

WHO IS NATURE?:
YORÙBÁ RELIGION AND ECOLOGY IN CUBA

By

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To my grandfather, Daddy Bill,
whose dedication and foresight in his academic, professional and personal living have been as
inspirational as
his pursuits in life,
which had so fully integrated the mind and the body

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NOTES ON ORTHOGRAPHY

I use the various spellings that I come across, since literatures are based in Brazil, Cuba, Nigeria and United States. In the Yoruba language, the ξ is pronounced “sh,” which the Spanish language doesn’t have. So, Spanish versions often make it a “ch.” Yet, when returning to the United States, it can take on both the anglicized version of Yoruba and or the Spanish. As such, I allow for not merely one version throughout this work, but multiple, much like it actually occurs throughout literature on diaspora. Spelling and pronunciation become less fixed to a static notion of correct.

Ashé, can also be ase with a dot under the s, which is the Yorùbá spelling, while in Cuba it is most often seen as aché, and in Brazil axe. Nonetheless, the English rendition of this word is most often ashé, and that is closer in pronunciation to the Yoruba a ξ é. In Yoruba language, *baba* means father of or master and *awo* means knowledge. Thus a Babalawo is a high priest of Yorùbá knowledge, and can be equated with the status and education of someone attaining a doctoral degree in the United States (Hunt 1979). In Cuba, a babalawo is spelled babalao. Some other examples include: Orisha, oricha, ori ξ a, orixa; Lucumí or Lukumí; Osain, Osanyin, Osayín, Osaayin. The spelling changes some, but the concepts refer to similar domains of understanding. Throughout the work, then, you will find a predominant spelling, and you will find alternative spellings referring to the same concept but including the diaspora continuity.

LIST OF TERMS

Ashé	Power, energy, universal life force.
Babalawo	Yorùbá high priest and scholar of Ifá.
Cabildo	<i>Cabildos de nación</i> – a socio-religious and cultural, mutual aid organization based on the Spanish organization that was implemented for people of African descent. These groups were organized around people of the same or similar ethnicities, and often had the hierarchical structures of king, queen and other roles with specific religious responsibilities.
Cowrie	Shells used to divine.
Ebbo	Offering of sacrifice.
Ewe	Plants used for offering.
Osain	Deity of the sacred forest and healing herbs.
Osainista	Initiated practitioner in herbs and healing.
Orisha	Intermediaries between humans and God, Olodumare.
Orisha worship	Religion of the Yorùbá, also called Santería, Lucumí in Cuba.
Lucumí	Orisha worship in Cuba.
Ifá	Yorùbá divination system.
Santería	Orisha worship in the diaspora. Often used pejoratively today with images of “primitive” African worship predominantly highlighting the use of ritual slaughter and blood. But in early 20 th century the term referred to “the way of the saints,” and was an alternative to the criminalizing notion of <i>brujería</i> , which meant witchcraft or sorcery.

PROLOGUE

In order to better communicate and understand diverse perspectives of the world using more locally relevant categories and expressions, I completed a Foreign Languages degree at New College, the Honor's College of Florida. Although I had studied Russian, American Sign Language, French and Spanish since high school, and German in college, I mastered fluency only in French and Spanish—primarily through traveling and lived, experiential learning. To learn to speak French, I backpacked around France and West Africa for several months until the French would ask me if I were from the South of France—my accent was obviously not Parisian. Also, I hitchhiked, shared homes, stories, meals and sometimes just a bench with West Africans who instilled in me a recognition of dignity, strength and cultural individuality—very unlike most of the images that I had received of Africans through the media.

To increase my Spanish fluency, I traveled and lived in Ecuador for almost a year. For the first two months, I volunteered at the Jatun Sacha Biological Reserve in the Amazon. There I learned about different ways of perceiving the environment when I would go on walks through the jungle with Quichua (local indigenous) guides. During that time, I lived at a nursery of Amazonian plants, and I helped create signs and structures to maintain indigenous ecological knowledge. Later, I moved to the town of Cuenca located in the Ecuadorian Andes. While teaching English to local high school students and adults, I conducted my research for the Bachelor's thesis, *Foreign Language Pedagogy*, specifically examining the use of music and experiential education in learning a foreign language. My time in both the Andes and the Amazon made me realize the vast depth of indigenous ecological knowledge. Intrigued by indigenous voices of the landscape, those whose concern for earth are for her sentience, spirituality and ability to heal, I decided to obtain my Master's in Latin American Studies

(MALAS) with a concentration in Tropical Conservation and Development (TCD) at the University of Florida.

Through my graduate research and my work experience in the field of conservation and development in the tropics, I found that learning multiple perspectives is fundamental to understanding different cultures' interpretations of nature and therein their distinct versions of development. Influenced by Marianne Schmink's emphasis on multiple stakeholders and gender in ecosystem analysis, Taylor Stein's in depth appraisal of ecotourism as a possible way to merge development and conservation, along with Sandra Russo's Feminist Political Ecology books, I set out to study ecotourism at the renowned site of Pinal del Rio in Cuba. But, due to the political climate and United States legislation prohibiting travel to Cuba, I was not able to obtain the permission in time to conduct my master's research. Instead, I followed Helen Safa and Jerry Murray's advice and went to the neighboring Caribbean island of Hispaniola, and do research in the Dominican Republic, which holds a completely different political history from Cuba in relation to the United States. For my Master's in Tropical Conservation and Development in Latin American Studies, I conducted an investigation that used locally relevant categories of development to evaluate an ecotourism venture, which I discuss in the master's thesis: *Resident Perspectives of Ecotourism as a Tool for Community-Based Development: a Case Study in Arroyo Surdido, Samaná, Dominican Republic*.

Thus, my concern with representing and accessing distinct ways of understanding nature comes through my graduate studies on Development, Conservation and Science Studies, and also from my work experience. I have been employed by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and the InterAmerican Institute for Global Change Research (IAI). For these organizations, I conducted ethnographic research, co-authored and

edited papers that dealt with the interplay of ecology and anthropology, including issues of climate change, livelihoods, gender, indigenous rights (legislation and land) and collaborative management of natural resources. These studies were made available to the World Bank, local and national nongovernmental organizations (NGO), published and presented at international venues. For instance, the study on the MesoAmerican Barrier Reef system in Central America was published in the international journal *Policy Matters* (2002).

This study shaped my future research on ecological knowledge production, since the results demonstrated that what was called collaborative management had little to do with learning from the locals, and actually did little more than integrate residents into a one-sided conversation, which effectively told them they had to leave the soon-to-be-conservation area and thereby drastically alter their livelihood patterns.

Conservationists comprising mainly international organization and nongovernmental organization personnel who interpreted conservation to mean protected areas without people were dominating the legislation and practice with value-laden agendas. Thus, my master's education exposed me to texts and visions from Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean that challenge internationally dominant views of development and conservation, yet rarely become included in international policy.

Cuba, however, is an exemplar of a country that has dedicated its national development and conservation policies toward an alternative to a hegemonic model of neoliberalism. Thus, I directed my doctoral scholarship in Ecological and Visual Anthropology with a concentration in Religion and Nature to that Caribbean island, and specifically the ecological knowledge of West African-derived religions, particularly Yoruba, which are prominent there. My dissertation, *Who is Nature?: Yoruba Religion and Ecology in Cuba*, focuses on improving methodological inquiry

to better understand and represent Lucumí or Yoruba-derived knowledge and ways of knowing nature in Cuba. This entails, as the title suggests, a strong element of understanding nature as subjects rather than objects. By this I mean that positivist science¹ practitioners often gloss over nature as object or objects (including everything from climatological patterns, bears, oceans, mosquitoes, trees, and great whales, or that which is nonhuman). Whereas Yoruba practitioners conceptualize nature as very specific subjects, that include particular forms of agency, subjectivity, judgment, and attitude, which impact humans. In order to attempt to portray this comprehension of nature and human-nature relationships that rely not solely on human judgment but integrate different subjects of nature, particularly through very precise embodied communication techniques, I employ visual techniques (including cognitive methods [i.e., visually mapping conceptions], photography and video) to study the meanings of nature and human behaviors for the Yoruba diaspora and the people aligned with it in Cuba, and beyond.

One of the best ways I have found to bring information, people, knowledge and skills together is through video. Video is a significant tool to document multisensory practices, and it has tremendous capacity for representing visceral sensations and diasporic epistemologies since it is characterized by experimental styles that can attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge. Since scholars' diligent mental and mindful work of separating, categorizing, and naming may not get them any closer to understanding what

¹ I note here that I do not wish to convey that natural scientists or positivists were were a monolithic group. Instead science practitioners are myriad and each individual or subgroup will focus on very specific nodes of nature including conceptualizing ecological niches as habitats or systems, or focusing on specific groups of vertebrates, invertebrates, reptiles, or avian species. Indeed, as Tsing (2001) lucidly points out, science and scientists should not be collapsed into one monolithic, homogenous clump. Instead, each scientist and her discipline will conceptualize and focus on different aspects of "nature" in different ways according to her individual backgrounds: e.g., forester, wildlife ecologist, wetlands specialist, climatologist. Nevertheless, all of these scientists often are conceptually following a similar paradigmatic understanding of nature, which separates an "it" from a "she" or a "he," who is human. This paradigm, often referred to as "Western," influences theoretical and methodological knowledge production in very concrete ways.

is meaningful to the people with whom they study, I integrate video as an embodied approach and an additional epistemological model critical to examine local knowledges and ways of knowing nature, particularly with Yoruba practitioners in Cuba. The result of my research is hopefully evoking an alternative way of knowing—not only accessing knowledge through categorizing, naming and sometimes othering—but also through evoking, feeling and sensing.

This focus on experiential learning is not only the foundation of my life and my research, but also of my teaching. Whether I am teaching about environmental issues, indigenous rights, gender, the African diaspora, Latin American and Caribbean regions, visual anthropology, yoga, or dance, I employ pedagogical techniques that rely on engaged, active, locally, and personally relevant learning, à la Freire (1982[1970]). Thus, I embrace experiential learning (including music and movement) as integral to my own syllabi as well as in my discussions and workshops to diversify other teachers' pedagogical techniques. Video, music and movement can be used for education, whether it is for students in a classroom, scientists in the field, scholars at conferences, or religious practitioners in their landscape.

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Major: Anthropology

Scholars must find culturally appropriate methods to interpret African ecological knowledges in order to improve our understanding of shifting, multisited, multivocal and multisensorial landscapes especially concerning human-nature relationships. This research is in response to the general academic need to examine how black histories have been conceived and written. Instead of folklore, I look to the Osainistas (healers and herbalists initiated into the secrets of Osain) in Cuba as possible partners in a conversation in collaborative conservation.

My study of Lucumí (Yorùbá-derived) religion and Osain (deity of the sacred forests, herbs and healings) reveals an embodied understanding of nature through which the boundaries of subject as well as material and spiritual become collapsed and traversed through specialized communication techniques. Ways of knowing through invocations, praise poetry, music and dance are essential to nearly all Yorùbá ritual in which spiritual forces are actualized—evoking and thus invoking spirit into physical form. Yorùbá employ these embodied techniques to transcend boundaries and open communication among spirit, material, temporal and spatial worlds, particularly to understand and work with natural resources. This embodied knowledge is, as Yvonne Daniel argues in her book *Dancing Wisdom*, “rich and viable and should be referenced among other kinds of knowledge” (2005:4).

This intermittently conducted 2003-06 ethnographic study, relies on what I am calling evocative ethnography, which is organized around ethnography using visual and cognitive techniques along with archival research to explore how Lucumí conceptualize nature and how I can translate these embodied perceptions. Additionally, since these Lucumí ways of understanding nature encourage, according to the practitioners', "respectful" environmental behaviors, I hope that this research will aid future studies and more importantly improved collaborations between Lucumí, scientists and policy-makers.

As one *osainista* explains, religious practitioners respect and care for the plants through specifically outlined environmental practices such as only taking the branches and never the roots of plants, and only taking what is needed for that day. This is a critical finding for ecological anthropology because it is situated at the nexus of cosmology and conservation, and thereby noteworthy for understanding an important aspect of the African diaspora on a particular Caribbean landscape. In contemporary times of quickly disappearing neotropical forests, these results are significant not only to the current debate on the politics of conceptualizing and conserving nature, but also to collaborative, community-based conservation and development endeavors.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In a world where the local is situated in a globalized context (e.g., migration and diaspora) and the global is localized (e.g., electronic media and ideascapes), where people are forming collective entities based less on geopolitical boundaries (i.e., nation-states) and more on textual and ideological convergences (e.g., Anderson's [1983] "print capitalism"), ethnographers must rethink how we are defining concepts like culture (including notions like local, global, modern, and traditional) along with how we are contextualizing and depicting the communities that we study. Methodology is a key component of knowledge production and how we define and represent the communities and the issues that we research. Scholars must find culturally appropriate methods to interpret African ecological knowledges within our methodological frameworks in order to improve our understanding of shifting, multisited, and multivocal landscapes especially concerning human/nature relationships. This is particularly vital for scholars and practitioners of tropical conservation and development and for scholars of the black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993; Matory 2005).

To contribute to collaborative conservation and development in the tropics through understanding and communicating contemporary cultural experience of human-nature relationships, I devote the following analysis to two primary queries:

- How do Lucumí practitioners—specifically the Osainistas in Cuba—conceptualize nature (and their environmental practices), and
- How can scholars and scientists access and evoke alternative cultural paradigms using techniques that may be more locally appropriate, (i.e., how can we conceive and represent black histories in less Eurocentric terms)?

As James Clifford powerfully summarizes contemporary cultural experience:

This century has seen a drastic expansion of mobility, including tourism, migrant labor, immigration, and urban sprawl. More and more people "dwell" with the help of mass transit, automobiles, and airplanes. In cities on six continents foreign populations have

come to stay...but often in partial, specific fashions. The “exotic” is uncannily close. Conversely, there seem no distant places left on the planet where the presence of “modern” products, media, and power cannot be felt. An older topography and experience of travel is exploded. One no longer leaves home confident of finding something radically new, another time or space. Difference is encountered in the adjoining neighborhood, the familiar turns up at the ends of the earth.... “Cultural” difference is no longer a stable, exotic otherness; self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than of essence (Clifford 1988: 13-14 as cited in Asad¹ 1993:9 [my italics])

These notions of *power* and *rhetoric* and the acts they incur or limit are primary to my work. The core issues facing cultural representation and modernity theorization as promoted by theorists discussing modernity who outline theories based on concepts such as dependency, core and peripheries, first and third world, must be recrafted to understand contemporary, highly mobile, interconnected, transnational societies (Appadurai (2003 [1996])). Additionally, Matory (2005) reminds us that scholars should not limit their understanding of interconnectivity (of what is now labeled globalization) to an imagined contemporary, modern state. Instead, scholars must recognize that the flows of information, bodies and ideas are inherent to the historical record as well since, “earlier flows were no more or less socially and geographically patterned than today’s.... We must be careful not to allow our enthusiastic description of the present to reduce the past to a one-dimensional foil” (2003: 9). Thus, historical ecology as well as spiritual and political ecology is fundamental to my work.

Although ethnography may have once conceived local communities as though they were bounded, particularly under the label of “traditional,” Charles Piot (1999) navigates theoretical conceptions of anthropological inquiry, analysis and exposition in *Remotely Global: Village Modernity in West Africa*. He critiques the types of ethnography that theorize “out-of-the-way” places as timeless, bounded, culturally homogenous, “traditional” entities opposite to the

¹ Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

globalized, transnational, heterogenous, “modern” world. Instead, he commits himself to writing a history that “disrupt[s] the conventional grand narratives of Western scholars” eschewing categories that describe social processes in a way that promotes concepts of society that are deeply informed by Euroamerican epistemological prejudices, which privilege commodified, individualistic views of personhood (1999: 6) and I add of nature.

Much like Piot depicts the ethnoscape of Kabre relations in Northern Togo flowing across borders of local conceptions of person and social life within changing temporal and spatial dimensions of modern life, I seek to eschew the essentialized interpretation of traditional, particularly as it refers to ecological knowledge, and hope to outline an example of an alternative and modern interpretation of nature and human-nature relations (1999: 23). The perspectives that I wish to illustrate are not those of a bounded and homogenous group set in some imaginary “traditional religion,” but instead, those whose foundations are based on flows of ideological concepts and material goods that have been welcomed and appropriated over time and space through territorially and ideologically mobile Africans—particularly I emphasize Yorùbá diaspora, Yorùbá descendants, and heterogenous communities of Lucumí practitioners of various heritages in Cuba’s modern time of early 2000s.

Stephan Palmié in *Wizards and Scientists* affirms the modernity of African diaspora cultural contexts in Cuba:

For what I aim to demonstrate is that, far from designating even only typological opposites, the meanings, associated with the terms *Western modernity* and *Afro-Cuban tradition* represent mere facets of perspectival refractions of a single encompassing historical formation of transcontinental scope. ...I call this formation *Atlantic modernity*. What I take this concept to refer to is, in part, a set of structural linkages that, since the early sixteenth century, transformed the Atlantic Ocean into an integrated geohistorical unit: an expanding theater of human interaction defined by a vast and intricate web of political and economic relations objectively implicating actors and collectivities on three continents in each other’s histories. More important, however, I also intend this term to designate a no less multiply determined, heterogenous, and historically contingent

aggregate of local discourses and practices reflecting on, engaging, and thereby both shaping and transforming this basic structural constellation... *Whatever else Afro-Cuba religion is, it is as modern as nuclear thermodynamics, or the suppositions about the nature of our world that underlie DNA sequencing, or structural adjustment policies, or on-line banking.* (2007:15, my italics)

Moreover, Matory argues that to understand cultures as “stable and unitary” is also erroneous for the past. He specifically highlights those communities that helped create the nation-states as well as later traversing them. He proffers that theorists must not make irrelevant those “forms of translocalism that have either produced the nation-state or subsidized it from the very beginning” (Matory 2005: 8-9). Thus, my research follows scholars like Matory, who sets for himself the task of “clarifying a standard of analysis for a translocal field that is both one of the most neglected and arguably the most important in illuminating the central role of transnationalism in the genesis of the territorial nation and of global capitalism itself—the black Atlantic” (2005: 5). My work also integrates historical ecological precepts, as William Balée suggests, by studying and understanding human/nature relationships through their fluctuations in both *time* and *space*—not just as a snapshot.

The thrust of my work, then, is to rethink *how black diaspora histories have been conceived and written* and conceptualize an alternative based on Gilroy’s conceptualization of the black Atlantic—recognized as a whole space with its integrated complexities including transnational and intercultural perspectives. Diaspora peoples should not be referenced as those historical records written by the colonizers often did—as inferior, irrational, savage, primitive, childlike, and “lacking” in respect to the implicitly assumed “norm” or apex of civilization and modernity—the European (white, bourgeoisie male). Nor should the descriptions be reduced to some uniform community limited by geographical or politically created boundaries. As an alternative, my work is based on a multi-sited ethnography that features the Lucumí, or Yorùbá practitioners in Cuba, and also includes: Yorùbá practitioners in Oyotunji, South Carolina,

Yorùbá practitioners in Gainesville, Florida as well as a contrasting analysis of conceptual categories of nature for Gainesville, Florida residents who do not have an affiliation with Yorùbá practitioners. When I refer to Yorùbá practitioners, I mean the people who are involved with the religion; they may or may not be descended from Yorùbáland, West Africa. Therein, I hope to illuminate aspects of Yorùbá conceptualizations of nature as they become performed in diasporic landscapes like—but not limited to—Western Cuba.

In this endeavor to more sensitively and accurately portray Yorùbá diaspora ecological knowledge, I propose evocative ethnography as a methodological framework, which integrates embodiment as a critical concept for African diaspora scholarship, and specifically the use of videography as a tool to access and evoke African-derived ecological knowledges. Thus, my research uses cognitive, ethnographic and videographic techniques to attempt to access, analyze and evoke senses of Cuban Osainistas' or Yorùbá-initiated herbalists and healers' conceptualizations of nature.

Thus, I focus on issues of power and rhetoric through employing more locally relevant—yet often more discounted—vehicles of knowledge production and transmission such as *music* and *movement*. In this endeavor, I hope to call attention to how (as Harrison 2008:10 explains), a “specific subjugation of knowledge lead[s] to the marginalization of...” certain perceptions, which have been historically devalued and shunned in the academy. As an alternative to support the “transforming,” “reworking,” and “decolonizing” of anthropology (Harrison 1991; 2008), I proffer this work using written text along with visual and audio media such as photography, sound clips and video clips. An evocative methodology is imperative for advancing a more decolonized understanding of Yorùbá practitioners’ religions, conceptualizations of nature and environmental practices.

Additionally, this multi-sited, evocative ethnography emphasizes not just cultural difference, but also the usefulness of Yorùbá ecological knowledge for development and conservation theory, policy, and practice. I assert that Yorùbá practitioners' role affects the imaginary as a constructed landscape of collective, interactive, complex, nested systems of agency in a deterritorialized world. These flows of power, discourse, text, and meaning within this interactive, fractal system should not be valued only for its "folklore" but also for its significance in development and conservation theory and practice.

Language does not just express thoughts and ideas, but also helps form perceptions and thus reality. According to the Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis, language symbolizes reality as well as shapes it (Whorf 1940). The French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1996) asserted that one must "deconstruct" language to truly understand the reality and the interests of the author.

Accordingly, one must locate the circumstances and the actors within each context to understand their unique perspective and rendition. In development and conservation literature, those who did not conform to an industrialized, productive, modern norm were thus assigned stigmatized descriptive labels like "inferior" and "backward" (Escobar 1995; Chambers 1997). Through the political language of the United States, Europe and international agencies² as well as the rhetoric espoused by the academic social sciences "developed" and "undeveloped" countries were created (Pratt 1992; Escobar 1995; Grillo 1998b).

Conceptualizing development should not be understood only in terms of a master narrative of evolution³ or more currently, globalization, and neoliberalism (Harvey 2005). Instead,

² For example, International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the United Nations, UNESCO, World Bank, International Monetary Fund and USAID.

³ The values inherent to modernity in the West can be traced back to the concepts of progress and evolution intrinsic to the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. During the 18th century, the Enlightenment promoted the idea of social progress and the liberating possibilities of rational and scientific knowledge. Subsequently, unilinear theories of progress with a definitive origin and destination, depicting a continuum that all societies must navigate,

development should be understood in terms of imagination (Appadurai (2003 [1996])), and conservation should be understood in terms of creative solutions (Shiva 2008). As the building blocks of “imaginary worlds” (Appadurai (2003 [1996]): 33), and as the sites to examine how locality emerges in a globalizing world, Appadurai emphasizes the investigation of the fluid, irregular, deeply perspectival constructs of ethnoscaples, ideascapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, and financescapes. Through these interactive scapes, he asserts that one discovers the agency of the imagination. Shiva argues that to improve conservation efforts, we must rely on socially equitable and creative solutions (2008). She continues to clarify that "solutions will not come from the corporations and governments... [s]olutions are coming from those who know how to live lightly" (Shiva 2008: 46). Shiva acknowledges the farmers of India, particularly the women who have demonstrated that their ecological knowledge has maintained fecundity, biodiversity, water abundance and life in their forests and lands, while colonial forestry-based legislation and the internationally enforced green revolution has depleted the soils, created water shortages and created famine (Shiva 1989). Shiva continues to discuss how the terms institutionalized through forestry programs convey a different meaning and therein interaction with the landscape than the local languages—with devastating consequences (Shiva 2008).

