of ethnic, or more accurately, neo-ethnic communities, did not evolve in stable or linear stages with early generations establishing the foundation for later generations. Early precedents were certainly a part of the process, but each generation's elements of cultural consensus, elevated from disorder and duress, also contended with new cohorts of Africans arriving from the continent, more or less consistently for over four hundred years. This socio-temporal factor further complicated ongoing processes of forging identity through various forms of socio-cultural and linguistic diversity across different social spaces of interaction and under varying degrees colonial control or oppression. Among Africans and descendants, identity formation processes in Cuba evolved slowly, unevenly, non-linearly, and through tremendous and consistent effort.

ORIENTE RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENTS

Cuba's organic, Africa-inspired religious traditions roughly include Muertería or Bembé de Sao*;* Palo Monte; the Regla de Ocha/Ifá*;* Vodú and the related Arará; the Abakuá secret male fraternity; and the variant of Espiritismo known as Espiritismo Cruzado*.* Of these, only Arará

and Abakuá are not active in Oriente and the historical development of the remaining practices in Oriente is a topic that is still in need of further research. Nevertheless, a colloquial reference among religious practitioners can tell us about the region's religious foundations, and holds a clue about early contours of multiple religious belonging. In fieldwork, Cubans from every geographic region of the island often referred to Oriente as "*la tierra de los muertos*," "the land of the dead." Some identify the eastern region as "the land of the African dead" or sometimes, "land of *mpungo*" or "land of *mfumbe*," spirit designations of Palo Monte (Larduet 2001, 62). At times, respondents contrasted this title with western Cuba as the "land of the Saints" or "Land of the *Orichas*." The distinction calls attention to the emergence and popularization of Regla de Ocha/Ifá in western Cuba, and acknowledges the centrality of ancestors in religious activities of the eastern region, as well as the population's rich ancestral ties to the Oriente land. In order to understand Oriente's reputation as "land of the dead," it is important to appreciate the African ethnic groups and religious characteristics that developed in the region.

A fairly wide spectrum of African ethnic groups appear in historical records, and even the early numbers of Africans shipped to Cuba in the sixteenth century were from a range of west and west-central African regions. However, there is limited and somewhat unreliable historical data concerning the particular ethnic background of Africans shipped to Cuba. This is due in part to the arbitrary nature of Spanish records on African ethnicity, the absence of records from clandestine imports of Africans, budding categories based in African regions or particular embarkation ports, and, most importantly, the unstable nature of "ethnicity" as a meaningful category of belonging at any particular historical moment within or applied to groups.

Despite these limitations, west-central Africans from the region around contemporary Angola and Democratic Republic of the Congo became an early and numerically significant presence in Cuba and in Oriente. Their cultural influence would overshadow many of the contributions of other African ethnic groups from the region's early colonial years. Portugal's political and religious relationship with the Kongo empire since the fifteenth century would help establish an early and relatively consistent stream of enslaved laborers that, though varying in intensity, would span centuries. Spain's reliance on Portugal to provide slave labor increased toward the end of the sixteenth century. And after Cuba's labor demand dramatically increased with the rise of eighteenth century sugar production, west-central Africans constituted at least 40 percent or more of enslaved laborers at several periods of importation (Landers 2002; Eltis and Richardson 2010, 28).

While many Africans imported into Oriente came from central-west Africa, within this regional concentration there was a variety of ethnic backgrounds, however such categories were understood at the time. For example, a 1648 inventory of the multi-generational enslaved population surrounding the copper mines near Santiago de Cuba revealed that:

> Some of the Africans…said they were Congos [sic], others said they came from subgroups or populations: Angola, Embuilas, Biojos, Gaytos, Quibundos, Embaxes, Cakongos, Cafungas, Malumbas, Amtetes, Quitembos, Enchicos, Bonigos, Quimbutos, Cangaras, Banguelos, Jungues, Sabues, Mulumbis, Quitus, Mofongos, Mambos, Barrigas, Lungengues, Mayalas, etc. (Portuondo 2000b, 83).

In the broad cultural identity formation process in Oriente, the ethnic, or more accurately neo-ethnic Kongo category of belonging, emerged and subsumed many of these subgroups. Even when finer distinctions continued within cabildos de nación that

were named for particular African hometowns or areas, those of West-central Africa often shared an official or unofficial affiliation.

The Kongo ethnicity endured because of advantages including an early and relatively consistent presence, relevant labor skills, regional linguistic intelligibility, and related compositions of cultural knowledge, among other possibilities. The broad Bantu linguistic family from which many local languages were derived probably informed linguistic intelligibility between groups. Mutual intelligibility of language could have facilitated a stronger degree of communication among pockets of laborers as well as within particular Kongo cabildos and perhaps among mountain palenques as well. In contemporary Palo Monte ritual language, linguists have specified a particularly influential root in Bakongo/Kikongo terminology (Schwegler and Rojas-Primus 2010).

Kongo in Cuba had another cultural advantage: the possibility of prior familiarity with both Portuguese, a language closely related to Spanish, and Catholicism by way of the Kongo kingdom's relationship with Portugal. Catholicism had a presence in the Kongo kingdom throughout the duration of the transatlantic slave trade, albeit locally transculturated. Such prior familiarity may have aided some in acclimating or even integrating within the Spanish Catholicism of the island. Such possible relationships also make it difficult to discern the cultural source of religious transformations and adaptations, since African Catholic practices may not have been noticed as distinct by observers (Thornton 2016, 15).

The Kongo, Carabalí, and Mandingo became the larger of the early ethnic groups established in Oriente, and were major contributors to the Africa-based content of Cuba's

transculturative processes over centuries (Dodson 2008, 29; López 1985). Yet, even Carabalí were not a single ethnic group, but the combination of persons from multiple African ethnic communities who were imported to the Americas from the port of Calabar. Neither the Yoruba nor Haitian Africans entered Oriente in significant numbers before the end of the eighteenth century, leaving the Kongo, Carabalí, and Mandingo to lay the cosmic and behavioral foundations for religious development (Dodson 2008, 32-33).

In the eighteenth century, Spanish authorities interrogated eleven captured African runaways from an Oriente palenque, a settlement created by escaped African laborers. The Spanish authorities reported that six were of Kongo ethnic heritage, two were Carabalí, one was Mandinga, one was Mina, and the last was a Creole from Jamaica (La Rosa Corza 2003, 60). The limited data suggests that the Kongo or Bakongo/Kikongo ethnic group continued to be a substantial portion if not a majority even in palenques.

The Kongo cosmic orientation included an emphasis on the natural world and ancestral spirits who regularly entered and interacted within the physical world of humans. Indeed, historian John Thornton has gone so far as to assert, “Central Africa was the land of the spirit medium par excellence” (1998a, 243). From this cosmic orientation, identifiable ritual behaviors emerged (Meneses 1994; Thompson 1983; Nodal 2001). Such interactive behaviors became regularized and included the creation and practical use of spiritually empowered medicines, remedies, and objects, as well as in dynamic spirit interactions and possessions. Of the several identifiable religious traditions that emerged or were integrated into the Oriente religious complex before the twentieth century, Muertería, sometimes called Bembé de Sao, is a first of such traditions and is among the oldest, possibly dating to palenque de cimarrones

that were scattered in Oriente. Muertería is not a well-defined or coherent religious tradition. Rather it is an acknowledgement of certain patterns in religious practices that are loosely characterized by a Kongo ethnic heritage and ritual ceremonies that involve ancestral spirits and the *cazuela de muerto* (Dodson 2008, 149-158; Millet 1996, 42-46). The cazuela de muerto (container for the dead) became one such common object for ritual use in Oriente. A cazuela is a bowl-like object filled with materials of nature and serves as a medium for communication with the dead. Or, in other cases, it serves as a home for special ancestral spirits (Millet 1994, 11-12). While conducting field research, I spoke with Santiagueran community leaders from several religious traditions who had intimate relationships with ancestral spirits of the dead, called muertos. By their accounts, a muerto(s) typically identified particular individuals with whom they wanted to establish a relationship. If a person accepted the relationship, the muerto(s) would provide special instructions about the creation of sacred spaces and methods of spiritual invocation. One Palero respondent in 2005 spoke about religious life in Santiago before the twentieth century, probably based on stories from his parents and grandparents. He described Santiago as a place with "cazuelas, things for good luck…there were muertos but not [organized traditions]." He used the term "Buey Suelto," literally a free-running ox, to refer to people in Oriente who had "ideas from spirits" and performed spiritual work but did not necessarily conform to a cohesive religious tradition. The slightly derogatory tone highlights a tension among some Palo and Ocha practitioners regarding the idiosyncrasy of Muertería, especially in its rural manifestations. Whether Muertería should be considered a distinctive religious tradition is debatable, but it is clearer that relationships with muertos and use of

cazuelas de muertos became a common and early part of Africa-inspired religious development in Oriente.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, hundreds of French-Haitian land and plantation owners escaped the violence of the Haitian Revolution to nearby Oriente Cuba. These owners often brought their enslaved Haitian laborers, some of whom established early Vodú communities in the region. However, this early Vodú appears to have declined or merged with Kongo practices, losing distinction until Haitian labor migrations throughout the twentieth century initiated a new form of Vodú in Oriente. Oriente Vodú amplified the fiercer *Petro* side of worship to defend against the multiple forms of oppression these migrant sugar laborers faced, but was also characterized by an orientation toward relationships and rituals with spirits of the dead (James 1999).

Espiritismo (Spiritism) became popular in Oriente in the middle of the nineteenth century, but was a tradition that emerged in Europe and spread in Cuba through the writings of Allen Kardec. It is considered a systematic religious means of communicating with spirits and has taken several forms in Cuba. One of these is called Espiritismo de Cruzado, distinguished by the fact that during rituals, spirits will inform practitioners to "cross" from their usual means of spirit work to employ Africa-inspired modes and spirits (Millet 1996, 27-30). Moreover, the tradition used materials like glasses of water, plants and flowers, and Christian prayers to initiate or supplement contact with African muertos or other types of spirits not usually associated with Kardec's European heritage. The terminology of "espiritista" is used loosely in Oriente, sometimes connoting forms of folk Catholicism and other times describing any who

perform spiritual work with muertos. Consequently, Espiritismo sometimes envelopes activities that might be better recognized as forms of Muertería.

Regla de Ocha/Ifá is an additional religious practice that developed in Cuba and became particularly popular over the twentieth and into the twenty-first century. The nineteenth century's massive increase in Africa-born enslaved individuals imported to labor in the island's economy included Yoruba speaking people from around present-day Nigeria in West Africa. Known in Cuba as *Lucumí*, this group constituted a small but influential proportion of this new imported labor and its members established additional religious traditions of Regla de Ocha/Ifá, largely using cabildos in and around Havana (Brown 2003b). Although Yoruba ethnic laborers were transported into Oriente, they were a small population in the region and did not seem to disrupt the presence of ethnicities in Oriente (Wirtz 2007, 59). Regla de Ocha/Ifá came to Oriente largely through travelers from western Cuba, and gained traction in Santiago de Cuba in the 1930s.

The Kongo-inspired Palo Monte religious tradition, particularly its Mayombe variant also arrived in Oriente through travelers from western Cuba. There was and continues to be large numbers of adherents in the Matanzas province, but Palo arrived, like Regla de Ocha, as a coherent set of ritual practices in Oriente in the early to mid-twentieth century (Meneses 1994). The early development of the tradition in western Cuba is difficult to discern, but likely involved cabildo de nación organizations and appears to have been bolstered by the nineteenth century surge of African laborers from west-central Africa (Ochoa 2010, 9; James 1999). The tradition's central sacred object, the ngañga, is a large burnt iron cauldron holding sacred materials and housing spirits, but shares some similarity to the cazuelas del muerto of Oriente.

This similarity may be a product of similar historical processes that brought the elements about, and also may have influenced the acceptance of Palo in Oriente. Oriente was layered with religious activities created from transculturated elements of Kongo, Carabalí, Mandingo, Haitians, Lucumí, and Cuban-European Creoles. This layering was increased by cross-regional Cuban migration and communication following the Independence War of the late nineteenth century.

Discrimination

The years leading to and including the first half of the twentieth century were exceptionally difficult for African-Cubans in general, and practitioners of Africa-based religious traditions in particular. Adherents of these religious traditions practiced their sacred lifestyles with integrity while national public discourse increasingly vilified their religious activities and repressed Africa-based religious expressions, in part from fear of organized political resistance. In the Independence War of 1895 for example, colonial sympathizers intentionally spread rumors about African Cubans killing and using the blood of white children as part of religious ceremonies in order to curb solidarity across races. Such rumors were common, penetrated national discourse, and created stigmas associated with expressions of African identity on the island. In other instances of repressive activities, legal codes targeted Africa-based religious expression and police were used to enforce the religious discrimination. In 1902, 57 members of a Havana Abakuá community were arrested for playing drums in public. One year later, 60 black Cubans in Pinar del Río were detained under charges of "witchcraft" (Helg 1995, 81-82, 107-109; Ferrer 1999, 84-85). In the 1920s, the mayor of Santiago de Cuba prohibited the use

of any 'African drumming' in the annual Carnival celebrations of the city, regarding such activity as shameful and immoral (Milstein 2013, 251n40). Practitioners of Africa-based religious traditions across the island were persecuted and arrested, and they lived in a public atmosphere of religious repression (Brown 2003b, 57).

After the Cuban Revolution in 1959, the political situation of the country substantially changed. The revolutionary government adopted a socialist political posture and instituted a series of reforms wherein African Cubans, in particular, received educational opportunities and medical benefits that had previously been unavailable. However, the government did not embrace the country's popular religiosity. In the early 1960s, religious centers were viewed as possible sites of counter-revolutionary activity and therefore a threat to the goals of the revolution. The government discouraged all religious practices and by 1975, Cuba was officially declared an atheist state (Ayorinde 2004). A declaration from the First Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba stated that religion was "born out of ignorance and out of the impotence of man before the forces of nature" (Rosado 1985, 283). However, in 1976, President Fidel Castro declared the Cuban population to be a "Latin African people," which officially embraced the country's African heritage even as the relationship between the state and popular religious expression remained tenuous (Ayorinde 2000, 76).

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, the government established centers to study religion and culture in Cuba. Organizations like Casa del Caribe in Santiago de Cuba and Casa de Africa in Havana were established in 1982 and 1987 respectively (Nodal 2001, 82). Casa del Caribe in particular was organized to reclaim the African and Caribbean elements of Cuban identity and counter popular trends that relegated Africa-based religious life to folklore (Gainza, 2006, 5-7).

Although this was not necessarily the position of others associated with the Cuban government, the mission and work of Casa del Caribe stands as an important example of Cuban officials establishing dignified relations with adherents of Africa-based religious practices. Nevertheless, the official relationship between the Cuban state and religious practitioners continued to be tenuous through the 1990s. While some religious discrimination persisted when the revolutionary government took power, the form and extent of such discrimination substantially changed and was also coupled with other social opportunities previously unavailable.

Within this broad context, two religious figures, Reynerio Pérez and Rosa Torres, shaped foundational religious activities in Palo Monte and Regla de Ocha to the regional character of Oriente and life in early twentieth century Santiago de Cuba. We turn now to these particular religious developments in Santiago.

SANTIAGO RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS: REYNERIO PÉREZ AND ROSA TORRES

On December 4, there is an annual prominent public procession in Santiago of an effigy of Santa Barbara draped in a flowing red and white embroidered dress. The procession begins in the historically black neighborhood of Los Hoyos and travels around the city. When I attended the procession in 2017, it was televised and there were well over 300 people dancing to songs and drums being played by walking musicians at the center of the crowd. The crowd traveled to the sites of historic and honored figures of the city's religious and cultural history, including the country's most prestigious cemetery and the city center, before returning to Los Hoyos. The procession was led by individuals holding Cuban flags and banners of heroes from the Independence and Revolutionary wars, immediately followed by people carrying three

framed photographs of three religious leaders in the city's history. These three figures were Reynerio Pérez, Rosa Torres, and Vicente Portuondo. The event memorializes and celebrates the three deceased figures' contributions to Santiago's religious landscape, anchoring this understanding in the historical memory of Los Hoyos and the island. Reynerio Pérez and Rosa Torres were religious leaders of Oriente who became important within the city of Santiago de Cuba and beyond. Their lives represent stages in the religious development of the city and in Oriente, and provide insights into Cuban twentieth century Africa-based religious practice in the eastern region. The following brief biographical sketches of these two figures offer a preliminary summary of how Palo Monte and Regla de Ocha emerged in Santiago and began to spread. The third and younger figure, Vicente Portuondo, was influential in raising public awareness of Cuban practices in the city and will be discussed in the next section.

Reynerio Pérez

Legends about the life of Reynerio Pérez are so widely known that no one conducting research on Africa-based religious practice in Oriente or Santiago de Cuba can avoid accounts surrounding the charismatic figure. Little evidence exists to counter popular conceptions that Pérez was among the most influential historical persons involved in establishing the Mayombe line Palo Monte and Regla de Ocha in the city and region. Although the Kongo and Yoruba-based religious practices likely existed in Oriente before his arrival, Pérez is credited with introducing a standardized coherent structure to religious practice in the two traditions, and for initiating many individuals.

Reynerio Pérez was born in the Matanzas province on June 17, most likely in the 1890s, according to a plaque hanging in Casa del Caribe. Accounts about where in Matanzas Pérez originated vary. He may have come from Los Arabos, a location where Palo is especially prevalent (2001b, 114), or Paricio, a town less than fifteen miles from the majority black city of Jovellanos. According to Pérez' daughter, both of his parents were from Matanzas and both were practicing santeros. Other accounts suggest that his parents, Anastasio and Leocadia, were born in Africa and that his father was of Kongo origin (Larduet 2001b, 114). Given Pérez was born in the 1890s, it is probable that his parents were enslaved and conceivable that they were imported from continental Africa, either legally or through the clandestine slave trade that operated in Cuba into the mid- to late nineteenth century (Harris 2016, 426). However, it is equally likely that stories linking Pérez' family directly to Africa also emerged to emphasize the African legitimacy of his ritual lineage and practice. Stories that link African and Cuban religious practice are common among religious adherents in Oriente and elsewhere. Pérez moved to Santiago de Cuba from Matanzas sometime between 1909 and 1926. By at least 1926, he had established permanent residence in the Los Hoyos neighborhood, where he married a woman from the surrounding Santiago countryside and eventually fathered fifteen children. Many of these children rose to leadership positions within either Palo or Ocha (Millet 2000, 118). Most respondents agree that Pérez was sent to Santiago de Cuba between 1909 and 1912 as part of his duties with the Cuban Rural Guard (Larduet 2001b, 114).

At the time, Cubans of African descent, particularly veterans who had fought valiantly in the Ten Years War and 1896 Independence War, were profoundly dismayed by the racism that plagued the island, which intensified with U.S. intervention into Cuban affairs in 1898. These

Cubans formed the *Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC) or Independent Party of Color. The PIC sought to gain political leverage through democratic means and demanded access to land, public office, free education, better working conditions, and an end to racial discrimination (Castro 2002, 30-31). The party held at least 9,000 members across the island and 32 registered municipalities in Oriente, including Santiago de Cuba (Helg 1995, 155-157). Under the approval of and urging from the United States, the nascent Republican government decided to suppress these political activities and protect the interests of the sugar industry. President José Miguel Gómez formed a Rural Guard to achieve this goal and several battalions were sent across the island. Members of PIC intensified their activism and in 1912, a bloody massacre ensued. Over 3,000 black Cubans were killed in the Oriente province alone (Whitney 2001, 20-21).

Reynerio Pérez first encountered Santiago de Cuba as a member of the Rural Guard, but his level of engagement in the massacre remains unclear. Neither articles about Pérez nor any person I interviewed revealed any information about what Pérez did as a member of the Rural Guard. This is possibly a result of the negative image it would cast over Pérez, or from a simple lack of knowledge. It is also unknown if he chose to stay in Santiago after his service in the Guard or moved to the city years later. His daughter also suggested that he remained somewhat active in military service after his arrival in Santiago, possibly achieving the status of captain. His status in the military may have garnered respect and resources for his religious community in the harsh conditions of Cuba's Republican era. However, it is unclear if his military service career was favorable after 1959. The revolutionary government often viewed veterans of the former regime with suspicion.

At the time of Pérez' arrival, inhabitants of Santiago de Cuba were familiar with Kongo-informed religious ideas in multiple local manifestations of Muertería practices as well as those of Vodú and Espiritismo. However, Pérez' presence constituted a milestone, in part because he was among the early religious leaders to introduce familiar but distinctive traditions of Palo Monte in the line of Mayombe, and Regla de Ocha. Apparently, Pérez arrived in Santiago well versed in Palo behaviors, possibly in the Matanzas spiritual line of a man named Beneficio. Nevertheless, Pérez was especially interested in Regla de Ocha and studied the tradition as he maintained his active Palo practice. He was even known to work, and possibly counted himself, among Santiago practitioners of Muertería (Millet 2000, 117). In 1933, Pérez traveled to Havana and was ritually initiated or 'made saint' in Regla de Ocha religious practice. Pérez made saint with the oricha Changó, possibly becoming the second Santiagueran after Rosa Torres, another foundational Ocha leader in Santiago, to make saint by way of Havana religious authorities. However, José Millet noted that identifying the earliest people to make saint in Santiago becomes complicated because of what he identified as the Oriente phenomenon of "self-initiation" (Millet 2000, 112).

