

# Sociocultural Context of the Yoruba Religion in Cuba: Cultural Legacy of the Transculturation Process

Yousy Baby-Ramírez<sup>1</sup> , Edgar Gutiérrez-Gómez<sup>2</sup> , Hubner Janampa-Patilla<sup>3</sup> , & Sonia Beatriz Munaris-Parco<sup>4</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanísticas, Universidad de Guantánamo, Guantánamo, Cuba

<sup>2</sup>Facultad de Ingeniería y Gestión, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Huanta, Ayacucho, Perú

<sup>3</sup>Universidad Nacional de San Cristóbal de Huamanga, Ayacucho, Perú

<sup>4</sup>Institución Educativa Nuestra Señora de Fátima, Ayacucho, Perú

✉ egutierrez@unah.edu.pe

## Article History:

Received: December 7, 2024

Revised: February 18, 2025

Accepted: February 22, 2025

Published: February 28, 2025

## Abstract

*The national cultures of Latin America and the Caribbean owe an important part of their historical formation to the settlement of enslaved Africans during the XVI - XIX centuries. The religions of African antecedents in Cuba constitute hard nuclei of cultural resistance, where the process of transculturation has left its mark. The study analyzes diverse epistemological positions of some researchers, as well as oral testimonies of religious and practitioners. The research is based on a systematic review with a critical approach based on the method of analysis and synthesis. The results offered reveal that religions of African origin have contributed significantly to the development of Latin American and Caribbean cultural identity. The resurgence of the Yoruba religion in Cuba is an example of the cultural legacy inherited from the transculturation process and passed down from generation to generation, enduring over time.*

**Keywords:** Cultural Legacy; Cultural Resistance; Transculturation; Yoruba Religion

## INTRODUCTION

The national cultures of Latin America and the Caribbean owe a significant part of their historical development to the population of enslaved Africans during the 16th to 19th centuries. In the case of Cuba, the African presence has been both diverse and constant, beginning with the early colonial period and continuing through the accelerated intensification of clandestine trafficking during the decline of Spanish rule on the island ([Guanche & Campos, 2000, p. 11](#)). In this regard, a social network is described as follows: "The African influence in this land is so deep and so many capillary currents cross and intertwine within our richly nurtured social landscape that unraveling the hieroglyphic would be the work of a miniaturist" ([Guillén, 1968, p. 2](#)). In the bellies of the slave ships, not only men, women, and children were transported, but also deities, beliefs, and worldviews: "Among the cultural diversity that arrived from what is considered the 'first continent of humanity,' the Yoruba were the people who most profoundly influenced Cuban society" ([Paz, 2023](#)).

The magical-religious thought of the different African ethnic groups had a second homeland in America. The Africans brought their culture to the Cuban shores: oral literature, music, art, gastronomy, religion, languages; conceptions about society, family, work, love, morals, as well as customs and traditions. These treasures were defended by them and their descendants for generations ([Martínez & Porras, 2016, p. 55](#)). The mixture, the symbiosis, the fusion of elements conformed, agglutinated and preserved a sensitive legacy until our days of being the heritage of all Cubans. The daily practice of a cultural marronage of which the religions of African origin constitute a bastion, allowed preserving fundamental aspects of this inheritance that has stamped a distinctive seal to the Cuban culture. The contribution of the blacks is fundamental to the Cuban mixture: "the two races that in the Island come out at the surface of the water, distant

in what is seen, tend a submarine hook, like those deep bridges that unite in secret two continents" (Guillén, 1968, p. 2).

Research on the most widespread religious expressions constitute an invaluable source of knowledge for the enrichment of the development of the national culture and the formation of the Cuban nation. Reasons enough for the present study to extend the continuity of religious contributions to the present and to approach a part of the history of the immaterial heritage: "the Yoruba who arrived through the African slave trade are also generically called *lucumíes* or *lucumís*" (Fernández Muñiz, 2007). The results offered reveal that religions of African origin have contributed significantly to the development of Latin American and Caribbean cultural identity. The resurgence of the Yoruba religion in Cuba is an example of the cultural legacy inherited from the process of transculturation and transmitted from generation to generation: "it is professed by a large group of individuals, mainly in Cuba, Brazil, Mexico, Colombia and other Latin American countries, without excluding blacks in the southern United States" (Fernández Muñiz, 2007).

## **METHODOLOGY**

The research is based on a systematic review with a critical approach using the method of analysis and synthesis, after receiving the hand of Orula and being initiated into the Yoruba religion. The research process was carried out in the San Justo community in the city of Guantánamo, Cuba. In this community, there are two Babalawos who initiate believers into the Yoruba religion after receiving the hand of Orula. For this, the believer must pay money to purchase the animals and objects needed for the ceremony. The predominant methodological perspective in the research is qualitative ethnography, and techniques such as interviews, surveys, and participant observation are used, with a greater emphasis on the latter.