How can we learn from people who have significantly different epistemologies? I assert that, through videography, scholars may better interpret diverse perspectives on how human-nature ecologies are imagined. As the Cuban filmmaker Glorio Rolando poignantly affirms,

were promoted by men like Comte (1798-1857), Malthus (1776- 1834) and Darwin (1809-1882) highlighting the human species as the most highly evolved with increased dominance over biophysical environments and natural selection as the driving force. In addition, evolutionary theory depicted people and societies as progressing through various stages from backward to advanced. For example, Lewis Henry Morgan (1877) explained that societies progress through fixed stages from savagery through barbarism to civilization. Continental Africans were often placed, conceptually and legislatively, in the “primitive” stage of savagery.

“[video] speaks a powerful and direct language that develops our imagination” (2001: 348). And in so doing, as Rolando explains:

[I]t can reveal to us the anonymous actors rarely highlighted in official history—the musicians and singers and the ordinary small-town people with their tragedies and their laughter. Most of all, it can bring the audience into contact with our ways of being beyond the usual prefabricated cultural stereotypes that make cultivating an effective narrative style both difficult and of the utmost importance. (2001: 348)

The imagination—when creating collective ideas of neighborhood, nationhood, moral economies and landscapes of group identity—can be fuel for action (Appadurai 2003 [1996]: 9,48). I suggest that religion may serve as a central node to be able to grasp the image and the habitus (Bourdieu 1993 [1977]), or the imaginary as defined by cultural influences that cultivate specific behavior patterns. Shared imagination can lead to collective action that operates beyond the boundaries of the nation—that is transnational and postnational achievements (Appadurai 2003 [1996]: 8). Escobar and Alvarez (1992) clearly highlight the fact that social movements in diverse and plural forms are occurring with creative alternatives, and in order to capture the complexity of them, scholars must become more transdisciplinary (which Zimmerman and Basset [2003: 2] define as “high-level, fused integration of disciplines”).

Thus, if I may be permitted to begin with my conclusion, I hope that this investigation aids in creating a collective imaginary of humans, natures and their relationships, which may in the future be collaboratively created and shared by Cuban scientists, Lucumí practitioners, the Cuban government and international organizations to be able to work together to envision and co-create a Cuban future⁴. In concert, I hope that these lessons and expressions may be understood and

⁴ One scientist I interviewed said that what she wanted was “a Cuban future” –meaning those Cubans who have remained and continue to live on the island (Holmes 2008).

implemented internationally within pedagogical⁵ strategies and conservation and development policies.

To construct this story's rhythm that includes an amalgamation of an historical tempo, pulses of African lives, cadences of European scholarship, along with distinctive Cuban beats, the core substance of this analysis proceeds with *Chapter 2: Historical and Ethnographic Context of the Yorùbá Diaspora and Western Cuba*. This chapter offers a basic geographical and human ecological perspective on Matanzas, Cuba. Subsequently, the chapter depicts the geographical landscape of the western region of Cuba with a historical, political and cultural ecological analysis.

Due to its location on the ocean with an accessible port along with its tropical climate, karstic terrain, underground riverine systems and fertile soils, Matanzas became a center of sugar and tobacco plantations. Consequently, many Africans were forced into slavery and brought to Cuba to support the sugar industry, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century. Between 1600 and 1900, more than one million enslaved Africans were transported to Cuba. About 85% of them were introduced to Cuba after 1800, and about 45% of all the Africans who disembarked in Cuba after 1800 belonged to the various Yorùbá kingdoms (Casanova 1996). Since Matanzas was the entry port for that particular African diaspora, it maintains not only the highest population of Lucumí practitioners in Cuba, but also some of the oldest temple houses. Lucumí or *Regla de Ocha*, as it is also known, is most widely known as Santería (literally, Way of the Saints). In the first quarter of the 20th century, Santería replaced *brujería* as the name for Yorùbá religion as practiced in Cuba. Yet, similar to how *brujería* denoted working with

⁵ By this I mean that universities teaching natural sciences should integrate some Yoruba ways of learning about nature. These might include music, movement and experiential learning to enhance intersubjective relationships rather than relying only on objective, reductive analyses.

witchery, or wizardry, and thereby to a Catholic, colonial mind with evil-doings that were understood in terms of crime and criminality, Santería also came to reference the religion with a pejorative image—connoting the deviancy of worshiping the saints rather than God.

Due to the high number of both enslaved Africans and, importantly, *free* Afro-Cubans in Matanzas and Havana, the retention of African traditions is especially strong there. Lucumí becomes practiced in Cuba by integrating traditional Yorùbá beliefs along with Catholic icons, Kardecian spiritist beliefs, and other African-based religions like Palo and Abakua. Often, Yorùbá practitioners in Cuba will follow more than just one. They allow for overlap that to a Western eye may appear contradictory. On the contrary, Yorùbá “tradition” implied not only change but also integration of other belief systems. Instead of a closed system philosophy that allows but one way, Yorùbá tradition is based on dynamic transformation and process.

Yet, instead of understanding African religion in Cuba as heterogeneous and with diverse cultural, political, historical and ecological influences, academics often have homogenized African populations and influences. Even worse, scholars typically represented Africans and Africans in the diaspora within an evolutionary construct that located African views and practices as inferior if not degenerate. In Cuba, the first anthropological studies were based on queries on why Africans were predisposed to be criminals (e.g., Ortiz’s *Los Negros Brujos* 1906).

In a similar vein, African knowledge of nature was demeaned since nature could only be acceptably understood within the dominant paradigm that reduced the environment to an object available for investigation and exploitation. Thus, *Chapter 3: Constructing the Study of African Religion(s) and Nature: Questioning Conventional Paradigms* begins with an exploration of some of the ontological roots of academic scholarship, particularly that of peoples who do not

subscribe to identical assumptions of the Europeans who often studied them. Chapter 3 illustrates how values and assumptions implicit in dominant rhetoric are supported within systems of power and become played out within academia and conservation policy, often casting their concepts and the persons, religions and conceptions they delineate as “primitive,” “irrational,” and less civilized. This chapter explores several examples of this occurrence. Through exploring the historical roots of how certain conceptualizations came to be (i.e., the objectification of nature, the backwardness of non-European human values, and the ungodly forms of relating between traditional religious practitioners and the natural world), I highlight the intrinsic implications for influencing environmental practices, policy and scholarship. The concepts of nature, humans, development and conservation cannot be compartmentalized so easily, and we as scholars must explore alternative models of meaning using additional methodologies that will enable the comprehension of how nature is understood in spiritual, material, social, medicinal and myriad other ways that are locally and globally relevant.

Since some African diaspora peoples are known to communicate within spiritual, material, temporal, and spatial worlds, an additional approach to the materialist-based empirical model is necessary. By privileging Western science, scholars—including Cuban ones—may ignore a prominent characteristic of many African religious forms. Instead, scholars and scientists alike must find culturally appropriate ways to interpret religions of African diaspora peoples. Since practitioners use music, dance, possession and divination to transcend otherwise seemingly impassable and unknowable divides, I propose embodiment and evocation as conceptual tools to deepen understanding of certain African diaspora epistemologies. *Chapter 4: Embodied Epistemologies toward Evocative Ethnographies: an Alternative Approach for Understanding Yorùbá Derived Ecological Knowledges* illustrates the import of an alternative model of

scholarship that includes embodiment as a central concept for understanding African diasporic ecological knowledge. Thus, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 delineate some epistemologies of the body, from empiricism to embodiment, and briefly review some of the theoretical shifts, both chronologically and conceptually. After elaborating upon varying perspectives on the body, I devote Chapter 4 to understanding the critical concept of embodiment for African diaspora studies by demonstrating its appropriateness for studying cosmology, practices and practitioners of Lucumí. While Chapter 3 is primarily historical, theoretical and definitional, Chapter 4 details an embodied methodological framework that I call evocative ethnography.

Thus, after guiding the reader through a historical analysis of religion and nature theory, briefly unearthing the conceptual archeology of relevant terms therein, particularly in Western academia, and continuing an exploration and appreciation of a worldview that integrates biophysical with spiritual conceptions in understanding the environment, *Chapter 5: Lucumí Religion and Spirits in the Forest* offers an overview of Lucumí religion and perceptions of nature in Cuba. Nature, fundamental to Lucumí religion, is no longer understood within a framework of human versus nature, but instead as repositories of *ashé*, and as *orishas* with whom humans are able to communicate and receive guidance, ask permission, interact,⁶ and even embody. “While others pray to an invisible god hoping someday to see him,” Canizares explains, “the Divine is manifested in Santería as living, breathing beings one can touch, kiss, and love” (1993:14). Orishas embody multiple layers of reality: metaphysical, physical, spiritual, and material worlds; they are both an aspect of nature and a human pursuit, and much more.

⁶ Santeros receive stones of each orisha only once in their life. These stones are cared for and revered as living entities by the santeros. Canizares explains that “because the wilderness is the true repository of all of Santería’s secrets [p]lants, especially herbs are essential to every Santería ritual” (Canizares 1993:101).

Chapter 5 discusses *ashé*, or power that is not only rhetoric but spirit made tangible. This spiritual power, with the proper knowledge and incantations, can be infused into material objects as well as accessed from appropriate plants. This idea and act of knowing nature as well as the technique of transmitting this knowledge is an example of what I mean by embodied epistemology. This chapter offers an overview of Yorùbá cosmology selecting specifically those orishas who are most pertinent to Western Cuba and to understanding practitioners' conceptions and practices with nature. For instance, the city of Matanzas is a primary example of where the biophysical and spiritual are interfused with daily life and living for Yorùbá practitioners. Abutting the sea, the ocean's waters and meanings are vital to Matanzas residents. In addition, two major above-ground rivers cross through the karstic terrain. So both Oshun (who represents fresh river waters, is the goddess of love, gold and marriage, and is the patron saint of Cuba) and Yemaya (who is the essence of oceanic waters and motherhood) are critical figures in religion and ecology. And of course the sacred forest is vital for the religion and for healing.

In an effort to illustrate Afro-Cuban religion as it more realistically becomes performed in Cuba, this chapter explores a vignette of a woman who holds multiple, seemingly contradictory roles in society, and as such is emblematically Cuban. She is an active member of the Communist Party, a soils scientist, a wife of a soils scientist, a mother to a college graduate who is about to leave the island, and a daughter of rural family origins. She helped build her home and many others so that she could have her own. She would be considered white—probably descended from Canary Island heritage. And at the time that this vignette is from, she was suffering from a deep depression, and seeking help in the multiple forms that are commonly available in Cuba. Through this vignette, Chapter 5 explores the complexities of contemporary

Cuban life and the intersections of various identity politics, scientific knowledges and religious knowledges that form a cultural hybridity known as Cuban.

One of the most fundamental orishas that requires attention if one is discussing Yorùbá religion and ecology is Osain. Essential to Yorùbá religion, Osain is an orisha who may be understood as the embodiment of nature and medicine, including herbs, plants, trees, and the forest. Osain is one of the most vital orishas, for without him and his kingdom of the sacred forest and the herbs within, there would be no religious rituals, no healings, and no initiations. In effect, there could be no religion.

Chapter 6: Who is Nature: Osain and Communicating across Material and Spiritual Worlds discusses the results of my research investigating Osain and includes data from ethnographic interviews, cognitive data collection and analysis of the Lucumí in Havana and Matanzas, Cuba from 2003-2006. According to the results of my research, if one is attempting to understand Yorùbá conceptualization of nature in Cuba, one must look to Osain, the owner of *el monte* (the sacred forest). Although Osain is rarely mentioned as one of the seven primary orishas, he is acknowledged as one of the most important for rituals and the one most connected ideologically and practically to the healing herbs of the forest⁷. This chapter offers background information on his personage and is the basis for the dissertation's title: *Who is Nature?*

Chapter 6 elucidates the connection between power, language and action. Power is *ashé*, and *ashé* can be manipulated by humans with the knowledge to communicate with the orishas, who are subjective agents. Language is not only how nature is talked about within the religion, but also how nature is talked to, asked permission of, interacted with through the religion. Action deals with the acts of communication as well as specific environmental behaviors.

⁷ Although Inle is also connected to healing herbs and Ogun is connected to the forest, Osain is said to be the owner of the forest.

Hence, once this chapter has explored an image of nature as subjective in Yorùbá religion and ecology, it looks more specifically at the expressed behaviors of the specialized practitioners, osainistas. The osainistas are the people who go to select the healing herbs from the forest and know the chants to elicit the power—or ashé—from them. According to the osainistas with whom I worked in Cuba, they conceive of their relationship with the natural world as one that is primarily based on respect. The Osainistas who have been trained in the process of communicating between material and spiritual world—among humans, plants and spirits—report respectful environmental behaviors that include not removing young plants, asking for permission to select a plant, only using the branches or leaves, and not removing the roots of a plant. These findings that call attention to Afro-Cuban ecological knowledge as well as the specific role of osainista as herbalist and healer may hold pertinent import for conservation practitioners nationally in Cuba as well as internationally.

Thus, to improve our understanding of these shifting, multisited and multivocal landscapes of human/nature relationships, I implement the evocative ethnographic framework that I argue may be more appropriate. *Chapter 7: A Documentary on Osain in Translation: Yorùbá Diaspora Religion and Ecology* offers this short ethnographic documentary video that I created. With a black screen and a strong drumbeat, *Osain in Translation* begins. Lazaro Ros, the renowned santero and Afro-Cuban singer, invokes Osain, the deity of nature through his encantations and salutations “*Ashé ogbo orisha, ashé elegua, ashé ogun, ashé ochosi, ashé obatála, baba.*” In a specified order, with specific intentions, he salutes the ancestors and the orishas, as is required by respect and ritual protocol. The rhythms of the batá drums accompany his encantation.

I have used visual techniques in this documentary that include nonlinear editing and montage, which are vital to this endeavor to evoke nonwestern epistemologies through what

Taussig 1994: 208), refers to as “embodied knowing” or what Marks (2000) elicits as the sensorial, almost tactile experience made possible through video. Moreover, by showing faces with the stories, tales become people who with their individual and collective perspectives transform “informants” into persons with their own voices. By recording and showing marginalized knowledges, the status of those ways of knowing is raised and no doubt is left concerning the provenance and ownership of that knowledge (Protz 1998).

This video of approximately 14 minutes explores how religious values intersect with environmental perspectives for practitioners in the South Carolina Yorùbá village of Oyotunji as well as for Osainistas in Matanzas, Cuba. South Carolina is included to illustrate the Yorùbá ideascapes that flow across national socio-political borders binding diverse peoples, histories and languages with common religious ties, which may influence environmental practices.

Yoruba cultural production is contemporaneously occurring in many locations synchronistically and diachronically through consistent exchanges, which occur between Africa, South America, the Caribbean and the United States. George Brandon (1993), author of *Santería from Africa to the New World*, details how an intricate network of Yorùbá practitioners surpassed 500,000 people who resided throughout the metropolises in the United States in the early nineties; now in 2010, these numbers have grown significantly⁸. Brandon’s work argues that to understand Yorùbá religion, one must comprehend it through its dynamic transformations: “...a creole culture’s real nature is processual and is only truly revealed by the way in which it unfolds in time” (1993:41). He delineates some of the major transformations of Yoruba religion from

⁸ See *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, edited by Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs, 2004, Migene Gonzalez-Wippler *Santeria: The Religion* 1994, and Miguel A. De la Torre, *Santeria: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America* 2004, Miguel Barnet, *Afro-Cuban Religions* 2001)

Africa to Cuba (including Pre-Santeria, Early Santeria [1492-1870], and Santeria [1870-1959]) and from Cuba to the United States (1959- present).

One of the most well known cases of Yoruba religion coming from Cuba to the United States is through Oba Osejiman Adefunmi I, who founded Oyotunji outside of Charleston, in Beaufort County, South Carolina. Adefunmi, born Walter King, is thought to be the first native black United States citizen who was initiated into Santería priesthood in Cuba. He first visited Cuba in 1956 and then was initiated into the worship of Obatala, the Yoruba God of Purity and Peace. In August of 1959, just before the Revolution, he and his Cuban friend Chris Oliana, went to Matanzas Province to get initiated. When they returned stateside, they founded the public temple called Shango Temple, and incorporated it as the African Theological Archministry. Later the temple was renamed the Yoruba Temple when he moved it to Harlem in 1960 (Bascom Introduction to Hunt 1979: np). Yet, since his was a mission of Black Nationalism, he became increasingly disenchanted with Lucumí due to its use of Catholic imagery and vocabulary (e.g., santo). In 1970, he began what Brandon refers to as Orisa-Voodoo and created the first African village in the United States that eschewed all Catholic connections, and recreated a connection with Yoruba religion from Africa.

Additionally, Beatriz Morales' essay (1995) on the cultural history of the Oyotunji Village in the context of the internationalization of Lucumi and its syncretic encounters with Vodou in the U.S. calls attention to the necessity to integrate a multi-sited approach when examining Yoruba diaspora cultural production. She asserts that locations like New York City and subsequent migration to the South have been fertile ground for Yoruba culture and religion.

Several scholars (e.g., Ofunniyin 2009; Olupona and Rey 2008; Poyner 2003; Clarke 2004,1997; Brandon 1993) call attention to the large contingents of Yoruba practitioners

throughout the United States. They reside and create their communities in predominantly urban locales, but particularly in Miami and Archer⁹, Florida¹⁰, New York City, New York, Richmond, Virginia and Chicago, Illinois (Clarke 1997: 59). Kamari Clarke (2004:2) points out that, “[u]nderstanding the making of transnational communities involves understanding how local communities are embedded in circuits of connections. Our ability to chart communities involves our ability to understand how people’s networks are both historically shaped and institutionally legitimated and globally interconnected” (Clarke 2004:3). Since Yoruba practitioners engage in a coeval cultural production of knowledge through exchanging ideas and practices in what Clarke (2004:4) has termed “deterritorialized spaces,” my research examines Yoruba religion in Cuba, and also in a few of its other spaces of co-existence and transformation.

Through using a framework that is—to a certain extent—multi-sited, I hope to complicate my invocation of “diaspora” by explaining the different kinds of sites encompassed by that concept, including some of the different kinds of relationships to Yorubaland in Nigeria and Benin and to the history of the dispersion and circulation of Yoruba culture, discourse and therein power. I take this opportunity to thicken and deepen analyses of diaspora formation—how all that is characterized to be Yoruba has come to be via diverse sociohistorical processes and coeval fields of connections. Hence, although my study primarily focuses on Cuba, and

⁹ Compound Ifálola

¹⁰ People from Oyotunji went to Florida. In several instances Oyotúnjì villagers did not agree with Adefunmi’s worldview or his methods for discipline and/or resolving village conflicts. In a few cases the disparity resulted in the opposing person being expelled from the village. This was the situation for Òrìsàmola Awolowo, who left Oyotúnjì after an internal conflict with Adefunmi and migrated to Gainesville, Florida. Awolowo is credited with the influx of former Oyotúnjì Villagers into Gainesville, Florida during the 1980s. Awolowo’s departure was followed by an exodus of people from the village. Some of these individuals joined Awolowo in Gainesville; some traveled to Miami, Florida, Atlanta, and Georgia, while others went to Los Angeles California. Clarke writes about this mass exit. In the mid-1980s, the population of the community plummeted from two hundred to seventy, but this led to an expanding constituency of thousands of urban affiliates with growing loyalties to the community. During this period, as increasing numbers of practitioners left for better opportunities in urban America, the community laid the seed for the spread of new institutional forms of urban Yoruba communities within a larger network of practitioners (Clarke 2004:57 in Ofunnyin 2009: 81).

prioritizes Matanzas, at times, I bring in examples from Oyotunji, South Carolina and Gainesville residents of Florida. The documentary includes interviews and footage from Oyotunji, South Carolina as well as Gainesville residents who went to Oyotunji to learn about Yoruba diaspora.

While Chapter 7 is the documentary itself, *Chapter 8: Osain in Translation: a Discussion of Videographic Techniques in Evoking Yorùbá Religion and Ecology* is an essay discussing the theoretical framework of embodied epistemology, or experiential knowing and transmission of knowledge, as used in the video *Osain in Translation: Yorùbá Diaspora Ways of Knowing Nature*. Since Yorùbá diaspora practitioners of Osain communicate with, get to know, and pass on local ways of knowing nature through dances, rhythms, foods, and stories, the use of video can be critical to access those embodied spaces of knowing. This approach to learning to know nature by communing and communicating between intersubjective worlds via embodied experiences, or what I call embodied epistemology, is an attempt to represent and more importantly evoke a Yorùbá way of knowing nature. Like Appadurai and Matory's scholarship, the film is not bounded within a political or geographic location of any one community, but instead goes beyond such boundaries to present a collage of narratives, interpretations, rhythms and visual montages.

The point of creating a film is to better introduce students, scholars and practitioners to alternative conceptions of nature in an evocative way. From my experience as a scholar and with working in the conservation field, I feel that this element of improving one's understanding of local conceptions of the environment is critical and lacking. As Spivak (1988) poignantly reminds us in her article "Can the Subaltern Speak," it is not the speaking that is missing, but the listening. Subalterns cannot be truly heard by the privileged of either industrialized or the less

industrialized worlds. Can development practitioners and conservationists listen carefully enough to “hear” alternative visions of the world that do not share or partially share a similar ontological and epistemological foundation?

Chapter 9 Sustainable Development, Conservation and Cuba’s Alternative Modernity emphasizes this conversation within Cuba. Indeed, a Cuba case study embraces complexity and nuance in myriad ways. Cubans laud a literacy rate higher than most United States’ cities, at 98% (World Health Report 2008). This includes the rural, inner city and other typically marginalized groups. Thus, the majority is a very text-educated and cultured populace. Additionally, Cuba’s accomplishments through its development policies as well as its scientific achievements rival industrialized nations’ triumphs. In all of these respects, Cuba is an unquestionably modern country. Hence, Cuba challenges dichotomous notions of West and non-west, science and non-science. Due to the excellent education that Cubans enjoy, the country boasts over 11 percent of the scientists of Latin America (including a cadre of professional foresters, wetland and soil scientists)—even though it only comprises two percent of the population (Rennett). Moreover, Cuba’s alternative modernity relies on the formative role that Lucumí and other African nations [like the Congo-based Palo Monte and the Carabalí Secret Abakúa Society] have played in defining its character and culture, which have important ramifications for tropical conservation and development.

Yoruba practitioners in Cuba also challenge a perception of non-Western to mean indigenous peoples far from urban centers and disconnected from the market, since Yoruba history details the existence from at least the 1400s of highly urban living with extensive trade networks (e.g., Bascom 1969; Thornton 2002). Accordingly, scholars and scientists must not only question the paradigm of creating an “other” to whom “Western” scientists and scholars

must teach, but from whom we should learn. As Shiva (1989) details the comprehensive ecological knowledge of the women in India, I hope to encourage a more open dialogue between Yoruba practitioners, scientists and scholars so that they may learn from each other in open conversation.

Here, I invoke Bhaktin's dialogic and the metaphor of dialogue that Matory (2005) prefers and Heckenberger (personal communication 2010) calls upon to suggest not that we should see opposing worldviews, but instead that we should create spaces for conversation thereby comprehending power as productive and generative, not only repressive (Foucault 1979; Spivak 1988; Escobar 1995). In that vein, I propose a more "ethical relation"¹¹ which "embrace[s] ...impossible differences and distances—indispensable for any movement toward decolonization" (MacClean and Landry introduction to Spivak 1988: 5).