Sometime after Pérez moved to Los Hoyos, he built his home and established the *Templo San Benito de Palermo* in the same location. Records or even oral history of the temple's founding were not available. However, it is curious that the temple's name does have precedent with earlier Kongo cabildos in the city's history. A prominent Kongo cabildo de nación dating back to the seventeenth century was organized under the saint patronage of San Benito de Palermo and became linked to the Santo Thomas church, located near Los Hoyos neighborhood (Portuondo 2000a, 81; Almaguer 2010, 31, 73). This cabildo gained early political

prestige by organizing an armed resistance against an English raid of the city in the seventeenth century, and soon began using their influence to negotiate the manumission of its members. The cabildo attracted as many as 500 or more members across several branches. When a newly elected king was crowned in 1873, it was also under the patronage of San Benito de Palermo (Portuondo 2000, 81). When cabildos were disbanded toward the end of the nineteenth and into the early twentieth centuries, many of their activities were forced to go underground, which in part led to the rise of private *casa-templo* (house-temple) religious communities. These are religious communities based in private residences. It is plausible that Pérez rose to religious leadership with the members of the former Kongo cabildo in the city, or perhaps named his casa-templo to honor its heritage.

Whatever the particular origins of Reynerio's Templo San Benito de Palermo, it constituted a central location for his community's religious activities. In the mid-1970s, around the time of his death in 1974, the Pérez family started an annual public procession in the name of Santa Barbara and Changó. The procession continues to this day on December 4, the feast day of Changó and saint day of Santa Barbara, though the circumstances around the creation or use of the Santa Barbara effigy in Pérez' lifetime are unclear (Wirtz 2007, 55). However, records of nineteenth century African cabildos in Santiago demonstrate that such effigies of saints, their garments, and decorations carried high social value among cabildo members. Not only were they a centerpiece of annual cabildo processions, but their location became the subject of heated debates and legal battles when cabildo leadership fell into disorder or the church wanted to assert control (Portuondo 2000a*,* 83). It is unclear if the effigies were also consecrated in religious traditions beyond the Catholic Church, but it is possible if not likely.

Pérez was among the first generation of influential religious leaders initiating Santiaguerans into Havana-based Regla de Ocha and Matanzas-based Mayombe line of Palo Monte. Locally, Pérez is perhaps most famous for the large number of initiations he performed into both Palo and Ocha in Santiago de Cuba and throughout Oriente, beginning in the 1940s. There is no available estimate for the "large" number of people that Pérez initiated into Palo or Ocha in either Santiago or Oriente. However, some Santiaguerans recall that Pérez once initiated five or six people into Regla de Ocha in one month (Millet 2000, 118). If Pérez initiated an average of even one person per two months into his religious family throughout his life in Oriente, the number of his direct initiates would exceed 500.

Pérez was also known to train his initiates "very fast." According to Larduet, Pérez provided his initiates with ritual instruments and knowledge, including a systematic means of initiating other people, in fewer years of preparation than was usual (2001b, 115). However, there were some who studied directly under Pérez for years after their initiation. Pérez taught a structured form of religious ritual practice that could be repeated without first fully comprehending its sacred foundation. This allowed easier transmission across generations and, given the large number of his initiates, suggests that he became highly sought after or may have actively sought to expand his religious family. Pérez was also known to have traveled throughout the Oriente region, initiating individuals in Santiago, Holguin, Manzanillo, Guantánamo, Las Tunas, and even in Havana and western Cuba. Interestingly, respondents to not recall Pérez ever traveling back to Matanzas to initiate people.

Reynerio Pérez held or developed a set of ritual or liturgical procedures in his initiations that integrated Palo Monte and Regla de Ocha activities, which aligned well with the spiritual

and practice predisposition of Oriente residents. In a region with an established precedent of trasculturative processes that integrated religious comprehensions, Pérez often bound initiation into Palo and Ocha together. That is, he initiated individuals into Regla de Ocha contingent upon their previous initiation into Palo, which he also performed. He taught an understanding of the oricha of Ocha that was paired with mpungo of Palo, all divine spirit forces of their respective traditions. For example, a person who received the oricha Changó also would be spiritually related to the mpungo Siete Rayos. The pairing was based on some relationship between the two spirit forces and not a conflation of one into the other. Pérez became the *padrino* or "godfather" of an initiate in both religious traditions. This double initiatory procedure afforded Pérez privileged authority over his initiates by discouraging external religious authority figures from exercising power over his initiates in either tradition (Laduet 2001b, 115). Pérez did not only initiate people into Palo and then Ocha. His daughter shared that he had also "[given] many santeros ngañga," which is contrary to a Palo-to-Ocha order of initiation to which many contemporary practitioners adhere. Perez may be known as the first to combine traditions because of his double initiation style, as well as the nascence of Ocha and Palo practices in Oriente, at least as they were understood as distinct and separate religious traditions.

In the middle of the twentieth century, Reynerio Pérez became a popular religious authority in Santiago de Cuba whose influence extended to other Oriente locations. His popularity rested on several converging factors. He lived in Santiago, with ritual knowledge of Palo Monte and Regla de Ocha, at a time when coherent practice of either tradition was relatively unknown or new to the city and the region. The large size of his spiritual family

suggests that the systematic ritual knowledge that Pérez introduced was effective and fit into a cosmic orientation already present in the area. Pérez also combined his knowledge of both traditions into structured and learnable forms as he established Templo San Benito de Palermo. Pérez died on January 30, 1974, but has become a significant component of the recorded history and public discourse on twentieth century religious practice in Santiago de Cuba.

Rosa Torres

Rosa Torres is widely considered as the first person from Santiago de Cuba to have made saint in Regla de Ocha. Her casa-templo has supported five consanguineal generations of leaders in Regla de Ocha and Ifá and remains a respected fixture in Los Hoyos.

Torres, a contemporary of Reynerio Pérez, was born as early as the 1880s and lived in Santiago. The family history recounts that her grandmother came from Africa to Cuba under unusual circumstances. Rather than being enslaved herself, she reportedly left Africa voluntarily, as a person of some means, in search of her brother who had been captured and sent to the island. She intended to travel to negotiate for his emancipation, and ended up staying on the island, possibly forced into servitude herself based on the family name. Rosa's mother danced in the *comparsa*, or dance troup called *Tumba Francesa*, that drew cultural distinction from French influence. Torres helped support her family by working in the local Bacardi Rum factory, cleaning bottles.

Like others in Oriente, Torres worked with a personal muerto. The circumstances of her developing a relationship with her muerto, named Papá Victor or possibly Papá Dinga, are unclear, but she came to host annual celebrations of the spirit that were well attended by

people in the community. It was her muerto, according to her family, who mandated that she shift her spiritual work to Regla de Ocha. She pursued the mandate, and eventually made saint in Havana sometime between 1931 and 1933, crowned with the oricha Changó. A Santiagueran studying medicine in Havana named Rosita Balbueno helped officiate the initiation. Upon returning, Torres continued spiritual work and frequently performed consultations in Ocha.

By the 1940s, Regla de Ocha was beginning to spread in Santiago, but the city's emerging *Santeros* lacked the infrastructure to perform the elaborate making saint rituals. Everyone interested in Ocha was forced to travel to Havana to make saint, which added cost to the already expensive procedure and slowed the tradition's growth in Santiago. A prominent Havana *santera* named Aurora Lamar traveled to Santiago with her recent Santiagueran initiate named Amada Sanchez. Lamar called together the three major Santeros of the city, including Rosa Torres, Reynerio Pérez, and another person named Totica, for a meeting that changed the course of Ocha in the city. According to oral history, she asked why the making saint ceremony was not being conducted in Santiago, adding, "There are no herbs here? There are no rivers? There are no stones?…What you don't have here is santeros!" (Hechavarría 1999, 119). After highlighting the local availability of materials for the ritual, and the need for more santeros to grow the tradition in the city, Lamar encouraged and helped organize the first ceremonies to make saint soon after. However, many expensive materials were necessary to perform the important ritual, even if done without Havana travel. It is likely that community resources were pooled to achieve the feat, since few black Cubans had the wealth to fund the ritual alone. It is worth noting that Aurora Lamar and Amada Sanchez both privately operated brothels in Havana and Santiago respectively until the Revolutionary government shut them down and

relocated their sex workers in different vocations. While it is not widely claimed among Santiago santeros, it appears that at least some of the early capital involved in launching Ocha in the city came from women whose financial independence was derived from one of the few profitable, albeit illicit occupational options available.

Rosa Torres was among the early santeras of the city to begin making saint, increasing the independence of Santiago residents from Havana for initiations. As early as 1969, initiations into Ifá began occurring in Santiago as Mario Medina Hechavarría and Manuel Garcia became the first Santiagueran babalao.

PUBLIC INROADS: VICENTE PORTUONDO MARTÍN AND CASA DEL CARIBE

Vicente Portuondo Martín became a respected and public figure of multiple religious traditions in Santiago de Cuba during the second half of the twentieth century. The third personality memorialized in the annual Santa Barbara procession, he was a mentee and ritual descendant of Reynerio Pérez but lived beyond the shadow of this prominent elder. His early inclination to learn sacred knowledge matured into a pursuit of comprehension and practice in Palo Monte and Regla de Ocha, but his initial religious recognition developed around Muertería and his personal muerto. While he developed a reputable casa-templo active in the three traditions that included national and international initiates, he also joined the Casa del Caribe cultural research organization at its founding. A large part of the late leader's legacy was his collaborative effort with Casa del Caribe to surface organic traditions from the shadows of private or hidden practice and substantiate in public the integrity of organic Africa-inspired

religious traditions of *Oriente* in post-revolutionary Cuba. Yet, his story also offers an unusually detailed account of a practitioner's path to multiple religious belonging.

Multiple Religious Training

Much of Vicente Portuondo's early life and development is known from a personal interview published by Casa del Caribe (Portuondo 1997), though practitioner respondents have also contributed details. He was born on July 19, 1949, the youngest of eight children in a family residing in the Los Hoyos neighborhood of Santiago de Cuba. Vicente's family practiced Espiritismo and his mother was strongest and a spirit medium in the tradition. He demonstrated what respondents described as an early 'inclination' to sacred knowledge from a young age, and was the only sibling to do so. For instance, Vicente recalled creating his own sacred space at four years old, made from Saint images cut from cardboard and homemade figurines to which he offered flowers. He and a cousin also made makeshift drums and replicated the drum rhythms they overheard from the homes of Los Hoyos neighbors who would hold religious celebrations of drum and song during holidays. He also described childhood 'visions' of spirits that confused and scared him, but also set him to look for answers. So passionate about religious matters was the young Vicente that his school notebooks were filled with drawings of saint icons rather than class notes. As a consequence of his spiritual preoccupation, he was made to repeat the third grade three times before he was transferred to a school where art supplemented general education (Portuondo 1997, 51). An early spiritual inclination is noted as among the attributes respected in religious leadership and this inclination would guide his entire religious life.

As an adolescent, Portuondo felt and saw the presence of a consistent spirit being who worked with him. Not knowing the name of the muerto, Vicente named him Pa Gambao but years later learned the muerto's name was Pa Mundo. On September 7th of the early 1960s, on the eve of festivities for Cuban patron Saint Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre and Oricha Ochún, Vicente decided to make a modest offering to the muerto. Not having a prescribed manner of communicating with Pa Gambao, he and some friends offered sweets and drinks in communion and had a small party. This initial spiritual activity, a milestone in direct recognition of the muerto, began an annual tradition for honoring Pa Gambao/Pa Mundo. As his spiritual maturation continued and he created a cazuela del muerto, September 7th became an annual day of Muertería ritual work engaging the "African dead" (Portuondo 1997, 52).

As a teenager, Vicente began visiting with a network of espiritistas who lived in his neighborhood. He came under the apprenticeship of Juan Delís de la Font, an espiritista who led a nearby *centro de Espiritismo* (Espiritismo center). The center functioned as a 'spirit school' where he learned about ways to invoke spirits. He described the process as a mentor helping to aid spiritual contact so that spirits themselves could clarify procedures of communication. While the centro offered a consistent ritual space for Vicente to learn and perform sacred work, the practice left him largely unfulfilled. In part, the dissatisfaction stemmed from a perceived weakness of 'guardian' and 'auxiliary' or 'missionary' spirits of Espiritismo. These spirits were neither African nor Creole, and were not able to manage negative 'currents' in ritual work or the periodic appearance of unwanted or *oscuras* (dark) spirits. African muertos could manage such negative presence but their invocation was

separate from Espiritismo. As he described, "I was looking into Espiritismo for a truth I was not finding…I was attracted to the African dead" (Portuondo 1997, 52).

Portuondo learned that the name of his muerto was Pa Mundo during ritual work at a different centro de Espiritismo. The confirmation inspired him to begin preparing a cazuela del muerto. The cazuela de muerto metallic or ceramic bowl-shaped sacred instrument that houses spirits of the dead is among the oldest religious elements particular to *Oriente*. Portuondo said that he prepared his cazuela the way he watched others prepare one and the way he felt he should prepare it. His impetus to create sacred objects from contextual familiarity and intuitive consciousness, if not spiritual dialogue, rather than along prescribed or rigid lines is a feature of Muertería that also creates diversity of expression.

The family of Vicente began allowing him to perform ritual work from their home after he and his mother shared the same dream and later, his family witnessed him become mounted by a muerto. With religious practice based in his home, Portuondo's reputation grew beyond Los Hoyos, largely informed by the strength of his muerto Pa Mundo. Family members and early friends recall people from around Santiago seeking council or healing from Pa Mundo regardless of their own religious background. As one Palero respondent said, "everyone came to see Pa Mundo!" Vicente himself described feeling overwhelmed with the volume of requests for spiritual work from city residents but nevertheless managed a budding religious community under his practice.

There is some ambiguity as to the religious tradition to which Pa Mundo belonged. Vicente himself advanced that despite his background and training in Espiritismo or Espiritismo Cruzado, his work with African muertos belonged to Muertería and was distinct from

Espiritismo. This sentiment was confirmed by several members of his community with whom I spoke who recalled that although he sometimes worked with espiritistas, his own work with muertos did not include recitations of prayers related to literature of Allen Kardec or recourse to guardian and auxiliary spirits. Although Vicente was not yet aware of the Palo Monte or Regla de Ocha traditions, Pa Mundo's renown would continue well after Vicente was established in these spiritual activities.

Portuondo reached a turning point when he witnessed *Siete Rayos,* a Palo spirit, inviting him to make a *caldero*, a ritual cauldron distinct from the cazuela de muerto and related to Palo Monte. Portuondo described his vision of Siete Rayos as "a medium-sized figure, not so stocky, with a semi-round face resembling an Apache" (Portuondo 1997, 53). Although referenced as a Congo spirit, the description also makes a connection with Cuba's indigenous populations. Portuondo said that he had wanted to make a caldero but was ambivalent about doing so on his own. The encounter with Siete Rayos confirmed his inclination and he prepared his caldero, "not in accordance with what someone dictated, with some teacher; I made it conforming to my thoughts and what I perceived" (Portuondo 1997, 54). The personally motivated and spiritually inspired creation of his caldero marked the beginning of his transition into Palo Monte and at this time, he came under the mentorship of Reynerio Pérez.

Portuondo recalled that in the mid 1960s, Reynerio Pérez was lead among the two or three elder adherents of Palo in Santiago de Cuba. The young Portuondo positioned himself in close proximity to the Palo community and subtlety demonstrated his interest in learning religious knowledge. Gradually, he was recognized as a talented and trustworthy person and allowed access inside the practicing community. He developed a strong working relationship

with Pérez in particular after he sought advice from the elder about becoming initiated into a Palo spiritual family. Pérez invited him to become initiated into his own spiritual family and Vicente accepted the offer. Vicente recalled that Siete Rayos mounted him and Reynerio during the ritual initiation. The reoccurrence of Siete Rayos in Vicente's life made it clear that this Palo spirit protected him.

Portuondo gained deeper access into the Palo practicing community after his initiation and established a profound mentoring relationship with Pérez. Several elders in Los Hoyos with whom I spoke remembered Portuondo visiting Pérez' home almost daily for hours at a time and that he regarded Pérez as a paternal figure. Portuondo worked with Pérez for years before receiving a ngañga ritual instrument and becoming formally recognized as a leader in the Los Hoyos Palo community. Soon after Vicente received his ngañga, Reynerio gathered the materials to initiate him into Regla de Ocha and he made saint in Changó, the oricha related to the Palo spirit force Siete Rayos. Initially, Vicente evaded initiation into Regla de Ocha and regarded the tradition as less powerful than Palo and too expensive to maintain. He eventually decided to become initiated only after Changó manifested through his body, proving to him that Ocha could also be an efficacious religious practice. Portuondo's relationship with Reynerio spanned the remainder of Reynerio's life. When Reynerio Pérez died in 1974, Vicente was known to have inherited Ocha-related religious materials of his mentor and friend, likely increasing his prestige in the community (Wirtz 2007, 55-56).

Empowered by systematic ritual knowledge and experience in Palo Monte, Regla de Ocha, and Espiritismo as well as a strong reputation in Muertería, Portuondo began establishing his own spiritual family in Santiago and across the island. Portuondo frequently exchanged with

paleros, santeros, muerteras, and espiritistas in a religious network that extended from Guantanamo to at least Havana province. His cross-regional travels enabled him to initiate many Cubans of Havana into his spiritual family. Although Portuondo had a network of religious colleagues in the western province, he met considerable resistance to the ritual initiations that he performed in Havana. Two knowledgeable respondents reported that Portuondo's life was threatened more than once in these religious disputes, and in some cases physical violence was involved in establishing his spiritual family in the area. The conflict may have been a result of east-west regional tensions over ritual or liturgical differences. The conflict may have also been over designated spiritual family territories and a sense that Vicente was trespassing upon their territory of initiates. Nevertheless, Vicente had initiated at least ten people in Havana before 1972, and at least 50 in total. According to estimates from casa-templo members, his religious community, informally regarded as Templo de Vicente, held well over 100 initiated people in *Oriente*, and considerably more through subsequent spiritual family generations.

Collaboration with Casa del Caribe

A cadre of Cuban intellectuals and researchers, led by Joel James Figarola, founded Casa del Caribe on June 23, 1982. The organization was established with an explicit mission to investigate Caribbean cultures and understand the African and Caribbean components of Cuban identity. Equally explicit was a goal to understand the integrity of organic or popular religious traditions of Cuba and the Caribbean (Delgado 2000, 5-6). In the context of interaction between investigators and local religious figures, Casa del Caribe invited Vicente Portuondo to

become the *katenganga*, or Palo religious protector of the organization. According to members of Casa del Caribe present at its founding, some doubt arose over the quality of Palo spiritual work done by early collaborating practitioners. Vicente was invited to re-consecrate religious objects housed at the organization and serve as *katenganga* in part to mitigate this doubt. The strength of his reputation in community and spiritual family link to Reynerio Pérez likely enhanced the legitimacy of Casa del Caribe among Santiago practitioners as much as Vicente garnered prestige from his affiliation with the state organization.

The organization initiated considerable work to celebrate cultural activities and historical contributions of Oriente and Caribbean communities in public. This process involved sponsoring the annual Festival del Caribe (Caribbean Festival), and its ceremonial passing of the *mpaka* event. In this public ceremony attended by international dignitaries, Vicente passed an mpaka, a sacred animal horn capped by a mirror, to a representative of the country that the city of Santiago would highlight in the following year's Festival celebration. The prominent inclusion of a religious leader and ritual instrument associated with Cuba's Africa-based sacred practices in Festival activities not only demonstrates Vicente's collaborative relationship with Casa del Caribe, but also Casa's efforts to raise Africa-inspired religions to a public and dignified level. However, Casa's work to achieve the latter goal also included representations of the largely private or hidden religious activities of Oriente's African descendent population. Portuondo was among several practitioners and casa-templo religious communities that participated in hosting religious or religious-themed public events at Casa del Caribe across a spectrum of religious traditions. The site of Casa del Caribe is relevant to the significance of such performances. The organization is located in the historically racially segregated and

wealthy neighborhood of Vista Alegre. Before the Revolution, African descendents were not allowed to visit the neighborhood after dark. The area stands in stark contrast to the historically impoverished African descendant neighborhoods most active in organic Africa-inspired religious practices.

