

Essays

The Proliferation of Yorùbá Religion in the Atlantic during the Nineteenth Century: The Portability of the Orisha

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Abstract

This paper seeks to analyze how Yorùbá religion and culture proliferated so widely throughout the Americas, though Yorùbá peoples comprised so little of the total percent of slaves imported to Trinidad, Brazil, and Cuba. Orisha worship managed to eclipse the religious practices of a more populous and well-established group like the West Central Africans. This essay argues that the highly organized and urbanized socio-religious structure of the Yorùbá Orisha lent itself to transportability. Thus, the Yorùbá system was reconstructed in the New World than some of its more localized counterparts in the Bight of Benin and Biafra regions, specifically the Kangas of modern Liberia, whose religious practices are more localized. The essay provides an overview of the Yorùbá socio-religious structure as it was practiced in Yorùbáland in the mid to late 19th Century, as well as the parallel structures in Trinidad, Brazil, and especially Cuba. The best documented region to establish how the socio-religious structures are replicated after Yorùbá people were dispersed into the Americas during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. The Yorùbá pantheon is boundless; this paper will explore the transportability of the orisha through three of the representative deities that arrived in the New World: Ogun, Shango, and Oshun.

Introduction

The Yorùbá¹ people are one of the best-known ethnic groups in West Africa. Despite their relatively low representation among the ethnicities deposited into the Atlantic region through the Transatlantic Slave Trade, the Yorùbá managed to preserve much of their religion, language, and culture in the New World, and consequently, Yorùbá Orishas became the most broadly worshipped African deities in the Black Atlantic. Despite the comprehensive study of the religion and culture of Yorùbá peoples, it has yet to be determined how an ethnic group that comprised so little of the total percent of slaves imported to Trinidad, Brazil, and Cuba managed to eclipse the religious practices of a more numerous and well-established group like the West Central Africans.

This essay asserts that in conjunction with the highly organized (though not dogmatic) and urbanized socio-religious structure, the Yorùbá Orisha were transportable. The Yorùbá system was better able to be reconstructed in the New World than some of its more localized counterparts in the Bight of Benin and Biafra regions, specifically the Kangas of modern Liberia. The essay will provide an overview of the Yorùbá socio-religious structure as it was practiced in Yorùbáland in the mid to late 19th Century, as well as the parallel structures in Trinidad, Brazil and especially Cuba, which is the best documented region. Because the Yorùbá pantheon is boundless, this paper will explore the transportability of the orisha

Through three of the representative deities that arrived in the New World: Ogun, Shango, and Oshun.

The Yorùbá system in Yorùbáland (Orisha)

The documentation of what would become the Yorùbá peoples in the 19th Century largely provided by traveler and missionary accounts that are preoccupied with establishing the existence of a Supreme Being in the context of the Yorùbá belief system. For example, Reverend Planque Baudin writes in 1885 that:

1 The term Yorùbá is an ethnonym used to describe the various Yorùbá speaking peoples of Southwestern Nigeria. Including the Ewè-Gén-Ajá-Fòn ethnicities, J. Lorand Matory writes in his book *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism and Matrarchy in Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*, that the ethnonym “was created in the creole society of the coast, in a place and in a time that put it in constant dialogue with the nations of the Afro-Latin diaspora,” and therefore the pan-Yorùbá ethnonym came into use through the ethnic groupings of Yorùbá-speaking Africans on the coast and in their respective destinations. For more on the creation of the Yorùbá, see J.D.Y. Peele’s, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yorùbá* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003).