Chapter 10: Conclusion: Politics of Conceptualizing and Conserving Nature summarizes how conceptualizing nature carries implicit assumptions, and how those underlying suppositions influence perceptions, actions and policies. It calls attention then to implicit values that researchers may not recognize or assess within their scholarship. Notwithstanding, these dominant worldviews help shape internationally implemented policies through specific rhetorical and power structures. Bringing into conversation distinct frameworks of cultural production, this work highlights marginalized epistemologies in the academy by reframing Afro-Cuban ecological knowledge. By translating Osain, the Yorùbá deity of healing herbs and the sacred forest, I hope to expand the understanding of the environment to include subjective community members who deserve respect. I hope to accomplish this through what I call evocative ethnography, or through alternative forms of expression and representation like haptic imagery

¹¹ "Thinking of the ethical relation as an embrace, an act of love, in which each learns from the other, is not at all the same thing as wanting to speak *for* an oppressed constituency" (Landry and Maclean 1996: 5).

(or use of images that enhances feeling to gain knowledge) and videography (with documentary video and video clips) that evoke the senses to be able to deepen our understanding of diasporic ecoscapes, which include human/nature/spirit relationships.

CHAPTER 2
GEOLOGICAL, ETHNOGRAPHIC AND HISTORICAL LANDSCAPES OF WESTERN
CUBA AND YORÙBÁ DIASPORA

In movement on a path through the landscape something is constantly slipping away and something is constantly gained in a relational tactile world of impressions, signs, sights, smells and physical sensations. To understand a landscape truly it must be felt, but to convey some of this feeling to others it has to be talked about, recounted, or written and depicted. In the process of movement a landscape unfolds or unravels before an observer. (Tilley 1994: 31)

Landscape—historically, culturally, politically, economically and spiritually—is created through many processes over time. The same is true for the landscape of Cuba. To attempt a “transformative” anthropological tale, this chapter begins with a recognition of the influence of historical, geological, climatological and oceanic patterns that have been integral to the formation of Cuba and its people. It goes on to examine the human landscape, including the first settlements in Cuba, and then the landscape of colonial Cuba, with an emphasis on the diaspora of the Yorùbá peoples from Africa.

Thus, this story begins with the indispensable yet often overlooked recognition of the ecological and geological connections between Cuba and West Africa. Then, it continues to discuss the diverse human and biological history of Cuba’s landscape. The section on first peoples notes the contributions of Cuba’s Taíno and Ciboney peoples for whom certain customs, foods, technology, and linguistic terms have become fundamental to Cuban practice and identity. These people have resided on the island for thousands of years longer than any other, and therefore influence more recent diaspora populations and their human-nature relationships. Then, the chapter proceeds to discuss those who came during Spanish colonialism. In order to more fully understand the heterogeneity on which Cuban culture is founded and continues to dynamically be produced, we must be aware of the many peoples who came to Cuba, either willingly or unwillingly, including the Spanish, Moors, and Africans.

The connections between Cuba and West Africa are not merely those of demographic and cultural history. They are also geocological, beginning with the ancient geological history that predates Cuba as an archipelago. Since culture and environment interpenetrate one another (Balée 1998: 3), the path of interpreting human-ecological interactions must include an understanding of lands and waters on their own ecological terms as well as the historical interactions between humans and the landscape.

The content of this chapter follows the lead of nineteenth-century geologist Charles Lyell who integrated an historical approach into his understanding of nature. He achieved this end by incorporating elements such as time and change along with land, climate, animals and plants. His *Principles of Geology* (1832), asserts that nature must be understood in a larger historical and geographical context^{1,2}. Lyell posited a picture of the world as perpetually new, made and remade forever. Through noting the rise and fall of mountain chains and land bridges, he explained: “The surface of the globe is not simply a one-time, divine contrivance, but the result of a continuing play of observable natural forces—wind, rain, sun—against a pliable crust. Ecology must not be understood as a permanent system installed once and for all by God” (as cited in Worster 1998[1977]: 138). More recently, and in a similar vein, Ronald W. Bailey encouraged scholars to integrate aspects of natural history such as latitudinal distinctions and ocean currents into a more encompassing and thereby relevant story to improve our understanding of the

¹ Glacken also discusses historical changes of nature, but focuses not on geology or geography, but on the changing perceptions of nature throughout Western history.

² Lyell contributes the idea of species dispersal to ecological biology, by surmising that plants could not have been continuously in the exact same places based on newly discovered fossils. Also, he expanded the image of nature’s disturbers to include other natural species besides humans. Specifically, he is famous for his polar bear example. The Greenland polar bear floated to sea on a chunk of ice and reached Iceland where it killed deer and seals thereby changing grass and fish populations, affecting insects and snails (Worster 1998[1977]: 139). Thus, one species (besides only human) can alter drastically all classes of living creation.

specifics of forced African migrations, livelihoods and human/nature relationships (Ronald C. Foreman, Jr. lecture, UF, April 2009³).

Geological and Geomorphological Features: Cuba and Africa Connected

The Republic of Cuba comprises largely the main island of 105,006 sq km (40,543 sq mi)—about 1,199 km (745 mi) long and 200 km (124 mi) across its widest and 35 km (22 mi) across at its narrowest points. Several other islands are also included in contemporary Cuba geography and nationhood: *La Isla de la Juventud* or the Isle of Youth (formerly known as the Isle of Pines), which is about 3,056 sq km (1,180 sq mi) and four clusters of smaller archipelagos—the Sabana, the Colorados, the Jardines de la Reina, and the Canarreos islands, along with numerous other smaller islands off of the coast of the main island (Stoner 1999). In geological terms, Cuba is one of the world's oldest archipelagos. Along with the rest of the Greater Antilles and the eastern edge of the Lesser Antilles, it formed after the shifts of the tectonic plates (the large rigid sections that the earth's crust is made of which move very slowly alongside each other over long periods of time).

Four primary stages make up the geological evolution of Cuba: Paleozoic-Jurassic, Jurassic-Cretaceous, Cretaceous-Paleogene (Eocene), and Paleogene (Eocene) --Holocene. Centuries ago, Cuba or "ProtoCuba," as Iturrande [1988] references it, was part of a huge continent that the German author of the continental drift theory, Alfred Wegener, named Pangaea. Pangaea comprised, among other territories, North America, South America and African lands (Figure 2-1). It is intriguing to consider that Cuba and Africa were parts of the same continent.

³ Ronald C. Foreman, Jr. Lecture, 3 April 2009; the title: "Grand Challenges Facing African American Studies and Higher Education in the 21st Century: Reflections from Forty Years in a Yet Emerging Discipline." Sponsored by African American Studies at the University of Florida.

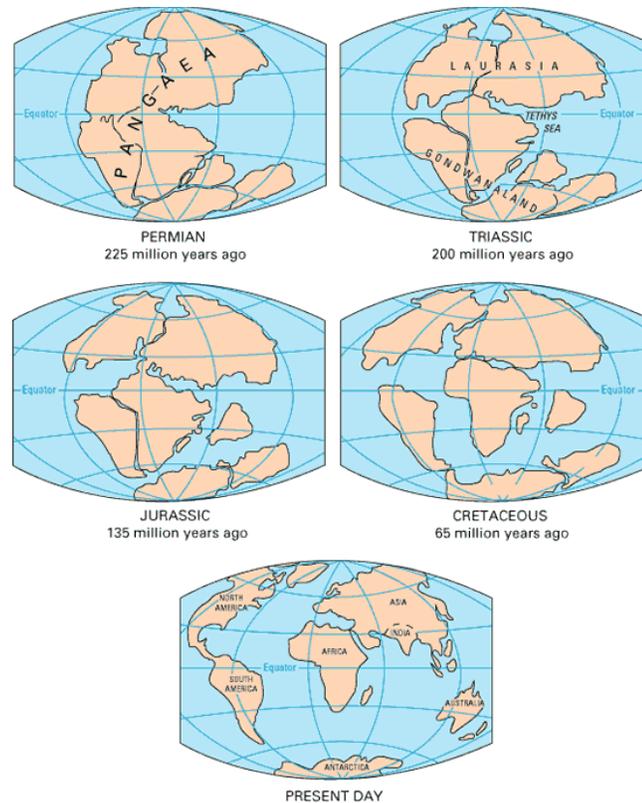


Figure 2-1. Maps showing the tectonic shifts and effect on how Cuba came to be.

According to the maps above, the Triassic period was 200 million years ago (<http://geology.com/pangea-continental-drift.gif>). During this time, a narrow and long depression began to extend from the European Mediterranean Sea to the North Atlantic Ocean. This tectonic shift moved huge masses of Cuba, along with the rest of the Greater Antilles. The eastern edge of the Lesser Antilles formed after the shifts of the tectonic plates (the large rigid sections that the earth's crust is made of which move very slowly alongside each other over long periods of time). The Caribbean Sea comprises one of these plates. The actual island of Cuba, according to geological theory, rose twice from the depths of the sea due to volcanic activity. About 70 to 50 million years ago, three chains of volcanic mountains emerged from the ocean's floor and created the majority of the Caribbean islands (except for the Bahamas). According to Rogozinski,

the first of these mountain ranges ran east along what is now the northern coast of Cuba and Haiti, a middle and much longer chain of volcanoes created the Cayman Islands then continued east along the southern coast of Cuba (the Sierra Maestre) and through the central regions of Haiti (the Cordillera Central) and Puerto Rico (El Yunque) coming to an end at what is known today as the Virgin Islands. The third southernmost chain created the Blue Mountains of Jamaica and extended along the southern coast of Haiti (1994: 5).

During this same time, similar volcanic forces created the Andes Mountains in South America and the Atlas Mountains of western Africa.

Waters and Migrations

Water is essential to the history of Cuba, to its present, and to its alternative modernity.



Figure 2-2. Matanzas Bay.

Scholars assert that most all of the plant, animal and human life migrated from east to west—meaning from the Northern coast of Venezuela to Trinidad and then throughout the Caribbean.

The first “residents” of the island, its endemic species, were of flora and fauna. Large marine life remnants are found along the coasts and in the caves indicating that marine life was able to and did frequent the archipelago of Cuba, like the following example of the remains found in a Matanzan cave.



Figure 2-3. Bone remains found in Matanzan Cave “Restos Fosiles de Megalocnus Rodens in Abra de Figueroa, Matanzas. Museo Historico Provincial de Matanzas

Even the caves where these remains were found, the Cuevas de Bellamar (2500 meter long caves with underground streams) were created over millions of years, due to Cuba’s underground riverine system, which caused Cuba’s limestone bedrock to erode, creating the Viñales Hills and more than 20,000 caves. These caves have offered glimpses into the past to understand some of the types and habits of flora, fauna and indigenous residents, as well as are being current tourist attractions.

[Object 2-1. Photostory of Bellamar Caves, Matanzas, Cuba \(.mov, 57 MB Quicktime required\).](#)

Humans also made their way to the island via the ocean. The majority of the first settlers came from South America. Since material culture⁴ like artifacts of chert and flint (raw material used to make items) were distributed widely, archeologists assess that these early islanders were competent sea travelers (Wilson 1997:5). Centuries later, many other settlers arrived from Spain and Africa, and even China. Cuba's location on the waters situates it within close proximity to

⁴ “As archeologists use the term, ‘material culture’ refers to a wide range of objects that relate to all aspects of human social, economic, spiritual, ceremonial, and personal life” (Righter in Wilson 1997:70).

Haiti, the United States, Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, and Jamaica, which has allowed people to migrate easily onto and off the island for thousands of years. This movement has helped form a rich fusion of peoples and customs throughout the Caribbean, and particularly in Cuba.

The Gulf Stream

One of the most influential currents that has contributed to this movement of diverse humans, including their different ideas, practices and artifacts, is the Gulf Stream. European discovery of the Gulf Stream dates to the 1513 expedition of Juan Ponce de León, after which it became widely used by Spanish ships sailing from the Caribbean to Spain. In 1786, Benjamin Franklin studied and mapped the current in detail:

On his transatlantic voyages, Benjamin Franklin noted changes in water temperature, atmospheric conditions, and the presence of whales feeding on plankton in warmer waters. He also noticed that similar ships taking different routes across the Atlantic made the crossing at different speeds—and that the shorter course was not necessarily the fastest. This all made sense when his cousin Timothy Folger, a Nantucket sea captain, told him about the Gulf Stream and drew its location on a chart of the Atlantic. The Franklin/Folger chart of the Gulf Stream was amazingly accurate. (Musée des arts et métiers, 2008)

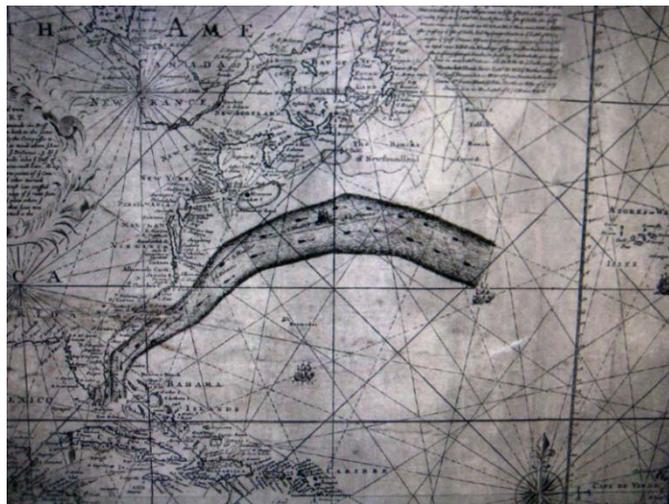
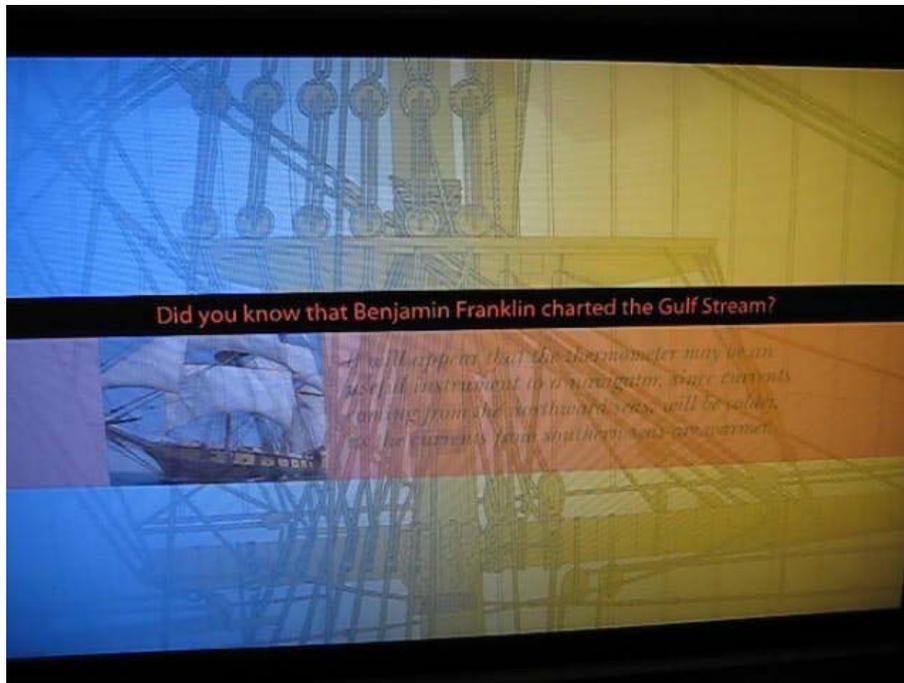


Figure 2-4. The Franklin/Folger map of the Gulf Stream, 1769 (Musée des arts et métiers, 2008)

To more fully understand the Gulf Stream, please click on the Object below to view a video clip from the Museum of Technology in Paris, France.



Object 2-2. Film clip of the Gulf Stream. Museum of Technology, (Musée des arts et métiers, Paris, France, visited March 2007) (AVI, 86.1 MB)

First Peoples

About 6000 years ago, during the “Archaic” period, the first indigenous peoples began to inhabit the Caribbean (Wilson 1997: 3). The earliest evidence of human colonization in Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic sites date around 3500-4000 BCE and includes flaked-stone tools similar to the Yucatan peninsular (Wilson 1997: 4). These peoples are considered to have lived through fishing, collecting wild foods, and hunting small animals on the islands and from the seas. Before 2000 BCE, most of these nonhorticultural peoples who migrated into the Caribbean are assumed to have come from the northeast coast of South America (Nuñez Jimenez 2002).

A key chronological note is that these humans inhabited the Caribbean islands including Cuba for *thousands of years* longer than the later African, Asian and European people who succeeded them. Since the indigenous peoples of Cuba inhabited the island for much longer than

any other group, it is necessary to acknowledge first their presence on the island. Additionally, some of the crops, technology and possibly religious knowledge that they brought with them remain staple crops and cultural highlights in Cuba to this day.

The second wave of people to migrate to the Caribbean islands arrived from the Orinoco region of Venezuela. These Saladoid people (500-250 BC), who were known for their ceramics and agriculture, came from the Orinoco drainage and river systems of South America's northeast coast (Wilson 1997: 5). Here an intimate connection between water, movement and migration is made obvious. Due to the trade winds and the gulf currents, travel by boat is easier to go north than south. Ocean currents join the trade winds west through the Caribbean sometimes reaching a velocity of 5 knots.

The Taino (AD 1000- 1492), an Arawak speaking people, are the people who were residents in Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico at the time of Columbus' voyage. According to Ortiz (1993) the Taino had brought the agricultural knowledge of the *conuco*, or small mound farm, which is still used today in many parts of the Caribbean. He continues to explain how "the Tainos left us many of our [Cuban] foods, especially vegetables and fruits like pineapple, the corn of the taínos, *boniato*⁵, tomato, peanut and yucca... now enjoyed in faraway continents by white people too" (1993: 11). Yucca, or cassava, was not only the staple crop for the Tainos, but remains a staple for Cubans and other Caribbean and American (South, Central and North) countries. Many plants, trees and fruits like the ones mentioned as well as *mamey*, *taonuco* and what many Cubans, particularly Afro-Cubans, consider sacred, the *ceiba*, come from the Taino language.

⁵ Boniato is like a white sweet potatoe.

John Kircher, author of *A Neotropical Companion: An Introduction to the Animals, Plants and Ecosystems of the New World Tropics* (1999), points out that the ceiba is one of the most common of Neotropical trees. He posits that this majestic tree probably originated in the American tropics, and dispersed naturally to West Africa (Baker 1983 in Kircher 1999) He continues to elucidate that the Mayans considered this tree sacred, and still today when farmers clear the land for slash and burn agriculture, often they will not fell the ceiba. In Cuba, the ceiba holds significant meaning for Yorùbá practitioners and Cuban laypeople alike. Every year on New Year's Eve, people congregate around the enormous ceiba tree located in Regla, just outside Habana. Additionally, under many ceiba, small parcels of offerings lie.

The Carib women particularly held special roles in their society. They were recognized for their matrilineal descent system, which maintained inheritance of rank through the female line, with females sometimes inheriting chief positions. The representations of the lineage's ancestors, called *zemis*, passed through the female line. *Zemis* are physical incarnations of gods, spirits or ancestors. They were used by families and villages to unify magico-religious institutions to "...help woman with child...many which speak, and others that make grow the things that they eat, and others that bring rain, and others that make the wind blow" (Arrom 1974:26). Women were both producers and distributors of certain goods that were high status like wooden stools, household objects, and "a thousand things of cotton" (Las Casas Keegan 1997: in 113).

Ortiz comments on the Taino woman's ability to weave cotton items. She made the undergarments for women to use, nets for the men to fish, and the *jamacas* from whence comes the renowned hammock—though no longer used as a bed for sleeping as it was and is in the Amazon of South America as well as in Mexico. Two of the technological advancements of the Taino include the *cibucán* and the *cunyaya*. The latter is still used by farmers to extract juice

(*ibid.*) Additionally, many concepts and words remain integral components of the contemporary Cuban's vocabulary. Some examples include the previously mentioned as well as *cacique*, *barbacoa* (barbecue), *canoa* (canoe), and *tabaco* (tobacco).

Elements of nature appear to have been intimately integrated into the Taino religion. One story about the *jurican*, the Taino word for a God of thunder and wind and our source of the word hurricane, speaks to the Taino understanding of nature and gods:

The Tainos will look up to the mountains as 'sleeping' or 'meditating' gods and will talk for generations of how for example the great god 'Yukiju' aka el Yunke, highest mountain in the island of Puerto Rico will fight 'Juracaan' which was the big god of the big storms. Today we know that a big elevation will affect the way an atmospheric system moves. Back then it was a battle between two powerful gods. (Onaway TrustThe Taino project).

The Ciboney, which is Arawakan for cave dweller, resided in the Greater Antilles including Cuba and Hispaniola. In the caves in Matanzas, Cuba—one of the key sites of this investigation—human remains have been found suggesting that people—possibly the Ciboney—were residing there. Bosch, a Caribbean historian, contends that the Ciboney were probably from the Arawakan line, and thereby originally from the Orinoco region in Venezuela (Bosch 2003: 43). The Caribs, like the Ciboney, were alive to witness the harsh realities of European colonialism.

Columbus

On 17 October 1492 during his first voyage, Christopher Columbus arrived on the island, and named it Isla Juana after Prince Juan, the heir apparent. Emilio Castelar (1892) describes Columbus' impressions of Cuba in the following terms:

Of all Columbus' 'discoveries,' Cuba stirred in him the deepest, most affecting emotions. He wrote in rapturous terms of "its streams strewn with the showered petals of the myriad flowers that festooned their banks, the beautiful mountain ranges that stretched not far but rose to lofty heights. The cool and aromatic groves, the yams that tasted like sweet chestnuts, the brightly plumaged birds and the inexhaustible aloes." Such enchantments led him to pronounce Cuba the "most beautiful land that eyes ever beheld." (in Onaway Trust).

Columbus' journal description of the Indians he met records their "Naked innocence and quick response to the influences of kindness rather than acts of force... Their hair, thick as a horse's mane, falls in long locks upon their shoulders. They are shapely of body and handsome of face. So ignorant of arms are they that they grasp swords by the blade! They are very gentle, without knowing what evil is, without killing, without stealing" (Castelar 1892 in Onaway Organization) .

The lives of the Taino and Ciboney residents were altered irrevocably as a consequence of the Spanish conquest. They were enslaved and their population dropped from an estimated sixty thousand in 1492 to approximately two thousand by 1550 (Brandon 1997:40). The story of Hatuey epitomizes the effects on the indigenous populations by the Spanish colonization of Cuba. In 1511, the Spanish conqueror Diego Velasquez, sailed from Hispaniola to Cuba. When he arrived, the Taino chieftain Hatuey, who had already witnessed Diego's acts of violence and massacre, nobly fought him to defend the island, using the tactic of attacking suddenly and then retreating to the hills. In time, though, the Spanish military besieged and defeated him. The Spanish Crown sentenced Hatuey to a public death, and he was burned alive at the stake. The Spanish priest, Bartolomé de las Casas, recorded the words of the chieftain to his people: "These tyrants tell us they adore a God of peace and equality, yet they usurp our land and enslave us. They speak of an immortal soul and of eternal rewards and punishments. They rob us, seduce our women and violate our daughters. Unable to match us in valour, these cowards cover themselves in iron that our spears cannot pierce." Subsequently, the Tainos were subjected to barbarous torture. As de las Casas described: "A village of around 2500 was wiped out. They [the Spaniards] set upon the Indians, slashing, disemboweling and slaughtering them until their blood ran like a river. And of those Tainos they kept alive they sent to the mines, harnessing them to

loads they could scarcely drag and with fiendish sport and mockery hacking off their hands and feet and mutilating them in ways that will not bear description" (Castelar 1892).