The performance of such religious and cultural events at Casa del Caribe brought about dialogue between residents of very different backgrounds, but also generated concerns. Casa staff members recall that Joel James fielded some resistance from government officials about legitimizing what they considered outdated or 'backward' cultural practices that had no place in Cuba's revolutionary future. However, Joel James was particularly adamant about ensuring the inclusion of African descendants and their cultural and religious contributions in the revolutionary development of Cuba. Similarly, members of Vicente's casa-templo and other city residents recall that Vicente also encountered resistance from practitioner communities about exposing too many religious secrets to the public in his work with Casa del Caribe. However, Portuondo appeared equally committed to posturing Cuban organic religious traditions in a position of public respect and integrity. Joel James and Vicente Portuondo, both strong willed and dedicated to their collaboration, navigated a contentious political climate in their respective communities to bring about awareness of organic Africa-inspired traditions.

In addition to these joint efforts, Portuondo's work with Casa del Caribe also afforded him the rare opportunity to travel abroad as part of the organization's international religious investigations. In the 1990s for example, Portuondo traveled to Santiago de Compestella Spain and visited Venezuela several times. While in Venezuela, he engaged in cultural exchange with religious practitioners in the country, and was said to have initiated fifteen Venezuelans into

the sacred practices of his spiritual family. Portuondo is also known to have international initiates in Mexico, Spain, Holland, Haiti, Dominican Republic, and the United States. Vicente Portuondo died of bone cancer on October 5, 2002, at 53 years of age. He was buried in a very prestigious and exclusive cemetery of Santiago de Cuba, holding the graves of such Cuban heroes as José Martí and Fidel Castro, and is remembered in three annual public memorial ceremonies sponsored by Casa del Caribe and performed by his ritual descendants during Festival del Caribe.

CONCLUSION

Reynerio Pérez and Rosa Torres are two foundational figures that helped spread Regla de Ocha and Palo Monte in and beyond Santiago de Cuba since the 1930s. The palero and santero Reynerio Pérez is credited with popularizing a more systematic Mayombe line of Palo in Santiago and throughout Oriente. The santera and espiritista Rosa Torres became the first Santiagueran to make saint and contributed to the earliest generations of Ocha practitioners in the city.

Each figure represents important moments in the rise of multiple religious belonging in the city. Because Pérez so widely performed "double initiations" in both Palo and Ocha, he shaped an integrated nature of initiations and practice throughout the city and region from among the earliest initiates in either tradition. The practice enhanced his leadership power but also linked the two traditions at the start of their expansion. Torres also represents an important milestone in religious multiplicity because she was among the first in the city to receive or at least act on a message from her personal muerto to advance within a new and

different religious practice. Her path toward Ocha is filtered by the authoritative voice of her muerto, linking the legitimacy of one of the oldest religious patterns in the region, related to Muertería and Espiritismo, with the emergent and relatively foreign Regla de Ocha. Both figures reveal early dimensions of how a multiple religious belonging inclusive of Palo and Ocha began to take shape in the city.

Moreover, each figure introduced these traditions within a regional ethos already acclimated to ancestral voices informing residents' lives beyond any particular dictates of prescribed religious borders. This regional ethos developed over centuries of trasculturated exchanges and developments wherein Kongo influences were prominent, in part because they were so adaptable to a wide range of circumstances. In the Oriente "land of the dead," Pérez also took the additional step of establishing a cabildo-like religious community that appears to pay homage to, if not create continuity with earlier Kongo cabildo predecessors. Such integrative behaviors suggest a bridge between the earlier, familiar spiritual orientation of the region and the twentieth century additions of Palo Monte and Regla de Ocha that remain active in the city. Vicente Portuondo Martín reveals a continuing development of religious practice in Santiago. Not only did he build a substantial and international spiritual family from a multiple religious belonging foundation in Palo, Ocha, Muertería, and Espiritismo Cruzado, but he contributed significantly to public awareness of these traditions through his collaboration with Casa del Caribe. This chapter has attempted to articulate some of the ethno-cultural and religious foundations of Oriente and view early manifestations of multiple religious belonging in religious developments of Santiago de Cuba. In the next chapter, we will begin reviewing data collected on contemporary expressions of multiple religious belonging in the city.

CHAPTER 5:

MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING DATA IN SANTIAGO DE CUBA

INTRODUCTION

Multiple religious belonging is a phenomenon wherein individuals or groups contemporaneously belong to, practice, or value commitments to more than one religious tradition. It generally recognizes the practice or use of multiple religious traditions while maintaining respect for the historical development, distinctive powers or spiritual forces, and boundaries of each, and may include activities that blend or permeate religious borders. Religious boundaries can be difficult to ascertain in the best of circumstances, but for my purposes they are distinguished as fundamental qualities that are reasonably understood within community to comprise the character of a religious tradition that can be practiced independently with social legitimacy. Importantly, the crux of religious boundary in this conceptualization is not necessarily elements of difference from another, but the relative autonomy of any one religious tradition. This distinction is important because it allows for the integrity of any one religious tradition to loosely hold, even as there may be areas of overlap or commonality between different traditions. With this definitional priority on the plausibility of religious singularity over difference in mind, the following discussion will review data I collected

about multiple religious belonging in Santiago de Cuba, organized by interviews and observations. The religious traditions that were most common in expressions of multiple religious belonging among practitioners in this project include Muertería, Espiritismo Cruzado, Palo Monte and specifically its Mayombe line, and Regla de Ocha/Ifá. I begin by briefly reviewing important features of these religious traditions. Next, I relate interview data among seven select respondents that view religious practice and relationships between traditions from different vantage points and backgrounds. Finally, the chapter details three ritual activities in Regla de Ocha, Palo, though with attributes of Muertería, and Espiritismo Cruzado. Each of these ritual activities offers a glimpse of what religious practice looks like and how traditions differ. These focal rituals are also situated in the context of other ritual activities of the respective practicing community, offering clues into their multiple religious belonging.

RELIGIOUS CONTOURS

The following section explores basic contours of the four organic, Africa-inspired Cuban religious traditions that emerged as primary contributors to multiple religious belonging: Muertería, Espiritismo Cruzado, Palo Monte, and Regla de Ocha/Ifá. This discussion is based upon both literary sources and fieldwork observations and conversations. Although each religious tradition is discussed with common features and characteristics, there is variance within each religious community's particular expressions. The variety is an accepted and respected feature of religious life in the city. None of the religious traditions operate under an ultimate authority that demands conformity or punishes heterodoxy. Rather, the organizational structure of religious practice in any one religious tradition typically manifests at

the level of casa-templos and spiritual families of ritual descent. This is the level at which religious authority is most successfully exercised and is frequently expressed in the maxim, "each house has its rules." The extension of spiritual families and the concomitant establishment of new and independent casa-templos from successive generations of religious leaders is equally a normal and anticipated practice across religious traditions. Each ritual generation of leaders has a capacity to establish particular rules for her or his house, which adds a highly adaptive quality to the evolution of any single religious tradition and opens the arena for a variety of expressions of religious practice engaging multiple traditions.

In Cuba, organic Africa-inspired religious traditions occupy a particular space in the religious landscape associated with what anthropologists and other scholars have long described as magic, sorcery, fetish objects, and possession cults. To the best of my ability, I will avoid using such language. Such descriptors have the obvious advantage of linking vast studies under common conceptual rubrics that enable and advance comparative cultural study. However, the disadvantage is that these descriptors carry unnecessary and at times debilitating "baggage" within western European and North American cultural sensibilities. They gained salience within pervasive and evolutionarily charged ideas about primitivism that are intimately tied to notions of civilization and modernity, to say nothing of their dubious relationship to Christian idioms. Their usage runs a serious risk of prematurely hampering the African American & African studies and anthropological goals of approaching African descendants and others of the world as dignified and culturally distinct compatriots in humanity (Long, 1995). With these sensitivities in mind, we may proceed with a brief discussion of religious traditions.

Muertería

In the development of sacred orientations throughout Oriente Cuba, among the oldest is thought to be a range of highly local ritual practices organized around the periodic appearance of one or more particular and broadly ancestral spirits, or muertos, in the life of individuals receptive to spiritual communication (Millet 2000, 110-111). The literature in this area is not well established, though some testimonials exist (González 1997; Portuondo 1997). These are consistent with oral history accounts within families describing a relative or two of past generations, frequently those who had lived in the Oriente countryside, who worked with a special muerto to develop rituals used within the family or a small community. Such activities continue to have a presence in Oriente and Santiago. Details about the rituals, procedures, or powers are limited and variable, but the most commonly referenced sacred object used in such practices was a cazuela del muerto, a pot or bowl-like container used with spirits of the dead. The cazuela or bowl would house the muerto, and be filled with materials deemed appropriate. It would be used in rituals or activities of spiritual communication (Dodson 2008, 155-156). It is possible that the cazuela emerged from similar processes that may have brought about the ngañga sacred cauldrons of Palo. Namely, both the cazuela and the ngañga objects may have developed as a reimagining of individual and small mobile sacred bundles empowered with Kongo-based *nkisi* spiritual power. The contents of the small bundles possibly transitioned into placement in larger, more permanent containers like bowls or cauldrons that were more appropriate to a home as independent living arrangements for African descendents became available (Meneses 1994, 106).

Another distinguishing feature of the practice was that it relied upon the particular communion of an individual and their muerto, which was not necessarily transferable across generations. Muertos are frequently said to choose a certain individual, and if the individual accepts the bond, their special relationship dictates the parameters of their activities. A contemporary Muertería practitioner from El Cobre added that in his experience, the "choice" of accepting the bond is superficial since his muerto punished him with misfortune after he initially refused to accept its invitation (González 1997, 56-57). Almost all practitioners with whom I spoke identified working with a variety of either African or native Indian muertos, although one described having a phenotypically white muerto with him. The path to becoming a Muertería leader, organizing ritual activities for a group around the communion with personal muertos, and participating in the sacred events of such communities do not appear to require rituals of initiation.

Scholars working with Casa del Caribe observed diverse practices organized around contact with muertos and used the term Muertería or *Muerterismo* to describe the occurrence (Larduet 2014, 98). However, this scholarly designation is not widely known or used among practitioners. A more commonly recognized generic term for the muerto-oriented activities among everyday eastern Cubans was *Bembé de Sao*. It is debatable as to whether these activities constitute a religious tradition since there is such high variability in forms of practice. However, I suggest that it is a useful demarcation because spiritual work with muertos is a fundamental element of Oriente sacred practices. Even as this work can extend or blend into other religious traditions like Espiritismo Cruzado or Palo, it can and is also practiced independently, without such integration.

Espiritismo Cruzado

Espiritismo Cruzado is one of several variants of Cuban Espiritismo that became popular in Oriente in the mid-nineteenth century and spread across the island. Cuban Espiritismo is largely informed by the writings of French author Hippolyte Léon Denizard Rivail under the penname Allan Kardec, who merged Christian and scientific ideas to write about methods of spiritual communication. In Cuba, Espiritismo became so popular among diverse socio-economic classes of Cubans that it gained substantial social legitimacy especially as it layered with expressions of popular Catholicism (Lago 2001, 71-72). Yet, Espiritismo's elevation of mediating figures to facilitate contact with the dead also resonated among Cubans of African descent. It is possible that Espiritismo Cruzado gained traction in this group because it extended social legitimacy of practice to ideas about spirits consistent with spiritual orientation among African descendants. At any rate, the practice is characterized by a "crossing" of elements from organic Africa-inspired religious traditions into ritual procedures of Espiritismo that stress clarity and purity, usually symbolized with glasses of water (Millet 1996). Also, unlike Regla de Ocha and Palo Monte, Espiritismo practices do not appear to demand particular initiation rites. Sacred spaces frequently include glasses of water, a crucifix or rosary, plants, and images of saints or deceased relatives, among other objects. Ceremonies may involve particular configurations of these materials and recitations of songs and prayers from Catholicism, books of Allan Kardec, or even from Ocha, Palo, Vodú, or other sources. The invocation of an epritistista's personal muerto(s) is an important part of many ritual events, and can be a centerpiece of gatherings. One espiritista of Cruzado noted that many types of spirits

are personally involved with her, but only two actually mount her to actively engage a community that regularly attends her ritual events.

Like Muertería, Espiritismo Cruzado can manifest in a variety of ways relative to the choices of the lead practitioner or medium. The "crossing" of diverse sacred elements is sometimes referred to as a crossing of "currents" or spiritual energies, and the invocation of spirits associated with different religious traditions can constitute such currents. Adding to the complexity is a popular tendency to describe any ritual work involving the invocation of "African dead" as Espiritismo Cruzado, whether or not widely recognized materials of Espiritismo are evident. For instance, I attended two ritual events attendees described as Cruzado that were fundamentally based on working a cazuela to invoke anticipated muertos and appeared more consistent with Muertería. Alternatively, among other espiritistas, the presence of African muertos in Espiritismo work is also often cause for labeling the activity Espiritismo Cruzado. To some extent, a racial politics appeared to be at play in labeling ritual activities with the dead, using Espiritismo to suggest distance from negative connotations of Africanness. Nevertheless, practicing Espiritismo with the presence of spirits, songs, or procedures not widely associated with the European background of Espiritismo is broadly recognized as Espiritismo Cruzado and is a tradition available for independent practice.

Palo Monte

Palo Monte, or Regla de Congo, are umbrella titles given to the variety of localized sets of religious practices known through such specific branches as Mayombe, Kimbisa, Balongo, Vrillumba, Briyumba, and others. These practices may trace their ancestry to particular African

ethnicities corresponding to locations in Bakongo and Kikongo speaking areas of central-west Africa, or to those Africa-inspired ethnicities evolved from Cuban ethnogenetic processes of eighteenth and nineteenth century Cuba (Palmié 1993). Despite different ritual lineages, communities practicing the Palo Monte, or Palo for short, are traditionally found in the most dispossessed neighborhoods with high concentrations of African descendants (Dodson 2008, 82).

Although there are local variations in practice, Palo communities share several common features. Fundamentally, the religious orientation is undergirded by reverence to Nsambi, who exists as both supreme creator and totality of creation. The natural environment is considered an optimal location from which to build a growing awareness of Nsambi and access power inherent to elements of creation, known as nkisi, which can be used to intercede in the course of events. Importantly, Palo includes a central sacred object known as an ngañga, an iron cauldron containing a variety of materials that serves as a concentration of nkisi force. The ngañga and its elements are empowered by a mediating muerto, ritually brought from a cemetery, which then resides in the vessel and is negotiated with to exercise power (Meneses 1994, 105-108).

The power of nkisi is largely based on mimetic logic. This form of mimesis operates through appropriating characteristics of the social and natural environment through behaviorally punning, quoting, and essentially capturing the characteristics as substance in abeyance, and applying that power in dynamic directions (Davis 2000; Dodson 2008, 92-94; Thompson 1983, 117-131). Much of nkisi's power is channeled with the use of an elaborate scripting practice. The culturally distinctive *firmas* (signatures) are used to identify paleros,

ngañga, and ritual lineages, and are a significant element involved in invoking nkisi and muertos (Larduet 2001, 61-63).

Practitioners engage in relationships with a variety of spirits in and out of ritual settings and create distinctive sacred spaces as focal points from which to engage in spiritual interactions and direct nkisi. While sacred spaces revolve around the ngañga as the central object, they also tend to include tree branches, leaves, and even figures of animals. These elements designate the ritual arena as part of nature, or more specifically, forested areas with thick foliage, soil, and other forms of plant and animal life. The variety of spirits that pass through these spaces include those of the recently dead, or the long dead, or *mpungo*, which are spirit forces tied to particular forces of nature. For example, *Serebanda* is a warrior and the owner of iron implements and tools, while *Madre de Agua*, Spanish for "mother of water," holds the sea as her domain. Certain spirits may reside within the ngañga or other sacred elements, while others visit or be invoked through rituals or at other occasions (Meneses 1994, 110; Barnet 2001, 128).

Interactions between Palo practitioners and spirits occur in a variety of forms. Possession is one prominent way that varieties of spirits contact the living. Many instances of possession ethnographically documented around central and other parts of Africa relate possession as an unwanted phenomenon, often manifesting through forms of sickness or ailment (Turner 1968). In Palo, spirit possession is a regular, expected, and intentional phenomenon. Spirits that "mount" and temporarily control a person's body are often focal points of ritual activity. However, there is also ontological space for spiritual contact through other forms such as visions, dreams, and intuitions. The power expressed in these relationships

may flow in both directions. Paleros may exert the power of muertos to achieve particular ends, and spirits may exert power over people to affect their lives (Meneses 1994, 117).

Regla de Ocha/Ifá

Regla de Ocha and Regla de Ifá are two related bodies of religious practice that occupy the same cosmological universe. Regla de Ocha is a tradition that revolves around particular relationships to a variety spirit forces known as oricha, while Regla de Ifá is the premiere divinatory structure through which knowledge of the past, present, and future is organized. Religious communities are structured through lineages of initiation into practice. Lineages extend back several generations and records of membership in a genealogical line are structured into worship procedures. While sacred activities may vary at the level of local ritual lineage community, many of the structures of practice are shared among adherents (Ayorinde 2000).

Both Ocha and Ifá are premised upon a comprehension that every human being is born under a particular guardianship of one or more oricha and that the general trajectory of one's life path, or *camino*, is established before birth and is knowable in life. From these premises, Ocha practitioners, known as santeros, hold domain over the formal establishment of relations between people and their guardian oricha(s). This relationship is made through a central ceremony popularly known as "making saint" or *asiento*, in which an oricha made or installed in the head of an adherent. Ifá leaders, known as babalao, have domain over discovering general life paths, and practice from exclusive communication with *Orula*, the oricha governing the

past, present, and future. Ocha and Ifá both utilize spiritual relationships and mediate the conferring of advice and information from the world of oricha (Murphy 1995, 92).

Oricha are broadly the consciousness in forces of nature or arenas of knowledge and activity. Adherents approach oricha largely as figures of royalty, whose particular attributes correspond to their domain of ownership. For instance, the oricha Changó is known as the owner of lightning and thunder, protector of sacred *Batá* drums, and is a warrior spirit. The oricha Ochún is the spirit of rivers and sweet water, and governs beauty and aesthetics (Barnet 2001, 39-49). Oricha such as these are not conceived of in terms of good and evil, but rather each holds constructive and destructive attributes. Sacred spaces of the tradition reflect themes of oricha royalty and authority. Avatar and elements of the spiritual forces are arranged in hierarchies and color coded to designate identity. Relationships with the various oricha are based in an exchange of gifts and attention to the spirit forces for their ability to guide, enhance, and supplement one's life. Practitioners provide oricha with offerings of food, drinks, and the life essence contained in the blood of animals to gain their favor, but are also expected to receive and submit to the will of oricha and behave in a fashion that respects their authority (Murphy 1995, 93).

PERSONALITIES

Practitioner accounts of the relationships between different religious traditions, as well as contours of their own experiences and backgrounds, can help elucidate features of multiple religious belonging. Of the thirty formal and informal interviews I conducted in the field, seven emerged as particularly informative about experiences in the city's religious

traditions and how these traditions relate. In selecting these interviews, I gave priority to individuals who demonstrated a range of religious belonging expressions and spoke from viewpoints that favored differing practices. The selection is also representative of many common attitudes and experiences expressed less fully by others in the data. These seven figures will form a common basis of analysis, though some data from interviews not included here will also elaborate analytical themes. Names are omitted in all but one of the interviews below, replaced with a practitioner title and letter. The titles chosen are based only on how respondents initially introduced themselves and do not reflect the range of religious practices in which they were involved. When available, descriptions of respondents' arranged spaces of sacred objects are included as part of the setting.

Espiritista A

A respected elder approaching 80 years of age, Espiritista A was a woman who had studied and practiced Espiritismo Cruzado since she was a child, had made saint some 40 years prior in the oricha Ogún, and was also periodically active in Palo. The interview occurred in her home in December 2017. Her home consisted of a long, narrow pathway leading to an opening connecting four rooms, two of which led to other rooms. A corner of the open area where we met displayed adorned dolls and a sculpture. On a small table against a blue and red cloth backdrop, a large black female doll in a wide red and white dress, red head scarf, and blue neck scarf, stood between two black male dolls dressed in red and white holding a cigar and rattle on either side. In front of them, a plant and a small sculpture of a hand with an eye in the palm stood upright and held a bill of money between the fingers. At the foot of the table, there was

a tall plant, a basket holding a baby doll and fruit, a white candle, and ceramic bowl holding stones. Espiritista A described this space as a visual aid to "help visitors who cannot see spirits better visualize them during consultations." A connected room displayed a Saint Bárbara figurine dressed in a long red and white dress with two wine glasses of cloudy liquid and a saucer of food. Behind it, a three-tiered rack displayed small porcelain figurines of animals, flowers, and three Buddha. In the bedroom beyond this room, there was a dresser top and three-tiered shelf all displaying multiple wine glasses and tumblers of clear liquid, containers of dried plants and roots, pictures of saints and deceased family members, and figurines of a Native American wearing a headdress, a Buddha, a bust of José Martí, and African figures. She described this space as coinciding with her Espiritismo practice. Weeks later, after we established a stronger rapport, Espiritista A briefly allowed to me to view her and her husband's Palo sacred space. This hidden space was comprised of one large burnt black iron cauldron, presumably a ngañga, filled with iron and wooden spikes, dried animals, and horns affixed with mirrors. Among other materials, there were also two smaller blackened pots filled with similar objects and it was not clear if these were also ngañga, cazuelas del muerto, or other sacred elements.