Various epistemological positions of some researchers, as well as oral testimonies of religious and practitioners are the object of analysis. Once initiated in the Yoruba religion, one has a godfather, a godmother, brothers and sisters of religion who give advice and remedies to solve personal and health problems that arise in the life of the believer. The way of acting and thinking changes, one feels protected from all evil. When making a decision, one must consult with the elders to know if it is right or wrong. It is a way to honor the ancestors and to exalt the Yoruba religion as a sociocultural practice of many Cuban believers.

The community of San Justo was chosen due to its complex social structure, formed through successive migrations, primarily from rural areas to the city. This phenomenon has led to issues of maladjustment and social marginalization, both on an individual and collective level. Several religions are practiced in this community, including Catholicism, Afro-Cuban cults, spiritism, the Palo Monte branch of the Regla Conga, and the Regla Osha. The interviews were conducted with 20 religious practitioners of the Yoruba religion. The participant selection was probabilistic or purposive, and included 10 religious leaders (godparents, godmothers, brothers, and sisters in the faith) with over 10 years of religious practice, as well as 10 initiates, for a total of 20 participants. Of these, 12 are men and 8 are women.

## **HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE YORUBA RELIGION**

Currently in Cuban society, a varied set of religious expressions, institutions, groups and practices of individual believers, relatively independent of organized forms, are manifested with a certain degree of complexity. In its roots are found beliefs and practices associated to the two main ethnocultural trunks that contribute to conform the Cuban nationality in the XIX century: on the one hand, of the group of peoples of Spanish origin that imposed their culture and catholic

religion. An extensive variety of African peoples brought under conditions of slavery and who were bearers of different religious expressions generically called syncretic cults: "due to the growing social acceptance of these cults, in barely five years many terms that come from the oral tradition of the Yoruba cults have become popular in Cuba" (Ramos Cruz, 2006).

Of all the ethnic groups present in the shipments of human beings forcibly brought to Cuba and subjected to the slave condition, the Yoruba were among the most numerically represented (Potts, 2020, p. 26). The African men and women brought to Cuba during the slave trade, belonging to the peoples of the Yoruba conglomerate, were bearers of customs and religious beliefs, which they preserved through cabildos, cofradías and house temples; these institutions served to preserve and conserve their religious conception, which is currently known as the Regla de Ocha (Argüelles & Hodge, 1987, p. 3). The African religious component was one of the strongest during the process of formation and consolidation of the Cuban nationality. The weight of the black in the urban and rural composition, whether brought from Africa or Creole, was indisputable, therefore, the rootedness and permanence of its expressions influenced the consciousness of the Cuban as a social being.

Religion, as a social phenomenon, shapes patterns, stereotypes, and ways of doing and feeling, all regulated by society's conception of it. This determines power dynamics within each context, leading to various social and socio-cultural changes depending on the society, time, or politics involved (Ajang, 2019, p. 22). From a sociocultural perspective, religion extends beyond its own boundaries, influencing social life and shaping ways of thinking and acting. The stereotypes, values, and principles embraced by an individual as a practitioner of a particular faith are reflected in all aspects of their life (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 7). Numerous attempts have been made to define religion,

given the variety of its manifestations. The search for its essence has been a challenging task that has captivated a wide range of researchers, and there is still no absolute consensus on some of the most widely accepted definitions ([Savater Palenzuela, 2003](#)).

We agree with ([Savater Palenzuela, 2003](#)), because he affirms that there is a set of elements that are present in many of them, for example, the acceptance of the existence of transcendent, supernatural forces or beings, together with the recognition of sacred things, with the realization of certain practical actions derived from these beliefs and with the frequent creation of human collectives of religious character. The complex religious sentiment of Cubans has many and varied elements. In addition to Christian religions, other African religions are practiced, such as the Regla de Osha or Santería, also called Yoruba because of the origin of the Africans who brought it to Cuba from Nigeria; the Rule of Palo Monte, whose origin is in the basin of the Congo River, the Arará or Dajomé Rule, whose founders were designated in Cuba as Arará, the religious cults of the Abakuá Secret Society, coming from the region of Calabar in Nigeria, the crossed Spiritism; the Voodoo that arrived from Africa through Haiti. Along with these religions, the doctrine of French Spiritism of Alain Kardec is also practiced, as well as a hodgepodge of superstitions ([Martínez & Porras, 2016, p. 36](#)).