In 1550, the Indian slaves were freed and moved to independent communities on the periphery of major Cuban towns. There they did well, and during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they moved into the eastern and central regions of Cuba (Brandon 1997:40). Despite the common message that the Indians were completely exterminated in Cuba, some groups today hail their indigenous heritage, including holding workshops and conferences (The Onaway Trust).

Cuba's cultural modernity is integrally linked to its historical legacy, which includes its geological transformations, agricultural shifts, indigenous and African influences. Of these, African influences probably outweigh all of the others (Palmié 2002; Ortiz 1921,1950; Barnet 1986).

Historical Context of the Yorùbá in Africa

To understand Yorùbá religious practitioners in Cuba, it is necessary to go to the banks of the Niger River, where a nascent Yorùbá cosmology coalesced. Yorùbá is not a unitary, cohesive population, but a configuration of 50 politically diverse kingdoms, including the Egba, Ketu, Ijebu, and the Ife (Busse 2000). Although heterogeneous, Matibag (1996) argues (like Thornton 2002) that these populations share a similar language, dress, mythology, history and ritual symbolism.

Organized in a series of kingdoms with a complex social structure, the Yorùbá were guided under a theocratic autocracy where the *oba* (*ogba*) or king had absolute power over thousands of subjects through complex political systems and active trade networks. Their urban centers were some of the most densely populated in all of sub-Saharan Africa, and their sculptural art has been

compared to that of Europe's in the classical period (450 BCE to 476 CE) (Sanchez 1997; Smith 1969).

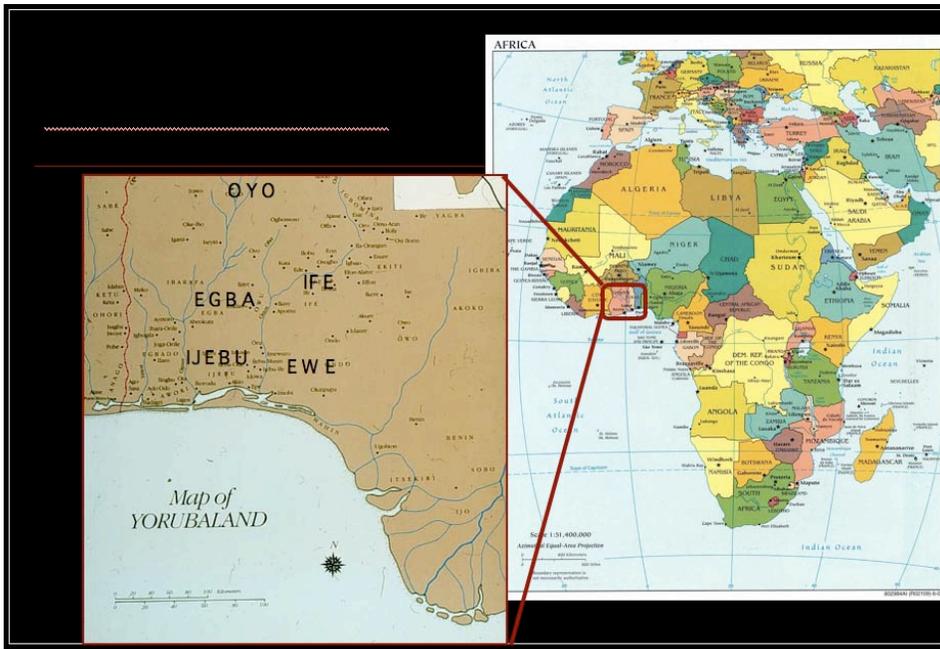


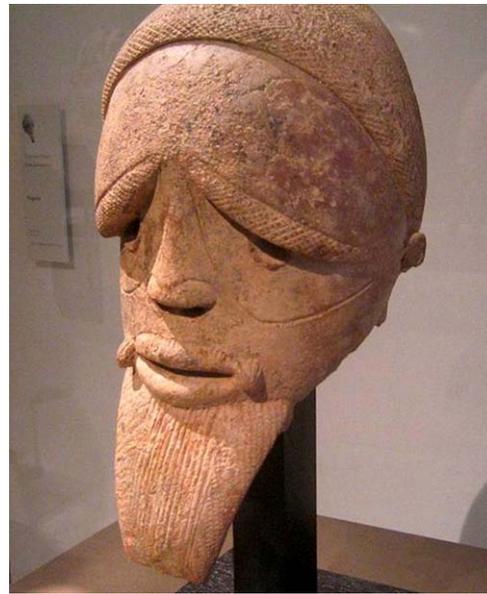
Figure 2-5. Map of Yorubaland in West Africa.



Figure 2-6. Map of Yorubaland in West Africa.



A.



B.

Figure 2-7. Examples of head busts from West Africa, now displayed in the Louvre, Paris

Particularly, Oyo was a hub of urban progress and market activity. In the 14th century its savannah plains was a hub of market exchange where commodities such as salt, copper, textiles, indigo, cowries and many other goods were traded. Commerce, crafts, cultivated crops and urban centers were typical in the tropical biomes of Western Africa. These biomes paralleled those of Cuba with its savannah grasslands, rainforests, mangroves and swamps. For instance, look at the following maps of the vegetation of Southwestern Nigeria and Western Cuba.

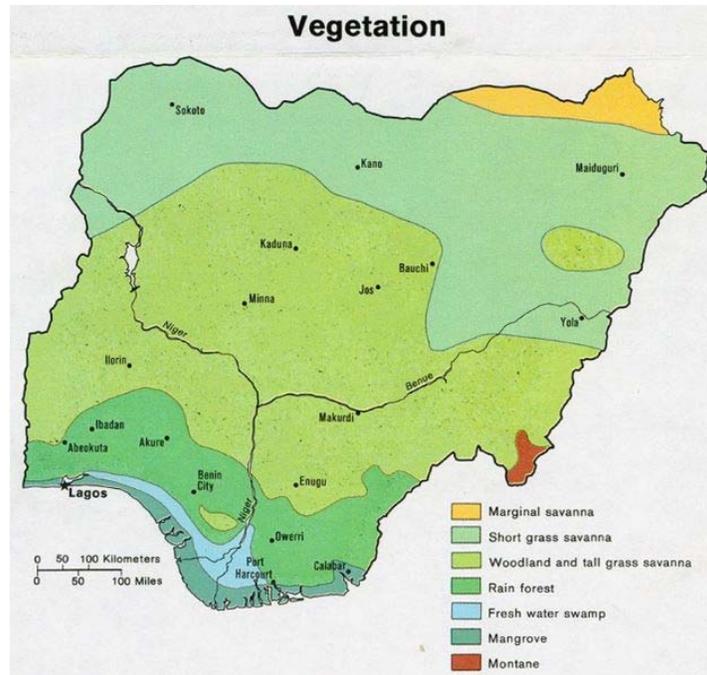


Figure 2-8. Map of vegetation areas in Nigeria.

Located in West Africa on the Gulf of Guinea, the terrain of the southern lowlands merge into central hills and plateaus including mountains in the southeast and plains in the north. The major river is the Niger, which flows southward through tropical rain forests and swamps to its delta in the Gulf of Guinea (CIA).

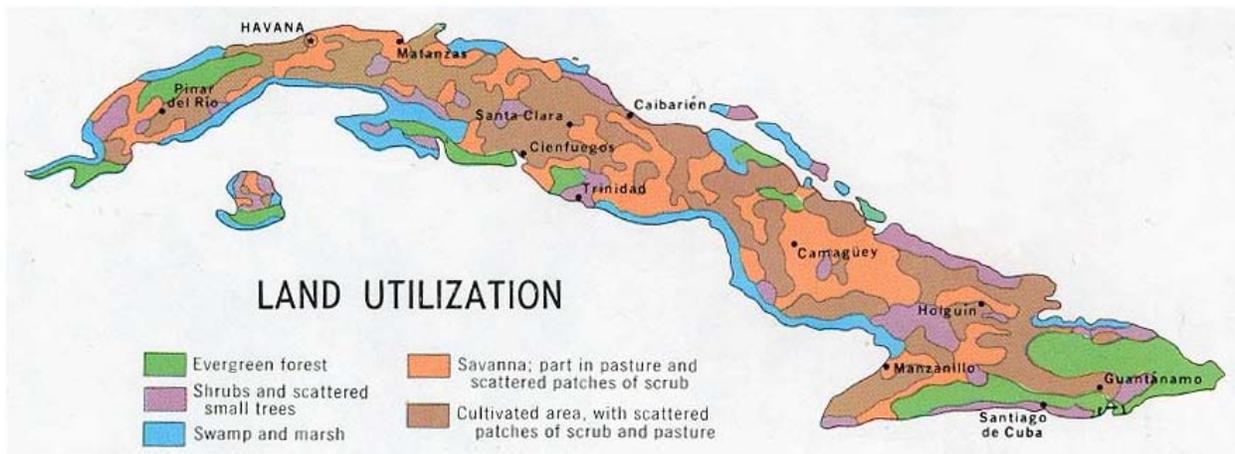


Figure 2-9. Map of vegetation in Cuba.

Similar to Western Cuba, which comprises savanna, coastal forests with swamps and marsh (University of Texas), the ecology of Nigeria comprises coastal forests, marshes and savanna inlands. According to John Thornton, “the combination of ocean and river routes defined the shape of the Atlantic zone” (1995: 15). The Niger River was considered by many Muslim writers and West African merchants as the “Nile of the Sudan,” while many Africans and outsiders alike conflated the Niger with merging rivers in Senegal, Gambia and the Benue into a single “Nile of the Blacks” connected at its final destination to the Nile of Egypt (Thornton 1995: 19). Although geographically not accurate, this conceptualization of riverine transportation is indicative of travel and therein trade. As Thornton indicates, “West Africans had a well-developed specialized maritime culture” (1995: 37). Because of the extensive trading routes and “commercial interconnections,” Thornton suggests, “cultural sharing and multilingualism would be widespread” (*Ibid*: 188).

Waterways and the Black Atlantic: Rivers Run to the Sea

The patterns of prevailing winds and ocean currents were critical to the formation of the black Atlantic. Pierre and Hugette Chaunu and Frédéric Mauro examining, respectively, the Spanish voyages from Seville to the Atlantic and the Portuguese navigation in the Atlantic, have both demonstrated that the customary trade routes, stopping points, and commercial developments were influenced primarily by these winds and currents (which are illustrated in the map below). This map is found on the *Burials at Sea* (accessed April 2010).

Most of the trade of market goods and intellectual ideas was based on the interconnections of rivers and coasts. What is now referred to as Guinea-Bissau, for instance, was a web of creeks and lagoons that connected the various parts of the country, and allowed for frequent communication between the Gambia in the north and Sierra Leone to the south.

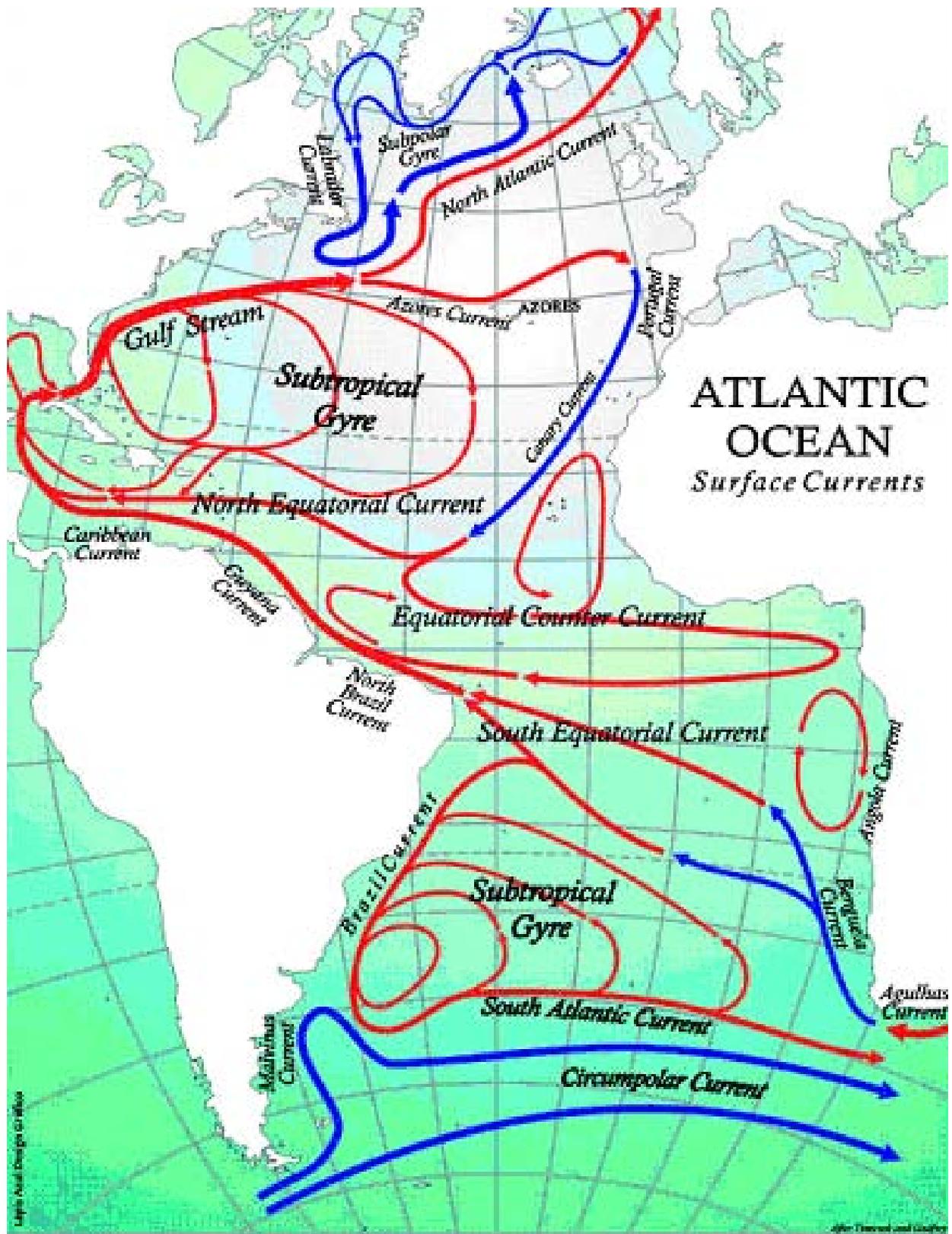


Figure 2-10. Map of ocean currents.

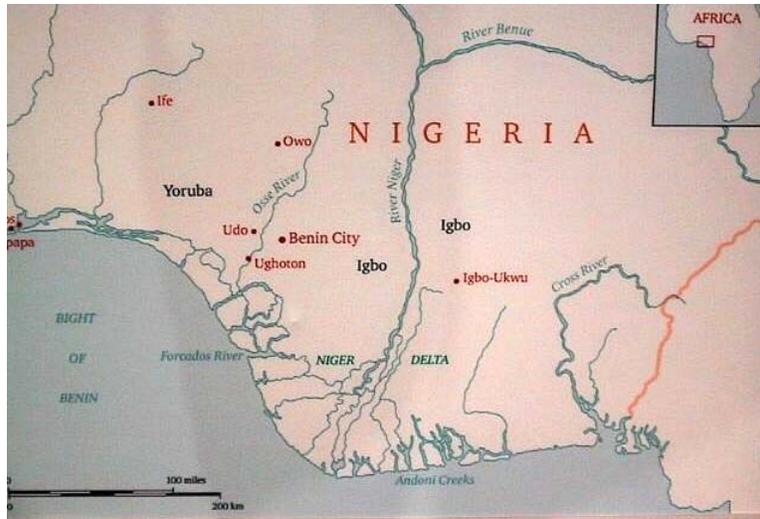


Figure 2-11. Prominent rivers and waterways of Yorùbáland.

Due to these water routes, extensive trade networks in West Africa had been set up since at least A.D. 1300 when the Yorùbá were carrying on trade with peoples of the north, exchanging cloth, kola nuts, shea butter, copper, iron tools, salt and people for sale as slaves within West Africa for products they needed (Zaslavsky 1999[1973]: 201 National Park Service).

Phillip Curtin estimates this trade to have been no more than 500–4000 “slaves” a year (1990:40–41):

From this trade and early West African slave trade by the Portuguese, a sizeable number of Africans ended up in Portugal and Spain. By the middle of the 16th century, 10,000 black people made up 10 percent of the population of Lisbon. Some had been manumitted. Some had purchased their freedom. Some were the offspring of African and Portuguese marriages and liaisons. Seville had an African population of 6000. These were some of the people accompanying Spanish explorers on the North American mainland. More importantly, this was the nascent beginning of the Transatlantic Slave Trade (Curtin 1990:40–11).

Thus, waterways facilitated the trade of fish, salt and agricultural products as well as art styles, religious items and lexicon (Thornton 2002: 190-191).



Figure 2-12. Map of rivers in West Africa: Senegal, Niger to the Benue

Hence, water was decisive in the creation of trade networks and thereby cultural exchange. Water transportation networks “brought the linguistically diverse people into close economic and cultural contact [which] tended to force linguistic accommodations” (Thornton 1995: 189;¹ African Studies Center) particularly among the three dominant zones of Upper Guinea, Lower Guinea and the Angola Coast. By the 1630s Yorùbá had emerged as a lingua franca along the coast from the Volta to Benin. Thus Yorùbá traditions and deities were revered on the coast even without obvious Yorùbá political domination. Bascom (1965:5) reminds us that the name Yorùbá was originally imposed by the Hausa or Fulani in reference to the people only from Oyo. Only later did Yoruba begin to include all the heterogenous Africans who spoke the Yorùbá language. Brandon points out that “[j]ust as Apulians, Sicilians, and Calabians all became Italians in the United States, Oyos, Egbas, Ijebus, and Ijeshas all became Lucumis in Cuba. Often Lucumi is heralded as the translation of ‘friends.’”

African Slavery and Enslaved Africans Forced to Migrate

Another African tradition was one of slavery. Though very distinct from what occurred with the African slave trade, the motivation for Africans to engage in slavery must be understood within the internal dynamics and the history of the domestic political economy. From at least as early as the 1400s, West Africans were implementing raids on neighboring lands and carrying off people who became their slaves. Land was not private property, so to increase wealth, West Africans acquired slaves. A relevant example of this process is with the Sapes, the early inhabitants of Sierra Leone, who were neither creating empires nor large states (Thornton 1992: 106). Instead, slaves were acquired through warfare to increase the ruler's income. Thus, Thornton argues that African participation in the slave trade was "voluntary and under the control of African decision makers" (1992: 125). Civil strife and wars fueled the slave trade. Moreover, the slave supply increased as a result of the heightened conflicts described in the next paragraph. The capture of people from wars and raids fed into the economic interests of transatlantic capital and exploitative labor needed for the increasing sugar plantations.

John Thornton, historian of Africa and the Atlantic particularly from the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries, argues that "the older anthropological tendency to see each ethnolinguistic group as a separate 'tribe' and to ignore such factors as multilingualism or nonlinguistic cultural sharing have tended to force the real diversity beyond its true limits" (Thornton 2002: 191). Thus, he asserts that at most three "truly culturally diverse areas [exist], and the seven subgroups within are often quite homogenous" (*Ibid*: 191-192). Moreover, he points out that the slave trade took certain regional and thereby cultural peoples more often than others—bringing people of similar backgrounds together. This is a particularly relevant point when discussing Yorùbá ecological knowledge in the diaspora.

He proves his argument through following the ship records of which ports they went to predominantly, and where they picked up enslaved Africans. He promulgates that the ships—in the interest of the ship captains—would only go to one or two⁶ ports in Africa.

Thornton continues his assertion that since only a couple of ports were used, “an entire ship might be filled, not just with people possessing the same culture, but with people who grew up together” (Thornton 2002: 195). Thornton sums up that Africans forced into migration may well have been able to communicate and thereby carry on their religious practices because: “...patterns of shipping and residence clearly put slaves of the same nation together” (Thornton 2002: 202).



Figure 2-13. Map of West Africa from 18th century⁷.

⁶ Thornton asserts that this would mostly happen on the Gold Coast since the ship could not be filled with gold, and thus this practice, called “coasting” was normally restricted to the Lower Guinea region (2002: 193).

The primary ports were located in the Bight of Benin, as shown in the following illustration.



Figure 2-14. Bight of Benin.

In the beginning of the 17th century, the Ewe invaded the region of Dahomey and neighboring kingdoms, like the flourishing Oyo, making the Yorùbá move to the Southeastern Nigerian coast. In the 18th century, various Fulani and Dahomey enacted war and freed themselves from tribute and servitude under the Oyo kingdom, where the Yorùbá were running a highly organized system of complex social and political structures and active trade networks including those linking some of the most densely populated urban centers in all of sub-Saharan Africa (Thornton 1992; Brandon 1997; Smith 1969).

When the Oyo Empire collapsed in the 19th century, the region went into civil strife. Due to the already implemented lines of trade, which coincided with those of slave trafficking, many chiefs, priests and royalty of the Oyo Empire were enslaved and sold to slave ships headed to the Caribbean. Thus, these wars turned many of the former masters into slaves, who were then sold en masse across the Atlantic to help with the expanding sugar industry in the Americas and the Caribbean at the beginning of the eighteenth century (Ortíz 1952-55; Courlander 1973:19; Sanchez 1997: 476). This is an important factor to consider because it reveals that many of the

Africans who were enslaved and brought to Cuba during the mid 1800s, were, on the whole, well-educated, particularly with specialized ritual knowledge since many in their homelands had filled a variety of religious roles from those of *babalawos*⁸ (high priests and specialists in divination) to those of musicians who had undergone the complex initiation rites required to play the sacred batá drums (Sanchez 1997:477). These were the people who founded and became the experts of religious traditions in Cuba. This point is vital to consider when analyzing the diasporic dispersion of Africans in Cuba, for the captives who were transported to Cuba included royalty of the Oyo Empire, and thereby highly educated in the spiritual responsibilities of priesthood including knowing the special songs and rhythms to communicate with the spirits.

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, at least 1.3 million Africans were enslaved and transported to Cuba (Casanova 1996). Cuban historian and economist Pérez de la Riva estimates that 85 percent of those Africans who were enslaved were introduced to Cuba after 1800, and about 45 percent of all the Africans who disembarked in Cuba after 1800 pertained to the line of Yorùbá⁹ and diverse tribes of Dahomey (cited in Casanova 1996:9).

Yet, some scholars dispute Thornton's conclusions, and instead assert that the regional variation of enslaved Africans was immense. For instance, Lopes Valdez (1992), an ethnologist from the Cuban Academy of Sciences, explains that:

Yorùbá, from whom bata drums came, were not the main ethnic group brought to Cuba, but their religious practices were ultimately the most widespread...The geographic area from which slaves were taken during the slave trade was enormous. Its northern bounds were from Senegal to the center of Africa (Lake Chad) to Kenya. Its southern borders were a line along the southern borders of Angola, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Mozambique. People were taken from both coasts and the central regions as well.

⁸ *Awo*, means knowledge in Yoruba, and *Baba* means Father. *Babalawo* signifies a person who is well-learned in the traditions of Yoruba religious knowledge. It holds similar prestige—due to the rigor of scholarship and initiation required—as the title of Ph.D. holds for people in the United States and Europe.