Espiritista A revealed that both Espiritismo and Catholicism colored her family's religious background, and that Espiritismo was especially strong with her great-great grandmother, grandmother, great aunt, and father. She described family members in terms of their relative spiritual capacities. Her grandmother healed with herbs and plants and could see but not "pass" or be mounted by spirits, and her mother was a "conscious medium" who could be mounted and remain aware of herself. The mother is the only mention in my data of an ability

to remain conscious with a spiritual mounting. Interestingly, Espiritista A also said that her mother was not religious and did not believe that spirits spoke through her, but rather that she spoke her own thoughts with no spiritual interference. Espiritista A did not elaborate on this discrepancy further, but it identifies interpretive differences in the family about the limits of spiritual agency. Espiritista A described herself as an unconscious medium who has no recollection of time while spirits mount her, which is consistent with most paleros and santeros with whom I spoke.

Her spiritual path began with a series of visions she had starting at age nine while she was growing up in the countryside of the Santiago province. One day, she passed a woman walking down a road, when suddenly "spirits took over [her] memory" and revealed a vision of the woman's leg in a cast. Her grandmother dismissed the event, but soon after, the woman she had passed along the road broke her leg. Convinced of the child's spiritual capacity, her grandmother brought her to a local Espiritismo center, effectively a "spirit school," where she received community support to understand how to control and channel her spiritual aptitude. For example, she described how she was trained to control the invocation of spirits, which abated her initial fear and confusion of experiencing spiritual visitations as unpredictable blackouts. The training included learning a conceptualization of her spirits, informed by writings of Allen Kardec, that involved identifying her "guide," "protector," and "auxiliary" spirits. She described these as her Espiritismo spirits, but said that the Cruzado or "Creole" aspect of her practice came from two African female muertos who intimately worked with her. I later observed that one of these muertos was particularly well regarded and attracted the most attention among the dozens of people who attended her Espiritismo ritual events.

Espiritista A was somewhat guarded about the breadth of her contemporary practice across different religious traditions, choosing instead to elaborate on Espiritismo. She described the beauty of her work in this religious tradition, emphasizing how it was "clean" and "clear" and that she enjoyed using the healing properties of plants and herbs for rituals promoting justice, health, and salvation. She took a strong position against the use of any spiritual work in matters of love, such as forcing love after a relationship has ended, suggesting that she had received such requests in the past. She offered a broad view of other religious traditions. Palo was a powerful tradition, and though it was attuned to spiritual communication and could be useful for achieving immediate or pressing ends, it could also be dangerous. Ocha was a religion for aligning and balancing one's life with oricha forces of the natural world. Depending on one's needs, one could seek advising or spiritual work in one tradition or another. She also described how many people attend ritual events of different traditions, without advancing in them. In addressing how people navigate the city's religious diversity, she said that each individual's thoughts and sensibilities should inform decisions about spiritual pursuits, but that it was best to consult one's padrino or "godparent" spiritual family leader for more informed guidance in such matters.

While Espiritista A offered few details about her own work in Ocha and even fewer for Palo, she did acknowledge that she usually performed consultations to help people using special *caracoles*, or "shells," to communicate with oricha, which she reads based on her training in Regla de Ocha. When the shells did not resolve an issue, she explained, she might then invoke her muertos for stronger spiritual work. Overall, she described personally performing consultations or ritual work in Ocha, Espiritismo, and Espiritismo Cruzado or

Muertería, but clarified that depending on the circumstances, she would attend rituals or seek consultations for herself from santeros, paleros, and babalao. In fact, her husband was a palero who made saint twenty-five years prior in Ocha. She and her husband said that Palo work was infrequent in their home because Espiritismo Cruzado was sufficiently effective for most of their needs, but also suggested that the intensity of Palo rituals could be dangerous when paired with her high sensitivity to spiritual contact.

Santera A

Santera A was a woman in her late fifties who made saint as an infant, and was an established leader within a cabildo spiritual family line of Regla de Ocha that spanned five consangual generations. She hinted at participation in other religious traditions and actively practiced Ocha. I met her for the interview in her two-story home in December 2017. She was welcoming and finishing an Ocha consultation with a woman when I arrived. The living room was clean and spacious, while religious objects were displayed along two walls and corners. The visible objects included three small black pots filled with spikes, wood, chains, machetes, and other materials. There were three small figurines with cowry shell eyes and mouths, and bottles containing variously colored liquids and materials. There were also porcelain or wooden containers surrounded in decorative cloth of blue and white, red and white, yellow, and green and yellow, as well as two dolls decorated in blue, white, and yellow. The objects appeared to correspond to the orichas Ogún, Eleguá, Yemayá, Changó, Ochún, and Orula. Later, I was taken to see a downstairs room with a protruding fireplace shaped like a castle with brightly colored red and white bricks built into the original architecture. The room celebrated

Changó and Aña, oricha related to Batá drums, and three Batá drums hung on the wall. Another downstairs room, held a small shop of unconsecrated religious objects for ritual use. Each object had a price tag and all were set in an organized display. Santera A said that the shop was a recent venture designed to supplement the income of her cabildo.

When we began our conversation, Santera A said that her great-grandmother, grandmother, mother, and her, among other family members, all practiced Regla de Ocha, and her children were babalao. Her great-grandmother and grandmother had personal muertos and had also practiced Espiritismo. While other family members also practiced Palo, Espiritismo, or worked with a cazuela de muerto, she clarified that her family's strength was in Ocha. She described Ocha as a religious tradition that facilitates communication with oricha to advise about what to do, how to act in life, or to address a particular problem. She offered the making saint ceremony as an example of important ritual work done to help a person resolve a problem like severe illness, or to align a misaligned life path. A portion of the ceremony describes the person's past, present, and future, and clarifies the behaviors a person should pursue or avoid to maintain a balanced life respectful of oricha. She said that when people do not find Ocha work successful, and perhaps seek alternative religions for assistance, it is because they did not follow directives of oricha revealed in ritual. She also described that an important role of babalao in Ocha work concerned the confirmation of one's guardian Oricha through a *mano de Orula* ceremony. This authoritative confirmation of Orula becomes important because sometimes one's emotional identification with a particular oricha as their guardian, or even a santero's reading of shells to identify one's guardian oricha, can be incorrect. However, she did note that there are also some santeros who are "anti-babalao."

She stressed that a root of the tension derived from the proliferation of babalao in Santiago who were initiated into Ifá before making saint, breaking with tradition of older generations who first made saint and became seasoned in Ocha before entering Ifá. Although babalao are expected to be authoritative in Ocha and are necessary in the making saint ceremony, some santeros refuse babalao to enter a making saint ceremony if they have not done so themselves. The contradiction between the authoritative status of Ifá and the inexperience of some babalao has created some discord in the religion. Moreover, she described how there are also new tensions among babalao. The recent rise of Nigerian Ifá in Cuba (facilitated by contemporary contact between African and Cuban Ifá practitioners) is increasingly at odds with the Creole or Cuban Ifá that developed on the island long before.

Santera A also discussed the relationships she perceived between different religious traditions. She said that Ocha, Espiritismo, and Catholicism work together and again offered the making saint ceremony as an example. The ceremony begins with a *misa* or spiritual mass, informed by Espiritismo and the Catholic Church, where one prays to God and spirits to clarify one's path through the ritual. The seven-day ceremony ends as one visits a church to give thanks to God about the path revealed. She further said that one cannot make saint before first being baptized. She emphasized that the Ocha, the spiritual, and the Catholic are the same. Santera A's son, a babalao in his thirties, had been listening to our conversation and added his perspective on Ocha's relationship to other religious traditions. He said that there was also a relationship between Ocha and Palo. Although there were different Palo casa-templos organized around particular mpungo spirit forces like Lucero or Serebanda, and Palo ritual work was not very close to Ocha work, people who practice Ocha spoke of mpungo like

Lucero as the oricha Eleguá, Serebanda as Ogún, Siete Rayos as Changó, Madre Agua as Yemayá, Padre Tiempo as Orula, and other relationships between oricha and mpungo. However, he described Palo as a religion "born in war" that developed for a different time period than currently exists in Cuba. Although there were strong Paleros who did good work, Palo is not as relevant as it once was. He continued saying that while there is a relationship between Palo and Ocha, there is less so between Cuban Vodú and Ocha. He described Vodú as "a Haitian religion relevant to their prophecy." Vodú had oricha-like spirits called *lwas* that governed forces of nature, and individuals had lwas that they served and defended. However, he explained there was very little interaction or integration among practitioners of Ocha and Vodú. Santera A summed it up by adding, "Vodú is a very different thing," and said it was easier to relate Ocha to Palo than Vodú.

Santera A said that she and most people she knew managed their involvement with other religious traditions by way of their foundation in Ocha. If the oricha or Orula directed a person to another religious tradition, one must follow the instruction. She offered a personal example, saying that Orula instructed her to receive sacred elements of the mpungo Serebanda for protection. She does not consider herself a palera, but she received Serebanda because Orula said so. Her son further emphasized the ultimate authority of Ifá in offering guidance, no matter what direction or religion is involved. He added, "if Orula says to go to China to receive a power there, you go to China."

Palero A

Palero A was a *tata ngañga*, or senior Palo leader, in his early sixties and had over thirty years of experience in the religious tradition. I met him in the front porch of his home, and did not have an opportunity to view his sacred space. His family's religious background included a grandparent who practiced Muertería and his mother, who practiced Espiritismo in their home. He was encouraged to pursue training in Espiritismo following a predictive childhood dream that indicated to his family that he had a spiritual sensitivity. He did so, but was not satisfied with the practice. As a young man, he encountered a Palo and Ocha community in his neighborhood that he visited repeatedly until they invited him to join. He studied and apprenticed in Palo for over a decade before achieving a leadership position and now leads his own spiritual family while also supporting other Palo groups. He said that he had made saint in Ocha many years before, and that while he maintains his sacred elements related to his oricha, his religious priority is definitively in Palo.

When asked about the relationships between religious traditions, he offered that they each have a place in the city, but that in his view, Palo was the strongest. Espiritismo was useful for learning about and communicating with spirits, and Regla de Ocha was good for providing general information about yourself, like what things to avoid or pursue to have good health and lead a balanced life. However, both religious traditions were too "soft" for his preferences. At one point, he rather dismissively described Regla de Ocha as a religion of "plants and rocks," while Palo was a religion of iron, of strength and power. When I asked Palero A to clarify how Palo was powerful, he identified both the atmosphere of intensity in rituals and the effectiveness of ritual work to achieve direct, tangible, and relatively quick

results to problems and circumstances. He offered as an example an occasion in which his work with the ngañga successfully healed a man with a leg injury that had prevented him from walking without pain. Within a few days, he said, the pain in the man's leg dissipated and he walked over to his home to thank him. He added that Muertería could also be powerful but it depended on the strength of the muerto. He noted that the deceased Vicente Portuondo Martín was a good example of this. Vicente was a known santero and very powerful palero, but the strength of his popular reputation rested on his personal muerto, Pa Mundo, who regularly attracted large crowds of diverse people to his Muertería rituals.

Palero A was familiar with and had experience in Ocha and Espiritismo, and was willing to attend or support ritual work in either one, but they did not personally resonate with him. My observations of him in different ritual settings seemed to confirm his sentiments – he was most enthusiastic in Palo rituals. On one observation, however, his reliance on Palo caused some tensions. He was among attendees of an Espiritismo ceremony and was asked to lead in song for the ritual because his singing voice was admired. He agreed and sang, but the song he chose was too closely related to Palo for the espiritista in charge. She stopped him and complained of his inappropriate use of the song in the setting. He argued with her, asserting that he was singing songs they had all grown up with that were known to invoke spirits and that he did not see a problem. Ultimately, another singer was chosen and he remained composed for the rest of the ritual. The episode suggests how his prioritization of Palo may have informed his behavior in a different religious setting, but also calls attention how one espiritista, in real time, enforced a limit or boundary between traditions that she felt should not be transgressed.

Palero B

I met Palero B in his capacity as a santero assisting at an Ocha making saint ceremony just outside of Santiago in February 2018. I sat in an outdoor patio lounge area where approximately twenty santeros and babalao periodically rested and socialized in between portions of the private ritual activities inside. In a moment of ritual downtime, I overheard a man, possibly in his late thirties, repeatedly complain in light conversation on the patio that he was a palero and did not like participating in this Ocha ritual work. The statement was unusual because in all my observations, conversations during a ritual lull seldom extended beyond the religious tradition of the ritual being performed. I started a conversation with him, explaining my research project, and he agreed to an impromptu interview before returning to the ritual work.

He was from Santiago and described that it had been eighteen years since he became a tata ngañga in Palo, and twelve years since he had made saint in Ocha. He was also a muertero who "passed" muertos, meaning that he could be mounted by them. He did not detail his family's religious background, but noted that he was a second-generation ritual descendant of the Palo Mayombe line of Reynerio Pérez. He described his Palo godfather, who was deceased, as "anti-Babalao" and that the man had refused to enter Ifá when oricha directed him to the practice. He also said that his own reading in Ocha pointed to entering Ifá, but that he could not pursue it because muertos could mount him and this was prohibited among babalao. When I asked why he decided to make saint, he said, "because my muerto told me to do it." He added that his having made saint allowed him to participate in the present ceremony, and that although he was somewhat obliged to be there, he was not very active in Ocha.

Palero B described the relationship between Palo and Ocha as a largely beneficial relationship between "hot" and "cool" religious traditions. Palo, a practice that involved developing a body of knowledge within ones "signature," was very hot and one needed Ocha for balance and to stay grounded. For instance, when he had an issue or problem that needed to be resolved, he used Palo because "it's much faster." He described that the strength of the practice could be used for beneficial or maleficent ends, but that the lines between them were not always clear. He personally used Ocha as a check on that power, to avoid becoming too hot or doing work that goes too far. He explained, in Palo "you use muertos to do work that changes things." The power could become overwhelming or corrupt a person, especially since the secrecy involved could limit trusted confidants who might otherwise offer perspective. Palo was a very secretive practice to non-initiates and even within the same spiritual family, because if one's sacred procedures were known to enemies, they could be used against that person and exploited as a weakness. Palo involved a tremendous amount of trust that was usually cultivated over many years of work and apprenticeship to an elder, but social isolation could be a problem in the absence of such trusting relationships. For Palero B, Ocha "refreshed" him in his spiritual activities and the communion with oricha helped keep him balanced, grounded, and aware of health concerns.

I asked if he knew anyone who practiced Palo without Ocha, and he responded that some paleros in older generations were not involved in Ocha, but that the paleros he knew also participated in Ocha in some capacity. He added that people were expected to be "scratched," (initiated into Palo), before entering Ocha as a general rule, but that he knew people who were initiated in the reverse order. He also said that babalao are not supposed to be able to pass

muertos, but that he knew babalao that could and kept it a secret. He said that he had never met or heard of a palero or santero who also practiced Cuban Vodú. Vodú was a practice mainly for Haitian descendants and he speculated that it was too similar to Palo and too dissimilar to Ocha to be used with them.

Babalao A

Babalao A was in his forties and had advanced experience in Palo and Muertería before entering Ifá less than 10 years ago. I met him at the home of a mutual acquaintance in January 2018. His family background included Espiritismo in earlier generations, but his immediate family practiced and raised him in Protestant Christianity. As a teenager, a close friend from school invited him to attend events of a religious community practicing Palo, Ocha, and Muertería. Babalao A later joined the community and excelled within Palo. His family initially had great difficulty with his decision to practice Palo but eventually they accepted it after he addressed their misconceptions and fears. He spent over fifteen years mastering songs, procedures, and rituals of Palo as well as working in Ocha and Muertería. However, an Ifá ceremony late in his life designated that he should become a babalao and master Ifá. The decision was difficult because pursuing Ifá would create distance between him and his collogues in Palo. Ultimately, he said, he consulted his personal muerto on the matter and the muerto confirmed that he should transition to Ifá. He was later initiated into the tradition. He said that currently, his work in Ifá demands most of his time but that he also makes time to host community Palo ceremonies at least once or twice a year. He revealed that he remained moderately active in Palo because it was important to him and he considered it important in

Santiago. He feared that Palo practice was declining in Santiago, and speculated that part of the reason was because so many young men sought the social status of becoming a babalao and too few young men were prepared to dedicate the years of apprenticeship necessary to advance in Palo.

In discussing the relatedness of organic religious traditions in Cuba, Babalao A described how Ifá held the highest position among the diverse religious traditions, not because it was "better" or "more authentic" but because it provided ultimate direction, orientation, and guidance for individuals regarding the other religious traditions of Palo, Espiritismo, and Ocha. He said that Orunmila, another name for Orula, literally meant "Muerto Mayor" or senior ancestor, when broken down at its etymological roots. Because Orula was the oldest and wisest ancestor, he and the Ifá tradition for communicating with him had the authority to designate or confirm who could or should practice Ocha, Ifá, Palo, Espiritismo, or other religious traditions.

Further, Babalao A's personal background in several of these traditions enabled him to guide people in each as needed, adding that a comprehension of other traditions was useful to any babalao, at least in so far as providing guidance, information, assistance, and healing to clients. He clarified that such multi-religious guidance was not at all exclusive to Ifá or babalao, but that Ifá had ultimate authority. Moreover, for multi-religious babalao, walking the path of other religious traditions was generally acceptable but with the understanding that being a babalao was the ultimate position in the spectrum of traditions. He then generalized that many people are comfortable with practicing and advancing within a single religious tradition, and even most multi-religious practitioners really just practice one main religious tradition and

participate less authoritatively in others. Boundaries between religious traditions do not prevent people from practicing more than one, he said; it is really a matter of time, dedication, and ability because "you can't do it all."

Babalao B

Babalao B was in his sixties and had less than 10 years of experience in Ifá and a religious background in Palo. I interviewed him in a park outside his home in 2005, and was not able to visit his home. He did not comment about his family's religious background, but said that he had spent many of his early years participating in a Palo community although he had not advanced into a leadership role. Since encountering Ifá and eventually becoming a babalao, he devoted all his attention to mastery of Ifá and had little time for Palo activities. He said that he had effectively stopped his Palo practice and all but retired his personal ngañga. In further conversation, he began reciting a perspective about the relationship between Palo and Ocha/Ifá that I later heard restated with greater or lesser intensity among groups of santeros and babalao on at least four other occasions and in different contexts. He described Palo as an ultimately outdated religious tradition. In his view, Palo was more significant among enslaved Africans of Cuba's past who lived in terrible conditions, but was too harsh of a tradition for the more peaceful contemporary Cuba. He described Ifá as a "civilized," "refined," "clear," and "beautiful" religious tradition, whereas Palo had "violent" and abusive features that were out of place in recent times. While he spoke abrasively of Palo as a religious tradition, he also expressed a nostalgic fondness for the former Palo community to which he had belonged. Eventually, he admitted that he missed the *corrientes* (currents) that Palo rituals generated.

When I probed further, he clarified that he missed the powerful energy of the ritual work, the feelings of emotional intensity from the singing and drumming that were common in Palo rituals and were less frequent in his more intellectual dedication to Ifá.

Babalao B was also among the few babalao I interviewed who spoke somewhat openly about financial incentives involved in practicing Ifá. To be sure, he discussed Ifá with integrity and pride. However, as the conversation progressed, he began mentioning how Ifá could better provide material resources to babalao and that there was more of a market for providing Ifá readings that could increase his material well-being and quality of life. There was a vocational tone in the way he spoke, stressing the economic opportunities it could afford beyond the sentiment of a religious calling. At one point, he expressed fanciful desires to one day move to Miami, where he had family, and practice Ifá there as a source of income. Babalao can charge much higher rates for services in the United States, he said. While many babalao I met confirmed that Ifá rituals tended to be resource-heavy and expensive to accomplish, Babalao B was the only one to acknowledge a personal financial incentive involved with his practice.

Babalao Juan "Juancho" Martín Portuondo

Juan Martín Portuondo, known as Juancho or through his Ifá sign *Irete Ansa*, was a native of Santiago in his late forties and director of the nascent Filial de la Asociación Yoruba de Santiago de Cuba (The Santiago de Cuba branch of the Yoruba Association), formerly Casa Templo Abbure Okan. He identified as a senior babalao in the city with some twenty years of experience, although he had also been an espiritista and palero in the past. He said that, with

very few exceptions, he was personally now only active in Ifá. He spent the bulk of his time managing the high volume ritual demands of his Ifá-based casa-templo turned Yoruba Association branch, overseeing the ongoing construction of its physical headquarters in Los Hoyos, building relationships of solidarity with religious communities throughout eastern Cuba, and serving as a public figure in religious and cultural events in collaboration with Casa del Caribe. Among his life goals was to help establish Ifá not just in Santiago de Cuba, but throughout Oriente, and to facilitate a dialogue and respect for eastern Cuban Ifá among western Cuban Ifá religious communities.