The Blacks have neither statues nor symbols to represent God. They consider him the Supreme Primordial Being, author, and father of the gods and spirits. At the same time, they think that God, after beginning the organization of the world, charged Obatala to finish it and to govern it, then withdrew and went into eternal rest to look after his own happiness....²

Another account written by A.B. Ellis reports that:

Olorun is the sky god of the Yorùbá; that is, he is deified firmament, or personal sky... He is merely a nature god, the personally divine sky, and he only controls phenomena connected I the native mind with the roof of the world.... Since he is too lazy or too indifferent to exercise any control over earthly affairs, man in his side does not waste time in endeavoring to propitiate him, but reserves his worship and sacrifice for more active agents In fact, each god, Olorun included, has, as it were, his own duties; and while he is perfectly independent in his own domain, he cannot trespass upon the rights of others...³

These two accounts are representative of the 19th Century documentation of the Yorùbá system. Despite their differences on particulars and what J. Omosade Awolalu would call in his text, misinterpretations of Oludumare's scope and powers, contemporary secondary scholarship generally agrees that Oludumare/Olorun/Eledaa is, in fact, the Supreme Being in the Yorùbá religious system.⁴ And though the scholarship has reached a consensus regarding the existence of a Supreme Being, there is no consensus on whether Oludumare as the Supreme Being was intrinsic to the Yorùbá system or if it was imported from the Yorùbá's contact with Muslims to their north, and later Christian missionaries. Where Awolalu would argue that the concept of a Supreme Being had originated with the Yorùbá system, Peter McKenzie argues in his seminal text, *Hail Orisha!: A Phenomenology of a West African Religion in the Mid- Nineteenth Century*, that there are no written records of Yorùbá religion prior to contact with the Abrahamic traditions and therefore it cannot be ascertained if the concept of a Supreme Being is intrinsic.⁵ Despite this fact, the

2 Planque Baudin and Mary McMahon, *Fetichism and Fetich Worshipers* (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1885), 6.

3 A.B. Ellis, *The Yorùbá-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of Africa*. London, 1894, 36-34.

4 J. Omosade Awolalu, *Yorùbá Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites* (Burnt Mill: Longman Group Limited, 1979), 9. Except for where being directly quoted, the Supreme Being will be uniformly referred to as Oludumare as to avoid confusion.

5 Peter McKenzie, *Hail Orisha!: A Phenomenology of a West African Religion in the Mid- Nineteenth Century* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 459.

existence of three different, though related, names of a Supreme Being is extremely telling regarding the Yorùbá's orientation to the concept of a Supreme Being and may reveal that the concept did, in fact, originate within the context of Yorùbá beliefs.

Though it is apparent that the Yorùbá people did not directly worship Oludumare, it is also clear that the Supreme God was an important feature of the three-tiered spiritual system, which is discussed in more detail in the following section. Because of Oludumare's distant nature, he could reasonably be worshipped anywhere his children, the Orisha, were worshipped. The existence of this distant (and perhaps consequently) portable Supreme God, as a fundamental feature of Yorùbá belief, provides the other tiers, the Orisha, and ancestor veneration, the flexibility to move across time and space as well.⁶ This is evidenced by the widespread influence of the Yorùbá Orisha in the Ewe-Fon regions of West Africa before its proliferation in the Atlantic.

The second tier of the Yorùbá religion and perhaps the most important for this study is the Orisha. The total number of Orisha has never been identified accurately. One account given to missionary Thomas Jefferson Bowen numbered them between "300-400 in all, most of which are of little note."⁷ It is important to note that the number provided by Bowen is not likely the result of a systematic account of the Orisha being named but is more likely a summation (if not hyperbole) to detail the inability to count the Orisha because of their great number. Because there are too many Orisha to count, many of whom do not make the trip to the New World, this research will only discuss the three aforementioned Orisha as representative of Awolalu's three major subcategories: Primordial Divinities⁸, Deified Ancestors⁹, and Personifications of Natural Forces.¹⁰

Ogun, the warrior god, is a Primordial Divinity that comes into creation with the religious system itself.¹¹ According to the account of Charles Phillips in 1855, Ogun is "the god of stone and iron," and like many other Orisha can be represented by the snake and accepts offerings of dogs.¹² In an earlier account, Phillips also cites that Ogun is represented by "a piece of the

6 Oludumare is described as omnipotent and all powerful, and therefore would not need to be moved from his eternal home in the sky. The use of portability here refers more to the ability to access Oludumare at any place and less to the need for Oludumare's movement

7 Thomas Jefferson Bowen, *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labours in several countries in the Interior of Africa* (New York and Charleston, 1857), pp. 313.