⁹ These were Yoruba of the linguistic sub-family Kwa, and less of the Tákua (Nupé) of the north of Yorùbá.



Figure 2-15. West Africans forcibly transported to western Cuba.

He continues to elucidate the four primary groups of Africans that came to Cuba: “Where Cuba's slaves were taken from in Africa varied over time. Four primary ethnic groups accounted for most of the Africans brought to Cuba were: Bantu 400,00, Yorùbá 275,000, Ibo/Ibibio/Ijaw 240,000, Ewe/Fon 200,000, Others 185,000” (Valdez 1992). The Bantu are mainly from the Congo, and introduced the religion Palo Monte to Cuba. According to Valdez, the Yorùbá were the second major ethnic group to arrive on Cuban soils. They were from southwestern Nigeria and mainly disembarked between 1820 to 1860s. They brought the religion on which this research is based, called Regla de Ocha or Santería. The related groups of Ibo, Ibibio and Ijaw—from southeastern Nigeria brought the Abakua secret society; they began to come around 1762. Lastly, the Ewe/Fon groups were from Dahomey, in what is now called Benin. They mainly arrived between 1750 and 1800, later invading the Yorùbá and selling them into slavery in the 1800s. With the Ewe/Fon came the religion called Regla Arara, which is mostly located in Matanzas, Cuba—and, according to Valdez, has been mostly assimilated by Santería. Valdez

notes that the Yorùbá religion became more widespread than the others, even though the Yoruba were not the most populous, because of this practice of assimilation. This tradition was based on a dynamic integration with other religions, as it allowed practitioners to follow more than one: including Palo Monte, Catholicism, Spiritism and Abakua membership. Hence, although Cuban culture and religion is a synthesis of Taino, Christian saints, Spanish Catholicism, complex spiritual and religious cosmology of various African religions brought across with slavery along with popular Folk Catholicism and Spiritism (Busse 2000: 33; Rodriguez 2004; Ortiz 1993, 1986; Barnet 2005; Lachateñeré 2005), the Yorùbá influence is said to far exceed that of any other. For the sake of simplicity, this investigation mostly refers to Yorùbá (including the cognates of Lucumí, Santería, Regla de Ocha and Orisha). Yet, in reality, many practitioners integrate Spiritism,¹⁰ Catholicism, and Palo Monte¹¹, as the narratives of later chapters indicate. Consequently, though Santería can be seen as the primary religion of Cuba (González-Wippler 1996: 2), practitioners regularly employ the concepts and practices of other belief-systems (including what can be glossed over as “Western science”) to adjust to their families and their needs.

In sum, waterways inside of Africa were crucial in the development of Yorùbáland—one of West Africa’s first cultures and great civilizations. And, as water united the South American Indigenous world to the Caribbean, water also united and tied people of African descent to the Atlantic world. Thus, skills of river navigation, agricultural techniques, and religious prowess including deftness of divination, precision in drum rhythms, and knowledge of chants and stories were transported along with the people and their spirits.

¹⁰ Based on mid-nineteenth century, French scholar, Allan Kardec’s *Spiritist Codification*, Spiritism became tightly interwoven with Afro-Cuban religions.

¹¹ Religion brought by the enslaved Africans from the Congo that also works with natural elements (*palo* refers to a branch or stick).

Cuba's prime geographical location, between Europe and the colonies in the Caribbean and Latin America, led to it becoming the stop off point where food was stored for Spanish colonial traffic. As Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz explains, "at the beginning of the sixteenth century...the conquistadors' gold-mining activities and the cultivation of yucca fields and stock-raising to supply cassava bread and dried meat for the conquerors' expeditions took preeminence" (Ortiz [1947] 1995: 5). Since Matanzas and Havana housed the major ports for colonial traffic and for all ships coming from Europe and Africa, these provinces—especially Matanzas—in the western region of Cuba also hold the cradle of Yorùbá religion in Cuba.

Colonial Cuba: Aquifers, Agriculture, and Migration

The water conditions of Western Cuba are a critical factor in understanding Yorùbá practitioners in Cuba. Due to the geological, soil and climate conditions including the karstic terrain, tropical weather and nitrogen rich soils, the Western region of Cuba became the hub of the country's agricultural production. Additionally, since that region housed the country's two prominent ports, it also became the primary entrance for immigrants, both voluntary and involuntary. Therefore, water, soils and rock are fundamental to the formation of Cuba's geological and human history.

Additionally, the Aquifers¹²—though often unacknowledged—are critical to Western Cuba's historical, social and political formation, especially in respect to the masses of West Africans who were forcibly moved to this region. Most of the underground aquifers are karstic¹³, and they are vital because many of the above ground rivers and small streams do not flow during the dry season (from November to April). The city of Matanzas (and many other cities) are

¹² An aquifer is a geologic formation of porous rock or sand that holds water underground.

¹³ Karstic refers to the predominance of limestone rock, which is porous rock that is able to hold large bodies of water underground.

supplied from karstic aquifers as are the agricultural and industrial centers in the province of Matanzas (e.g., sugar-cane mills, thermoelectric plants, cement factories, and rum factories). Since more than 66% of Cuba is formed by karstic rocks, the relationship between karstic environments and Cuban industry is vital to examine.

In Cuba, about 44,000 sq km are “naked karst” or covered with thick layers of soils, mainly ferralitic in mountainous and flat zones. About 18,000 sq km of karstified rocks are covered with red and brown soils and about 8700 sq km are under thick soils of diverse types. Yet, the Southern Plain of La Habana-Matanzas is a region made up mainly of organogenic limestone, marls and calcareous marls from the Miocene-Quaternary, revealing a naked karst that at best is covered with thin to medium soils. As Indian physicist and environmental rights activist Vandana Shiva (2008) affirms in *Soil not Oil: Environmental Justice in an Age of Climate Crisis*, scholars must call attention to the soils of a region, and not limit an understanding of modernity to merely its oil-based industrialization. These soils of Western Cuba, albeit thin in depth, are highly productive. Therefore, they have made up the principal zones of agricultural production on the island, and therein required significant human labor. This understanding of the relationship between the soils and agriculture in Western Cuba is noteworthy to understand African diaspora forced migration in Cuba, since many of the Africans were brought to help with specific agricultural needs, particularly sugar production, but also tobacco.

Western Cuba as Agricultural Hub for Tobacco and Sugar

The first peoples smoked tobacco, or *cohiba* as the Taino called it, not to be confused with *cohoba* (a psychoactive powder ground from certain seeds taken by caciques to help cure illness and communicate with spirits and ancestors). When the Spanish arrived, they were enticed, and Matanzas became the central location to cultivate the first commercial crop of the region.

Western Cuba became an agricultural hub. And, as Ortiz asserts, “[t]obacco and sugar are the two most important figures in the history of Cuba” (Ortiz [1947] 1995: 4). Throughout his book, *Cuban Counterpoints*, Ortiz refers to sugar and tobacco as metaphoric persons, highlighting their characters, contributions and causalities on Cuba society and ecology. Though they are both plants grown in Cuba, the differences in their biology, cultivation techniques, processing and marketing have made their distinctions “reflected in the history of the Cuban nation from its very ethnological formation to its social structure, its political fortunes, and its international relations” (Ortiz [1947] 1995: 4).

He notes that this is in part due to the climate and location of Cuba. He elucidates that the climate for sugarcane to be able to grow is determined by the isothermal lines of 68 degrees, and the zone that is able to produce sugar lies between latitude 22 degrees North (Havana) and 22 degrees South (Rio de Janeiro). He continues to expand the discussion of why Cuba’s environment is the best suited for cultivating sugar cane even though all of the West Indies is located within this geographical region since, “[i]n no other part of the world do sun, rainfall, land, and winds collaborate as they do there to produce sugar in those little natural sugar mills of the cane stalks” (Ortiz [1947] 1995: 7). As for tobacco, Ortiz explains that the soil and climate advantages are so evident in the Cuban product, that there is no reason even to expound upon them.

Fernando Coronil, a Venezuelan anthropologist working in the United States who wrote the introduction to the Duke University Press edition of Ortiz’s book, *Cuban Counterpoints*, aptly summarizes how Ortiz unpacks some of the socio-political significance behind agricultural transformations of the western region of Cuba:

As metaphorical constructs condensing a multiplicity of meanings, tobacco and sugar stand for themselves, as agricultural products, as well as for their changing conditions of

production. Tobacco represents a native plant from which is made a product of great individuality and uniqueness, but also relations of production marked by domestic control over the labor process, individual craftsmanship, and the flexible rhythms of seasonal time. Sugar, on the other hand, represents not only a generic product derived from an imported plant, but also stands for industrial capitalist relations of production that reduce people to commodities, homogenize social relations and products, and subject labor to the impersonal. ([1947] 1995: xxii).



Figure 2-16. A Painting of tobacco fields in Matanzas.

Faye V. Harrison (2007: 80), who wrote an entry on Fernando Ortiz in *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* explains:

Through the poetic deployment of these entities as metaphors, he offered a holistic analysis of these paradigmatic commodities as both material objects and socially constructed historical actors in a world shaped at once by human practice and the wider structural forces that constrain it. Critical of reductionist interpretations of Cuba's colonial and neo-colonial experience, Ortiz's contrapuntal method offered an alternative to the dominant canons of anthropology and history as established within the Northern Hemisphere.

Sugar required land and lots of slaves. The slaves included whites, blacks, Moors, black Africans, Chinese, and others (Ortiz [1947] 1995: 60). Some of the "others" included *Ladinos*. When the early Spanish explorers came to Cuba, so did free, Spanish-speaking Africans, known as *Ladinos* in the literature. The famous, now classic book on the litigation history of interracial marriage and mating in 19th Century Cuba—Verena Martinez-Alier's *Marriage, Class and*

Colour in 19th Century Cuba gives insights on this population. Examples of Ladinos include the al Moravids and al Mohads who were Islamized Africans of Berber and Arab heritage, commonly referred to as Moors; they integrated aspects of their North African culture within a developing Spanish culture from 711-1492 (Daniel 2005: 121). Yet most Ladinos, or Africans in Spain, originated in the Kongo. They came to the Iberian Peninsula with the Portuguese. The Spanish appreciated that the Ladinos were Catholic converts with some knowledge of Spanish customs and language. Some of these people had been manumitted, born free or had purchased their freedom, so Spain first sent these free Christian Ladinos to supply labor and populate the “New Spain” (National Park Service, accessed 10 Sept 2009). That these Ladinos had been Christianized to varying degrees was important to King Ferdinand, who initiated the African slave trade on September 3, 1501. In a letter to the Governor of Hispaniola, he said:

In view of our earnest desire for the conversion of the Indians to our Holy Catholic Faith, and seeing that, if persons suspect in Faith went there, such conversion might be impeded, we cannot consent to the immigration of Moors, heretics, Jews, re-converts or persons newly converted to our Holy Faith, unless they are Negro or other slaves who have been born in the power of Christians who are our subjects and nationals and carry out our express permission (Williams 1971:41–42).

Afro-Spaniards came with the first wave of European contact along with several other Spanish cultural segments of regional and class segments (e.g., Andalucians, Canarios, Castellanos, Asturianos, Gallegos, and Catalans) (Daniel 2005: 121).

Additionally, the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) and the Wars of Independence in Spanish America (1810-1825) encouraged many enslaved and freed Africans and Afrodescendants to travel to Cuba and other Caribbean countries like Puerto Rico, Martinique, Guadeloupe and Dominica as well as Louisiana in the southern United States and back to France. Seven thousand *affranchis* (free people of color), slaves and French refugees from the former French colony of Saint Dominigue came into Cuba between 1803 and 1808. Additionally, people

of African descent migrated from Louisiana and Florida to Cuba as Michele Reid depicts in her dissertation, *Negotiating a Slave Regime: Free People of Color in Cuba, 1844-1868*:

The island's free population of African descent increased rapidly throughout the first half of the nineteenth century through a variety of ways. Immigration, involuntary or voluntary, served as one stimulus. In 1763, at the end of the Seven Years' War between Spain, Britain and France, the Spanish Crown relinquished its Florida territory to Britain. The geopolitical exchange forced Spain to evacuate over three thousand people from the region. The Spanish government relocated the bulk of these refugees, eighty- four families, to a new settlement in the Matanzas countryside of Cuba, popularly called known as Ceiba Mocha. Among the evacuees were four free *pardo* and nine free *moreno* families. (Reid 2004: 34)...Subsequent territorial shifts renewed migratory movements of *libres de color* to Cuba when the United States gained control over Florida (1821) and Louisiana (1803). British Florida lasted for twenty years, before being returned to Spanish control in 1783. The colony remained under Spanish rule until 1821, when it was sold to the United States. Free individuals of color, such as *pardo* Juan Romero, recalled relocating to the island when St. Augustine, Florida "became the United States."¹⁴ Similarly, the transfer caused families, like Tomás and Agustina Álvarez and their young son to leave St. Augustine. They reestablished themselves in Havana, where the Álvarez's son Tomás, became a tailor and served in Havana's *pardo* militia.¹⁵ *Libres de color* from Louisiana also resettled in Havana. For instance, Antonio Merlin, a *moreno libre* and a native of New Orleans, made his living as blacksmith in Cuba.¹⁶ These circum-Caribbean relocations demonstrated the mobility and viability of free men and women of African descent in their adopted homeland. (Reid 2004: 14).

The slave trade to Cuba began earlier and lasted longer than in the rest of the Americas/ Caribbean. While Africans did not arrive in the U.S. until 1619, and Brazil in 1538, the slaves—not *ladinos*—were brought from Africa to Cuba as early as 1521. The trade ended in the U.S. in the 1860s and in Brazil in the 1850s, but in Cuba lasted until the late 1870s (Valdez 1992)—despite the fact that slavery had been abolished in 1807. In Haiti, by contrast, the slave trade had ended in 1791 with the Revolution.

¹⁴ Juan Romero to Cuba Captain General, Havana, 3 May 1844, ANC-AP, Leg. 140, Exp. 12.

¹⁵ Tomás Álvarez to Cuba Captain General, Havana, 30 April 1844, ANC-AP, Leg. 140, Exp. 31.

¹⁶ Antonio Merlin to Cuba Captain General, Havana, 17 May 1844, ANC-AP, Leg. 140, Exp. 19.

In 1828, Cuba produced more sugar than all of the West Indies; and the base of the industry was slave labor (Turner 2000:46¹⁷). Thus, with the help of primarily African labor, mechanized technology and international craving, Cuba began to control the international market on the trade of sugar. The 1800s was a pivotal epoch for Cuba: “Between 1815 and 1840, sugar exports more than tripled, growing from 45,396 tons to 161,248 tons. Between 1834 and 1839, the 35,000 European immigrants and 27,000 enslaved Africans arrived in Cuba.”

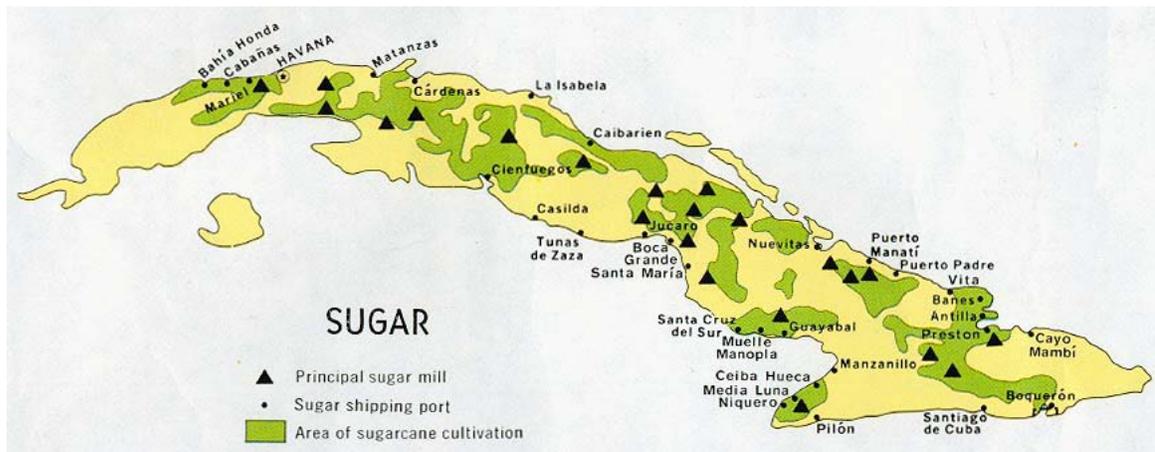


Figure 2-17. Map of Cuba illustrating the areas of sugarcane cultivation.

Western Cuba’s rich sugar district in Sabanilla, Matanzas held many of the sugar plantations like: the *Triumvirato* sugar plantation, the neighboring *Ácana* plantation, the *Concepción* plantation, the *San Lorenzo* and the *San Miguel* plantations. Matanzas was one of the regions that saw intensive development of sugar plantations during the colonial era. Consequently, many enslaved Africans were imported to support the sugar industry, particularly during the first half of the nineteenth century. For example, in 1792 there were 1900 slaves in Matanzas, roughly 30% of its population. In 1817, the slave population of Matanzas had grown to 10,773, comprising nearly 50% of the overall population. By 1841, 53,331 slaves made up

¹⁷Turner, Mary. 2000. Fuerza de trabajo china contratada en Cuba (1847-1874). *Del Caribe*. Casa del Caribe Santiago de Cuba. No. 32: 46-52.

62.7% of the population of Matanzas. Census figures for 1859 put the Matanzas slave population at 104,519. Matanzas was the site of several slave insurrections and plots, including the infamous Escalera conspiracy (discovered in late 1843). Due to the high number of both slaves and, importantly, free Afro-Cubans in Matanzas, the retention of African traditions is especially strong there. In 1898, Matanzas became the location of the first action in the Spanish/American War. American Navy vessels bombarded the city on April 25th 1898, just after the beginning of the war. The Wars for Cuban Independence were particularly important for people of color, since they earned prestige as military officers, and they were fighting for their own independence as well as the independence from colonialism. Antonio Maceo is a prime example.

Free People of Color in Cuba and Livelihoods

In addition to the free people of color who migrated to Cuba, enslaved Africans manumitted and became free once they were there. These free people of color made up three thousand four hundred people or twenty percent of the industry's labor (Reid 2004: 38). Hence, the following section explores the lives of *libres de color* or free people of African descent in Cuba, beginning with those people who migrated to Cuba of their own accord as immigrants and then the Africans who came in bondage but eventually became free while in Cuba through mechanisms of manumission including self-purchase. Next, this section details some of the livelihoods and the economic sector that free people of color occupied. After an analysis of some of the impacts of *libres de color* on the politics of the nation, this section outlines some of the influences they had on the culture of Cubanness. In summary, although most accounts of Afro-Cubans do not integrate an examination of free people of color, limiting their analyses to the Africans who arrived in Cuba through chains of bondage and remained slaves, free people of African descent in Cuba are an integral aspect of Cuban society, religion, culture and history.

Manumission, Self-purchase

In addition to immigration, the free population of color in the first half of the nineteenth century grew due to Spanish-Cuban legislation concerning slavery. As early as 1526, a Royal Decree allowed slaves in Cuba to buy their freedom (Valdez 1992). Through both manumission and self-purchase (or *coartación*), enslaved Africans and people of various degrees of African descent were able to become free Cubans of color (*libres de color*). Since Spanish law recognized the right to own property and make contracts, enslaved men and women were able to sell their services as cook, coachman, tailor, midwife and other trades, and keep their salaries (Reid 2004). In 1774, 170,783 “souls” were broken down into the following:

Table 2-1. Population figures for 1774.

	Men	Woman	Total
White	55 152	40 000	95 576
Free of color	16 152	14 695	30 847
Enslaved	28 771	15 562	44 533
Total of color			75 380

Furthermore, according to Cuban colonial policy under Spanish rule, Afro-Cubans were able to buy their freedom after seven years of servitude. Thus, by the mid-19th century, free people of color formed 1/6 of the population (Murphy 1993 in Busse 2000; Reid 2004). The following chart is based on Kiple’s Blacks in Colonial Cuba and Lachatañeré’ information (in Reid 2004 and Lachatañeré 2005).

Free people of color in Cuba embodied a powerful contradiction in societies that maintained slavery: “they were not white and free or black and slave...[a]s W.E.B. Du Bois, Paul

Table 2-2. Population figures for free people of color from 1792-1841.

Date	Total Population of enslaved Africans	Total Population of free people of color	Total Population of white	% of free of total Cuban population
1792		54,152		19.8 of 272,301
1817		114,058		20.6 of 553,033
1827	M W 183,390 103,652 Total: 286,942	M W 51,962 54,532 Total: 106,494	M W 168,653 142,398 Total: 311,051	15.1 of 704,487
1841	M W 281,250 152,245 Total: 436,495	M W 75,703 77,135 Total: 152,838	M W 227,114 191,147 Total: 412,618	15.2 of 1,007,624

Gilroy¹⁸, and other scholars of race and identity in colonial and slave societies of the Americas suggest, free people of color were entrenched in a realm of duality” (Reid 2004: 65). One example would be José Antonio Aponte. Aponte illustrates what Kondo (1990) and Wagner (1991) proffer with their scholarship on single persons holding multiple identities that must be historically and socially contextualized to be understood. Aponte was a carpenter, retired military officer, and leader of a *cabildo de nación*. Yet, as a person of color in colonial Cuba, he was still subjected to legal restrictions. For instance, legislation negated the possibility that *libres de color* could hold positions that were “designated ‘learned’ professions and civil positions, such as government bureaucrats, lawyers, doctors, priests, and pharmacists” (Reid 2004: 65). Nonetheless, holding a position as a military officer and being a leader of a *cabildo* assured prestige and stature.

¹⁸ W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam, 1989 [1903], 2-3; Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993)

Caibildos de Nación in Cuba: Ethnic Congregations

In terms of transmission of knowledge and customs, enslaved Africans, free Africans and miscegenated, culturally creolized Afro-Cubans often shared customs in a hierarchically organized *cabildo*, or “*cabildos de nación*” as they were known and legislated from the Spanish government. According to Spanish law, Afro-Cubans, like Spanish people, were obliged to belong to mutual aid societies called *cabildos*. *Cabildo* membership was based on ethnicity, and it was “a socio-religious and cultural, mutual aid organization for free and slave men and women of African descent” (Reid 2004:75; see also Cabrera 1954:24; Ortiz 1921: 3-16; Sanchez 1997: 477). At these *cabildos*¹⁹, which had their own governing body and place to meet, old residents and new arrivals carried out traditional, religious ceremonies, as well as relaxed and played together. Thus, these *cabildos*²⁰ offered group identity, ethnic cohesion and united enslaved Africans with free women and men of African descent in Cuba (Reid 2004: 75). In Cuba, the hub of Afro-Cuban *cabildos* was located in Matanzas.

¹⁹ Deschamps Chapeaux, *El negro en la economía habanera*, 177. For a detailed discussion of *cabildos de nación*, see Fernando Ortiz, “Los cabildos afro-cubanos,” *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 16 (Jan- Feb 1921): 10-11, Howard, *Changing History*, 21.