Juancho described his religious background as maturing under the tutelage of his maternal uncle Vicente Portuondo Martín. He made saint as a young child and spent his early years training with and closely assisting his uncle, becoming proficient in the Palo, Ocha, and Muertería ritual work of the casa-templo. Although Juancho reached advanced levels in these religious traditions, Vicente became convinced that his spiritual path was more closely aligned with Ifá and helped coordinate his Ifá initiation with one of the very few Santiagueran babalao of the early 1990s. He later studied Ifá in Havana and Santiago, before starting a casa-templo of his own around the turn of the twenty-first century. According to his own estimates, he had since accumulated thousands of *ahijados* (godchildren) and was among the earliest Santiagueran Babalao to also begin initiating other Babalao in the city. He described the Yoruba Association in Santiago as a culmination of decades of work. He was proud to have contributed so intently to creating a formal religious organization with ritual space and resources available to the public.

When I asked him about religious relationships in the city, Juancho first pointed to how he conceptualized the Santiago Yoruba Association. Despite the name and his position as senior babalao, he clarified that the Association was actually a multi-religious organization in that it provided ritual and worship space for espiritistas and paleros, in addition to santeros and babalao. A tour of the compound appeared to corroborate his statement. The opening room doubled as a waiting room for guests and a sacred space of Espiritismo. The room held long benches organized into three rows in two columns facing a table with a large crucifix surrounded by glasses of water, beaded necklaces, and plants. The décor appeared loosely consistent with private Espiritismo spaces I observed. This room opened to a large rectangular courtyard with a street-facing gate large enough for vehicles to enter and exit. In a roughly six-foot wide outdoor enclosure of the courtyard, opposite the Espiritismo room, sat a collection of burnt, blackened cauldrons filled with materials, appearing consistent with ngañgas, as well as other sacred objects related to Palo that were partially obscured from view by a wooden board cover. There were also three indoor rooms along the mid-section of the courtyard that were largely devoted to Ocha/Ifá ritual activity. Beyond this were guest rooms, a lounge area, an auxiliary yard for holding animals, as well as a kitchen and bathrooms. While Ocha/Ifá ritual activity was dominant in my observations, several members of the Association told me that ritual work in other religious traditions does occur on site. Juancho acknowledged that Ocha/Ifá is dominant there, but stressed that the organization's principle of inclusivity promotes sharing of the space with members of other religious traditions, in support of the city's diverse religious life. Moreover, the director regularly invited guests from multiple religious traditions, especially from across Oriente, to hold or attend various rituals at the site.

The inclusion of multiple religious spaces not only provided a semi-public resource for diverse practitioners but also served as a basis for actively building a more integrated multi-religious, regional community network.

When I pressed him for further details about the relationships between different religious traditions, Juancho offered a cosmological view that noted how Ifá is actually inclusive of other religious traditions. He was limited in details, given the secretive nature of Ifá, but suggested that the powers of other religious traditions have roots in the oral literature of the Ifá, known as the *Odú Ifá*. "Everything is in Ifá," he said, essentially espousing an integrated view of multiple religious traditions with Ifá as a common point of connection. However, it was also clear that he drew from a wide array of literature to support his Ifá work. At one point, he described himself as a "healer" and showed me how his personal library contained not only several Ifá-related books and print outs, but also medical books, anatomy books, and even sources on palm-reading. Ifá was his foundation, but his effort to help or heal his godchildren was not singularly confined to Ifá sacred texts.

In more practical terms, he noted that it could actually be advantageous for babalao to have familiarity with other religious traditions. Orula was the ultimate divinatory authority and source of confirmation of people's life paths. Sometimes, a strength in Palo, Espiritismo, or other religious traditions was identified or suggested as beneficial to a person's path. On these occasions, a babalao's familiarity with other religious traditions aids in the interpretive work of translating Orula's messages to help individuals secure a balanced life and optimize their spiritual and personal potential. He confirmed that he had personal experience guiding some

ritual godchildren in learning or strengthening their practice of other traditions under Orula's authority.

RITUAL ACTIVITIES

In addition to accounts from personal interviews of Santiago religious practitioners, data from actual ritual activities are also instructive in understanding multiple religious belonging. Observations of religiously-themed public cultural performances is not a very contentious source of data, but observing genuine religious rituals in communities can be a sensitive data collection endeavor. Rituals conducted in private tend to reflect more meaningful features of practice, while public or public portions of rituals are often more festive in nature. The challenge in reporting ritual observations relevant to this study is locating events that express meaningful attributes from the vantage point of an invited outsider with permission to observe. In the course of my dissertation and pre-dissertation fieldwork, I observed some twenty-six religious rituals and thirteen public events. The ritual observances were of public or public portions of events in different religious traditions and many only affirmed broad features of the event, attendees, and religious tradition involved. However, three ritual activities hosted by three separate spiritual family communities included substantial portions that were both publicly viewable and substantively illustrative of the religious traditions involved. I have selected these three for detailed description of activity and sacred space arrangement and usage. Because singular ritual activities do not represent multiple belonging expressions well, each ritual is briefly contextualized by a list of other ritual and religious tradition observations that occurred with the group within a month and a half of the

ritual described. Selection of the three rituals also prioritized a range of religious tradition expressions relevant to the four practices of the study, and the inclusion or attendance of practitioners from each of the traditions. The ritual titled "Palo-Muerto Intervention" serves a dual purpose of revealing activity with characteristics of Palo and Muertería in that it involves work with a ngañga and the presence of a personal muerto in a community leadership role. I offer these rituals to provide a sense of religious distinction, as well as shared attributes involved in discrete practices.

Tambor for Changó

During a month-long period in December 2017 I observed, from a distance, Yoruba Association members perform two Ifá consultations, two mano de Orula ceremonies, and attended a Muertería ceremony just outside of the city. I was then invited to attend a semi-public *tambor* ceremony coordinated by babalao and santero members of the Santiago branch of the Yoruba Association. A tambor is a festive drumming ceremony that honors particular oricha, and this event honored Changó. I arrived early at a private residence and as I walked through toward the back of the home, I noticed a room elaborately decorated in red and white cloths across the walls and floor, with fruits and sweets on the floor and a vacant sitting area in a corner. I proceeded to a large outdoor patio area that would be the focal area of events. Initially, there were fewer than ten people in the back, including a singer and four men taking turns playing three Batá drums decorated in red and white. Near the performers was sacred space in a large open cabinet, presumably belonging to the residents. The upper tier displayed wine and tumbler glasses filled with clear liquids, a crucifix, plants, saint figurines, and photos

that appeared consistent with Espiritismo sacred spaces. On the ground beneath, there was a small black iron pot holding sticks and other materials, a male doll dressed in white, a lit candle, a small bell, a large wooden staff, and roughly ten plastic cups of variously colored liquids. The presence of the doll possibly related to a known muerto of the home.

The musicians played for an hour and sang one or two songs dedicated to roughly a dozen different oricha, each with distinctive rhythms, melodies, and call-and-response lyrics. At times when an individual's guardian oricha song was played, there appeared to be an expectation that they approach the drummers and salute them and the oricha with a series of gestures and then dance. After a brief break, the group began a second set similarly organized as more people began arriving. After the second set, the patio was cleared of all furniture. Two men arrived dressed in stylish street clothes. I recognized one from previous Ocha ceremonies as a high ranking santero who I once saw mounted by Yemayá. The other man was between 35 and 45 years old and had long hair in a ponytail pointing up and out from the back of his head. He expressed flamboyant and at times effeminate mannerisms. Changó would soon mount the man with the ponytail hairstyle, who I will call Santero B.

The musicians began their third set with songs specifically dedicated to Changó, and the two Santero men, the woman of the house, and another person began a modest two-step dance in the central cleared area. Approximately 40 people stood around watching in a wide semi-circle, including a dozen teens, another dozen elders, and three young children. The four adults danced in the center for about fifteen minutes before Santero B began to episodically pause, hold his head, and resume dancing. Each time he resumed dancing, the dance increased in intensity while the singer, with increased persistence, called on Changó to arrive in verse.

The three other dancers eased into the audience as Santero B's movements became more forceful. Then he suddenly jumped straight up and came down lying flat on his stomach in front of the Batá drums. The music stopped, as it appeared Changó had mounted Santero B. He stood, saluted each drum with a kiss, and was escorted to a back room.

Santero B, now Changó, returned from the room minutes later adorned in an iridescent red and white costume decorated with zigzag designs resembling lightning bolts, a matching hat, and double-sided wood axe. After briefly drinking rum from a bottle, he brought the woman of the house to the dance floor. She joined him, appearing considerably reluctant to do so, and continued her two-step while Changó danced with forceful, full-bodied movements. He then approached her and picked her straight up at the legs. Her facial expression displayed surprise, and perhaps fear. When he let her down, she began jerking and shaking the moment her feet touched the ground. She appeared to struggle to shake off an apparent attempted spirit mounting, moving to the audience where people dabbed her face with water and she tried to regain her composure. Changó continued dancing alone and then began using a white cloth hanging from his costume in a cleansing gesture to members of the audience, symbolically wiping their heads, arms, and legs and briefly speaking. Periodically, he wiped sweat from his forehead and flicked it at the audience, and I overheard an audience member say it was for luck. Changó alternated between this apparent cleansing and interacting with the audience and continuing to dance, and at one point turned to each Batá drum, drummer, and singer in a sign of respect. Over the course of the ceremony, I saw one other person mounted. A seated woman in her sixties who wore at least a dozen beaded necklaces of various color patterns began jerking with her eyes closed while in the audience. She appeared to be mounted when

her eyes opened, but was quickly escorted to a back room by the high-ranking santero who had accompanied Santero B. She returned as herself a half hour later.

Toward the end of the evening, Changó and the musicians closely interacted with each other. Each took turns introducing a theme as the others responded with punctuation. The performative interaction also included corrections. At one point, Changó dismissed a song the singer had attempted to introduce and waited for a different musical direction that he then accepted. After roughly two continuous hours of music, Changó's dancing slowed and he exchanged looks with the musicians that signaled an end. He thanked the drummers once again, the music stopped, and he walked through the crowd to a back room. Food and cake were then distributed to the crowd and people ate and conversed. Santero B came out dressed in his street clothes, spoke, ate, and joked with a few people while the crowd slowly dispersed.

Palo-Muerto Intervention

In the summer of 2005, I attended a religious ceremony organized by members of a Palo, Ocha, and Muertería practicing casa-templo. This ceremony occurred at the end of a busy three-week period in which I observed the casa-templo perform two Palo rituals, four Ocha consultations, Ocha ceremonies for the oricha Olokún and another for Changó, and one other muerto invocation ritual. The evening's semi-public Palo/Muertería ritual, attended by approximately 35 religious community members and invited associates, included a feeding of multiple ngañga and cazuelas de muerto and an invocation of two personal muertos. I later learned that the tata ngañga leader, who I will call Palero C, also scheduled the event at the request of his personal muerto, here called Pa C, to address inappropriate behaviors of a casa-

templo member. Pa C was an especially active and respected spirit fixture in the community, and described himself at a ritual two weeks earlier as a Kongo *bozal* cimarron, or first-generation, self-liberated from slavery, Kongoese African. The ceremony occurred in a relatively small room of the casa-templo residential home and proceeded for nine hours, starting at 7:30pm. Those in attendance included eight elders, four teens, two children, and the rest were between 20 and 50 years of age. There were ten women present, four of whom were elders. Based on previous observations and conversations, I noted that more than half of the attendees were also active in Ocha, including at least one babalao. There was one senior espiritista, and Palero A was there as well.

Sacred objects and materials of multiple religious traditions were present in the focal room of the ceremony. The left two-thirds of the main wall held an elevated two-tiered display of three handmade Catholic saint figurines, dried plants and seashells, a chalice and other glasses of liquid, two small bells, images of deceased family members, and several bottles of rum. The materials here were consistent with broad features of Espiritismo sacred spaces. The ground beneath the tiers held two large burnt iron cauldron ngañga replete with iron spikes, sticks of wood, feathers, horns, horns affixed with mirrors, and other materials. Machetes, knives, and a large crucifix lay against each ngañga and the surrounding area was filled with plants, containers, cowry-shell studded figurines, taxidermied animal bodies, and two smaller iron pots filled with materials similar to the larger ngañga. These materials were flanked on either side by two cazuela de muerto terracotta bowls, holding iron spikes, horseshoes, and other materials. One was topped by a taxidermied animal and the other by a carved wooden head. A handmade black doll in a red and white shirt and a red bandana sat in a small chair to

the side, along with four wooden staffs. There was a large four-tiered cabinet against the right third of the wall. The top four tiers each held porcelain décor around a covered porcelain container, with color themes of white, then blue and white below, yellow, gold, and white below, and burgundy below that. On the ground was a small iron pot filled with iron objects, and on the adjacent wall, a red and white covered bowl was displayed atop Batá-drum-shaped stand with a red and white wooden axe. These color-coordinated spaces appeared consistent with the oricha Obbatalá, Yemayá, Ochún, Oyá, Ogún, and Changó, respectively. Thus, representations of Espiritismo, Palo, Muertería, and Ocha appeared to be divided along the same wall of a single room.

The ritual activity began at 7:30 p.m. Attendees waited for over an hour for the designated casa-templo member with poor behavior to arrive, but decided to proceed in his absence. Palero C, the officiant of the ceremony who was in his thirties, along with his younger lead mentee serving as an assistant, began preparing to "feed" or make an offering to the sacred objects housing Palo spirits and personal muertos. The preparations involved writing a series of sacred signatures, fundamental in Palo work, and pulling out all of the sacred objects, including the ngañga and cazuelas de muerto from the lower level of the religious space. A series of evocative songs followed, some in Spanish and some in what was described as Kongo. Two tall, single-sided wooden drums and a wooden box turned upside down were used in drumming, and everybody attempted to join in the call-and-response style songs, although three people there seemed particularly unfamiliar with the songs. The babalao and the senior espiritista, who I had known only through strictly Espiritismo community circles and who was not directly a member of the casa-templo, loudly sang along to the Palo songs and were active

in dancing and participating. A man just outside of the focal room held together several animals – a pig, goat, and chickens – displaying deep care for each. The collective drumming, singing, and dancing intensified in the cramped space and animals were sequentially brought into the focal room. Every attendee saluted each animal with a special, gender-specific gesture of respect before the animals were offered. A moment of comic relief entered the otherwise dignified and energetic atmosphere of the ritual as a man unfamiliar with the correct gesture for a male mimicked the gesture of the woman in line before him. The room shared in a hearty laugh before resuming in the ritual process. The offering involved Palero C or his assistant letting the blood of the animals over the ritual instruments while the music and dancing continued. Afterward, the animals were taken to the kitchen to be cooked and served after the ceremony while the floor of the room was ritually cleaned.

The group continued to wait until the stylishly dressed Cuban man in his early twenties, who was the focus of the event, finally arrived nearly three hours late. He brought his ngañga and other elements that were supposed to be fed. This man was a member of the casa-templo community but had lived away in Europe for some time. While in Europe, he had engaged in inappropriate and unacceptable behavior relating to substance abuse and neglecting religious obligations. The muerto Pa C had called for the ritual as an occasion to address the man's transgressions.

When the awaited guest arrived, Palero C began the work of invoking his muerto, Pa C. The process involved Palero C sitting in a chair at the center of the room and doing spiritually invocative actions as he and attendees participated in drumming and singing sacred music that called Pa C by name. Despite the intensity of the music and atmosphere, several unsuccessful

attempts were made to invoke Pa C through Palero C's body, but he would not enter. The guest visiting from Europe looked visibly annoyed. It was later revealed that Pa C was displeased with the guest's disrespectful tardiness to the ritual and was reciprocating the behavior. In the meantime, a different respected male muerto surprisingly mounted Palero C and offered advising words to everyone in attendance, except the guest from Europe. The muerto then left, and at last Pa C manifested through Palero C's body. His head was adorned with an identifying head scarf to designate the particular spiritual presence. The muerto spoke in a Cuban Creole dialect, presumably from an older time period, and employed terms and an accent that some Cubans had trouble deciphering. Pa C smoked from his cigar, drank rum, and laughed and joked with those present before diverting his attention to the guest and moving to the important matter at hand.

The visiting guest was called into the ceremony room and Pa C chastised him at length in front of the community. The guest maintained a somewhat dismissive attitude, provoking Pa C to intensify the chastisement. The muerto stood in a threatening posture and spoke in a decidedly aggressive tone about how the man's disrespect was intolerable and how his behaviors in Europe brought spiritual "filth" upon him. In a particularly intense and humiliating moment, Pa C reached into the man's stylish pants and ripped out his underwear from within, throwing it on the ground and exclaiming about his filth. The man's attitude then changed and he gave the muerto his undivided attention. Pa C then performed a ritual cleansing of the man, employing procedures and instruments of Palo Monte. Several hours later, when Pa C exited the body of Palero C and the ceremony ended, the chastised man was welcomed back into the community on the condition that his lifestyle would adhere to the integrity on which the

community was based. Palero C returned to consciousness and said he felt exhausted but had no recollection of the experience. He had to be told about the events that transpired as everyone shared in a meal that incorporated the animals offered earlier.

Espiritismo Cruzado 'Misa' Gathering

After an interview conducted with Espiritista A in December 2017, the leader invited me to attend an Espiritismo Cruzado ceremony she hosted at her home a few days later. The event became the first of five religious rituals in Espiritismo Cruzado, Palo, Ocha, and Muertería I observe her lead, organize, or assist in during the subsequent six weeks. The Espiritismo ceremony began at 6 p.m. in her home. I walked through a narrow corridor leading to a slightly less narrow open area connecting four rooms. The open area and a side room were involved in the ritual work and ten people sat in irregularly available seating in the confined spaces. There were three men and seven women, each wearing immaculately white clothes, or at least white shirts. One man also wore small green and yellow bracelet indicative of receiving mano de Orula. Of these, five women appeared older than 65 years old and the rest of the attendees were between 25 and 50 years old. People continued streaming in over the course of the ceremony, and roughly 50 people packed the area by the end of the nine-hour event.

Espiritista A sat alone at a square table in the side room. Several items were placed on the white tablecloth laid across the table. A large metal crucifix was laid against a clear vase holding wild flowers just above the center of the table. Ahead of it was a large wine glass filled with clear liquid. On top of the wine glass was a ruler-like object and a chain necklace with a small crucifix. Six tumbler glasses of clear liquid were organized in groups of three on either

side of the wine glass. Each group of three glasses was positioned in the shape of a triangle pointing to the wine glass. A dozen unlit white candles and cigars lay to the side, along with two bottles of rum, a small bottle of an herbal-water mixture, and three differently colored pieces of cloth. A candle was soon lit and placed near the vase.

After making a few jokes with the group, Espiritista A began the ceremony with about fifteen minutes of opening text readings, prayers, and songs. She first lead the group in singing a Catholic hymn and then alternated between song, reading the text of prayers from a worn 1910 edition of *Colección de Oraciones Escogidas* (Collection of Prayers) by Allen Kardec, and leading the group's recitation of memorized prayers. The tone of the reading, singing, and recitation was solemn and devotional, and no drums or clapping was involved in any of the music that evening. Espiritista A would initiate a group recitation of the Catholic prayers of "Padre Nuestro" (Our Father), "Ave Maria" (Hail Mary), and "Gloria" (The Glory Be) in quick succession at the transition between text, song, and prayer, and later, between every major transition of activity throughout the evening, as well as to punctuate certain portions of activities. She would call out "Padre Nuestro" and the group would respond with the rest of the prayer rapidly spoken.

After these opening activities, Espiritista A began a procedure to greet the sacred space arranged on the table. The procedure involved reciting the "Padre Nuestro" prayer, dousing the flowers and her hands with the herbal-water mixture, and distinctively snapping and waving her arms and hands over the table and her torso. After, she invited each of the ten guests in attendance to do the same and only one man needed assistance in reciting the prayer. As more

people arrived throughout the evening, Espiritista A would momentarily pause her activities to allow the new guests to similarly salute the sacred space.

Espiritista A then led the group in singing three songs over the space. These songs, just as the previous, were in Spanish and included Catholic vocabulary. Espiritista A, who wore a sleeveless white dress, began periodically shaking, her voice beginning to crack while she sang, and her arms broke out in visible goosebumps while everyone sang. These motions subsided after the songs and she called a "Padre Nuestro," sat down, lit a cigar, and looked pensive. She then spoke to a man in attendance about her vision of a female muerto that followed him and described how the spirit supported him. She then stood over the table again, performing similar gestures as before, and led the group in song again. As before, her voice began cracking, her body shook, and goosebumps were visible. This time, she was mounted and an assistant wrapped a cloth from the table around her head. The spirit mounting Espiritista A did not speak to the group but prayed and gestured over the table before initiating a song and modestly dancing to it. After the dance, an assistant helped the spirit leave Espiritista A's body with a gesture that involved touching shoulders and lightly throwing her arms backward over her head. A man nearby speculated that this spirit was her "guide" spirit.