All these religions suffered a process of clash, overlapping, contamination, fusion and/or syncretism of cultures over the centuries, which forced them to transculturate and adapt to the new environment, despite all attempts to preserve their purity ([Martínez & Porras, 2016, p. 46](#)). All of them have shaped and nuanced, over generations, the vocabulary, the mentality, the way of living and projecting, consciously or unconsciously the Yoruba culture: "plays a fundamental role, since it constitutes an indicator of the effectiveness with which society prepares man to perform in any area of life and

very especially in enjoying the knowledge of this Yoruba root in Cuba" (Pérez et al., 2019).

## **CONCEPTUAL ASPECTS OF THE YORUBA RELIGION**

Santería is the pejorative denomination given by the Catholic Church to the Yoruba religion, which today is accepted by its believers without any prejudice, and which served as a basic pattern for any analysis. Originality and universality, it is all this, Olympic resistance that these beliefs showed in the face of the subjugation of slavery. Creativity and culture of survival in the face of Western hegemony and repressive and discriminatory policies (Barnet, 2011, p. 124). It can be stated that the Rule of Ocha is a complex of myths, ceremonies and rites that becomes a cultural religious whole whose main antecedents were the Yoruba, although it integrates elements and beliefs from other areas of Africa and also from Islam and Christianity. The term Yoruba is linguistic because it designates the language spoken in six states of present-day Nigeria, it is also spoken in parts of Benin, Ghana and Sierra Leone (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 31).

The Osha-Ifa religious complex is part of a Euro-African cultural heritage, but recontextualized and considerably enriched by the Cuban population: "the term Yoruba could well be the eponym of a confederation of tribes of great geographical extension, although the etymology of the name, from a philological perspective that considers the normativization of the Arabic language" (Torres, 2022, p. 183). It has been a means of cultural resistance against the various onslaughts and hostile Catholic and atheist activities from the colonial period to the present day. It also represents an important channel of communication, both for the development of the oral tradition culture of a part of the Cuban people for the richness of myths, tales, popular medicine, handicrafts, gastronomy and many others, and for the professional or vocational artistic recreation of its main images (scenic,

visual and musical arts); with the obligatory caution before the also growing process of unscrupulous mercantilism imposed by the crisis, the irruption of international tourism with reference to the religious, the rise of Osha-tour and the new ways in which religion is sold through social networks ([Guanche & Campos, 2000, p. 123](#)).

Santería, also known as the Lucumí cult or the Rule of Ifá or Osha, is an Afro-Cuban religion that originated in Cuba and is now present in several countries across the Americas and other regions of the world. Its roots lie in the Yoruba people, whose ancestors were enslaved during the colonial period. It is part of the group of Afro-American religions, and its beliefs are directly derived from Yoruba culture and religion, which in Cuba were syncretized with the Catholic Christianity imposed during the slavery period.

Barnet, ([2011, p. 7](#)) in his book "The Living Source" stresses that the religion of the orishas is linked to the notion of family. The great family, coming from the same ancestor, that embraces the living and the dead, in this way, when the system of tribal or family lineages is lost, a religious brotherhood is produced that involves godparents and their godchildren in a kinship that goes beyond the blood union to become a horizontal, encompassing and compact line. That has been one of the most authentic characteristics of the Osha-Ifa Religious Complex in Cuba, the godfather or godmother becomes the father or mother of a number of children belonging to a form of worship popularly known as the line of the saint. The same rigorously counts on a varied pantheon of divinities, which must be rejoiced and satisfied frequently with festive ceremonies to this end. There is always a relationship with agricultural activity and the survival of the culture: "From oral traditions we learn that the battles of Gbanamu and Erunmu took place shortly before the corn harvest season. Based on Yoruba agricultural calendar there are only two corn seasons" ([Olatunji, 2017, p. 376](#)).



The essential principle for those who practice this religion is the respectful worship of the orishas through the adoration, feeding and ritual fulfillment of all the historical dates within the santera liturgy. For that reason it is affirmed that this religion is of African lineage, but of national invoice, it is, therefore, a living and eloquent presence of the African element, so powerful in the Cuban culture. On the other hand, there are the Babalochas and Iyalochas who are the santeros with consecrated godchildren, the Iyawos who are the santeros in their first year of consecration and finally the Aleyos who are believers who have not been consecrated. Believers are people who sometimes become leaders of the communities where they live, hegemonically enforcing these precepts, hence this study is not limited only to mystical or transcendent religious conceptions, but contemplates religion as historically integrated into society in all its aspects, influencing and being influenced in turn by other manifestations such as culture, politics, art or morality.