²⁰ Not only does Thornton argue that slave ships would often have large numbers of people from similar backgrounds due to African systems of riverine trade and the slave ship system of going to three primary ports, but the laws in Cuba provided fecund soil for cultural and religious knowledge transmission among its adherents. Unlike their English counterparts, Spanish and Portuguese plantation owners who housed and controlled much of the lives of enslaved Africans, encouraged the development of ethnic factions within their enslaved work force. Encouraging factions along ethnic lines was meant to maintain divisions so a pan-ethnic mass would not unite and revolt. In addition, the Spanish colonists created mirror institutions to their own ethnic clubs. Since, they came from Galicia, Vizcaya, Asturias, Andalucía, and the Canary Islands, and spoke Gallego, Catalan, and Basque, as well as the official Castillian Spanish, each group had its own social clubs and mutual aid societies based on ethnic, regional and linguistic characteristics (Canizares 1999: 24). By 1568, there were already documented African clubs called *cabildos* in Havana. The *cabildos* exemplify Strathern’s discernment between the political, social and the individual for Yorùbá diaspora, as well as highlights Bourdieu’s argument that the three cannot be delineated as completely separate, instead, political, spiritual, social, and individual are integrated. The individual then is not only a slave or a free person of color (*libre de color*), but as Wagner (1991) posits, the self a continually changing, fractal, plural, and contextual person—not merely a singular, static individual.

Matanzas and Western Cuba

Matanzas refers to one of the fourteen provinces of Cuba as well as a port-based city on the Northeastern coast on all three sides of the Bay of Matanzas. This bay jets deep into the land mass and is the recipient of three above-ground rivers (i.e., Rio Yumurí, San Juan, and Canímar) that flow through the city limits, and the reason that one of its names is the City of Bridges.



Figure 2-18. Bridge Over the Yumurí River, Museum de Sauto.



Figure 2-19. Aerial view of Matanzas and three of its bridges.



Figure 2-20. Bridge Over the Yumurí River.

Matanzas was and is a major port, and thereby the entrance to many of the migrations of people, animals and plants to come to Cuba. The Indigenous had called the bay Guanima when in 1508 Sebastián de Ocampos wrote down his sighting. It was renamed the Bahía de Matanzas to signify the massacre of a group of Spaniards during early indigenous rebellions.



Figure 2-21. Guaníma turned Matanzas Bay.

The name Matanzas is Spanish for “massacre,” and refers to an alleged slaughter at the port of the bay during which thirty Spanish soldiers were crossing one of the rivers to attack a camp of first peoples on the other shore. According to the story, since the soldiers didn’t have any boats, they solicited some native fishermen to bring them across. Yet, once they reached the middle of the river, the fishermen flipped the boats. The Spanish soldiers drowned due to their heavy metal armor.

On 25 September 1690, the Spanish King commanded that the bay and the port of Matanzas be populated. On 12 October 1693, the Captain General and Governor of Cuba, el mariscal Severino de Manzaneda, founded the municipality and called it San Carlos y San Severino de Matanzas.

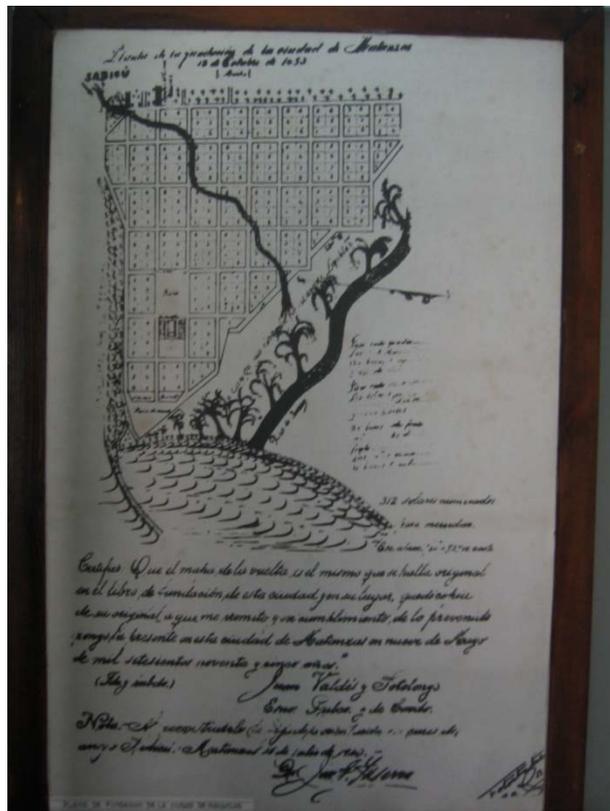


Figure 2-21. Map of the founding of Matanzas City, Museum de Sauto.

Subsequently, thirty families who came from the Canary Islands founded the town. Afterward, this port became the main stopping point since it was geographically ideal to house the pigs, goats, and other supplies to be able to host the Spanish fleets as they traversed between “Old” and “New World.” Later, during the colonial era (mainly 1800s), Matanzas was one of the regions that was intensively developed for sugar plantations due to its climate, soils, and position by the ports. Consequently, as this chapter has briefly discussed, many enslaved Africans and free Africans were enlisted to support the sugar industry with their lives. Indeed, Matanzas only began to flourish in the 1820s, when the large sugar mills began to be constructed, and enslaved Africans were brought directly to the Castillo de San Severino. (As of 2009, this castle/prison is now a museum dedicated to learning about Africans in Cuba.)



Figure 2-22. Photo of San Severino Fortress (currently the Route of the Slaves Museum) in 2006.



Figure 2-23. A photo of two cells where slaves and later prisoners were kept at the fortress. From 1792 until 1841, the slave population grew from approximately 30% of Matanzas' population to about 62.7% (i.e., 1900 people to 53,331 enslaved Africans). By 1859, census figures show the slave population at 104,519²¹, ²². These figures do not represent the significant number of free people of color in Matanzas.

By the 1850s, Matanzas was the second largest city of Cuba, and known as the “Athens of Cuba” for its rich culture of music, dance, theatre and much more. For example, Dámaso Pérez Prado is from Matanzas, and is credited as the king of mambo.



Figure 2-24. Sauto Theatre in Matanzas City.

²¹ In 1817, the Matanzas' slave population had increased to 10,773 enslaved Africans.

²² Bergad, Laird W. *Cuban Rural Society in the Nineteenth Century: The Social and Economic History of Monoculture in Matanzas*. Princeton University Press, 1990.

Thus, if one is to understand the history of Matanzas, “it is impossible not to take into account the development of its black population, because it has played a determining role in all of its economic, social, political and cultural future”²³ (5). Matanzas was known for being the epicenter of the Cuban slave-based sugar economy and the cradle of African traditions. Scholars and practitioners alike claim Matanzas as *el nido* or the cradle of Afro-Cuban religion, particularly Yorùbá religion. It is a hemispheric seat of African culture, with many temple-houses and myriad music groups.

Matanzas City: Rhythms of Waters, Sacred Forests and Spirits

Significantly, African spirits came over with African bodies. And due to the more fluid and accepting character of Yorùbá religion along with the collapse of the Oyo Empire, the implementation of a sugar plantation economy, and Cuba’s geographic and geological advantages, Matanzas became a center of Afro-Cuban cultural expression. This means that the forest, the rivers, and the ocean that abut this urban center are not merely biophysical, nor simply natural resources, but they also embody spiritual subjects. Thus, though this chapter ends with the significance of Cuba’s historical geography tied to its economics and politics, the bulk of my research highlights the import of Afro-Cuban epistemology, which learns from and interacts with the spirits of the forest, the ocean and the rivers with distinct and specific rhythms, dance movements and divination techniques, which aide mental and physical healing through not only ethnopharmacology, but also through the ability to communicate and invoke the spirits. This ecological knowledge and its transmission is what I propose is significant to tropical conservation and development conversations.

²³ “Recorriendo la historia de su Matanzas, fundada en 1693, es imposible dejar de adentrarse en el desarrollo de su población negra, porque ella ha jugado un papel determinante en todo su devenir económico, social, político y cultural. (p5)

Cuba has a powerful history that is integrally tied, historically, geographically, politically and spiritually to its relations with others, which mostly occurred via water transport. In order to convey a bit more of the complexity of the history and thereby the modernity of Yorùbá diaspora practitioners, this chapter has done an historical geographic excavation of some of the geological, biological and human marks of Cuban lives. Western Cuba's geographic structures demonstrate geomorphological alterations and relations, from the continental drift through some of the major tectonic and neotectonic geological alterations. Consequently, this region holds artifacts that illustrate the biological (flora and fauna) diversity from the Eocene Age and the Pleistocene as well as remnants of the first settlements of travelers. Matanzas, also known as the "Athens of Cuba," not only has caves that hold these artifacts, but it also holds human settlements and cultural production that represent Amerindian, African and Iberian heritage. Particularly, the black populations of Matanzas have had a determining influence on its economics, cultural production, and religious manifestations.

[Object 2-3. Matanzas photostory \(.mov, 57 MB Quicktime required\)](#)

The next chapter examines how religion, nature, and culture have been constructed in the academic canons to contextualize how black histories have been conceived and represented. Then, we can return to Matanzas and western Cuba and more fully comprehend and appreciate Yorùbá-derived ecological knowledge through a more appropriate method of evocative ethnography.

CHAPTER 3 CONSTRUCTING THE STUDY OF RELIGION AND NATURE: QUESTIONING CONVENTIONAL PARADIGMS

Through understanding not just the names and classifications but additional ways of knowing the environment, I intend to further the fields of tropical conservation and development, African diaspora studies, religion and nature, ecological anthropology, and spiritual or sacred ecology through an exploration of Yorùbá religion and ecology in Cuba. I intend to accomplish this through the use of a set of research techniques that include cognitive and visual tools. We as scholars must find culturally appropriate methods to interpret African diaspora ecological knowledges. Researchers need to acknowledge multiple perspectives and identities within their methodological frameworks (Rojas 2000; Schmink 1999; Feldstein and Jiggins 1994; Harrison 1998, 1997, 1995; Boserup 1971). This allows us to improve our understanding of shifting, multisited, and multivocal landscapes (Harrison 2008; Appadurai 1991, 1996; Marcus 1995), especially concerning human-nature relationships (Merchant 1996, 1992; Shiva 1993, 1989; Haraway 1991).

To improve our understanding of local, sometimes called “traditional” ecological knowledges, research should not be limited to taxonomic, categorical and hierarchical lists comparing names of plants. Nor should it be limited to obtaining “local knowledge” in Western scientific form (e.g., Zarger and Stepp 2004; Berlin 1992; Majnep and Bulmer 1977; Berlin et al. 1977; Conklin 1957) where *traditional* gets translated as ancient or indigenous, *knowledge* as informed deductively through empirical tests and written texts, and *nature* understood through assumptions based on a priori human/nature and mind/body ontological separations (Latour 2004; Bateson 2002; Ingold 2000; Descola and Palsson 1996). [say again in Chapter 9]

Instead, scholars must examine the unique knowledges and ways of knowing that locals have about their environment (Meffee and Carroll 1997; Berkes 1999). Such knowledges include

distinct processes of learning about and interacting with the ecosystems they inhabit, sometimes perceived as extended community (G. Harvey 2005; Oelschlaeger 2005, 1994; York 2003; Morrison 2000; Apffel-Marglin 1998; Callicott 1997,1990; Seed et al. 1988; Leopold 1949). For example, Yorùbá practitioners in Cuba follow a religion that integrates biophysical, human and metaphysical components into an intersubjective cosmos and conversation. Through this embodied way of knowing the world, Yorùbá diaspora practitioners communicate with trees, plants, animals, spirits, ancestors and orishas (i.e., divinities) using salutations, songs, dances, and divinations.

This chapter seeks to expose some of the distinct ways that academic scholars including natural scientists, anthropologists and religious studies professionals, have dissected nature from religion and religion from science, disregarding the ecological knowledges that African-derived heritage may proffer.

In recent literature scholars are beginning to recognize that the concepts of “religion” “nature” and “science” are constructed, whether enacted in an academic setting, a religious one or in a more secular cultural one; yet few scholars have pointedly examined the role of the effect of this construction on understanding African diaspora ecological knowledge¹. By addressing the nuanced processes of how Western scholars have created not only the previously mentioned disciplines, but also delimited what is appropriate as subject matter and methodology within those disciplinary confines, I hope to illustrate the usefulness of understanding multiple perspectives. Thus, I offer an analysis of some of the genealogical roots of the study of Religion

¹ I alternate between using knowledge and knowledges. In its singular form, I aim to highlight that religious conceptions of nature should be understood within a framework of local ecological knowledge, and not demeaned as merely belief. Yet, I also employ the plural term knowledges to recognize the multiple interpretations and expressions of this knowledge. And to recognize the co-existence, often conflictual, of hegemonic and subaltern modalities of knowing, knowledge production, and knowledge validation.

and Nature. Subsequently, I will present a few pertinent examples of scholarship that highlight the implications of how the conceptualizations of nature influence environmental behaviors.

Today's environmental crises reveal a need to understand alternative concepts of ecology and religion so that we as conservationists, development workers, environmental policy makers and people living in a common world can reevaluate and reassess our own values and environmental practices. I hope this examination attends to this project and conversation to offer insight and inspiration towards a goal of valuing diversity: biological, cultural, and religious.

Academic Roots & Constructing the Study of Nature through the Colors of Religion, Science and Culture

Scholars, scientists, and practitioners alike must be cognizant of the categories and epistemologies by which we come to know nature (Gill 1998). If we seek an understanding through the discipline of religion, then we must recognize that whether we speak of religion, anthropology, or another discipline, it is a created category. Religion, when understood through a scholarly discipline, often highlights a static set of beliefs and practices, and thereby erases the existential experience. As Jonathon Z. Smith asserts, religion is “solely the creation of the scholar’s study. It is created for the scholar’s analytic purposes by his [and her] imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence outside of the academy” (1987). Although Smith is referring to religion as a social institution of beliefs, he notes that for most people, that institution per se, does not exist outside of the domain of life, but instead is deeply ingrained in all other aspects of belief systems, living practice and experienced reality. Or, as a Yorùbá practitioner at the village of Oyotunji in South Carolina explains, “Religion is just a word. Here in the West, we think we can separate it out from someone’s life, but it is just a word” (pers comm. 2004; see Chapter 7 video). This is equally true for the

concepts of both Science and Nature. They become concrete, coherent objects of analysis through a particular paradigm, not because they somehow exist outside of lived reality.

I suggest that these three concepts are not best understood as distinctly separate categories, since creating any category entails limiting exploration through imagined boundaries. After all, even the word “term” is constructed from the Latin *terminus* meaning boundary or limit according to the prominent religious scholar Taylor (1998:16). Instead, this trinity of ideas might be better understood as three dyes on a spectrum of color. Their deeply integrated historical landscape of colonialisms, power, scholarship, knowledge (production and acceptance) should be acknowledged within distinct contexts that shape different perceptions.

The way we scholars create categories and the methods we use to produce knowledge construct the way we understand the world. My own scholarship is shaped and cultivated by these nexuses of conversion and conversation. I readily accept plurality of voice, perspective and insight, and I seek to use my graduate research to illustrate plural knowledges in the hopes that scholars can conceptualize multiple realities within distinct contexts of power to gain insight in both theoretical framing and the conservation and development practice. Yet, despite the awareness I invoke in my own analysis, despite my training and my decision to act otherwise, I also too easily fall into the approach of dichotomous descriptions that are less effective in engaging complex and sometimes conflicting notions of identity and lived experience. Therein, I intend for this work not to create opposing dichotomous forces, but rather to decipher and depict complex landscapes of experiences, histories, and relationships to interpret better the concepts of religion and nature in contemporary Cuba.

In this effort to help the reader understand this position of not merely understanding an idea, as a *terminus* or with one limited definition, I invite you instead to attempt to understand

the concepts to which I refer (i.e., nature, religion, science and culture) as merging with blended boundaries while maintaining distinctive elements that are unique to each. Thus, allow me to refer to a metaphor of color to help interpret the abstract idea of conceptualizing realities and the intersections of nature, religion, science and culture.

If one imagines the color spectrum, it is a continuum, each color gradually blending into the next; there are no sharp boundaries. But we impose boundaries; we speak of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. These sometimes arbitrary discriminations can change depending on the language and the perceptions of each group and each individual².

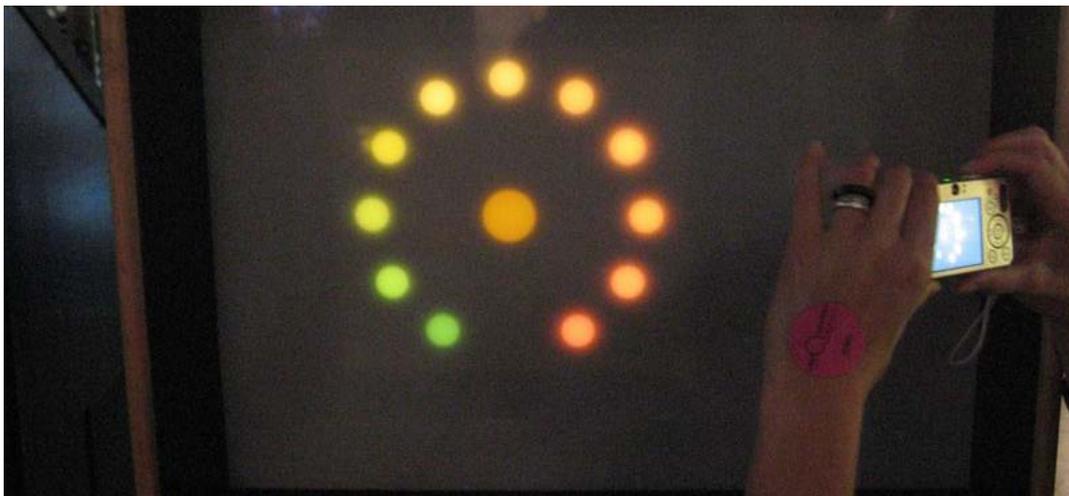


Figure 3-1. The color wheel exhibit located at the Science Museum in San Francisco.

In the Science Museum in San Francisco, a color wheel exhibit asks “which of the outer dots best matches the inner one?” Each of the outer dots contains a different mixture of red and green light. Most people will find only one or two dots that look like the center dot. However, each person perceives differently which dot that is, and may select a very different dot than the

² Even within cultural groups, different people will experience the same things distinctly. A child with a missing arm, an elderly woman with lots of land, a young man before initiation.

person standing next to her. Each and every color in the circle is correct, yet some people will see a match between colors that you think are very different.³



Figure 3-2. An up-close view of the color wheel exhibit located at the Science Museum in San Francisco showing individual differences in perceptions of color.

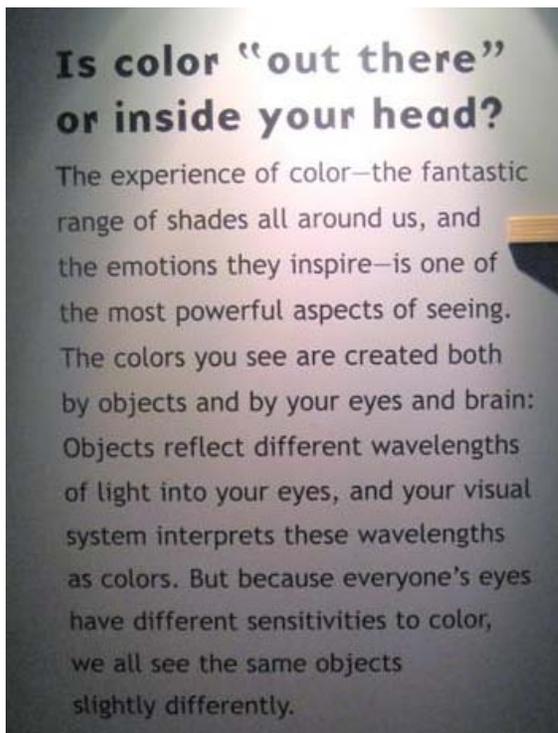


Figure 3-3. Explanation of the color wheel at the Science Museum in San Francisco.

³ No two people's eyes contain identical sets of cones, the light-sensitive cells that allow you to see color

Recognizing that a multiplicity of correct though distinct perceptions exists and that they must be understood in context and through their relationships is the first step. The next is to explore the roots, contexts and nodes of particular perspectives. For instance, the roots of underlying assumptions of contemporary Western scholarship are often traced to the Enlightenment.

As Gregory Bateson (2002) in *Mind and Nature* suggests,

I hold to the presupposition that our loss of the sense of aesthetic unity was, quite simply, an epistemological mistake. I believe that that mistake may be more serious than all the minor insanities that characterized those older epistemologies which agreed upon the fundamental unity.

It is critical to study the conceptions of nature because often the notion is taken for granted since as Bruno Latour explains in the *Politics of Nature*, the historically and politically situated conception of nature as “knowable through the intermediary of the sciences... formed through networks of instruments ...defined through the intervention of professions, disciplines, and protocols” often is unacknowledged (Latour 2004: 4). And we must acknowledge the politics of the conceptualization of nature by examining its inherent issues of power and privilege.

Academic and Scientific Epistemology Historicized

Language and thereby perception hold a specific cultural epistemology. The 17th century is critical to this genealogy of contemporary conceptualization of nature. For instance, Thomas Hobbes in *De Cive* presented a mechanistic structure of reality and society asserting that everything is best understood by its constitutive elements: “For as in a watch or some such small engine, the matter, figure, and motion of the wheels cannot well be known except it be taken asunder and viewed in parts that are based on order and regularity” (1642). Philosophical assumptions influenced by the structures of machines found in the daily experience of western Europeans during this period enabled the human modification, control and domination of nature.

This mechanistic worldview segmented nature into its atomic parts that consist of discrete information bits extracted from the world, and which are assumed to operate according to laws and rules that are context-free.

Isaac Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (1687) was a powerful synthesis of the new mechanical philosophy: the dualism between the passivity of matter and the externality of force and activity, which limited the world to matter and power. Rather than organic change and process, resistance to change and stability were emphasized (Merchant 1992:57), and the significant role of Creator who controlled from a removed heaven was reduced or abolished. The 17th century scientific, positivist worldview was considered to be objective, value-free, context-free knowledge of the external world. This language of an "objective" science based on mathematical equations of reality led the path for further religious studies, anthropological, and ecological research on development and conservation. And, as Buhner (2002: 27) elucidates in *The Lost Language of Plants: The Ecological Importance of Plant Medicines to Life on Earth*, "[m]athematics is an unusual language. Though mathematical phrases *can* be articulated, mathematics cannot be spoken as are other languages. But like all languages, once a person begins to think in it, it shapes *how* things are perceived and how they can be described."

Yet, the roots of these underlying assumptions should be traced further into the soils of history. In fact, western cosmologies that separate religion, humans and nature while dividing spirituality from materiality are based on a counter cosmology that dates back at least to the Greeks. During the Hellenistic period, the Stoics (334-262 BCE) believed that all the forces in the universe were united into one force (the soul of the universe), which penetrated everything. All life, all movement stems from this soul. This was God. Everything in the universe is God and

God is found in the whole universe, similar to how all of a flower is contained in a seed (Frost 1962). God, for the Stoics was the creator of all things. Not divided, God was but one personality integrally involved in human lives by governing the world, punishing evil and rewarding good.

For the early Greeks, humans were made up of the same substance as the rest of the universe and subject to the same natural laws. In the late 6th century in Miletus, this substance was water for Thales, air for Anaximanes and the process symbolized by fire for Heraclitus in Ephesus. A little later, Empedocles (ca. 492-432 BCE) in Sicily explained that the universe and everything in it was made of all four elements of earth, air, water and fire (Frost 1962; Glacken 1990). Humans were made of the same elements as everything else in nature, subject to the same laws and by a natural process return to the original one of the universe (Frost 1962: 54).