Next, a woman who looked to be in her thirties stood up, and began saluting the sacred space on the table and singing a song alone. Before the song was complete, she began shaking and became mounted with a series of jerky movements of her body. Once mounted, she sipped rum and briefly advised to two people in attendance, and performed an interactive gesture with them. The gesture involved the herbal-water mixture, a prayer, and her and the person touching shoulders and guiding the person's hands in a series of mirrored motions

before throwing hands back behind the head. The spirit then initiated a song and danced to it, nearly knocking over a bottle of rum on the floor. An exiting gesture was performed on the woman, who then slowly resumed consciousness, and Espiritista A joked that the muerto would have had to replace that bottle of rum if she broke it, causing everyone to laugh before becoming serious again.

In the momentary downtime after the mounting, Espiritista A smoked a cigar and again received and described the vision of a muerto to a guest in attendance. Then a man in his twenties stood and asked permission to speak. He articulated receiving spiritual messages for about five people in attendance, and proceeded to share these messages of personal difficulties and possible health problems with each person. Then Espiritista A worked the table with gestures and the herbal-water mixture as before, and soon became mounted again. This muerto, given a green scarf to wear over her head, self-identified her Kongo heritage as she drank rum and smoked a cigar. She spoke to the gathering about the world's need to respect, love, and cherish the land, repeatedly calling for the group to touch the ground as a sign of respect, but she did not address individuals. She initiated a song everyone knew about an "Africana del monte" (African women of the mountains/undomesticated countryside) and danced in hearty movements before leaving. The moment this muerto left, Espiritista A was immediately mounted again and the spirit requested a change of headscarf to designate her arrival.

The new muerto identified herself by name, who I will call Ma A, and described herself as an "Africana Lucumí." It became apparent that this muerto was the presence that attendees most anticipated. Everyone in attendance immediately pulled out their own leafy bundle of

thin branches or were given some from a back room, and the number of guests arriving began to surge as word of Ma A's arrival spread in the neighborhood. After saluting the space on the table, Ma A drank some rum, lit a cigar, and began to give personalized consultations to each person in attendance. Each session, lasting between five and fifteen minutes, involved discussing highly personal information in front of everyone as an assistant took notes for the person. The advice addressed themes such as relationship troubles, health problems, and family issues, and frequently included a recommendation for plant-based medicine. Attendees frequently called out "luz!" (light!) or "gloria!" (glory!) in affirmation of the accuracy of messages. Ma A's diction was distinctive, often replacing the soft "c" sound with a "ch" sound, though her Spanish seemed intelligible to all. After the consult, she would splash the herbal-water mixture on the plants people held, use the plants to symbolically brush all around the person's body from head to feet in a cleansing fashion while reciting a prayer, then break and drop the stems. She then initiated the interactive gesture from earlier that ended in throwing the persons arms out behind their head, and moved on to consult the next person. This main process continued through roughly fifty people, lasting until about 3 a.m., and intermittently included other guests in attendance becoming mounted.

In the month and a half following this event, I also observed Espiritista A organize or lead initiation ceremonies for a group of five people entering her religious community. These events and initiations included a festive Bembé activity in her home that introduced the group of five to her muerto Ma A, a Palo initiation ritual for the group where an invited tata ngañga led ritual work in her home, and an Ocha making saint ceremony she directed for the group at a colleague's large residence outside of town. I later observed her participate in a ritual to create

a new cazuela de muerto for an individual. With the exception of the festive occasion, each of these events were private and not available for public view. However, two broad points are worth mentioning about them. First is that Espiritista A initially presented herself to me primarily as an espiritista, offering few details about her involvement in other religious traditions. Only after considerable trust was established between us did she later reveal the massive ngañga hidden in her home or display her proficiency to lead a making saint ceremony that included dozens of invited santeros and babalao. The second point is that the assistants and attendees of these different ritual activities did not overlap. With the exception of her husband and the group of five initiates, each ceremony appeared to include rather different groups of people in attendance.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented a selection of fieldwork data from interviews and ritual observations in Santiago de Cuba that concern the study's four focal religious traditions. The respondents' articulations of personal practice and views about relationships between religious traditions in the city supplement behavioral observations of ritual activities in the traditions. This data will serve a common basis of analysis in the subsequent chapter, supported by additional data not included here, for probing particularities and strategies of expression of multiple religious belonging in Santiago.

CHAPTER 6:

CONTOURS OF MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING: DATA ANALYSIS

INTRODUCTION

Systematic observations and interviews with practitioners of Oriente Cuba's Africa-inspired and organic religious traditions have provided the evidence for this dissertation. The question now is, what was learned? Observed practice of multiple belonging within Cuba's distinct religious traditions was earlier observed and reported by MSU's African Atlantic Research Team (Dodson 2008, 169-173), of which I am a member and with whom I was part of the data-gathering travel. The earlier report of the phenomenon revealed that contours of the traditions themselves did not prohibit practitioners from performing rituals from multiple traditions. In analyzing the absence of rigid boundaries, findings of this 2019 study broadly confirm that boundaries of Cuba's Africa inspired religions are not rigid or prohibitive of practitioners' multiple engagement. The present chapter seeks to analyze that data and occasionally supplement it with insights from additional conversations and observations in the field. The goal of the chapter is to discuss what this combined information reveals about expressions of multiple religious belonging and attitudes concerning religious boundaries in Santiago de Cuba.

CHARACTERIZING EXPRESSIONS OF MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING

In viewing the variety of religious expressions among respondents and in observations, patterns emerged to highlight distinctive characteristics or types of expressions of multiple religious belonging at individual, group, and popular levels. These characteristics offer a view of particular manifestations of multiple belonging in the city that range from single persons or groups more or less active in assorted practices to features of socio-religious networks of mutual support and service of a geographic community.

Individual Expressions

At an individual level, the data suggests three basic types of expressions of multiple religious belonging. These three types relate to low, moderate, or high activity of practice in more than one religious tradition. Expression of high activity multiple religious belonging includes a person who sustains a regular and active ritual practice in more than one religious tradition. This type appears to be most demanding in terms of time and energy, particularly among religious leaders, and involves fulfilling regular commitments within multiple traditions on an ongoing basis. Espiritista A and Vicente Portuondo Martín most dramatically exemplify this type from the data. Both appeared to maintain their most active and consistent commitments to either Espiritismo Cruzado or Muertería respectively, as well as to Ocha and Palo.

A person who is mainly active in one religious tradition, but used to be active in or still possesses sacred objects from other religious traditions represents low activity multiple religious belonging. This type is most clearly expressed in Santera A and Babalao B. Santera A

described Regla de Ocha as her religious practice, and said she was not active in Palo even though she received a ngañga. Babalao B described formerly belonging to a Palo community and still possessing a personal ngañga, but devoting all his attention to Ifá. In these instances, the practitioners have a minor personal relationship to another religious tradition and that relationship does not appear to interrupt their primary religious practice.

Moderate multiple religious belonging is a third type and occupies the wide space between the other two. The moderate type characterizes a person who is primarily active in one religious tradition, but is also initiated or experienced within one or more other traditions and occasionally participates in the other religions' rituals and events. This type appears to be most common and reveals how people may belong to and participate in multiple religious traditions. Within that type, there is one religious tradition in which a person's interests, talents, or time is most focused or recognized. Palero A, Palero B, Babalao A, and Juan "Juancho" Martín Portuondo express this type of multiple religious belonging. Paleros A and B are most active in Palo, but have both made saint in Ocha and minimally participate in rituals of Ocha, Muertería, and Espiritismo Cruzado. Babalao A devotes the majority of his time to Ocha/Ifá work, but also occasionally leads Palo ceremonies. Juancho is similarly devoted to Ifá but may participate in ritual work of other religious traditions or host such sacred activities at the Yoruba Association compound.

These three types pertain to people that are religiously active or have experience actively participating, training within, or being initiated into multiple religious traditions. The heuristic typology identifies three areas that can shape individual expressions of multiple

religious belonging at a particular moment. However, over time, these types may shift or blend into each other based on changing circumstances.

Group Expressions

At a group level, my data suggests that multiple religious belonging is expressed in two broad forms: as a multi-religious center such as a casa-templo that is inclusive of more than one religious tradition, or through socio-religious networks of practitioners of various religious affiliations. The first expression revolves around the organizational unit of the casa-templo local religious center, sometimes colloquially referred to as a cabildo. A casa-templo typically provides a shared ritual and meeting location common to a group of leader(s) and their initiates, and is often in the home of a leader. While casa-templos can be organized around a single religious tradition, such as Santera A's Ocha/Ifá community, there are also religious cabildos that host ritual activities in two or more distinct religious traditions. The religious communities that formed around Reynerio Pérez or Vicente Portuondo Martín, as well as the community that hosted the Palo Muerto Intervention ritual illustrate a single cabildo committed to actively practicing multiple religious traditions. In a multi-religious casa-templo, there could be a single leader versed and active in multiple traditions or different members active in distinct religious traditions. The former appeared to be the case with Pérez and Portuondo, while the latter seemed possible with Espiritista A and her palero husband –a consangual family residing in a single casa-templo whose different members engage ritual activities of diverse traditions.

The multi-religious cabildo arrangement can offer the advantage of consolidating individuals' multiple religious memberships or initiations under a single spiritual family or godparent. Leaders might benefit here in strengthening members' bonds and fidelity within their group and decreasing the likelihood of outside influences, or divergent teachings or practices from outside leaders. Godchildren or members might benefit from a consistency in spiritual guidance and direction in navigating multi-religious complexities. However, distinct religious traditions practiced in the same cabildo group could also place more intensive demands on a religious group and its leader to secure the necessary social and material resources to meet expanded ritual obligations.

While certain casa-templos may organize sacred activities in more than one tradition, multiple religious belonging largely manifested at a group level through broad socio-religious networks of leaders and members of various organic religious traditions and spiritual families. I observed several sites that facilitated such networks. Any casa-templo could potentially serve this purpose because it was relatively common for members of different spiritual families or practitioners of diverse religious traditions to attend one another's rituals and gatherings. Moreover, many sacred activities were broadly inclusive of initiates into that ceremony's religious tradition rather than limited to initiates of a particular spiritual family. Or, private rituals might be followed by festive music and dance that was open to the public or at least to those informed through word of mouth. Although it was not typical for attendees to visit a ritual or festive segment without an invitation or prior relationship with the leader, some ceremonies did provide opportunities for socializing beyond one's immediate casa-templo community.

Friendship or collegial networks also informed mutually reciprocated ritual attendance between spiritual families or members of different religious traditions. It was common for familiar residents of a neighborhood to visit ceremonies of each other's religious communities or traditions. For instance, I witnessed Palero A attend a nearby Espiritismo activity, and Espiritista A attend a local Palo ceremony; neither figure was a member of the ritual-hosting cabildos.

There also appeared to be a strategic dimension to religious network attendance. Non-members' presence at a ritual could demonstrate support for that casa-templo and their quality of work, and strengthen relationships to foster a broader multi-religious community of diverse families and groups. Outside recognition, especially from respected religious elders and figures, could enhance the reputation of a casa-templo and better integrate them within relations of reciprocity. The reciprocity might manifest more tangibly as a sharing of a needed resource for an event, such as a singer, drummer, drums, or animals, or simply expecting participants at an event. At other times, social bonds fostered in ritual attendance among members of different religious traditions could be used in enhancing a cross-religious referral network. For instance, I witnessed a santero who needed to refer a godchild to a palero for ritual work, and requested the assistance a palero who he knew and whose rituals I saw he had attended. On another occasion, I witnessed a babalao in the downtime of an Ifá ceremony seek a referral to an espiritista from a woman cooking lunch, to help manage a family spiritual problem best suited to Espiritismo. The woman referred him to a trusted friend whose ceremonies she had attended, and within minutes a consultation was organized over the phone. In addition to attendance demonstrating support and building reciprocal relationships, strategic absence of

welcomed or invited outside groups could also communicate displeasure or dissatisfaction for a casa-templo. I observed one Palo ceremony led by a young tata ngañga that was suspiciously absent of elder paleros or other fixtures of the area's religious community. In conversations with two babalao outsiders who knew of the situation, dissatisfaction with the group was a significant reason so few attended.

Casa-templos typically fostered social networks of a broad religious community of the city, while Casa del Caribe and the Filial de la Asociación Yoruba de Santiago de Cuba exemplify state supported efforts to build multi-religious social networks across the eastern region. Casa del Caribe, for instance, supported religious and cultural activities outside of Santiago and hosted religious-themed events in the city that members of religious groups in diverse areas of Oriente organized. These religious-themed events were seldom actual rituals, but imitations of rituals that were representative of the guest community's sacred work.

I observed two such events in 2018 that reveal how regional religious relationships are fostered. In the first, I accompanied representatives of Casa del Caribe, who attended and supported an actual Muertería ritual celebrating San Lazaro in the town of San Luis. A few weeks later, the same Muertería community from San Luis co-organized a public drumming and dance performance with Casa del Caribe in Santiago celebrating Cuba's cimarrones. This event utilized certain cleansing gestures with plants, rum, and tobacco consistent with the San Luis group's sacred practices, but fell short of actually invoking spirits.

On another occasion, members of Casa del Caribe attended and supported an anniversary festivity for the mountain town of Pilón del Cuato, a community made up of the descendants of Haitian immigrants. A few weeks later, a Vodú community from the same area

performed a public religious-themed event at Casa del Caribe that went so far as to include animal offerings at the foot of a sacred *Ceiba* tree. However, the group's *houngan* Vodú leader deliberately cut drumming segments short to reduce the chances of spiritual mountings.

The two Santiago events were well attended by members of diverse religious groups and traditions, among other attendees from the general public. Socio-religious relationships were both made and reaffirmed in the gatherings. The many events that Casa del Caribe hosts during its annual Festival del Caribe, inclusive of ritual work related to Palo, Ocha, and Espiritismo, furthers these social bonds along multiple religious and cultural lines, and even extends them to guests from the Caribbean as well as tourists.

Similarly, the Filial de la Asociación Yoruba de Santiago de Cuba was active in inviting guests from around Oriente to attend or receive religious work. For example, I observed visitations from babalao and paleros from as far as Guantánamo and Havana provinces, or as close as Canay. Here, I observed similar forms of reciprocity in ritual attendance, and a proactive building and nurturing of relationships between a wide and diverse range of practitioners across the city, eastern region, and even the island and Caribbean region. The activities described above reveal some of the dimensions around which multiple religious belonging can and does operate at a social or group level, and also contributes to building Santiago as a religious center in the eastern region.

Popular Expressions

Apart from leaders or active religious community members, it was not uncommon for everyday Cubans with few if any ties to religious traditions to also seek spiritual services in

more than one religious tradition. Many of the everyday people I met, including some who identified as atheist or believers of only science, described several brief encounters in multiple religious traditions. For instance, I briefly spoke with one middle-aged woman who had a severe health problem and had unsuccessfully sought a remedy from hospitals, ritual services of the Catholic Church, ritual services in both Espiritismo and Regla de Ocha, and was currently working with a group of babalao to find a resolution. A young man I met, who was proudly atheist, found himself in a difficult social situation and a female family member had encouraged him to seek council from a leader in Regla de Ocha. He humored her and described undertaking a ritual cleansing wherein the santera used a coconut to absorb negative energy around his head and body. He said that he had brought a fresh, hard coconut for the ritual, and by the ritual's end, less than two hours later, the coconut inexplicably fell to the ground as a soggy mush. He was shaken by the encounter, his first in any religious tradition of Santiago, but also became open to the integrity of religious healing. When I spoke to him the following year, he described more regularly attending not only Ocha ceremonies, but Palo as well, to help him navigate different challenges in his life.

As everyday Cubans navigated the religious arena of organic traditions to meet specific needs, I also observed that cost became a factor in decisions about ritual work. While general complaints about the high expense of Ocha work were frequent throughout the city, I encountered two women with concrete testimonials about the issue. I met the two middle-aged women in two different settings, and both described seeking council from santeros for a personal difficulty. In each case, the Ocha consultation with the santero resulted in a prescribed course of further ritual action to resolve their challenges that was too expensive.

Ultimately, neither woman could follow through with the Ocha ritual work. One woman described seeking council instead from an espiritista and became active in that community where costs were minimal. The other woman instead worked with a palero and pursued ritual work prescribed in Palo because she could afford it. These experiences bring attention to how cost of services can inform the navigation of multiple religious options in the general public.

More broadly, these popular expressions highlight a pragmatic dimension to religious activity in multiple traditions for those who seek resolution to a problem, more than a full commitment to a religious community. This approach to religious endeavors resembles what Bastide called the "law of accumulation," wherein multiple religious and non-religious sources are used until a desired result is achieved (2007 [1960], 277-79). This type of behavior alone is distinct from multiple religious belonging, which is related to stronger commitments, but may constitute a path to multiple religious belonging.

RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES AND MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING

As a phenomenon wherein individuals or contemporary groups of individuals simultaneously belong to or make use of more than one religious tradition, multiple religious belonging is quite pervasive in Santiago of Oriente Cuba. Practitioners and the traditions recognize and maintain respect for the historical development of particular sets of customs, their boundaries, spiritual forces, and distinctive powers of the traditions. They also employ religious activities that blend or permeate borders and are inclusive in nature.

During this investigation, I found that boundaries of the traditions serve as differentiated, fundamental qualities that make it possible to practice each independently and

with social legitimacy. The crux of boundaries between distinct religious traditions in Santiago lies in the relative autonomy of any one set of practices, without emphasizing the fact that practice elements may differ from one community to another. This central understanding allows the integrity of a tradition to remain intact, even as more than one support practitioners.

Observations in Santiago de Cuba overwhelmingly represent a widely shared cultural understanding that, in principle, religious boundaries are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In formal or casual conversations, not one respondent spoke of inherent incompatibility of the traditions or invoked even an implicit understanding that one's religious identity must or should be confined to a single arena. The cosmological, ritual, or experiential consequences of a religious boundary was meaningful, but simply did not presuppose inherent exclusive membership. Multiple religious traditions were, in principle, accessible to all, although particular access varied by factors such as one's spiritual inclination or aptitude, the availability of one or more supportive communities, and their internal mechanisms for assessing individual religious strength and advancement.

The following section offers a closer look at discursive practitioner articulations about the boundaries and relationships between discrete religious traditions in the city that inform multiple religious belonging. The composition of sacred spaces offers clues and is included as part of the analysis of interview data concerning tradition boundaries and relationships. Respondent perspectives are reviewed for insight into general attitudes of how religions relate, as well as how order in such relationships are described or circumscribed.

Sacred Spaces in Multi-Religious Sites

Practice of Regla de Ocha, Palo Monte, Muertería, and Espiritismo Cruzado entail the use and maintenance of sacred alter spaces that may be privately held or communally shared. These sacred spaces are usually arranged by individual preference but include consecrated materials and other elements that are distinctive and common to the religious tradition involved. The spaces signify a material expression of cosmological understandings and offer supplemental information about religious boundaries in expressions of multiple religious belonging (Bastide 2007 [1960]; Houk 1996; Dodson 2008; Flores-Peña and Evanchuk 2010).

The most common pattern I observed in sacred spaces of multi-religious practitioners was that sacred objects were grouped or segmented by religious tradition. Sacred objects related to Regla de Ocha, such as porcelain bowls and containers holding materials empowered by oricha, occupied a different space than objects of Palo Monte, such as one or more ngañga. Likewise, the sacred materials of Espiritismo Cruzado, like glasses of water, a crucifix, and saint or family images, were grouped in separate places. This separation of sacred objects associated with distinct religious traditions was visible in sacred spaces at the three ritual events described in the previous chapter. In each case, most materials of Espiritismo were elevated above the ground in tiered displays. In the altar spaces of Espiritista A and Palero C, ngañga and related Palo objects were situated on the floor. Materials of Ocha were also segmented, whether in a separate room, as with the Tambor for Changó, or in a separate tiered cabinet as displayed in Palero C's space. In Palero C's space, cazuelas de muerto were located on the floor next to two ngañga, and both cazuela and ngañga were ritually fed together. Given the otherwise separate groupings of Espiritismo and Ocha objects in the space, the close proximity of cazuela and

ngañga in the display and the ritual suggests a closer relationship or unification between elements of Palo and Muertería practices. Such a relationship is possible but unverified in the home of Espiritista A because she did not clarify her Palo elements or identify a cazuela de muerto. In line with the home and casa-templo observations, the displays of religious objects at the Yoruba Association relegated Espiritismo objects to one room, Palo objects to an outdoor ground area, and Ocha/Ifá materials to various other rooms.

Also of note, the visibility of sacred spaces varied with relationship to a particular religious tradition. Palo objects were hidden or obstructed from public view in the spaces of Espiritista A and at the Yoruba Association, and presumably in the home of Santera A as well. At least some Ocha and Espiritismo materials or representative materials were visible in most of the observed spaces, although Ocha was least prominent in Espiritista A's home, and Espiritismo was not visible in Santera A's home if present at all. Palero C's sacred space was the only one to visibly display sacred objects of Ocha, Palo, Espiritismo Cruzado, and Muertería.