8 Awolalu, *Yorùbá Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, 21.

9 Ibid., 33.

10 Ibid., 45.

11 Ibid., 31.

12 CMS 077, J. 26/10/55.

skin of the tail of an elephant he had killed.”¹³ The differences noted by Phillips on the content denote Intrinsic flexibility in the worship of Orisha. Ogun was uniformly described as a warrior or hunter, but his offerings vary by the availability of the object in the various locales where he was worshipped. The portability of Ogun in Yorùbáland and the variations in the deity’s worship across locations were not unlike the proliferation of Ogun in Trinidad, Brazil, and Cuba and the subsequent adjustments made to accommodate the needs of the deity based on the available resources.

Shango, however, is under the category of a Deified Ancestor.¹⁴ Deified Ancestors are usually national figures who have achieved some major accomplishment on behalf of the various Yorùbá-speaking peoples, or a particular locale. It cannot be ascertained when and if Shango was actually a living human being. Nevertheless, the Yorùbá mythology treats Shango as if he was a living human being at one point residing in and eventually ruling over Oyo.¹⁵

Regarding Shango’s worship, Peter McKenzie writes that “the frightening effect of the thunderclaps, the lightning bolts and the swirling winds [elicit] acclamations of Sango’s majesty to ward off further intervention by him, the imploring of protection.”¹⁶ The thunderstorm, as one of Shango’s main points of access, allows the deity to be reasonably accessed, or transported anywhere thunderstorms occur. This presents no challenges to and perhaps facilitates, Shango’s transition to the Atlantic region, where thunderstorms are relatively frequent.

Lastly, Oshun, one of Shango’s three wives¹⁷ is also in the category of Orisha are Personifications of Natural Forces. Oshun is a river goddess, whose color is yellow (or gold), whose metal is bronze, and is known most notably for her vain, seductive, and sexual qualities, although her domain extends into divination, and governance.¹⁸ Oshun is also represented by honey, which is sweet in life and rules over the abdomen. Women on issues of fecundity, childbirth, and marriage, therefore, consult it.¹⁹ McKenzie, provides evidence of Oshun’s broad influence writing that, “The Oshun River itself flows some

13 O78,19, J. 4/12/77

14 Awolalu, 33.

15 This feature of Shango will become important in discussing his large following in the Atlantic regions as perhaps due to Oyo-centrism in the larger Yorùbá system where Shango was the patron saint even if he was not factually the king at some distant point in the past.

16 McKenzie, *Hail Orisha!*, 33-34.

17 Shango’s three wives are Oshun, Oba and Oya/Iyansa. Oya, represented by hurricane force winds is said to be his favorite wife because she became deified when he did. Additionally, Oya’s winds fan the flames of Shango’s fire causing thunder.

18 Awolalu., 47.

19 Ibid.

miles to the east of Ibadan, but the cult of the river goddess is not confined to the living near her banks. In this case, the ‘small brook’ and indeed the sacred tree would serve as the focal point of Osun worship.”²⁰ Oshun’s various access points away from her river prove that Orisha is generally not bound to their points of origin. In addition, if Oshun worshipped away from her river at Ibadan, it makes sense that she and her counterparts could be worshipped as far as the New World at ‘the small brook’ or the sacred tree in Trinidad, Brazil, or Cuba.

Ancestor worship²¹ is the last, but perhaps the most important feature of the Yorùbá spiritual system in general. “In the Yorùbá belief, the family is made up of both the living members and the ancestors. The ancestors constitute the closest link between the world of men and the spirit world and they are believed to be keenly interested in the welfare of their living descendants.”²² The ancestors of a given clan, or the national ancestors of a given locale, also known as Egungun are therefore the first line of defense against ill will. This is evidenced in the account of Miss Sarah Tucker who noted that the Yorùbá “adore[d] the manes of their ancestors.”²³ One of the earliest descriptions of the interrelationship between these three components is presented in the account of Henry Townshend in 1847, where an informant provides the phrase, “I hold Shango’s feet, Ifa’s and Egungun’s that they should help me to beg Olorun to give me all the things I want.”²⁴ This evidences the importance of *Oludumare*, even if through the intermediary relationship of the Egungun and the Orisha. Though the Egungun were not, perhaps, transportable, they were constantly being made. As soon as a devotee buried a family member in their new location, veneration could resume even if it had been adjusted to meet the new social structure.²⁵