Regarding its terminology, during the colonial era, it was common to refer to it as the Lucumí cult, a term derived from the Yoruba expression *oloku mi* ("my friend"). The Spaniards derogatorily called it "Santería" to mock the apparent excessive devotion that followers showed toward their saints. Later, in Matanzas, this same name was adopted to designate a religion that blended the beliefs of the Regla de Osha, Catholicism, some practices from Palo Monte, and cross-bred spiritism. It is also known as the Regla de Osha-Ifá. In fact, today many consider Osha and Ifá as two separate religions, due to their symbols and some differences.

## **SOCIO-CULTURAL PRACTICES OF THE YORUBA RELIGION IN CUBA**

In Cuba Santeria does not have sanctuaries as in Africa, nor terreiros as in Brazil, but in the house of the main santeros and priests

of Ifa is the so-called Ilé Osha. Each Ilé Osha performs its ceremonies according to what was established by the founders of that branch, since there is no bible or sacred book that establishes what should be done: it is the tradition from religious to religious that prevails ([Martínez & Potts, 2016, p. 28](#)). All these religions and creeds with African roots have as a common basis the cult of dead ancestors, who become idealized models, whether in their mystical or purely spiritual variant. The cult of dead ancestors is present in all invocations. The conception of death that comes from Africa turns the dead into beings who, although invisible, coexist constantly with humans.

In addition, it has in common to pay tribute to a Supreme God, called Olofi, Oludumare or Olorun by the Yorubas; Zambia or Nzambi by the Congos; Mawú by the Dajomé or Fon; or Abasí by the Carabalís or Abakuá. This supreme being never intervenes directly in the destiny of men; he does so through intermediary deities. The main socio-cultural practices developed in this society are the initiation ceremonies, the promises, the celebration of the holy dates of the relatives, the presentations of the Iyawó, the game of the bembé and the festivity of the different saints (Eleggúa, Oshún, Ogún, Yemayá, Changó, San Lázaro, Obbatalá, among others). People are initiated because of illness problems or because they were born with half a unit, that is to say, they were born crowned and others say they have become saints because when attending a consultation they have been recommended and since they have the money they have done it.

These practices motivated the appearance of specific attributes for each saint, the appearance of the Catholic-influenced altar, the creation of the throne, the meals to the orishas and the feasts that configured the power relations that are maintained to this day, constitutes a religious norm in which the individual-individual, individual-group, group-community relationship predominates ([Medina Garcia & Chacón, 2017](#)). This religion worships about twenty

deities of all those that exist among the Yoruba. There are also other elements of great relevance that intervene in many of the ceremonies and rites, mainly the Cuban bush, tobacco and sacred trees such as the ceiba, the royal palm, the flamboyant and the coconut tree. In addition to other trees and plants endowed with healing properties, such is the case of the omiero, a product prepared from herbs that is used in many ceremonies, for example, the one taken by the Iyawó, fasting, during the first seven days he remains under the throne when he "makes the saint".

The ceremony in which a person is initiated into this religion at a practically priestly level, "becoming a saint", is called "asiento". A bond is formed between the santero and an orisha, based on the belief that "he puts his saint or Guardian Angel on his head". This determines customs and taboos to his Omó, son, according to the personological and mythical characteristics attributed to this "saint"; thus defining the rules of behavior, both at a personal and community level, since these norms are not only given by the Omó-Orisha relationship, but also the godson-godfather and the practitioner-house-temple and at a higher religious-social level. "Crowning the head" is the way to enter the hierarchy of the Rule of Ocha.

The Ifa priest or Babalawo is the person with the highest hierarchy in this religion, and they are the ones with the most knowledge regarding divination and any liturgical or existential problem faced by believers, he is the "son" of Orula, the intermediary between men and Olofi. It is of great importance to note that to hold this position certain requirements are needed, in some cases related to gender, which leaves several limitations for many practitioners who wish to be initiated into Ifa. For example, they cannot be women, nor homosexuals, nor of any type of "dubious" conduct; but due to the enormous richness of the Oddun of Ifa and the mystery to which they are subjected. In the same way the spiritual practice is related to

parties where: "some orichas are fiddled, there are babalaos who work with spiritualists to complete their divinatory act, prayers and "corrected" songs are incorporated through contact with Yoruba Nigerians or the reading of anthropological texts" ([Argyriadis, 2005, p. 92](#)).

Other positions of great relevance would be those of the sons of Eleggúa who are exempt of hanging the necklace of the Babalawo, but exempt of officiating with the Oracle of Ifa. The "sons" of Obbatalá, who have the privilege of falling into a trance under any deity because their "mother or father" is the owner of the heads; the sons of Changó, who as a general rule are prestigious diviners although women are deprived of acting as priestesses under the protection of this orisha; then come the "sons" of the other deities not mentioned above who receive the names of Babalochas and Iyalocha depending on the sex to which they belong, male and female respectively.