In contrast to accepting the spirit of God within all things and feeling that humans were under the control of various deities and their unseen forces, Lucretius (50 BCE) (based on insights from Epicurus [311 BCE]) enters the theoretical and cosmological stage with a completely materialist perspective, denying anything beyond the immediate five senses. Lucretius promulgated that only the empirically⁴ known, physical reality has position in an epistemology of nature in his epic poem *De rerum natura*, translated in English as *On the Nature of Things*. The only reality, then, is the physical one –even the concept of the soul was to be broken down into its atomistic, physical parts. Through analyzing the individual pieces, scholars and scientists alike could know the universal laws of nature. Within this completely materialist perspective, scholars deny anything beyond the immediate five senses. This cosmology

⁴Empirical comes from the Greek word *empeirikos*, which means experienced or skilled *em* means in and *peira* means trial or experiment. Experience (first recorded in 1377) comes from the Latin *experientiai* meaning knowledge gained by repeated trials *experiri* to try, to test. The verb in 1533 “to experience” meant to test or try. An expert, first recorded in 1374, is “a person wise through experience.”

(understanding of the universe) and epistemology (study of truth and knowledge) was the foundation for modern western scientific paradigms.

Within this materialist perspective, scholars denied anything beyond the immediate five senses as testable and thereby verifiable. These theorists had a lasting impact on academia with the privileging of scientific inquiry promoted through scientists such as Carl Linné or, in Latin, Linnaeus (1707-1778) who further sought to order, name and categorize the world in an effort to classify and thereby *know* it. Linnaeus, a 28-year-old Swedish naturalist, recognized the value of determining a perspective on plants through a class system (whether they had been previously encountered or not). Linnaeus, one of the main founders of modern natural science, created the system on which botany's taxonomic system is based still today. His classification system orders all plants whether known or not yet known by their reproductive parts, and organizes them into a hierarchical system from the kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, and genus to the most specific (species) categories.

While this system for understanding botany has proved useful to categorize a world of plants, these efforts to classify and hierarchically categorize the biophysical world soon became a way to understand the human world. For example, Linnaeus hierarchically ordered all first order primates (i.e., *Homo sapiens*) of the world into six "natural" categories according to their phenotypic and parallel emotive characteristics that favored Europeans. For instance, the European had flowing, brown hair, blue eyes and was acute and inventive while the Asiatic had black hair, dark eyes and was haughty and covetous, and the African was phlegmatic and relaxed (Linnaeus 1735)⁵.

⁵ In the 1758 tenth edition of *Systema Naturae* (Natural System), the white Europaeus was "sanguine" and "muscular"; the sallow Asiaticus was "melancholy" and "stiff"; the red Americanus was "choleric" and "upright"; the black Afer was "phlegmatic" and "relaxed"; the wild and hirsute Ferus ran about on all fours; the Troglodyte;



MAMMALIA.

ORDER I. PRIMATES.

Fore-teeth cutting; upper 4, parallel; teats 2 pectoral.

1. HOMO.

Sapiens: Diurnal; varying by education and situation.

2. Four-footed, mute, hairy. *Wild Man.*
3. Copper-coloured, choleric, erect. *American.*
Hair black, straight, thick; nostrils wide, face harsh; beard scanty; obstinate; content free. Paints himself with fine red lines. Regulated by customs.
4. Fair, sanguine, brawny. *European.*
Hair yellow, brown, flowing; eyes blue; gentle, acute, inventive. Covered with close vestments. Governed by laws.
5. Sooty, melancholy, rigid. *Asiatic.*
Hair black; eyes dark; severe, haughty, covetous. Covered with loose garments. Governed by opinions.
6. Black, phlegmatic, relaxed. *African.*
Hair black, frizzled; skin silky; nose flat; lips tumid; crafty, indolent, negligent. Anoints himself with grease. Governed by caprice.

Monstrosus Varying by climate or art.

1. Small, active, timid. *Mountaineer.*
2. Large, indolent. *Patagonian.*
3. Lefs fertile. *Hottentot.*
4. Beardless. *American.*
5. Head conic. *Chinese.*
6. Head flattened. *Canadian.*

The anatomical, physiological, natural, moral, civil and social histories of man, are best described by their respective writers.

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Figure 3-4. Linnaeus' chart that shows his hierarchical, scientific system.

and what could not be classified otherwise (such as giants and genetic mutants) was relegated to the category of the Monstrous.

The various races were ranked in a *scala naturae*, a scale of nature, in which the most “intelligent” races represented the pinnacle of evolution. Blumenbach, a student of Linnaeus, emphasized anatomy rather than cultural characteristics in his racial scaling. For instance, he considered a skull from the Caucasus Mountains the perfect European form, and regarded the other four races as examples of degeneration from European perfection⁶. The ranking of the races according to their hierarchical excellence is still explicit in the way race is conceptualized.

Conceptualizing African cultures within an imaginary hierarchical system that placed the white European, Christian male at the pinnacle was a colonial system that merchants and scholars used to create a category of race, and in a similar vein also to create the categories of religion and culture. For example, scholars first considered indigenous peoples of Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia and the Pacific to be left behind by evolution; hence they were studied with interest as providing “the best knowledge of the lower phases of religious belief” (Tylor 1871:I, 380). Not only should the reader take note of the “lower phases” verbiage which signals inferiority, but also critical is the word “belief” that Tylor and many contemporary scholars use to reference religions other than their own. In other words, that which is not accepted as knowledge is devalued as belief (Good 1988). The words we choose to depict categories and the names we use to describe them often influence and craft our perceptions particularly when we do not acknowledge these relationships (Escobar 1995). In this case, the language used to describe religions and cultures of Africa cultivates derogatory perceptions of epistemological and ontological systems that are different from the systems of the scholars and scientists who are endowed with the privilege of writing and publishing about the African systems.

⁶<http://www.cartage.org.lb/en/themes/Sciences/Lifescience/PhysicalAnthropology/PhysicalAnthropology/PhysicalAnthropology.htm/> Accessed April 27, 2008.

For example, one of the first anthropologists to study religion, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1871) in his book *Primitive Culture* created the term animism to define the religions of “the lower races” who blurred the divisions between inanimate and animate –thus negotiating over the meaning of materiality in a symbolic-ritual system. He identified these “false” precepts of the South African Zulu because they believed that “inanimate” material forms have spirit or soul. He identified these “primitive” understandings of religious principles as survivals of “savage,” prehistoric, uncivilized times compared to the pinnacle of development, reason and civilization manifested in Western European urban, industrialized ideology. The stages of social evolution developed, according to Tylor’s theory, from animism to polytheism, culminating in monotheism demonstrating the progression from primitive to civilized. As an evolutionist, E.B. Tylor described “savage religion” as less evolved on a unilinear scale of progress, placing at the apex civilized cultures of which the epitome was his own. The beginnings of Western research of nonwestern religions demonstrates how certain theoretical projects are entangled in local and global negotiations over the meaning of reality realized in language: “[a]nimism per se presents more of a problem with nineteenth century European imperialism, colonialism and capitalism rather than a solution for understanding religious engagements with the natural world” (Chidester 2005: 81).

As might be expected, the representations of black cultures have often been racist, whether in ethnographic work, literature, or travelogues. The three main ethnographers to whom any scholar studying the African diaspora in Cuba must attend are Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969), Rómulo Lachateñeré (1909-1952), and Lydia Cabrera (1900-1991). Through these authors, foundational in Afro-Cuban studies, we can witness significant transformation in anthropological investigations of religion and Africans in Cuba. Ortiz, for instance began his career studying

Afro-Cubans as examples of degenerates and outlaws. He was working under the Lobroso school of criminology when he wrote *Los Negros Brujos* (1906), which denotes evil witchcraft. With this book, he attempts to catalogue the “barbaric” religion which was low on the historical evolutionary chain, and would disappear when scientific knowledge improved, and the religious atavism that slowed progress, disappeared. He considered and called it the “mala vida” or “dark side” of the “hampa” or “underworld” of Cuba. Ortiz studied Afro-Cubans as a positivist criminologist in an attempt to explain why they are more prone to commit crimes than whites.

Later in his career, Ortiz recognizes the debasing manner by which he tried to understand Cubans of African-heritage; he apologizes and writes more books in the 1950s including *La africanía de la música folklórico de Cuba* (1950) and *Los Bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba* (1951). These books stress the contribution of African culture to Cuban culture. He is known for his terms of *ajiaco* and *transculturation* to describe Cuban culture, as a mix of distinct cultures. Yet, African cultures in Ortiz’s work are still “Othered” and homogenized.

Rómulo Lachatañeré offered a major contribution to Afro-Cuban studies specifically because he recognizes the diversity of Africans and his writings delineate some of the differences in a more specific and accurate way. For instance, he substitutes the more individualized and accurate Lucumí, Congo, and Abakua for Ortiz’ all-encompassing *brujería* or sorcery. And when he refers to the practitioners, he names them appropriately (e.g., *palero* or *iyalocha*), which indicates not only which religion the practitioners practice, but also what role they assume in the hierarchical structure.

In 1942, Lachatañeré’s book *Manual de Santería: el sistema de los cultos lucumis* [*Manual of Santería: the system of the Lucumí cults*] is published by Editorial Caribe. In it, he begins the trend of an alternative Cuban ethnology in which he attempts to offer Afro-Cuban ideas without

filtering them first through the judgements of an anthropological intellectual and theoretical tradition ruled mainly by white elites.

In Lachatañeré's style, Lydia Cabrera completely revamped the anthropological mode of scholarship of Afro-Cubans, and reinserted the otherwise marginalized in redefining and reimagining a plural national identity (Rodríguez-Mangual 2004: 3). Unlike Ortiz who valued the written word of the canon of published scholars, Cabrera placed primary value on the information of the practitioners. Cabrera recreates the ethnography to include self-representation and reflexivity in her use of I, and she embodied the data in her style of representation, which could be called magico-realism –interlacing fictional stories with fieldwork. Cabrera was dedicated to writing what her collaborators told her “almost verbatim and with a minimum of organization and thus making her books true primary sources of ethnographic material” (Castellanos in Lachatañeré 2005[1938]: xvi). She wrote one of the most influential books on Yorùbá religion called *El Monte* 2000[1954], which to this day practitioners name as vital to understanding the religion—particularly Osain and the magical and healing power of the herbs.

Since Cuba has a distinguished educated population, the above three authors may be the most well-known, but are only the tip of a rich canon of Cuban authors on Afro-Cuban themes. Miguel Barnet, one of Ortiz's most famous students who wrote the narrative *El biografía de un cimarron* based on the real life of a former runaway slave (1986). Additionally, the following Cuban authors have helped to enlighten aspects of Cuban culture: Alejo Carpentier (1988, 1985); Natalia Bolívar (1990); Israel Moliner (1988, 2002); Andres Rodriguez (1993, 2005); and Jorge Castellanos (2003); Isabel Castellanos (1987).

What is Nature?

Nature as a distinct and separate category from human culture and religion is a construct of Western⁷ scholarship, and as such it is often taken for granted without recognizing that it came to be known as a concept “through the intermediary of the sciences; ...formed through networks of instruments ...defined through the intervention of professions, disciplines, and protocols” (Latour 2004).

Conceptions of nature are also shaped by language seeped in contexts of power since words play a decisive role in shaping the cognitive relationships among humans, religions and nature (Oelschlaeger 2005). Benjamin Lee Whorf (1897-1941), Sapir’s student and fellow linguist, explains how language shapes perceptions of nature in the following terms:

We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organised by our minds—and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organise it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. (213)

Yet, not all communities categorize, perceive or experience nature in the same way. For instance, Foucault, in his preface to *The Order of Things*, quotes a passage to a “certain Chinese encyclopaedia” to demonstrate distinct ways to categorize, in this passage animals: “animals are divided into: (a) belonging to the Emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) *et cetera*, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies” (1970: xv).

⁷ Here I am not distinguishing Cuba as an ‘Other’ than the West. Indeed, Cuban scholarship is intrinsically Western.

And as Gary Paul Nabhan explains in *Cultures of Habitat*, the Seri Indians of Sonoro Mexico have seven terms for the different stages of ripeness of mesquite pods. *Azj* signifies the driest stage, “when the pods are easiest to grind into fine flour [while] the Spanish term *pechita* lacks that precision” (as cited in Buhner 2002: 28). Another indigenous term that shows distinctions in human/nature conceptualizations is *ayulla*. The *ayulla* is fundamental to how Andeans following Quechua cosmology in Peru interpret their environment. This concept is, as Peruvian indigenous scholar Rengifo-Marglin explains, an ecological community that includes humans, spiritual beings and respectful relationships (1998). Thus, it is a linguistic and affective organizing principle that stresses interconnectedness and intersubjectivity. This concept of intersubjectivity or attributing personhood, consciousness or spirit with whom people can and should communicate is also a fundamental aspect of the Yorùbá system of understanding nature. The concepts of *ashé* and *orishas*, and specifically *Osain* are the ones that this analysis will elucidate for precisely these aspects of language, metaphor and interpretation are ignored and undermined in most scientific epistemes. David Orr labels this “verbicide” and concludes that:

Language is... under assault by those who intend to control others by first subverting the words and metaphors that people would otherwise use to describe their world....The highly technical language of the expert is...useful for describing fragments of the world but not for describing how these fit into a coherent whole. But things work as whole systems whether we can describe them or not, whether we perceive it or not....Consequently as our language becomes increasingly artificial, words and metaphors based on intimate knowledge of soils, plants, trees, animals, landscapes, rivers and oceans have declined....Of the roughly 5,000 languages now spoken on Earth, only 150 or so are expected to survive to the year 2100. Language everywhere is being whittled down to conform to the limited objectives of the global economy and homogenized in accord with the shallow imperatives of the ‘information age.’... Because we cannot think clearly, about what we cannot say clearly, the first casualty of linguistic incoherence is our ability to think well about many things. (as cited in Buhner 2002: 28)

Thus, as this examination will illuminate, Yorùbá epistemology does not create nature and the environment as a mere solid, physical form that is void of spirit, emotion, or subjectivity. This point of distinguishing material and spiritual within a concept of nature through mutable

and transforming as well as transformative boundaries that can be crossed with appropriate knowledge in the skills of the religion is an important point to understand about Yorùbá practitioners' interpretations of their landscape. According to the practitioners who participated in my research, nature is not separate from religion or from culture. Instead what many religion and science scholars have as separate and distinct domains of study—the physical and the spiritual—interpenetrate onto a landscape of subjectivities and personhoods among whom communication is not only possible, it is prevalent. Additionally, then, scholars must attend to the heterogeneity within the religion as Snodgrass (2008) does for indigenous persons in India who live near the Phulwari ki Nal reserve for not all participants embody and enact religious consciousness in the same way. Instead, specific indigenous practitioners who hold distinct roles that deal directly with healing and herbs may be more likely to have contact, a more beneficent view, and also more environmentally-friendly interactions with the biophysical world.

The question arises, then: how do religion scholars interpret religions, particularly those that are nature-based? Often, religious scholars have invoked an idea of the sacred. For instance, Émile Durkheim (1947) defines religion as “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community” (p 47). This definition highlights a particularly important debate in contemporary religious studies concerning whether religion really points to the sacred? Huston Smith argues that implicit within religion is a concept of a connection with the divine or sacred, (often implying a universal Truth underlying religion). Through Smith's analysis of Tjilpa and Near Eastern cosmologies, he addresses the problems of associations and comparisons. Instead of a center of an *axis mundi* reaching to a transcendental, celestial realm, the Australian

conceptual system, according to Smith, is based solely on the terrestrial in all its forms and alterations.

However, Smith too reveals his own historically contextual biases with his interpretation of religion and the religious. Smith, does not accept *a priori* sacredness, refuting its existence as fixing biased boundaries that are not relevant to all groups' cosmologies, and thereby disallows other reality maps by forcing distinctions and similarities where they are not. Smith, then, appears to have a bias toward a materialist culture in his analysis, possibly with roots in Zwingli's modern concept of time in which "every event was either spiritual and mental or corporeal and material but no event was or could be both at once...[s]pirit, word and sign had finally parted company for many at Marburg in 1529; and myth or ritual...was no longer literally *and* symbolically real and true" (in Smith 1987:99).

Like Smith, Mircea Eliade ([1957] 1987) also highlights the discoverability of the sacred as an essential quality inherent in religion through hierophanies [manifestations of the sacred] in nature. Eliade has been one of the foremost authorities on religion drawing dominantly on Durkheim's dichotomous distinction between the sacred and the profane to define the religious in opposition to the mundane.

Some contemporary theorists negate this assumption of an essential sameness or universal truth that scholars can discover in all religions. Instead, they point to the relative differences and the phenomenological distinctions between bodies (read minds) they conceive as an individual, autonomous brain that organizes human existence—creating, believing, living and “making real” their “fictions” or “reality maps” (Scarry 1985; Smith 1998). Yet, often these contemporary theorists simply deny the “unknowable” sacred and rely instead on theorizing the creation of “belief.”

How do these categorizations of religion, nature, culture and science help us to understand different conceptualizations of nature and environmental behaviors? Well, the premise of this research is that how we conceptualize nature influences how we interact with our environment. Religious scholars sometimes contrast nature with the divine to search for a metaphysically sacred that can be starkly differentiated from the physically mundane; natural scientists can conceive of a nature that is devoid of the divine to demonstrate universal laws of the material world. In Western history, explanations and thereby methods to know the “Truth” of nature, the world, and the relationships of the humans within it have swung on a dialectical pendulum, then, between spiritual and material. Different conceptions alter the ways of knowing (epistemology and methodology), which in turn influence how scientists, scholars and religious practitioners conceive and interact with their conceived categories of nature.

Bateson in *Mind and Nature* summarizes the primary point of this chapter and clarifies how these epistemological assumptions are the base of the university system, as expressed in his quoted passage:

While much that universities teach today is new and up to date, the presupposition or premises of thought upon which all our teaching is based are ancient and, I assert, obsolete. I refer to such notions as: a. The Cartesian dualism separating “mind” and “matter.” b. The strange physicalism of the metaphors which we use to describe and explain mental phenomena—“power,” “tension,” “energy,” “social forces,” etc. c. Our anti-aesthetic assumption, borrowed from the emphasis which Bacon, Locke, and Newton long ago gave to the physical sciences, viz. that all phenomena (including the mental) can and shall be studied and evaluated in quantitative terms (as quoted in Buhner 2002: 64).

Cognitive Mapping of Nature and Spirituality

One way that I used to access and assess the interpretation of the interplay of material and spiritual in conceptualizing nature is through cognitive mapping. Cognitive mapping attempts to model how people think and organize a concept, which is referred to as a cultural domain, a schema, a model or a cognitive map. The cognitive psychologist, George Mandler defines

schema as a “bounded, distinct, and unitary representation” (1984: 54). The term, he explains goes back to Kant who described the schema or mental pattern of a dog that “can delineate the figure of a four-footed animal in a general manner, without limitation to any single determinant figure as experience, or any possible image that I can represent *in concreto*” (Kant, [1781] 1929 in Mandler 1984:55). Schemas, asserts Mandler, “are built up in the course of interaction with the environment” (1984: 55-56). They are abstract conceptualizations of experiences and events; they are not the event, nor the object nor the experience but the representation of it. In sum, cognitive mapping creates a visual map of how people think about and organize a concept. For this investigation, the concept that interested me was that of nature, specifically because of the way that certain categories and assumptions get privileged and thereby influence national and international environmental policies.

Cognitive Maps and Environmental Policy

An example of how cognitive maps affect policy would be when the pioneers first came to the U.S.; they understood progress to mean the mandatory killing of the wolves. Wolves were understood as an impediment to progress, so laws were enacted that mandated their killing –to near extinction (Kempton 1995; Kellert 1991). However, when the conception of wolves changed in contemporary times so did the legislation. Now wolves are legally protected and are being reintroduced into places such as Yellowstone National Park. What is critical about this to keep in mind is that U.S. Western values of nature and legislation guide conservation policy nationally and internationally. For example, a category of nature as wilderness that excluded humans guided the national legislation with the Wilderness Act of 1964 (Cronon 1995) as well as the conception of the Biosphere Reserves, which has been implemented internationally including in Matanzas, Cuba where I do my research. This conception of the biosphere reserves has humans eliminated from the center (sometimes forcibly).

Another example of bias that though power and privilege gets to be normalized, implemented and imposed was addressed by *Our Common Future*. This international document addresses the issue that much of Western resource management science was biased toward temperate ecosystems, thereby promoting maladjusted and sometimes maleficent conservation projects. With the failure of so many projects, international organizations began to acknowledge the relevance of local peoples' knowledge and their contextual understanding of the environment. As one of the first international organizations to express interest in traditional management systems, UNESCO, through its Division of Marine Sciences, found that oftentimes geographically appropriate conservation practices are founded in local value systems or worldviews (UNESCO 1982).

So, I began by using cognitive techniques to investigate diverse conceptions. In order to have data with which to contrast the Cuban data I was to obtain, I tested the cognitive methods first with Gainesville academic and local community members to distinguish how Gainesville residents and Cuban Yorùbá practitioners differ in their conceptualization of nature and spirituality. To do this, I gave the following piece of paper out to members of the Gainesville community—both on the University of Florida campus and at the local downtown Farmers' Market. Their compiled responses are in Appendix A.

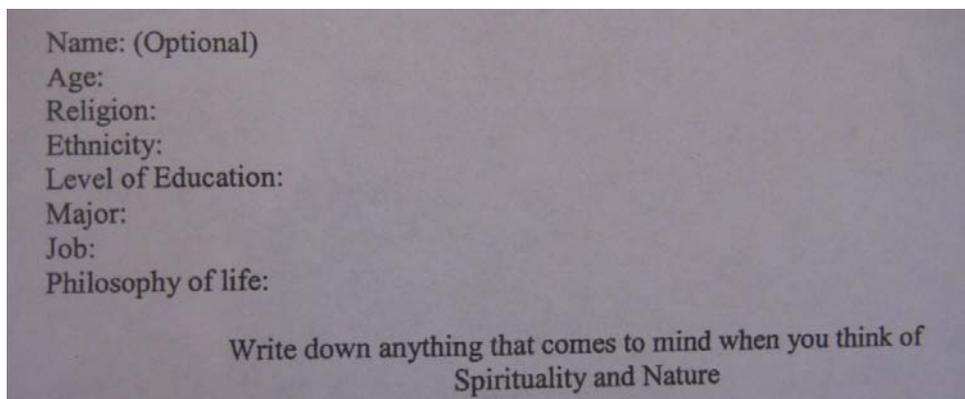


Figure 3-5. Photograph of the Freelist Sheet handed out in Gainesville, Florida.

Based on Kluckhohn's work with Navajo philosophy and the development of a method by which an ethnographer could identify cultural values and their relationships to behavior, I collected and analyzed (with Anthropac® Borgatti 2001) dimensions of Gainesville, Florida residents' values of nature using the cognitive techniques of freelists, pilesorts, rankings, multidimensional scaling (MDS), property fitting analysis (PROFIT) and quadratic analysis procedure (QUAP) (Kluckhohn 1949; Kruskal and Wish 1978; D'Andrade 1995; Borgatti 1998).

After doing a frequency analysis on the freelists, I selected 36⁸ of the most commonly mentioned responses⁹ (including a few that I wanted to test or thought would help make it fun for people [i.e., sex in the woods]). With these words on individual cards (Appendix B), I conducted the pilesorts. After gaining the data from the pilesorts along with a Ratings questionnaire, I was able to conduct a multidimensional scaling (MDS) analysis.