20 McKenzie, *Hail Orisha!*, 31.

21 *Ibid.*, 61

22 *Ibid.*

23 Miss Sarah Tucker, *Abbeokuta, or Sunrise within the Tropics* (New York, 1853) pp. 34-35.

24 CMS Archives, O85, 239 J, Henry Townshend, 21 December 1847, quoted in McKenzie, *Hail Orisha*, p. 464 It should be noted that here Olorun is being used to identify the Supreme Being.

25 It could also be argued that Yorùbá people continued to venerate their existing Egungun in Africa by calling their names, pouring libations, and making offerings of food items in their new location. These practices are perhaps the most popular ways in which ancestors are honored in the New World, and probably originated because of the lack of physical access to burial grounds and shrines. These adjustments will be discussed in more detail in the sections regarding Trinidad, Brazil and Cuba.

Counterexample: The Kangas and Grebo Religion

Other African spiritual systems, like that of the Kru-speakers in modern-day Liberia were more localized and had deities that were less portable than the Orisha of the Yorùbá-speakers.

Though the religion of the region is not well-documented, George Christian Andreas Oldendorp provides a mid-19th Century account in which he cites Nesua as the Supreme Being²⁶. Not unlike the documentation of other African religions by missionaries, it cannot be ascertained if the Kangas themselves considered Nesua to be Supreme, or if Oldendorp sought to find a Supreme Being for the purposes of conversion. Oldendorp also details that there are specific locations where the shrines of Nesua are worshipped citing that they “have places where they pray to God and sacrifice to him, here a little house, there a great tree, other places a water and the like,” denoting that the shrines of Nesua are location specific and that the tree, for example, could not be moved²⁷ Reverend John Payne²⁸ and Miss Anna Scott both provide more detailed accounts of the Grebo spiritual practices in the mid 19th Century. Of these, Scott’s account is probably the most detailed (and relevant) regarding the structure and beliefs of Grebo religion²⁹. Scott too cites Nesua as the Supreme Being but asserts that “inferior spirits,” as intercessors were much more important.³⁰ These local “inferior spirits” inhabited features of nature like, rocks and mountains, which is where they were worshipped.³¹ Scott cites “Bidi Nyema,” “Beda Nyebo” and “Si-wu Bia” as examples of these local deities. Unlike the Orisha, these spirits do not seem to have any overarching, general characteristics like thunder, or fresh water, or war that would make them transportable. Instead, “Bidi Nyema,” “Beda Nyebo” and “Si-wu Bia” seemed to be bound to their specific locations as positive spirits that intervened on behalf of the Kangas who made offerings to them. Consequently, it would have proved difficult to transport Beda Nyebo to the New World since the shrine dedicated to the deity was in rocks.³² And as far as Scott reported, Beda Nyebo was not a “rock deity” and therefore could not be represented by

26 Christian Georg Andraes Oldendorp, *Historie der Caribischen Inseln Sanct Thomas, Sanct Crux und Sanct Jan.* (4 volumes, Berlin, 2002), 399.

27 Oldendorp, 399.

28 Reverend John Payne, Rt. Rev. J. Payne’s account of the Grebo Tribe, at Cape Palmas,” Thirty-Ninth Annual Report of the American Colonization Society (Washington, DC, 1856), pp. 34-37

29 Miss Anna Scott, *Day Dawn in Africa* (Washington, DC, 1858)

30 Scott, *Day Dawn in Africa*, 76.

31 *Ibid.*, 69-70.

32 *Ibid.*

or worshipped at any set of rocks but only at the particular site that the Kan-gas deemed holy.