Women play a secondary role, and in some cases, an nonexistent one, usually limited to tasks such as preparing sacrifices or the animals and food for these rituals. In other words, they perform many of the social functions they carry out in their daily lives, reproducing traditional roles. While they are educated to participate in all ceremonies, they are prohibited from leading them, as is the case with initiations. As for the other essential functions of women, these align with those performed by the santeros, such as carrying out omieros, consultations with shells and the coconut as divination systems, preparing achese, performing ebbó, and moyugbar or mayubar.

## **THE YORUBA RELIGION AS THE RESULT OF THE TRANSCULTURATION PROCESS**

The Catholic Church at the time of colonization played a fundamental role in Cuban society, being the governing body on the island. The solution of the slaves was to externally venerate the

Catholic saints while internally they continued to worship their own, thus originating the second process of transculturation on the island. The religions of African origin identified their gods with the saints of Catholicism, this phenomenon in Cuba is most strongly reflected in Santería or Regla de Ocha. In Cuba, unlike Nigeria, no saint can be received in Osha or even wear the necklaces without first receiving the so-called "warriors", the orishas: Eleguá, Ogún, Ochosi and Osun. Each of them is considered to fight in their sector against the evils or enemies that may affect them (Martínez & Potts, 2016, p. 89).

The characterization of the male warrior orishas begins with Eleguá, who finds his syncretism with the Santo Niño de Atocha, the colors of his clothing are black and red, with his doodle in his hand and on his head a yarey hat adorned with cauris. The second, also an Oggún warrior, finds his syncretism in San Pedro, dressed in black and green, colors with which he identifies himself, his attributes are the mariwó sackcloth, machete in hand and on his head his yarey hat. Next to them Ochosi or San Norberto in Catholicism, he has a blue and yellow golden suit, leopard skin wallet, hat of the same material, bow in his hand and quiver on his back (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 34). Next, Changó or Santa Bárbara Bendita, both owners of the lightning, the first wearing red and white pants and jacket, with a sword at his belt and wielding a two-edged axe in the other hand, and the second covered with a red blanket with a white back. The Ibeyis or San Cosme and San Damián, sons of Changó (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 34).

Also in the Yoruba pantheon is Babalú Ayé or San Lázaro in the Catholic religion, a saint well known as protector of the helpless and benefactor of the sick, who is granted promises conceived. The former has clothes of jute burlap and at the terminals of his seams with a purple vivid and adorned with cauris, the latter helping himself with his two crutches to walk and accompanied by his dogs sporting the same colors in his attire (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 34). Orula or San Francisco

de Asis, the orisha of divination, is represented with the colors yellow and green, in his hands the ekuelé and the divination board, representing wisdom and experience. Inle or San Rafael, yellow and blue, patron of the rivers, mute through which Yemayá speaks, is the doctor of the Ocha. Orisha Oko or San Isidro Labrador, owner of the yam and the products of the earth, prudent and discreet. Osaín or San Silvestre, the possessor of the secrets of the forest, the antonomasia yerbera. Agayú Solá or San Cristóbal, the giant orisha of the Regla de Ocha and patron saint of the city of Havana in Catholicism, with his dark red suit and handkerchiefs of all colors tied around his waist (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 35).

Obbatalá or Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes, dressed all in white, in one hand her white iruke and in the other the silver alfanje. Due to her androgynous condition, some of her forms are syncretized with saints depending on their sex, for example, Oddúa or Oduduwa considered by some as an independent deity, who is also received ritually in a very different way from the others -or the Blessed Sacrament. Ochanlá, the blind Obbatalá is syncretized with Saint Anne or properly the Virgin of Mercy, or Ayáguna, Jesus Christ himself with thirty-three years of age (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 35).

The main orishas of this religion are: Yemayá or Santísima Virgen de Regla, patroness of sailors and fishermen, dressed all in blue, on her shoulders her fine mantle of burato and rhinestones, the queen's diadem girding her head, in her hand her silver and mother-of-pearl fan. Ochún or Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre, patron saint of Cuba, with a golden yellow dress, in her arms tinkling her golden handles, in one hand her fan of peacock feathers and in the other the jícara of oñí, honey (Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 35). Obba or Saint Rita de Casia, dressed in pink, her hair tied back with a turban of the same color, hiding her mutilated ear for love of her husband Changó. Oyá or Santa Teresa de Jesús, companion in the battles of Changó,

superb in her dark red dress, accompanied by nine colors in relief on her waist and her black iruke in hand. Yewá or Saint Clare of Assisi, the ever chaste maiden who reigns in the cemetery, dressed in pink and white ([Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 35](#)).