The contrasting visibility of spaces related to different traditions in the homes of Palero C and Espiritista A is also noteworthy in relation to the visibility of their practices. Palero C led a relatively consistent group of cabildo members in ritual events of Ocha, Palo, and Muertería, and the space seemed to reflect the shared access and familiarity. Conversely, the attendees of Espiritista A's ceremonies largely differed at each event relative to the religious tradition, suggesting less integration of participants. As such, Espiritista A's public display of objects of Espiritismo in the home, and hidden or privately held objects of Palo and Ocha, could relate to a stronger differentiation between participants in each of the religious traditions. Yet, in all

observations, when comparisons were possible, visible sacred objects were minimally consistent with an articulated primary or favored religious tradition of practice.

These preliminary findings about the grouping or segmentation of objects in sacred spaces suggest that religious traditions largely retain distinction even when practiced in the same home or by the same person. The possible exception to such boundaries is expressed by the close proximity of cazuela de muerto and ngañga in at least one of the spaces. While some sense of boundaries is evident, the relative visibility of particular sacred spaces also hints at the character of religious community composition as well as sentiments about what facets of a multi-religious practice are appropriate for public or private viewing.

Perspectives on Religious Relationships

Interview respondents largely viewed general relationships between their city's organic, Africa-inspired religious traditions in terms of the relative strengths or spiritual resources available in each. In this view, the plausibility of multiple religious involvements broadly involved ascribed distinctions of particular practices and how these attributes could compliment each other or resonates in the life of a practitioner. In the patterns of religious distinction described, respondents viewed Regla de Ocha/Ifá in holistic terms, noting that it provided insight into general features of one's whole life and particular means for leading a balanced and healthy life under spiritual guidance and protection. Recurrent views of Palo included notions of strength, power, and tangibly directing spiritual force to affect change. Espiritismo Cruzado and Muertería, as well as Palo, were noted for their engagement with

ancestral spirits of the dead, particularly African muertos, though patterns of ritualized communication differed and appealed to different types of people.

While details were difficult to obtain in interviews, respondents hinted at some particular ways in which one religious tradition could compliment another. Palero B emphasized that his favored practice, Palo, could become too "hot" and threaten his or others' wellbeing if left unchecked. His personal Ocha practice "cooled" and grounded him, tempering extreme impulses. Palero B also favored the ritual power of Palo, but appreciated that Ocha provided a broad view of his life and areas around which to be cautious. Espiritista A described regularly offering Ocha consultations to assist people in need, but added that when her Ocha work did not resolve a situation, she would raise the problem with her personal muerto in Espiritismo Cruzado for stronger action. Similarly, the dissertation's opening story about a child falling ill midway through making saint in Ocha saw the invocation of a personal muerto and Palo spirit to provide immediate healing. In these examples, a religious tradition's perceived strength, like Ocha's ethical or lifestyle information, or particular spiritual resource, like a personal muerto's capacity to heal, cues recourse to one tradition or another.

Babalao A and Babalao Juancho both articulated a view of the diverse religious traditions as applicable to different types of people or relevant in certain situations, though both highlighted the elevated and ultimate Ifá authority of Orula. Further, both noted situations in which an Ifá reading could designate Espiritismo or Palo in a person's life path. Babalao Juancho further stressed how the cosmology in Ifá was inclusive of sacred knowledge across the different religious traditions. Yet, Babalao B and the Babalao son of Santera A offered less balanced views of how Palo figured into the religious makeup of the city, citing Palo

as an antiquated tradition too violent for current times. Instead, Santera A volunteered the more harmonious relationship between Ocha, Espiritismo, and Catholicism, suggesting that elements of these traditions integrated within an Ocha ritual. Babalao B also brought attention to differentiation of emotional experiences produced in different traditions. Although he was vocal about the negative attributes of Palo, he lamented the absence of emotionally evocative ritual experiences that he valued from Palo, which were unfulfilled in his Ifá work. Further, the absolute authority of Ifá over Santeros or Paleros, articulated by Babalao, was at least plausibly contested. Santera A and Palero B spoke of anti-Babalao practitioners of Ocha and Palo, and neither Palero A nor B expressed any way that their Palo practice was under an authority of Orula. These sentiment suggest areas of multi-religious integration in Ocha as well as resistance to such integration.

Palero B and the Babalao son of Santera A both viewed Cuban Vodú as the religious tradition least likely to be included in expressions of multiple religious belonging in the city. They speculated that this could be the result of a strong association between Vodú and Haitian-descendant identity, or overlapping characteristics with Palo that render the two somewhat competitive. Vodú communities were also not widely known to reside in the city of Santiago, but rather in Haitian descendant towns located in the surrounding mountainous areas.

Among respondents, the multiple organic religious traditions in the city were variously conceptualized with diverse spiritual resources, each carrying varying degrees of power, protection, or guidance. The traditions also involved distinctive spiritual invocations that attracted and engaged diverse types of spirits, and personal or collective communion experiences. While most broad views of religious characteristics were consistent, the particular

meaning of individual arrangements of multiple religious belonging and ways these religious traditions were related in a person's life varied to suit equally particular needs and preferences.

Paths to Multiple Religious Belonging

How practitioners came to choose or accept more than one religious tradition to practice is another relevant factor in multiple religious belonging expressions in Santiago. Frequently, consult with a spiritual godparent guided a person's involvement in multiple religious traditions. Yet, with or without such consultation, the process of extending religious practice to an additional tradition most durably included one form or another of spiritual confirmation about the decision.

In the data, embarking on an additional religious practice was often confirmed within the parameters of one's initial religious tradition or through particular sources of spirit authority. For people with access to communication with personal muertos, that muerto was frequently cited as an initial source of confirmation to enter another religious tradition. The earliest instance of this phenomenon in the data was the story of Rosa Torres, whose background was in Espiritismo. Her great-granddaughter recited Torres' entrance into Regla de Ocha as a "mandate of her muerto," placing the occurrence around the early 1930s. Before deciding whether or not to become initiated into Ifá, Babalao A, initially socialized in Palo, Muertería, and Ocha, described seeking confirmation with his personal muerto. Interestingly, this confirmation occurred after ritual work in Ifá, wherein Orula confirmed the direction to become a Babalao. Similarly, Palero B described choosing to make saint in Ocha only after his

muerto told him to, and Vicente Portuondo described pursuing Palo more confidently after visions of a Palo spirit appeared to confirm that practice to him.

Muerto confirmations may have also been prevalent among people who practiced Espiritismo early in life. Espiritista A, Palero A, and five other babalao, santeros, muerteras, or paleros reported that after they received an initial spiritual contact from a muerto, or experienced a decisively spiritual encounter, they sought the aid of espiritistas or attended an Espiritismo center to facilitate and manage spiritual contact. With such a foundation, some form of muerto confirmation was possible, though they did not directly describe it. Among many respondents, particularly of older generations, the authorizing force of personal muertos appeared to be an important factor in guiding adherents and a foundation from which to pivot to other religious traditions.

For those initially involved in Ocha/Ifá, more frequent in younger generations of age and initiation, primary guidance and confirmation to extend religious practice typically came from messages from Oricha, or Orula in particular. Babalao A and Babalao Juancho identified such occurrences. They described Ifá readings that directed individuals to practice other religious traditions in conjunction with their development in Regla de Ocha, in order to reach their spiritual potential. In 2004, I observed three women complete Ifá readings in Babalao Juan's community. Two shared that they were advised to advance in Espiritismo training to learn to manage receptiveness to diverse forms of spiritual communication, and the other woman said she was somewhat unexpectedly designated to enter Palo. In such cases, Orula and other Oricha constitute an authorizing voice for advancing multiple religious belonging. Others, more independent minded, might follow their own personal intuitions and inclinations

that were simply not bounded by a single religious practice, as Vicente Portuondo's development suggests.

This range is not to suggest that all religious traditions were openly available to all, or that one's personal desire to practice a tradition corresponded to spiritual confirmations. For instance, one reluctant palero articulated a strong interest in practicing Ifá, but spiritual messages in consultation with Orula confirmed his Palo path and definitively disconfirmed his ability to become a babalao. Generally, multiple religious belonging is a phenomenon evaluated personally or in a community on a case-by-case basis.

Beyond religious evaluations of individuals and personal preferences, pathways to multiple belonging also appeared to be influenced by gender. For instance, Ifá was strictly available to males and carried a fraternal dimension magnified by a potentially high religious status, at least in Ocha. This sometimes caused tensions with the gender-neutral practice of Ocha. Some women resented being excluded from Ifá even after receiving "strong Ifá" life path revelations or, more commonly, the conceit of authority that some babalao wielded toward santeros/as. As noted by Santera A, this tension appeared to intensify with the rise of babalao in the city over the previous decade who were both young and directly initiated into Ifá without first making saint. Experienced santeros/as tended to view the authority of such inexperienced babalao with suspicion, if not outright distrust. Palo was largely associated with males and expressions of tough masculinity. Although women, like Espiritista A, held and carried out pivotal roles in Palo and regularly attended gatherings, women overall appeared less vocal about associating with the tradition and prioritized activities elsewhere. Muertería and Espiritismo Cruzado were also gender-neutral traditions, although Espiritismo appeared to

broadly appeal to women in larger numbers. Nobody I spoke with articulated their gender or associated attributes as a reason for pursuing a particular religious path, but notions of masculinity and femininity seemed at least implicitly influential. For instance, the proportion of Paleros who became Babalao raises a question about how expressions of strong masculinity may have informed the transition.

Multiple Belonging 'Rules'

In addition to personalized aspects of multiple religious belonging, respondents also consistently raised two particular interreligious customs that appeared commonly known. Palero B alluded to both and the first is also referenced in literature (Palmié 2002, 164). Interestingly, both regarded limits within Regla de Ocha and Ifá that concerned other religious traditions. I did not observe or hear mention of any criteria that would exclude or limit religious practice in Regla de Ocha/Ifá from the perspective of other organic religious traditions. The most commonly mentioned multiple religious belonging rule concerned the appropriate order of initiation a neophyte should consider in consultation with their spiritual godparent. The conventional wisdom dictated that one could not be "scratched" or initiated as a member of a Palo community *after* becoming initiated into Regla de Ocha. There was a bit less consensus about the level of Ocha initiation that precluded establishing a relationship with an ngañga. Largely, any level was considered too much, including early entrance levels of receiving *guerreros* or *mano/cofa de Orula*, but among some people, making saint was the more definitive boundary. The common explanation about ensuring that Palo initiations occurred before Ocha was that this was the proper direction of advancement, and that getting scratched

after an Ocha initiation would be “moving backward.” The implicit logic situated Palo and Ocha on a religious hierarchy in which Ocha was higher.

The second convention I consistently heard relevant to multiple religious belonging was that babalao must not be prone to being mounted by spirits. A few babalao I spoke to even said that prospective initiates into Ifá are tested to ensure that they are not susceptible to spiritual cohabitation. One rationale I heard for this convention was that babalao had particular ritual responsibilities that would be compromised if a spirit took possession of his body in a ceremonial context. Babalao did appear to have key roles in many Ocha rituals I observed, which only they could perform, whether or not they led a particular ceremony. It was reasonable to see that a spirit mounting a babalao in a ritual context could effectively stop a ritual event from proceeding. Others elaborated how babalao alone are directly connected to Orula, the oricha of past, present, and future, and that their connection to Orula should not be interrupted, especially in ritual context. Moreover, I was told that experienced babalao are often expected to hold authoritative knowledge about ritual proceedings and being mounted could prevent their ability to interpret and respond to various circumstances in ceremony. Given the gravity of spiritual work, any of these possibilities could be dangerous. Interestingly, I did not encounter similar prohibitions among high-ranking leadership in other traditions. For instance, in the rituals I observed at the Palo Muerto Intervention and the Espiritismo Cruzado Misa Gathering, a personal muerto mounted the ritual officiate and controlled the remainder of the ceremony. In the Tambor for Changó, as in other Ocha observations, ritual officiates tended to facilitate conditions for others to be mounted by oricha.

The common understanding that babalao could not be mounted had consequences for a handful of people in the data. In an immediate sense, it could be a frustrating barrier to people whose Ifá life path reading indicated they should otherwise pursue Ifá. A man in his twenties privately lamented about desiring to enter Ifá after his Ifá reading directed the practice, but was prohibited because of his susceptibility to being mounted. This he shared after two observed occasions of him unexpectedly becoming mounted at Espiritismo Cruzado and Muertería events. In a broad sense, the rule seemed to elevate the status of babalao, reinforcing the intellectual dimension of their discipline, while also implicitly casting the capacity to be mounted as a vulnerability. This was among the distinguishing qualities of babalao that contributed to tensions with santeros and well as practitioners of other religious traditions intimated by Santera A and Palero B.

Respondents and analysis of the data also suggest exceptions or ambiguities to the prohibition on mountable babalao. For instance, Babalao A, B, and Juancho, along with at least three others described themselves as former paleros and/or muerteros. The prevalence of babalao who were formally active in religious traditions strongly inclined to mediumship raised a question about how rigid the rule was in practice. Early attempts to inquire about the apparent discrepancy were met with avoidance and my impression was that this was not a polite question to ask. However, I followed up with one babalao after receiving word he had recently become mounted by a muerto during a Muertería ritual. He avoided comment about being mounted but said that babalao participating in other religious traditions was frowned upon in the broader Ifá community. Orula was the ultimate spiritual authority, and interacting with spirits in other religious traditions seemed to implicitly suggest that Orula was somehow

not sufficient, and thus contradicted the most fundamental principle upon which Ifá was based. He described his participation in non-Ocha/Ifá rituals, rare though it was, as an expression of pride in cultural heritage and as support for spiritual family lines to which he had an amicable relationship. Of all respondents, only one babalao, in his forties, offered a clarification that Ifá was not prohibitive of mediums, per se, but only of mediums that *oricha* could mount. This distinction, he explained, is why so many people with backgrounds in Palo or Muertería were able to pursue Ifá without contradiction. Mediumship in one religious tradition was not necessarily transferable to another.

Mutual Intelligibility Between Religious Traditions: Spirits and Muertos

One of the major factors relevant to religious boundaries in the traditions of Santiago was the existence of spiritual entities that were distinctive to each practice. The oricha, mpungo, muertos, and other designations each constituted defining, though not necessarily unique, attributes that distinguished one tradition from another. Despite differences, each tradition had some areas of mutual intelligibility that appeared influential in compositions of multiple religious belonging. Broadly, each of the four studied traditions, Muertería, Espiritismo Cruzado, Palo, and Ocha/Ifá, practiced diverse and regular forms of worldly spiritual agency available to humans. They also shared understandings about multiple privileged avenues through which direct communication with spiritual agents could be achieved, including spirit possession. Beyond these overlaps, data suggest that similarities between spirit forces and the prevalence of muertos were two additional and particular spirit-related areas of mutual intelligibility that supported multiple religious belonging, and are discussed below.

Spiritual forces particular to one religious tradition that shared characteristics, or domains of activity, with another practice was a common theme in Cuban religious literature, and usually highlighted a correspondence between oricha of Regla de Ocha and Catholic saints. Indeed, Catholic iconography linked to oricha was a normal feature of Oriente Ocha sacred spaces (Dodson 2008), and santeros and babalao regularly used the terms "oricha" and "santo" interchangeably. This relationship is well established. However, Cuban scholar Miguel Barnet also described relationships between oricha and mpungo spirits of Palo (2001, 126-129). One respondent, the Babalao son of Santera A, described the same phenomenon. Barnet likened the correlation of spirit forces to an expression of syncretism. However, the similarities have limitations that restrict the synthetic quality implied by the syncretism concept.

As an example, respondents noted a linkage between Changó of Regla de Ocha, the Catholic saint Santa Bárbara, and mpungo Siete Rayos of Palo Monte. Each shares a relationship to lightening, among other similarities. The association between these spirits was partially corroborated by Vicente Portuondo, who made saint with the oricha Changó, and whose large ngañga held the Palo spirit force of Siete Rayos. Ritual work associated with Changó is also known to occur on December 4, the saint day of Santa Bárbara. However, shared characteristics between spirit forces, or the use of corresponding Catholic saint days for sacred celebrations, does not equal a synthesis of disparate traditions. Ritual work with Siete Rayos in Santiago involves distinctive songs, drum rhythms, animals, procedures, prayers, and overall ritual language particular to Palo and shares little with three observed devotional activities for Changó. Ritual work and interactions with spirits remain qualitatively distinct. Similarly, in one observed occasion, I saw a master drummer scolding a group of younger

drummers who were inappropriately playing “Lucumí” (i.e. Regla de Ocha) rhythms in a Muertería ritual that required Kongo rhythms. After the correction, the younger drummers easily changed to the appropriate rhythms. This indicates that common comprehensions about spirits and their required ritual work retain distinction relative to their religious tradition. Respect for contours and boundaries of traditions to which spirits are known is consistent, even as shared attributes between spirits can facilitate mutual intelligibility, if not find expression in practitioners’ multiple religious belonging.

The visible and non-visible presence of muertos in practitioners’ lives was also a consistent and widely valued phenomenon in a majority of the observations and interviews of this research. This presence of muertos, embedded in the sacred lifestyles and cosmological orientation of practitioners, was an important and key area and demands closer examination. Muertos were understood as spirits of those whose material selves were no longer alive, and the term is applied to a vast range of manifestations. They were known to operate in all of Oriente’s organic, Africa-inspired religious traditions, and could occupy the bodies of one or more practitioners or attendees during ritual events, with or without predictability.

I most frequently observed muertos in the festive portions of ritual activities in various religious traditions, and even in cultural, non-religious festive activities that were aesthetically or thematically related to the traditions. An instance of the latter occurred at a 2004 Yoruba cultural presentation of oricha songs and dances at Casa del Caribe. Late in the presentation, one of the five costumed dancers and an audience member both began shaking and appeared to be mounted before both were taken to a back room to cool down. Alternatively, a large Muertería ceremony just outside the city in 2017 included an hours-long singing and dancing

portion after the main ritual, wherein mounting muertos appeared welcome. Of the approximately 175 dancing attendees, at least 11 women and one man ranging in age from teenagers to over 60 years old became mounted and danced in the crowd for five to ten minutes before one of several ritual assistants vacated the muerto with a procedural gesture. In these cases, the term muerto is used to describe a spiritual presence whose avatars are part of rhythms, songs, and/or dances of the event. The muerto typically enters an attendee's body to dance. Though they may make sounds, these occupying muertos are not known to speak, provide particular spiritual insights, or seek a profound or permanent relationship with their momentary *caballo,* or human host. Rather, the muerto appears as a member of the crowd or event participants to simply share in the festivities.

Questions are always raised about which non-practitioners are susceptible to hosting a muerto*,* with or without religious experience or training. In general, the capacity to pass muertos was not itself extraordinary, nor was it particularly desired among those prone to it. I spoke with two young women who were not religiously active but were self-described as prone to hosting a muerto at spiritually evocative festival events. They reported high discomfort with the occurrence and that they tried to avoid such receptivity whenever possible. On another occasion, a grandmother described unsuccessfully pleading with her "very spiritually sensitive" teenaged granddaughter to stay inside while neighborhood drumming festivities occurred on the street outside their home. Literally the moment the granddaughter walked outside, several dancing muertos successively mounted her body to celebrate through her that evening. These types of "participating" muertos were relatively normal in Oriente celebratory drumming activities, though not predictable. Moreover, the pervasiveness of spirit participation across

public and private spaces was a visible mechanism that perpetually reinforced the fundamental Cuban cultural notion of a broad spiritual community in which everyday life was involved, and that elevated organic religious traditions as means through which to bring order and spiritual variety.

"Personal" muertos were another type of spirit, widely understood as more deeply involved in the lives of religious community members. A personal muerto was a spiritual entity that was understood to have a personal relationship with an individual and its presence was not necessarily associated with a single religious perspective. Unlike the universal nature of Ocha in which everyone was born related to an oricha, my Santiago research found no consensus on the muerto as universal. However, it was clear that the presence of a personal muerto was not limited to the spiritually gifted, but could be discovered through ritual work across traditions.

The personal muerto was perhaps most elaborated in Muertería and Espiritismo Cruzado, if not Palo, where leaders tended to be particularly sensitive to spirits and their muerto could assume a role in the community. It is difficult to characterize common attributes of personal muertos because they varied widely in personalities and demeanors when mounting a medium. The most consistent pattern in observations was that the materially dead figures that the community considered unusually profound or efficacious tended to attract larger groups of people seeking their advice or power. Yet, even with a reputable muerto, a person might have or accumulate a relatively consistent group of other spirits that cohabitated their body in spiritual work. An assistant to Palero C mentioned once that seventeen muertos were known to manifest through Palero C's body, including a female African muerto and an African cimarron (self-liberated from slavery). Espiritista A described three consistent

presences with her. None of the research respondents identified their capacity to remain cognizant of her or his surroundings during a mounting, describing instead the sensation of a blackout. After the spirit left, mediums often relied on attendees to describe what transpired, which was what occurred at the end of the Palo Muerto Intervention. Beyond mountings, some people described an internal or intuited communication with spirits, or the use of coconut shells or other instruments to facilitate dialogue.