The Spread: Orisha Worship in the Atlantic

As previously discussed, the Yorùbá make up a small percentage of enslaved peoples deposited into the New World. The Yorùbá however enter the Atlantic region in two distinct waves: involuntary capture, particularly during the Yorùbá civil wars and the collapse of Oyo, and voluntary recaptive migrations where relatively large numbers of Yorùbá enter and reentered Trinidad, Brazil, and Cuba. On the initial dispersal of Yorùbá people after the collapse of Oyo, David Eltis writes that, “Oyo collapsed long after the slaving demands from the Atlantic had passed their peak levels from relevant parts of the coast. The Yorùbá civil wars picked up strength at a time when the commodity exports from the Bight of Benin, and specifically Yorùbáland, were utterly trivial.”³³ Even when the Yorùbá region was exporting the largest number of slaves, the demand was so low that their percentage in the New World did not dramatically increase.

The emigration of Yorùbá captives however, is when they begin to comprise sizeable percentage of the population of their respective destinations. On the voluntary movement of the captives throughout the Atlantic, Peter F. Cohen writes that:

Throughout this complex of migration through enslavement, recapture, deportation and voluntary choice, Yorùbá speakers constituted a conspicuous—if not predominant presence. In 1835, approximately 28.6% of enslaved Africans in Salvador, Bahia were Nago (Reis, 1993, p. 146). In Cuba, the Lucumí represented the single largest incoming group (34.5%) after 1850. During the 1820s over half of the captives in Sierra Leone were Yorùbá, and an 1848 census put the number at 54%.³⁴

With the understanding of the historical and demographic features of how the Yorùbá enter the New World, which is relatively late and in little numbers, the Yorùbá’s large impact on the socio-religious structures of Trinidad, Brazil and Cuba can be interrogated vis a vis their small numbers. It will be easier to ascertain why the proliferation of the Yorùbá Orisha was attributed to the portability, and perhaps the perceived effectiveness of the Orisha themselves,

33 David Eltis, “The Volume, Age/Sex Ratios, and African Impact of the Slave Trade: Some Refinements of Paul Lovejoy’s Review of the Literature.” *The Journal of African History* 31, no. 3 (1990): 491

34 Peter F. Cohen, “Orisha Journeys: The Role of Travel in the Birth of Yorùbá-Atlantic Religions,” *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 47, no. 117 (2002): 19.

coupled with the sophisticated, urban organizational structure which may have made the religion more attractive to non-Yorùbá Africans in the Americas.

As distinct from the other regions discussed in the paper, Trinidad's development of Orisha worship occurred relatively late. Even in Brazil and Cuba, the religious practices of *Candomblé* and *Lucumí* respectively had been well-established under enslavement. In contrast, Cohen writes that in Trinidad and other parts of the British West Indies, "the development of Orisha traditions... was essentially a post-slavery phenomenon, part of a larger pattern of movement linking the British West Indies, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria through the single growing infrastructure of the British Empire."³⁵ Consequently, the development of Orisha worship in Trinidad was augmented if not jump started by the second wave of Yorùbá migrants. Those migrants, likely from a region heavily influenced by the culture of Oyo brought their Orisha and their rituals with them.

To this point, Funso Aiyejina and Rawle Gibbons detail the predominance of Shango in Trinidad in their article, "Orisa (Orisha) Tradition in Trinidad," writing that, "although many Yorùbá deities including Esu, Ogun, Yemoja, Osun survived to be worshipped in Trinidad, it was Sango who made the most visible contribution to the practice of African religion on the island."³⁶ Shango's predominance in the Black Atlantic has already been discussed in terms of the amount of Shango devotees that come to the Atlantic region via the slave trade and emigration from regions where the deity predominated in Yorùbáland. In addition to the high numbers of devotees bringing Shango's rituals to the Island, the fearsome thunder god likely appealed to the plight of oppressed Africans as well.³⁷ Shango could offer both protection and inspiration that the recently emancipated Africans would need. Like her husband, many Oshun devotees enter the new world, probably from Oshogbo or Ileshe where she was the patron saint.³⁸

And though there were many similarities between the continental practices and those in Trinidad, some features of the religion needed to be adjusted to the new social environment.