In these expressions of African origin that are practiced in Cuba, the oral tradition is a living source of learning that the believer counts on, and the door of access to such knowledge is the initiation process. The oral tradition of knowledge, dances, ceremonies, ways of playing drums, making liturgical or profane musical instruments, Yoruba, Fon and Efik languages used in prayers and invocations have been preserved with great fidelity. In the wakes there is a mixture of customs: the novenario is of Spanish origin and is preserved today and is performed during the nine days or is done only on the ninth day. The sortilegios and agüeros (the flight of birds, the cures with magic words, the tail of a black cat, the salt that is thrown calls misfortune, the pregnant woman should not wear a chain or necklace because it tangles the umbilical cord). These are superstitions and manifestations that have endured, transmitted and assimilated from one generation to another.

In the Santería festivities, songs and dances are performed in honor of the orishas using instruments of genuinely African origin, and during the course of these celebrations and between the playing and dancing, the phenomenon of possession takes place, in which some of the believers have links with the divinities, making prophecies, advising or admonishing the saint. The individual loses his personality and adopts that of the orisha, his habits, his way of speaking and his attitudes. All Santería chants are antiphonal, the soloist says a phrase that is answered by the chorus, maintaining this dialogic structure throughout the chant. The chants narrate the different events in the life of the orisha, and each chant has a specific passage.

The divinatory system of the Rule of Ocha is also based on religious orality, since the meanings that religious people admit of divination are part of the religious heritage of the person who consults. Such is the case of the Obi, which is the simplest divination system: it is based on taking four pieces of dried coconut and depending on how the shells fall, either on the inner white part or on the outer carmelite part, five possible answers to the concise questions asked to the orishas are formed. According to ([Ferrer, 1995, p. 18](#)): "The diloggún is a complex divinatory medium, made up of sixteen cauris shells, each shell that falls face up is counted and the possibilities are from one to sixteen, but since two shots of shells are required, the possibilities are much greater".

Santeros can only read up to twelve shells, in the case of thirteen or more, the consultation would be transferred to the Babalawo. The combination of these two spreads receives the name of Oddu or letter, by which the santero will be governed to find the patakíe that corresponds to each Oddu. Santeros can also be paleros, spiritualists and at the same time attend the Catholic church and can be engineers, doctors or fruit sellers. The last method of divination is the Ifa board, which is the most complex of the three, based on the Ekuelé. According to ([Ferrer, 1995, p. 145](#)): "it is a necklace made with eight shells of dried coconut shell, mango seed, jicotea shell or other material, tied by a chain. This is used by the babalawos to consult the Ifa oracle".

Santeria women are not allowed to menstruate because it weakens the saints. Practicing women are forbidden to perform various jobs and occupy various positions of important hierarchy as is the case of being a Babalawo. Currently in Cuba there are several women with this distinction, although the number is very small and they are not officially recognized by the Yoruba Association of Cuba ([Gutiérrez, 2013, p. 61](#)). In Cuba, many people go to church, or to a



Babalawo (Ifa priest) to have their cards cast, or consult with paleros or espiritistas to have their cards cast when they have a problem that they cannot solve by their own means. Believers with a defined religious attitude cannot escape the interweaving of beliefs and practices that make up the Cuban religious background. Religious syncretism and/or the juxtaposition of practices that interact or coexist is an evident and perceptible phenomenon.

An example of this transculturated mixture that is the religiosity of the Cuban appears in El Monte de Lidia:

Many babalawos, olúos, babalochas, mayomberos, vrillumberos, kimbiseros, now have spiritual spirit, they are also spiritist mediums. So says an iyalocha who works for the spiritual, and who manifests herself, alternating with Cachita, Mamá Cashé, La virgen de la Caridad, the spirit of the slave gangá: Ocha o palo. Why doesn't it come to be the same thing? Espirit nothing more! Doesn't it fall the same with saint as with dead?" ([Cabrerera, 1954, p. 16](#)).

A current tendency, emerged in certain sectors of the Cuban Santeria, pretends to free this religion from the contaminating contributions of others and to re-Africanize it, denying the syncretism with Catholicism and other religions. It is claimed that the identification between Orishas and saints was provoked by pressures from the dominant layers during the colony and in the 21st century, but the Ilé Osha (foundation house) never abandoned the Yoruba African ways of representing and settling the Orishas ([Martínez & Potts, 2016, p. 27](#)). It is fundamental to consider the predominance of the African religion in Cuba: "Lázaro Cuesta, one of the most important babalaos (Santeria priest) in Cuba, states that "it is a mistake of the Church to consider us as deviant Catholics, we have our own religion, the Yorubá" ([Ravsberg, 2012](#)).