While the social popularity of a personal muerto enhanced the reputation of leaders like Espiritista A and Palero C, not all respondents expressed positive attitudes toward muertos. Some santeros and babalao described muertos as significantly less authoritative than oricha or Orula, overall less consistently efficacious, and potentially abusive to a host's body. The latter concern was confirmed twice in observational data. On one occasion, while the personal muerto Pa C had mounted Palero C's body, he repeatedly and unflinchingly jabbed safety pins though his forearms and chest, boasting that he did not feel anything. This was presumably done as evidence of the veracity of his presence. On another occasion, a man was unexpectedly mounted by an uninvited, participating muerto at a festive Bembé drumming event that Espiritista A hosted. The muerto suddenly banged the man's head against a nearby door, creating a cut across the forehead, before being physically restrained and removed to a back room. Moreover, even especially kind muertos sometimes mounted and interacted with community for several hours at a time, wearing at the body. Espiritista A described feeling "exhausted" the day after her Espiritismo Cruzado Misa Gathering.

Beyond welcome and unwelcome, personal and participant muertos, some respondents extended the typology into Ocha and Palo practices. In general, spirit forces of these traditions

were referred to with language like Oricha or Mpungo. However, one palero clarified that a "cemetery muerto" was captured from a cemetery and specially empowered through intensive ritual work to become the mpungo of an ngañga. Similarly, one babalao described that "mounting oricha," such as that seen in the Tambor of Changó event, were actually not oricha but muertos who had lived under that tutelary oricha. Further, Babalao A described oricha not as spirit forces of nature, per se, but as ancient muertos who, by virtue of their extreme age, were immensely powerful. Despite these relationships, personal muertos did not appear to strongly factor into Ocha rituals, though participating muertos could mount people at festivities during or after rituals. In contrast, Palo rituals could be broadly inclusive of personal or other muertos in different capacities.

The prevalence of muertos across religious traditions, though somewhat diverse, could indicate the figure's endurance in the region. Historically, the muerto was a fundamental attribute in spiritual activity of Oriente before the arrival of Palo Monte and Regla de Ocha. The cultural appreciation of active relations to ancestors plausibly adjusted and adapted as new religious traditions and knowledge spread. The pervasiveness of muertos in the city's religious life was consistent with Oriente's regional reputation as *la tierra de los muertos*, "the land of the dead." The colloquial descriptor belied several attributes of regional pride, not least of which were a pronounced west-central African heritage and a legacy of fighting for freedom dating back to self-liberated communities fighting against slavery. The symbolic strength of muertos in the region and city, and in the organic religious traditions of this study, suggests a conceptual thread that facilitates dexterity between traditions. This thread, as a mutually

intelligible feature of the practices, appears at least partially influential in facilitating expressions of multiple religious belonging.

CONCLUSION: MODELS OF MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING

In the data, most expressions of multiple religious belonging shared an articulation of a favored or primary religious tradition of personal practice. The preference was at times described as the practitioner's religious "strength" or the current focus of their time and energy, and was particularly vivid among respondents of low to moderate multiple religious belonging activity types. Among respondents who learned and practiced one religious tradition before learning or practicing another, the babalao respondents favored their most recent practice of Ifá as elevated in their lives. Palero B and Espiritista A both described favoring their early religious practice, even as they entered others. At face value, communication about a favored religious tradition within a repertoire seems to be consistent with a core-periphery multiple religious belonging model, such as that noted by Phan (2003). This model gives priority to a primary and auxiliary religious identity, albeit based on irreconcilable doctrinal differences. While respondents did not cite incompatible beliefs between religious traditions, many respondents described a central religious practice. Palero A, for instance, was unambiguous in describing Palo as his primary religious activity and Ocha as supplemental to his overall wellbeing.

However, a number of issues complicate the application of a core-periphery religion model to Cuban practitioners. One factor concerns perceptions of public or contextual acceptability of different religious traditions. Practitioners are not equally vocal about all

religious traditions that inform their lives and it can be difficult to gauge a primary or auxiliary religious tradition if such a hierarchy is present. In casual conversations, most Cubans were especially guarded about their involvement in Palo and, like Espiritista A, only revealed their relationship to the tradition with trust over time. Such concerns appear related to Gilbert's (1988) discussion of public and private religious practices that inform multiple religious belonging. When applied to Cuba, the heightened privacy involved in personal or group Palo practice, and sometime Ocha or Muertería, could distort an outsider's view of a primary religious tradition.

Equally relevant, the religious tradition that participants discussed or claimed at any given moment sometimes varied by context. They often adjusted to the immediate religious environment since few situations called for an articulation of multiple religious belonging at the same time. This contextual religious focus was evident in conversations during downtime at ritual events. The dominant tradition discussed or claimed was the religious tradition of the ritual being performed, regardless of other religious affiliations of an individual or group. With the unusual exception of my conversation with Palero B about Palo at an Ocha ritual, most practitioners appeared to fully engage one religious tradition at a time relative to the immediate context.

Perhaps most significantly, the contextual religious priority was particularly applicable in ritual observances. Palero C's community performed the Palo-Muerto Intervention in the aftermath of three weeks in which they also organized two rituals of Palo, two of Ocha, and one ceremony focused on personal muerto invocation. Similarly, Espiritista A led or organized ritual work in Espiritismo Cruzado, Palo, Ocha, and Muertería over a month and a half. None of these

activities across religious traditions overlapped in the same day, and each appeared focused on parameters of the tradition at hand. Palero C's casa-templo organized ceremonies of differing traditions largely among a single, shared group of adherents. Attendees at each of Espiritista A's ritual activities of different traditions were largely dissimilar from each other. The contrast between the two leaders suggests more and less collective expressions of multiple religious belonging, yet both collections of multi-religious work respected religious tradition distinctions rhythms, songs, dances, and procedures.

Said another way, even if one identified as primarily an espiritista, santero, or palero in one context, their involvement in a different religious tradition typically involved a full commitment to the order and boundaries of that tradition. A santero/palero would not lead a Palo ritual as a santero, but as a palero. Whether as individuals or in a group, practitioners appeared to fully commit to one religious tradition at a time, while also switching between them over successive days. The contextual focus to activities of one religious tradition at a time within an overall dexterous religious identity complicates a rigid notion of a primary and secondary religious affiliation, and adds credence to Roberts' (2010) un-centered or multi-centered model of multiple religious belonging grounded in rhizome tuber imagery. In this view, no single religious center necessarily determined a person's or group's religious identity, but rather identity shifted between distinct commitments. Boundaries between religious traditions were respected and functioned coherently within individual and community needs.

The shared coherence between traditions despite boundaries is important to comparing these traditions and their practitioners with those who follow doctrinal traditions. The latter religions tend to prioritize practitioners' belief as guided by authoritative texts and utilize

habitual rituals as compelling power to reinforce the religion's ideological tenets. With an emphasis on text and doctrine, these religions are considered mutually exclusive or incompatible if members do not articulate the same beliefs in the same way (Roberts 2010, 53). Practitioners of Cuban organic traditions, while aware of belief tenets, appear to embrace both the generative capacity of ritual to facilitate an order of comprehensions, and similarly to enhance a working sacred knowledge from the efficacy of ritual activity. Related, each of the organic religious traditions appeared to possess a strong component of spiritual interactions and mechanisms for receiving confirmation, which informed religious lives and decisions, and increased variability of expression. As individuals or groups, practitioners largely appeared to build upon training or expand to new religious options relative to their strengths, aptitudes, and personal spiritual dynamics. These are but a few of the factors involved in navigating religious boundaries that inform an acceptability of multiple religious belonging in the city.

CHAPTER 7:

CONCLUSION

Multiple religious belonging is not a concept widely known in academic or even popular literature. In the range of social strategies used to manage multiple religious options, it is among the least developed or elaborated. Members of the African Atlantic Research Team first noticed and began to pay attention to the phenomenon in Cuba around 2001. At that time, we had no conceptual language to describe it. We were conducting inductive field research inspired by analytical methods of Grounded Theory to investigate African descendants' religious expressions in Oriente Cuba, as a site belonging to the broader African diaspora. At first, we met individuals who identified as practitioners of one religious tradition, but later revealed practice in another. There were espiritistas or santeros who later divulged their Palo practice, or paleros who subsequently shared their Ocha practice. We met leaders who organized their communities around initiation, training, and active practice involving more than one religious tradition. A discursive and behavioral pattern began to emerge in the course of reviewing such data that was intermittently collected over summers of several years. Despite respondent clarity about distinctions between traditions, dynamic relationships between available organic religious practices became equally clear, and multiple belonging appeared less and less marginal to religious expressions in the city.

We could not identify an applicable or representative concept for this complexity from theoretical literature of African American & African studies, anthropology, or sociology, and we labeled it "integrated religious plurality" in trying to isolate its conceptual value (Dodson 2008, 169-172). The terminology was introduced as a potential attribute of religious orientation in Oriente, but was not the central object of study. The research of the dissertation has specifically attempted to build upon this earlier finding and center analysis on elaborating its contours through nearly three months of dissertation fieldwork in Santiago de Cuba. The project has modified the earlier terminology, examining the phenomenon in relation to a budding scholarly interest in "multiple religious belonging," and begun to contextualize its significance in broader academic arenas of African American and African studies and anthropology.

The very possibility of multiple belonging among individuals or especially in communities challenges most conceptions of religion, and the interactive outcomes in relationships between religious traditions. Broadly, religious traditions are understood to emerge or take hold in communities that seek to organize around shared beliefs and practices that affirm community values – such as positions about life and death, health and illness, and even moral notions of right and wrong. Conceptions of religion generally informed by Western civilization have given primacy to the distinctions of belief, usually observed in doctrinal differences articulated through text. The result is not only a focus on single, bounded religions, or denominational variants, but also on an implicit or explicit mutually exclusive relationship between religions due to divergent belief claims to truth. This narrow view is too often an

assumption, and can preclude study or even an awareness of the possibility of multiple religious belonging.

Socio-cultural anthropology has developed a robust literature critiquing rigidity in attributes of popular conceptions of religion. We have learned that religious beliefs, even if prioritized and doctrinally driven, are in practice susceptible to instability or temporal limitations. Equally significant, ritual activity once thought to reinforce previously held or articulated beliefs can in fact be more interactive or generative of sacred comprehensions. Further, ongoing discursive practices about a religious tradition, responding to local, national, and other demands, offer a view of shifting religious attitudes and assumptions even among order of the clearest doctrinal proclamations or moments of articulated coherence. Narrow and rigid models of religion not only fall short under nuanced analysis of actual habits of practice, they also do not represent the spectrum of religious traditions humans develop across the world. Given such variety, a primacy of belief and text is not always shared. More fluid relationships can exist between religious traditions. This is a space from which multiple religious belonging can find expression.

As we know from religious scholarship in African American and African studies, many religious traditions developed in conditions of the African diaspora include broad characteristics that are distinct from narrow views of religion. In large part, traditions developed around protracted oppressive conditions and ruptures from homelands and responded to a common need for socio-cultural affirmation of human integrity in the face of dehumanization and racial denigration. Although the diaspora experienced a dearth of political and economic power and representation, their religious life was an area beyond the full control of colonial or other

authorities. It became a space for diverse peoples to engage, construct, and perpetuate values with some autonomy. Common thematic elements of Africa and slavery became embedded in the variety of traditions that coordinated knowledge and practice. Ritual activity necessarily developed around multiple cultural referents, and evolved to express particular beliefs and also generate new knowledge over diverse methods of spiritual contact. Over generations, and using every means available, the wisdom of these communities found expression in sacred traditions of distinctive coherence and activity.

The study of religious traditions born out of this process, and scholarly interest in the ways in which people manage multiple religious options that is inclusive of such traditions, is frequently informed by syncretism. Religious syncretism is a strategy of borrowing and blending elements of sacred knowledge from different sources in multi-religious environments. A chief feature of the process is a pairing of characteristically analogous spirits between two or more religions, though other forms of borrowing are also acknowledged. Syncretism is flawed when applied to questions of cultural origin, when borrowing from varied traditions is fundamental to cultural development. Indeed, syncretism is usually brought into scholarship on African diaspora religions to understand diasporic cultural continuity or discontinuity from African homeland practices, which is a dominant area of interest in the field. However, syncretism has limitations with regard to the study of multiple religious belonging. The concept has been so elastic as to encompass most instances of grey area between religions that are otherwise known to be distinct. Yet, it fundamentally emphasizes either the incorporation of outside sacred elements into the practice of one religion, or the synthesis of diverse elements to form a new, singular practice. When syncretism is applied, the primary object of study

ultimately remains a single religious tradition, which fails to capture religious practice that may is multiple. Further, scholarship that examines religious relationships through syncretism focuses on African diasporic traditions that borrow from Christianity or Catholicism, and often overlooks relationships between organic religious traditions.

This dissertation research is designed to contribute to several underdeveloped areas of scholarship. The study centers the concept of multiple religious belonging to advance scholarship in Cuban and African American & African studies beyond a reliance on syncretism, Christianity, and the focus on African cultural origins. In addition, an elaboration of multiple religious belonging advances the anthropology of religion and popular religious discourse beyond single religions as the primary object of analysis. The examination of multiple religious belonging, as it is expressed in relationships between organic, Africa-inspired religious traditions, also seeks to directly address African diaspora religious scholarship's analytical overrepresentation of the formation and expression of Yoruba-inspired traditions, and the influence and imposition from religions of colonial and political power. In bringing African diaspora and Caribbean religions into dialogue with multiple religious belonging, the project further addresses an omission in the latter field's geographic foci in North America, Europe, and Asia. The project's geographic center in the historically distinctive eastern region of Cuba contributes to expanding English-language Cuban religious scholarship beyond its overrepresentation of developments in western Cuba. Most significantly, the project seeks to expand conceptual understanding of multiple religious belonging in its focus on elaborating the contours of how this phenomenon is expressed in Santiago de Cuba. This emphasis directly

informs the broader scholarly process of building conceptual propositions about how humans manage religious options in a multi-religious environment.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

This dissertation has focused on the human phenomenon of multiple religious belonging among eastern Cuban practitioners of organic, Africa-inspired religious traditions. The project fundamentally asks: how is this phenomenon expressed in Santiago de Cuba? With regard to literature, related questions are: do multiple religious belonging expressions reflect a core-periphery or multi-centered "rhizome tuber" model? Or, do religious activities across traditions actually demonstrate a synthesis or integration into a singular religious orientation? Do features common in religious traditions of the African diaspora inform multiple religious belonging?

The first and broadest key finding of the research was that how practitioners expressed multiple belonging varied considerably in composition and intensity, but most frequently included some combination of Muertería, Espiritismo Cruzado, Palo Monte, or Regla de Ocha/Ifá. As organic traditions of Cuba historically developed among African descendants, key areas of mutual intelligibility between the traditions appear influential in facilitating multiple tradition practice patterns. These areas include general comprehensions about worldly spiritual agency available to humans and diverse ritual or other privileged avenues through which direct spiritual communication and communion is achieved. Notable among shared spirit communicatory forms is an awareness of spirit possession, or "mountings," in religious expression. The muerto, or spirit of the dead, was the most widely shared spirit category across

the four religious practices, though Ocha and Palo each included spirit forces that also shared more particular characteristics with each other. These areas of mutual intelligibility are inclusive of broad aesthetic or behavioral preferences in what Joseph Murphy called "working the spirit" (1995) and referents to the African presence and historical experience on the island (Scott 1991).

While such areas of mutual intelligibility could facilitate fluid or permeable relationships between the four traditions, the absence of Cuban Vodú in multiple religious arrangements suggested a limit to that fluidity. Cuban Vodú, active in Oriente but not widely known in Santiago, was least likely to be included or known in multi-religious arrangements of individuals and groups. Speculatively, the separation may be a response to the enduring distinction of Haitian ethnic heritage in Vodú, among other possibilities, which raises questions about how Paul Johnson's notion of "Diaspora horizons" may affect multiple religious belonging (2007, 7). Cuban Vodú, established from early twentieth century migration from Haiti, may look to Haiti rather than Africa as a primary homeland, distinguishing it from the four practices organic to Cuba that privilege African referents.

Another notable finding is the appearance of common understandings or rules concerning multiple religious belonging expressions. Largely, social legitimacy is afforded to multiple belonging expressions fundamentally based on individual capacity, inclination, spiritual confirmation and spiritual godparents or mentors guiding pursuit of additional religious practices. An individual's free choice to practice one or more desired religious traditions could inform the process, but did not itself determine membership, advancement, or recognition within different and multiple practices. The young palero disconfirmed from entering Ifá

despite his desires to become a babalao illustrates this limitation. In addition, differentiated access points to practice in each tradition were also important. Ocha/Ifá and Palo involved ritual initiation procedures to enter a practicing community, while entering and advancing within Muertería and Espiritismo Cruzado largely depend on one's capacity to pass personal muerto(s) and the caliber of muerto(s) involved in community interactions.

Within the varied pathways to multiple traditions, spiritual and ritual confirmation was a common bridge between religious traditions. Largely, the confirmation mechanism available in one's initial religious practice bridged the path to another. Orula or other oricha were cited as directing practitioners toward additional traditions for those first involved in Ocha/Ifá. The confirmation of personal muertos was cited as bridging the transition to Ocha/Ifá among practitioners of Muertería, Espiritismo Cruzado, and Palo. Mpungo spirits of Palo were not cited as confirming entrance to other religious traditions in the data collected. Beyond these individualized cases, the data also identified the phenomenon of dual initiations into Palo and Ocha, dating back to the spiritual family line of Reynerio Pérez of the early twentieth century. Pérez is cited as foundational in spreading Palo in Santiago and more broadly in Oriente. His regular pairing of Ocha and Palo initiations in his vast number of ritual godchildren likely influenced the close relations between the two traditions as they developed in the city.

Two widely known multiple religious belonging 'rules' in the city regarded the relationship between Ocha/Ifá and other religious practices, and both rules elevated or distinguished Ocha/Ifá. The first concerned an appropriate order of initiation that privileged Ocha after Palo, because the opposite would signify regression. The second excluded people susceptible to spirit possession from entering Ifá, so as to avoid disruption of ritual

responsibilities, and mostly discouraged babalao from active practice of other religious traditions. The presence of these conventions is indicative of efforts to bring order among religious options, albeit biased toward Ocha/Ifá.

The final significant finding of the research is that the contextual respect for disparate religious tradition boundaries appeared largely maintained in the performance of particular ritual activities. Practitioners who actively practiced multiple religious traditions generally did so one religious tradition at a time. This is the fundamental meaning of the quote in the title of the dissertation. "A dog has four legs but walks in one direction" is a *patakín* (proverb) in Cuba, but one that a respondent said she received as a message from Orula after an Ifá consultation. In her particular context, the phrase was an analogy to address the respondent's labors being spread too thin, but it is also applicable to multiple religious belonging. When Ocha work is called for, one does Ocha work. When Palo or Espiritismo Cruzado work is needed, that work is done, and so on. One may have knowledge or experience in multiple religious traditions, "four legs," but performs ritual activities in one tradition at a time, "walking in one direction." Divergent beliefs in religious traditions were not represented as prohibitive to multiple belonging. More so, compatible interests in ritual strengths across traditions, and specifically the efficaciousness or capacity to be effective in religious activity, appeared as the strongest broad strategy in multiple belonging.

Expressions of multiple religious belonging in the data have characteristics of both core-periphery and multi-centered models. In interviews, respondents articulated a favored tradition as their strength or current focus, and often regarded other religious traditions as supplemental or supportive. However, observations suggested that practitioners might not be

forthcoming about the full range of their religious activities, and also could regularly shift discourse on religious identity relative to a ritual context. Moreover, in the performance of rituals of different traditions, each ritual was done with concern for operating within the traditions accepted boundaries of distinction. These factors appear to complicate a core-periphery view, if not support a multi-centered model of expression. Within casa-templos or broad socio-religious networks of mutual support, religious traditions largely retained distinction even as practice was multiple, which suggests resistance to synthesis into one cohesive tradition. However, there was an overt effort among some babalao to articulate such an integrative whole with Ifá at its center. In particular, and consistent with Palmié's (2002) findings about Palo and Ocha, the data showed attempts to integrate Palo into the cosmology of Ocha/Ifá, and yet some Palero respondents did not share a willingness to do so.

In sum, the concept of multiple religious belonging captures dynamic relationships between religious traditions that people use in their everyday lives. Whether oriented to a shared reality or complementary relationships, or expressed through one or more centered identities, the concept renders discernable the ways in which religious practice of community is not guided by a single tradition, a reality that can be obscured when studies use single religions as objects of analysis. The hope of this research is to contribute a beginning elaboration of the concept with data from eastern Cuba, so that the full range of lived expressions of religious belonging and practice are appreciated, and the complex manifestations of religious identity more accurately represented.

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