These changes are most notably seen in the area of ancestor worship. Aiyejina and Gibbons write that:

35 Ibid., 30.

36 Funso Aiyejina and Rawle Gibbons, "Orisa (Orisha) Tradition in Trinidad," *Caribbean Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (1999): 37.

37 Aiyejina and Gibbons, "Orisha Tradition in Trinidad," 37.

38 Mercedes Cros Sandoval, *Worldview, The Orichas, and Santeria: Africa to Cuba and Beyond* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 51.

In spite of the centrality of the rituals/festivals of ancestors (egungun festivals) to the religious world of the African. However, this tradition did not survive in its complex ritualized form in the new world but ancestor veneration continues to be signaled through basic social rituals like the pouring of libation to the earth (the abode of the dead) from freshly opened bottles of rum....³⁹

This change, in conjunction with the differing social structure of the island, could have been caused by the lack of ancestors in the New World. Even after the adjustments to the new social structure of Trinidad, the Yorùbá tradition in Trinidad continued to model itself after the three-tiered system including Oludumare, the Orisha and the ancestors. They were able to do this by, [leaving] the essentially heterogeneous situation of the plantation and tend[ing] to congregate in ethnic clusters."⁴⁰ This included, but was certainly not limited to choosing to marry by tribal affiliation where possible.

Aiyejina and Gibbons also address syncretism of Orisha with Catholic saints. They take an interesting position on the necessity of the practice writing that, "it has often been suggested that the use of Catholic saints by the Yorùbá was a ploy designed to fool the authorities into believing that the Yorùbá had accepted Christianity and that the Yorùbá continued to worship their orishas under the guise of saints."⁴¹ The authors go on to argue that syncretism would have served no purpose in ethnically homogenous and secluded clusters away from the gaze of Europeans.⁴² Though this is an interesting position, I am more inclined to believe that syncretism likely began out of necessity. Developed into a full-fledged acceptance of Catholic saints into the Orisha tradition based on the compatibility of the systems and the opportunity for co-revelation. This position supported by the fact that the large numbers in Kongolese Christians already inhabiting Trinidad⁴³ introduced the Catholic saints to the Yorùbá

Nineteenth Century Brazil is a unique case regarding the documentation of Orisha worship because slavery is not abolished until 1888. Although the Orisha were clearly worshipped as early as the 16th Century, there is little documentation to support that fact. For the 19th Century, the primary documents exploring Yorùbá spiritual practices are limited to police reports and

39 Ibid., 40.

40 Ibid., 9.

41 Ibid., 13.

42 Ibid.

43 John K. Thornton, "The Kingdom of Kongo and Palo Mayombe: Reflections on an African American Religion," (Boston, 2015).

newspaper articles, leaving much to be desired.⁴⁴ Consequently, the most comprehensive studies of Orisha worship in Brazil take place during the 20th Century. Regarding the ubiquitous nature of Orisha worship in Brazil, particularly Bahia, Manuela Carneiro de Silva Cunha writes that, “the religion of the orishas was a powerful pillar of identity in Brazil.”⁴⁵ Eltis provides demographic support for Cunha’s assessment of the significance of the Orisha in Brazil, noting that “the African impact on Bahia and the Bahian impact on the Bight of Benin was certainly greater than the interchange between any other two regions of Africa and the Americas,”⁴⁶ despite the fact that the total number of Yorùbá-speaking peoples arriving to Brazil between 1750 and 1866 only makes composes 17 percent of all arrivals.⁴⁷ Still, what is called the Nago nation in Brazil, established cultural and religious predominance.

Despite the lacunae in documentation in the 19th Century, Roger Bastide’s book, *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations*, establishes the widespread practice of Orisha worship in Brazil. And like Trinidad, Shango held a special place among the enslaved Africans of Brazil. On the popularity of Shango, Bastide writes that, Shango “tenaciously retained all of his African characteristics in Brazil, perhaps because he is the master of lightening and because in tropical countries storms break with sinister fury.”⁴⁸ This cultural, and religious predominance happens in an environment where West Central Africans represent more than half of all arrivals during the same time frame. And as previously mentioned, Oshun could also be found where her husband was being worshipped and was “included in this fabric of fidelity along with him,” in the *Candomblé* system.⁴⁹

Ogun, on the other hand, underwent a series of changes to meet the needs of his devotees in bondage. According to Bastide:

Ogun has retained his persona as the god of iron. He is represented by a set of small metal tools—hammer, hoe, spade, etc.—tied together, symbolizing agriculture, the forge, and skilled work. But a whole set of functions over which this god presided in Africa has been dropped from his cult....