## CONCLUSION

The Yoruba religion has allowed the development of national culture and the formation of Cuban nationality: "shamefully, due to lack of knowledge, the Yoruba and African religion in general is still associated with a racial condition and not as a cultural and identity expression" (Valdés, 2019, p. 55). In Cuba, Christian religions are practiced, of African origin such as the Rule of Osha or Santería, also called Yoruba, the Rule of Palo Monte, the Rule of Arará or Dajomé, the Abakuá Secret Society, the crossed Spiritism, Voodoo and the French Spiritism of Alain Kardec. In the Yoruba religion the oral tradition is a living source of learning that the believer counts on, and the gateway to such knowledge is the initiation process that is transmitted from generation to generation: "the diaspora of numerous African ethnic groups during the four hundred years of the slave trade is possibly the greatest tragedy of humanity" (Paya, 2008). Oral culture is common in Latin America: "due to not having written sources to process the information, the researchers were guided by oral sources, mostly in Quechua, the predominant language" (Gutiérrez-Gómez et al., 2023, p. 15). This oral tradition is maintained to this day because of the existence of aboriginal languages in everyday communication.

The current conditions allow preserving and promoting the ancestral practices of the religion with its manifestations intact since its origins: "the most popular religious festivities in which popularly preferred figures are venerated (Saint Lazarus, Charity, the Virgin of Regla, La Merced and Saint Barbara, on which versions, legends, Catholic and Yoruba myths converge with the imagination of the people" (Ramírez Calzadilla, 1997). In Cuban society, the practice of the African religion is protected: "Herbalists (yerberos), priests and mediums of various cults were legalized, and the Asociación Cultural Yoruba de Cuba (Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba), which is

financed from the State budget, was established" (Маничкин, 2021, p. 201).

The fundamental pillars of this religion focus on the worship of deceased ancestors (egúns) and the understanding of the existence of a single God (Oloddumare), who relates to humans through his extensions, which are also deities, known by the Yorubas as orishas. The orishas are the emissaries of Oloddumare; they govern the forces of nature and human affairs. They are recognized through their various numbers and colors, which serve as their distinctive marks. Each orisha has their favorite foods and other items they enjoy receiving as offerings and gifts.

### **Authors Contribution**

Conceptualization: Y.B.R., E.G.G., S.B.M.P., & H.J.P.; Data curation: E.G.G., Y.B.R.; Formal analysis: H.J.P., S.B.M.P., & E.G.G.; Funding acquisition: E.G.G., & H.J.P.; Investigation: Y.B.R. & E.G.G.; Methodology: Y.B.R., E.G.G., S.B.M.P., & H.J.P.; Project administration: Y.B.R., & E.G.G., Resources: S.B.M.P., & H.J.P.; Software: H.J.P., & E.G.G.; Supervision: Y.B.R., & S.B.M.P.; Validation: Y.B.R., & E.G.G.; Visualization: S.B.M.P., & H.J.P.; Writing - original draft: Y.B.R., & E.G.G.; Writing - review & editing: Y.B.R., S.B.M.P., E.G.G., & H.J.P., All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

### **Funding**

This research is self-financed by the authors.

### **Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent was not required for this study.

### **Data Availability Statement**

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

### **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

## REFERENCES

- Ajang, D. F. A. (2019). *Representación social sobre las iyalochas en el complejo religioso Osha Ifá del consejo popular Condado Norte de Santa Clara* [Social representation of the iyalochas in the Osha Ifa religious complex of the Condado Norte de Santa Clara people's council]. Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas. Facultad de Ciencias Sociales.
- Argüelles, M. A., & Hodge, L. I. (1987). *Los llamados cultos sincréticos y el espiritismo como expresiones religiosas en la sociedad cubana contemporánea. Estudio monográfico sobre su significación social* [The so-called syncretic cults and spiritism as religious expressions in contemporary Cuban society. Monographic study on their social significance]. La Habana.
- Argyriadis, K. (2005). Religión de indígenas, religión de científicos: construcción de la cubanidad y santería [Religion of indigenous people, religion of scientists: construction of cubanity and santeria]. *Desacatos*, 17, 85–106. <http://www.ciesas.edu.mx/Desacatos/17> Indexado/2 Esquinas 1.pdf
- Barnet, M. (2011). *La fuente viva* [The living fountain]. Casa Editorial Abril.
- Cabrera, L. (1954). *El Monte* [El Monte]. Editorial Letras Cubanas.
- Fernández Muñiz, B. E. (2007). Religion Yoruba: Regla de Ocha. *Revista Tramas*. <https://doi.org/10.24275/tramas/uamx/1992467-80>
- Ferrer, A. (1995). *Ochatowa: Chango, Yemaya, Ochun, Oya Leyendas Afrocubanas* [Ochatowa: Chango, Yemaya, Ochun, Oya Leyendas Afrocubanas]. El Caballi.
- Guanche, J., & Campos, M. G. (2000). *Artesanía y religiosidad popular Cubana* [Cuban handicrafts and popular religiosity]. Ediciones Unión.
- Guillén, N. (1968). *Obra poética* [Poetic work]. Unión.