44 Joao Jose Reis, “Candomblé in 19th Century Bahia” *Priests, Followers, Clients*, *Slavery & Abolition* 22, no. 1 (2010), 118.

45 Manuela Carneiro de Silva Cunha, *Negros, estrangeiros: os escravos libertos e sua volta a Africa* (Sao Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1978), 119.

46 Eltis, “Free and Coerced Transatlantic Migrations: Some Comparisons,” *The American Historical Review* 88, no. 2 (1983): 277.

47 Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, [http://www.slavevoyages.org/Queried arrivals in Brazil by African regions of embarkment, 1750-1866](http://www.slavevoyages.org/Queried%20arrivals%20in%20Brazil%20by%20African%20regions%20of%20embarkment%201750-1866)

48 Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2007), 256.s

49 Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*, 256.

Ogun's persona as a brutal and aggressive warrior and beheader was the one that won out.⁵⁰

Not unlike his presence in Trinidad, Ogun's warrior features likely superseded the agricultural ones based on the enslaved African's particular needs for protection in some cases, and guidance for rebellion in others. The importance of Egungun too traveled to Brazil, along with "the idea that the souls of the dead rejoin[ed] the great spiritual family of ancestors beyond the ocean."⁵¹ Consequently, the Yorùbá-speaking peoples in Brazil continued to value the importance of "render[ing] due respect to the dead, lest they avenge themselves by returning to disrupt the lives of their children."⁵² Thus the three-tiered hierarchy presented by Awolalu, where the Orisha and the Egungun are praised as intercessors for the Supreme Being, Oludumare, was preserved in Brazil.

According to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, Yorùbá-speaking peoples from the Bight of Benin regions only compose 13.9 percent of the total arrivals to Cuba between 1750-1866, whereas people from the West Central Africa region compose over double that amount at 29.7 percent.⁵³ This makes the popularity of Yorùbá Orisha particularly salient since Yorùbá people's physical representation on the Island was dwarfed by their West Central African counterparts⁵⁴ though the percentages are very similar to Trinidad, Mercedes Sandoval asserts in her article, *The Orichas, and Santeria: Africa to Cuba and Beyond*. The circumstances under which the Yorùbá were imported, the collapse of Oyo, caused "many of its residents from all levels and spheres of society [to be] sold into slavery. Among those slaves were a substantial number of well-trained priests and individuals versed in the complexity of Yorùbá music."⁵⁵ These people, like those in Trinidad and Brazil could use their knowledge to recreate rituals and praise their gods in Cuba in the form of *Lucumí* because their Orisha was able to make the trip.

50 Ibid., 254.

51 Ibid., 128-29.

52 Ibid., 129

53 Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, <http://www.slavevoyages.org/> Queried arrivals in Cuba by African regions of embarkment, 1750-1866

54 The significance of the sheer numbers of West Central Africans in Cuba is significant regarding the question of syncretism with Catholic saints. The amount of West Central Africans in Cuba, and elsewhere, makes Thornton's argument for the exchange between Kongolese Catholicism and Yorùbá religion, as opposed to that of the Cuban Church all the more salient.

55 Mercedes Cros Sandoval, *Worldview, The Orichas, and Santeria: Africa to Cuba and Beyond* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 50.

According to Baudin, the etymology of the term *Lucumíoriginates* from the phrase “*oluku-mí!*” meaning “my friend.”⁵⁶ *Lucumí*, in many ways, mirrored Orisha tradition in Trinidad and Brazil. Like the other regions, The Catholic Church’s, or perhaps more accurately, The Catholic Kongolese’s, emphasis on the saints facilitated syncretism of the saints with the Orisha.⁵⁷ Aligning directly with Awolalu’s Orisha hierarchy, in *Lucumí*, “each oricha’s seniority is based upon its relative ‘closeness’ to the Creation and its principle elements (e.g. sky, earth, water) on the one hand, and the quotidian, material, human lifeworld, on the other hand.”⁵⁸ As in the other regions, the cult of Shango was very popular. Bascom notes that cults of Shango flourish most notably in large cities and attributes this to the longstanding urban organization of the Yorùbá.⁵⁹

This was also true of Shango in Havana.