- Gutiérrez-Gómez, E., Wiliam, H.-A. J., Marilú, M.-P. K., Abraham, P. y M.-C. M., & Diana, L.-P. (2023). The Evangelical Church as an extirpator of idolatry in the Water Festival in the Andes of Peru. *Religions*, 14(8), 965. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14080965>
- Gutiérrez, P. J. C. (2013). *Expresión de los diversos tipos de masculinidades en la oralidad religiosa de la Regla de Ocha* [Expression of the different types of masculinities in the religious orality of the Rule of Ocha.]. Universidad Central "Marta Abreu" de Las Villas.
- Martínez, F. M., & Potts, V. P. (2016). *El ashé está en Cuba* [The ashé is in Cuba] (Editorial). Editones Cubanas.
- Medina Garcia, A., & Chacón, D. (2017). La sociedad religiosa divina caridad en el Municipio de Cienfuegos [Divine Charity Religious Society in the Municipality of Cienfuegos]. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 9(2)300-305. [http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci\\_arttext&pid=S2218-36202017000300046](http://scielo.sld.cu/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2218-36202017000300046)
- Olatunji, O. (2017). The slave ship Manuelita and the story of a Yoruba Community, 1833-1834. *Tempo (Brazil)*, 23(2), 360-382. <https://doi.org/10.1590/TEM-1980-542X2017v230209>
- Paya, G. E. (2008). La cultura Yoruba en América [Yoruba culture in America]. *Revista Chilena de Infectología*, 25(5), 357. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0716-10182008000500007>
- Paz, P. J. E. (2023). *Religión Yoruba: ¿en qué consiste esta variedad religión?* [Yoruba religion: what is this variety of religion?]. El Tiempo. <https://www.eltiempo.com/cultura/gente/religion-yoruba-en-que-consiste-esta-variada-religion-752887>
- Pérez, Y. A., Guerra, V. M., Hung, M. J., & Cobiella, Y. S. (2019). La influencia de la raíz yoruba en Cuba y su desarrollo en la cultura nacional [The influence of the Yoruba root in Cuba and its development in the national culture]. *Revista Caribeña de Ciencias Sociales*, (Diciembre 2019). <https://www.eumed.net/rev/caribe/2019/12/raiz-yoruba-cuba.html>

- Potts, V. P. (2020). *Las alegorías de Olodumares: Símbolo y memoria cultural en la regla Oscha e Ifá [The allegories of Olodumares: Symbol and cultural memory in the Oscha and Ifa rule.]*. Ediciones.
- Ramírez Calzadilla, J. (1997). Religión, cultura y sociedad en Cuba [Religion, culture and society in Cuba]. *Papers. Revista de Sociologia*, 52, 139-153. <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/papers/v52n0.1885>
- Ramos Cruz, G. (2006). Oralidad Africana en Cuba: Memoria y discurso de permanencia cultural [African Orality in Cuba: Memory and Discourse on Cultural Permanence]. *Oráfrica*, 2, 113-129. <https://raco.cat/index.php/Orafrica/article/view/136752>
- Ravsberg, F. (2012). *El ajiaco religioso que el Papa encontrará en Cuba [The religious ajiaco that the Pope will find in Cuba]*. BBC Mundo. [https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2012/03/120320\\_ajiac\\_o\\_religioso\\_cubano\\_cr](https://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2012/03/120320_ajiac_o_religioso_cubano_cr)
- Savater Palenzuela, V. M. (2003). *Sociedad y religión. Selección de lecturas*. Editorial Félix Varela
- Torres, K. (2022). Arabismos activos en los teónimos lucumíes (1517-1870) cubanos Ob[b]atala y Oxala/ Osha[n]la/Ochala [Arabisms active in the Cuban Lucumi theonyms (1517-1870) Ob[b]atala and Oxala/ Osha[n]la/Ochala]. *Estudios de Linguística Del Espanol*, 46, 179-199. <https://doi.org/10.36950/elies.2022.46.10>
- Valdés, A. G. (2019). A cinema of beliefs. The presence of the Yoruba religion in the Cuban filmography. *Comunicacion y Medios*, 28(39), 52-63. <https://doi.org/10.5354/0719-1529.2019.49329>
- Маничкин, Н. А. (2021). Ориши прОтив вируса: афрОкубинские культы, киберпрОстранствО и пандемия COVID-19 [Orisha vs. virus: Afro-Cuban cults, cyberspace and the COVID-19 pandemic]. *Шаги*, 7(4), 198-220.