Lucumí also underwent some syncretism according to Migene Gonzalez-Wippler, but she takes a different stance than Aiyejina and Gibbons. Gonzalez-Wippler writes instead that, “syncretism is the combination or reconciliation of different religious or philosophical beliefs. The Yorùbá did not simply accept the Catholic saints—they identified them with the orishas.” (10)⁶⁰ This a more reasonable assessment of the exchange between Catholicism and Orisha worship. The ideological similarities between Catholicism and *Lucumí* should not be understated and since so much care was taken to preserve ritual, culture, and language, it could be deduced that the incorporation of the Catholic saints was as purposeful as, for example, the establishment of the *cabildos*. To this point, John K. Thornton argues that the syncretism that takes place is not between the Orisha and the Catholic saints as provided by the Cuban Church, but rather stems from the amalgamation of Kongolese Christianity. With Yorùbá beliefs to formulate what becomes *Lucumí*, or *Santería*.⁶¹ Thornton writes that, “it was the Kongolese who brought Catholicism to Afro-Cuban life as much or as, or even more than the institutional Cuban Church,” further supporting the argument for co-revelation over that of the imposition of the saints onto the Orisha.

56 Baudin, 19

57 Sandoval, *Worldview, The Orichas, and Santería: Africa to Cuba and Beyond* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 41.

58 David Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 125.

59 Bascom, *Shango in the New World* (Austin: African and Afro-American Research Institute, The University of Texas at Austin, 1972), 19.

60 Migene Gonzalez-Wippler, *Santería: The Religion* (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publishers, 1994), 10.

61 Thornton, “The Kingdom of Kongo and Palo Mayombe,” 1.

As previously mentioned, “the imposing presence in Cuba of the cult Chango, gives credence to the notion that a number of priests and priestesses who specialized in Chango’s worship came from territories where the Oyo Empire had great influence. If not from Oyo proper.”⁶² This is also true of Oshun’s cult “which flourished in Cuba, suggest[ing] the presence of well-trained priests from Oshogbo and Ilesha, the cradle of Oshun’s cult”⁶³ Like the ethnically homogenous clusters in Trinidad, and the nations of Brazil, *Lucumí* preserved itself in Cuba through the formation of *cabildos*. Ethnic grouping was clearly the most effective way of preserving Yorùbá traditions (or any tradition for that matter), and they, therefore posed a threat to Cuban authorities. For this reason “in 1792 the authorities mandated the *cabildos* establish their locales outside the walled perimeter of the city,”⁶⁴ which in turn allowed them more religious freedom to maintain their practices intact.

Conclusion

Trinidad, Brazil and Cuba received differing volumes of Yorùbá-speaking peoples in the 19th Century. Still, the Yorùbá did not comprise a numerical majority in any of these regions. In spite of this numerical disadvantage, the Yorùbá Orisha and religious traditions were able to survive and thrive in ethnically diverse and hostile environments. While the evidence here makes it clear that there are many contributing factors, including when the Yorùbá are imported and where they are imported from, as to why some Orisha, like Ogun, Shango and Oshun travel farther and are more widely worshipped than others, it also makes one other feature of the Yorùbá tradition very clear: its portability. It would not matter if a large influx of Shango devotees were deposited in Trinidad if Shango himself was bound to Oyo, like the Grebo spirits were bound to their local shrines. Because thunder can be reasonably accessed anywhere it rains, so can Shango. Just as his wife Oshun can be worshipped at any river, and Ogun can be appeased with iron from any place. In short, the efforts of the Yorùbá to maintain their traditions through endogamy and the creation of *cabildos* would have been fruitless if their gods could not have come with them.

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