When you look at an MDS plot and try to interpret it, you look for two things: clumps and dimensions. The clusters are what items seems to group together, while the dimensions are patterns that can be distinguished as moving horizontally, diagonally and vertically along the plot. Cluster analyses tests your ideas about clumps, and PROFIT (Property-Fitting) analyses helps you to test your ideas about dimensions. The variable that seems to be driving or grouping the data is the dimension. You can test the dimension by using paired comparison, ratings and rankings data and analyzing it with a Profit Analysis.

To test the clumps, then, I used the Cluster Analysis, which uses the aggregate proximity matrix from pilesorts to construct a dissimilarity matrix that gets converted to a cluster diagram. This means that the pairs and then the groups that are conceptually similar show linkages.

⁸ You should select between 30 and 40 items.

⁹ Pilesort cards can be constructed from the freelist data analysis, interviews, and researcher creation with specific questions and hypotheses in mind.

Through a multidimensional analysis (MDS), the groupings or clusters are visually mapped, and thereby can be more easily analyzed (Figure 3-6). I have highlighted in green a set of words that most people grouped together. This cluster includes ideas like cliffs, jungle, waterfall, and bugs, and could be considered “physical nature.” If you look on the right of the map, the concepts that are clustered together (here highlighted in yellow) are items like Christianity, Jesus, prayer, and God, which bring together common concepts into a group that could be called “spirituality.”

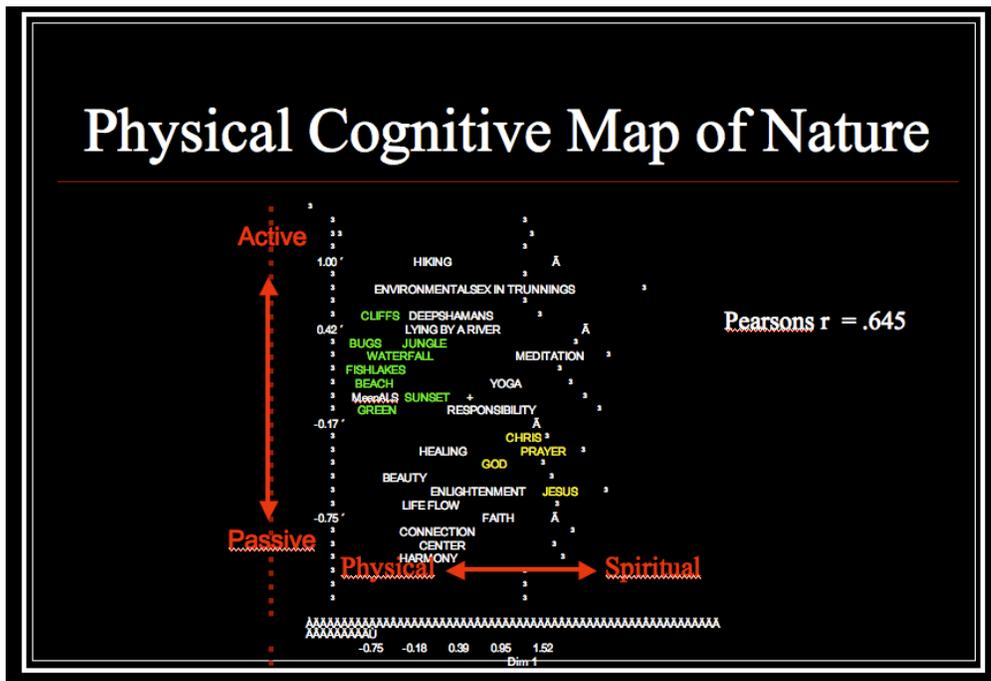


Figure 3-6. Physical cognitive map of nature and spirituality for Florida residents. (Holmes 2003).

An interesting point about this exercise is that the map, much like a map of the United States represents the relationship of concepts spatially. For instance, just as Florida is on the opposite side of the U.S. as California, or Santiago de Cuba is on the opposite end of the island as Havana, the concepts grouped under “spirituality” and those grouped under “physical nature” are on opposite ends of the cognitive map of nature for Gainesville, Florida residents

(predominantly University of Florida students). Since the export of Figure 3-8 made it shrink, I have also placed the following figure, which was not condensed:

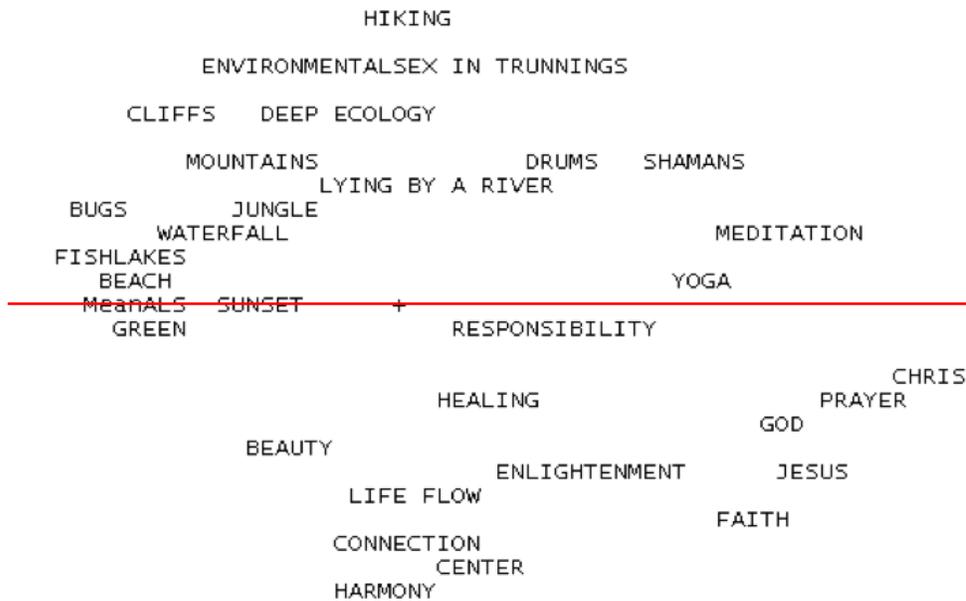


Figure 3-7. MDS plot of nature and spirituality.

To test the dimensions, I used PROFIT Analysis. Through charting a regression line across the MDS to look for patterns, the PROFIT Analysis calculates (based on ratings or paired comparisons data) a line that fits the data. By examining the relationship between the items and the PROFIT line, the ratings data merges with the pilesort data and the dimension can be supported or refuted. The output for PROFIT gives coordinates for the regression line, which are examined using Pearson’s R; dimensions are demonstrated with a high R-squared value. In this case, the R-squared is 0.645, which gives it a Probability of 0.001. This means that it is likely that the dimension is not due to mere chance. This research (Holmes 2003), demonstrates two dimensions, which consists of the distinct dimensions: Christianity to biophysical elements and active to passive interactions.

Albeit these analyses are meant to be descriptive and not necessarily inferential, the implications are note-worthy. First, it graphically displays the segregation between the spiritual and the physical in the conceptualization of nature for Gainesville residents. Second, it should make us ponder the conceptions of those people in positions of power particularly in international legislation. By this I mean, that if the people who are implementing environmental policies that are affecting the world have a very different ecological understanding, then dire consequences could (and have) ensue. The University of Florida, where I primarily asked people to do the freelists and pile sorts, is renowned for its multiple ecology programs, which educate scholars to become policy-makers at international organizations like the World Bank, World Wildlife Fund, and the World Conservation of Nature as well as many others that have direct influence on the policies that affect the ecologies and the peoples of tropical forests. As Kempton implores us scholars and scientists to consider, “cultural models affect behavior—whether managing milpas [small-scale farms] or supporting national environmental policy” (Kempton 2001: 65).

Do Conceptions of Nature Influence Environmental Behaviors?

Lynn White Jr. (1967) in “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” blamed the environmental crisis on the Judeo-Christian ethic that legitimated the domination and exploitation of nature. White believed that religion was perhaps the most important force shaping human societies because religious values had direct effects on human behavior (Whitney 2005). The historian Roderick Nash in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967) agreed. He argued that a cosmology that separates humans from nature, and offers the earth and its inhabitants as the profane “other” (intended for human use --spiritual and material) fosters environmentally detrimental attitudes and behaviors.

Martin Holdgate, the former director of the World Conservation Union (IUCN¹⁰) based in Switzerland, discusses the convergence of science and theology to understand ecology. He explains how values have impacted environmental policies both nationally and internationally “for in the end, value judgments dominate political and social choices” (p10). Holdgate displays evidently how these values are integrated into international policy on development and conservation. My own research with Wildlife Conservation Society also shows that the collaboration element of collaborative projects often entails merely telling the locals that they must relocate and no longer use the resources so that the area can be conserved (Barborak et al 2002). Instead of cultivating a true partnership, the multiple scientists (e.g., foresters, wildlifers, botanists) and national government come in and with a worldview of conservation that eliminates locals from the ecology, tell the locals that they are destroying the forest, and to protect the forest, they must leave. Take for instance Macdonald’s (2008: 25) account in *Cultural Survival* of a case in Nigeria:

One day in 1969, the Ndola people of Ndombo Ngishi in Taraba State, eastern Nigeria, woke up to find government officials in the middle of their village telling them they had to leave their homes and find somewhere else to live. The forest in which they lived, said the officials, was to be turned into the Ngel Nyaki Forest Reserve, and no one was allowed to live in the forest may longer or use it in any way. The villagers were not given compensation and were not resettled to any particular site; they were simply expected to re-establish themselves elsewhere.

They now must find alternative livelihood strategies that often integrate them into a world market economy, since they are disallowed to use the resources from what is now conserved land. This story is not singular, but unfortunately all too common. In tropical development and conservation policy, gender differences are not always considered leaving women sick and lacking access to resources (e.g., MERGE 1999).

¹⁰ What is now called the World Conservation Union used to be called the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. The organization changed its name, but not its acronym, i.e., IUCN.

These implicit yet often unacknowledged values and worldviews that are written into international conservation policies can have detrimental consequences. For example, *Our Common Future* (WCED 1987) (also known as the Brundtland Report because of the chair at the time of creation was Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland), is a report from the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development; it was one of the first international documents to address issues like sustainable development. The document notes that much of Western resource management science was biased toward temperate ecosystems, thereby promoting maladjusted and sometimes maleficent conservation projects. Thus, international organizations and scientists began to acknowledge the relevance of local peoples' knowledge and their contextual understanding of the environment. As one of the first international organizations to express interest in traditional management systems UNESCO, through its Division of Marine Sciences, found that geographically appropriate conservation practices are often grounded in local value systems or worldviews (UNESCO 1982).

An example of a misunderstanding of the local interaction between humans and the landscape would be when ecologists, botanists, agronomists and social scientists believed the area of Kissidougou Prefecture in Guinea to be undergoing a transition from forest to savanna with only small patches of humid forest cover left (e.g., Fairhead *et al.* 1992; Fairhead and Leach 1994). On the contrary, they had to later conclude that "island forests" instead of being remnants, were created and managed by people around their settlements; they used fires as pre-emptive burning while the grasses were short and damp. Then, as part of government policies, people were disallowed to use fire. As a result of the banning of controlled burning, fires came later in the season when the grasses were higher and drier, which caused more damage. Instead of the policymakers belief, "it was not population pressure that limited the forest area, but lack or

absence of people; and it was not the people's management practices that were the problem, but those of government" (Chamber 1997: 26-27). When the people were forced to move, the protection of old forests decreased and the new forest patches formed around the new settlements.

This is an apt story for my research for multiple reasons. One reason is to recognize the implicit values in research like assessing the local human as the problem and reason of degradation. Conservation policies often are founded upon this "wilderness" notion that separates humans from the imaginary of a conceived pristine state of nature. Yet as Heckenberger (2003) has found in the Brazilian Amazon and Fairhead and Leach (1994) have found for the Zياما Reserve in West Africa, what professionals regard as pristine forest often actually supported a dense human population. The second reason that the above story is useful for my research narrative is to demonstrate that the methodologies a scientist uses do not always reveal what is actually occurring on the ground. Third, the locals of a region may have vital ecological knowledge and practices that natural scientists should acknowledge and respect. Also, human populations in Africa and in other regions of the world sometimes create zones around their human settlements that become segments of biodiverse forest, which they protect for nutritive, medicinal and spiritual reasons. Lastly, and quite significant is the fact that humans may integrate with the landscape without degrading it.

In a parallel study of the Zياما Reserve, Fairhead and Leach (1994) [in Chambers 1999: 27] found that contrary to popular scientific belief with which professionals had regarded this area as pristine forest, it had actually supported a populous community in the nineteenth century (as recorded by colonial travelers). And, in fact, "most of West Africa's high forests contain old abandoned village sites" (Fairhead and Leach 1994: 481-4). As Chambers notes, "human and

ecological history, when carefully and sensitively investigated, was found to be more complicated, dynamic, changing and locally specific than scientists and administrators had ever supposed, and to contradict many of their beliefs” (Chambers 1997: 27).

Two fundamental lessons should be derived from these mistakes. The first is that that our methods and the often-unquestioned underlying assumptions that guide them should be made clearer, and the second is that some locals have relevant ecological knowledge and practices that scientists should take into consideration and policy makers need to incorporate. This investigation is based on these two premises. The study of local ecological knowledge should not be restricted to the lens of Western epistemology, which understands nature through assumptions based on a priori human/nature and mind/body ontological separations (Latour 2004; Bateson 2002; Ingold 2000; Descola 1996). Instead, ecological anthropologists and conservation scientists should examine the unique knowledge that peoples have and the processes of learning about and interacting with the ecosystems they inhabit—sometimes perceived as extended community (e.g., G. Harvey 2005; Morrison 2000; Apffel-Marglin 1998;).

For instance, Dorm-Adzobu (1991) notes that several of the small patches of closed-canopy forest in Ghana (as well as in other African and Asian countries) are often “sacred” or “fetish” groves. In other words, they are groves that are preserved “primarily for religious purposes” (p4). He specifically outlines the case of the Malshegu grove which is the largest in northern Ghana, and which the community has preserved for over three centuries because it is the abode of Malshegu ancestors and the guardian deity *Kpalevorgu*. Through specific behavioral mandates, human access is restricted as is the use of forest products; these restrictions help protect the groves against human and natural disasters.

This assertion should not be confused with the romanticizing notion that oversimplifies indigenous and African peoples and their religions to be environmentally friendly assuming an *a priori* connection to nature. Indeed, some scholars have rejected as facile the assumption of a close connection between nature-related beliefs and ideals and actual practices (e.g., Matory 2005¹¹; Redford 1991; Tuan¹² 1968 in Taylor 2005).

Yet, whether *nature* is envisioned as organic, mechanical, sacred, or profane; whether it is conceptualized as a unified, interconnected and interdependent process, an intersubjective community or divided into individual static parts and pieces, the conceptualization of nature plays a normative role within cultural ethics sometimes operating as restraints or sanctions (e.g., Juhé-Beaulaton 2008; Berkes 1999; Dorm-Adzobu 1991). Religion and culture appear to play an integral role in how humans interact with the landscape. Furthermore, Santería priest and scholar Canizares (1999:4) explains: “the worldview of Santería differs from that of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic faiths; therefore, the ethical framework found in Santería is correspondingly different from that found in Western religions.” Thus, contributing taxonomic lists or forcing local knowledge into western categories is not sufficient, researchers must attempt to learn local knowledge using local categories and more importantly attempt to understand local relationships. As the picture of the sign below taken from Poor Richard’s Almanack in 1750, which states, “What signifies knowing the Names, if you know not the Natures of Things.”

¹¹ Matory warns scholars to be careful of collapsing African diaspora with an essentialized notion of being closer to nature.

¹² In “Discrepancies Between Environmental Attitude and Behaviour: Examples From Europe and China,” the geographer Yi Fu Tuan rejected the claim that occidental cultures before Christianity were relatively benign by pointing to the environmental devastation caused by the Greeks and Romans, and he argued that the Chinese devastated their environment long before Western civilization could have exercised any influence in this regard.

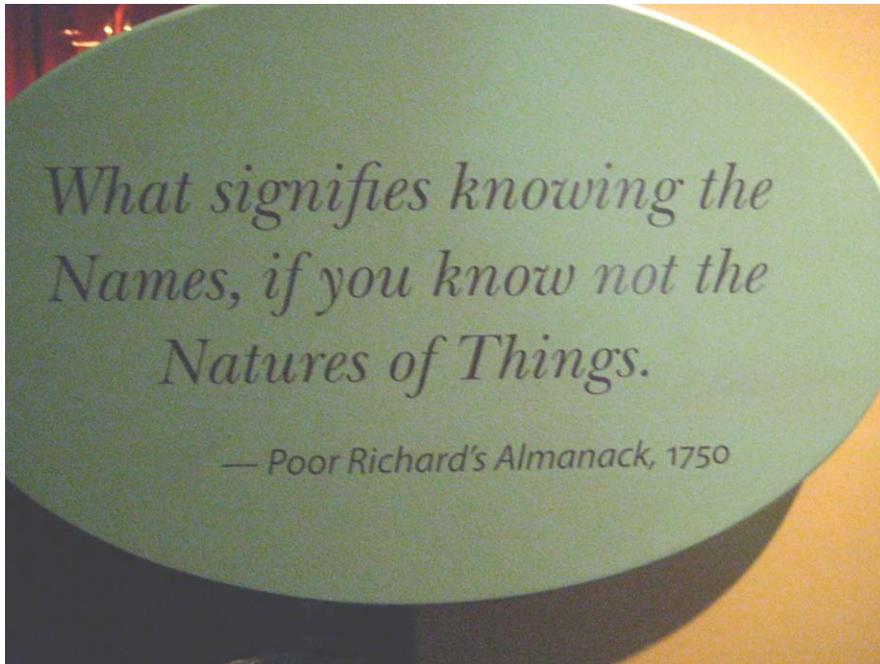


Figure 3-8. Picture of sign that signals the futility of names without a greater understanding.

CHAPTER 4
EMBODIED EPISTEMOLOGIES TOWARD EVOCATIVE ETHNOGRAPHIES: AN
APPROACH FOR UNDERSTANDING YORÙBÁ DERIVED ECOLOGICAL
KNOWLEDGES

To interpret African ecological knowledges, scholars must find culturally appropriate methods within our methodological frameworks in order to improve our understanding of shifting, multisited, and multivocal landscapes especially concerning human/nature relationships. This investigation, then, is in response to the general academic need and in particular to Torres and Whitten Jr's request for research priority in which they appeal for: "[r]esearchers ... to develop techniques to understand cultural traditions, practices, and orientations where blackness is important to social life in the broadest and deepest possible dimensions of time and space" (1998:52). I propose embodiment as a critical concept for African diaspora scholarship, and specifically the use of videography as an ethnographic tool to access and evoke African diaspora ecological knowledge.

In studying African religions, an embodied approach is particularly appropriate, since a distinguishing feature of many African and African diaspora religions is that "nature" integrates spiritual and material worlds into an interactive community (Sweet 2003; Akinyemi pers. comm. 2003; Omari 1995; Thornton 1992; Oduyoye 1997; Mintz and Price 1976; Evans-Pritchard 1937; Casanova 1996). For instance, the Lucumí, or the bearers of the cultural legacy of the Yorùbá diaspora in Cuba, follow what could be called a "nature religion" (Taylor 2005), which integrates biophysical, human and spiritual components into an intersubjective cosmos and conversation (compare with Morrison 2000; Gill 1987,1982,1977; Busse 2000; Taiwo 2000; Chevannes 1998; González-Wippler 1996; Canizares 2000, 1993). According to some of the literature (e.g., Daniel

2005; González-Wippler 1998; Ortiz 1995; Thompson Drewal 1992; Amira and Cornelius 1992; Bascom 1980; Castellanos 1977) and my interviews (2003, 2004), the Lucumí *santero/a* (initiated priest), transmits this understanding of the world through what I call an embodied epistemology including salutations, songs, and dances to communicate with ancestors, trees, plants, animals, spirits, and orisha (i.e., divinities). Osainistas, followers of the orisha Osain, are specialized *santeros* initiated into the knowledge of how to communicate with the orishas to be able to know, find and collect the ritually required plants and healing herbs from *el monte* (i.e., wild or sacred forest) (Cabrera 2000 [1954]).

Thus, a study of Yorùbá religion and Osain reveals an embodied landscape akin to that which Ingold (2000) and Tilley (1994) discuss. The land is not an empty space void of meaning, but instead a landscape in which subjectivity is inherent (Tilley 1994; Ingold 2000; Rengifo 1998). Human and nonhuman realms become a common “intersubjective community,” as scholars such as Apfel-Marglin (1998), Morrison (2000), and Berkes (1999) have found prevalent within indigenous ecological knowledge systems. The human is located and constituted within a larger community, which includes spiritual, natural, temporal, spatial as well as human realms, going beyond ontological separations as reflected in the subject/object dichotomy. Hence, with respect to methodological approaches, James Elkins elucidates the observer/object relation:

There is ultimately no such thing as an observer or an object, only a foggy ground between the two. It's as if I have abandoned the place in the sentence that was occupied by the words “the observer” and I've taken up residence in the verb “looks” literally between the words “object” and “observer”... what I have been calling the observer evaporates, and what really takes place is a “betweenness” (for lack of a better word): part of me is the object and part of the object is me (as cited in Sewall 1999:263).

Embodied Epistemologies

My work is embedded within this framework that I call embodied epistemology: the adjective embodied comes from the noun embodiment¹, which as a concept, collapses the subject/object division along with the mind/body dichotomy into knowing (or learning to know) through a whole lived experience. I use epistemology to refer to the process of learning to know (Foucault 1994[1973]; 1980; Bourdieu 1984). According to Foucault, *episteme* is similar to a worldview and is “the total set of relations that unite, at a given period, the discursive practices that give rise to epistemological figures, sciences, and possible formalized systems” (1972:191).

An example of embodied epistemology is found in Geurts’ (2002) study of a sensorial knowledge of the Anlow-Ewe speaking people of Ghana, which emphasizes how the pattern of attitudes and practices an individual develops to interact with the world is based on how that person learns to perceive and experience the world. Bourdieu (1993[1977]; 1984) calls this internalized knowing “embodied” knowledge. One of several websites dedicated to Yorùbá religion explains it as, “where the miracle of the embodiment of an idea into a matter [sic] is real.”. Also, Csordas (1994) in *The Embodied Self* and Stoller (1997) in *Sensuous Scholarship* both refer to embodiment to understand a process of an expanded, experiential concept of personhood.

Yorùbá religion expresses how a practitioner can traverse the seemingly impassable divide between defining the world as merely physical or characterizing it as spiritual through offering practices that enable interaction and communication among temporal, spatial, spiritual, and material worlds. In order to grasp some of these embodied experiences of Yorùbá diaspora in

¹ See for instance, Bateson 2002; Marks 2000; Taiwo 2000; Sewall 1999; B. Turner 1997; Stoller 1997; T. Turner 1995; Schepher Hughes 1994; Lock 1993; Csordas 1994, 1990; Douglas 1970; Heidegger 1962; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Husserl 1931.

Cuba, additional methodology² may be necessary. This next section will delve into embodiment as a critical conceptual tool and move toward evocative ethnography as an alternative methodological framework.

African Diaspora and Embodiment

Studies of the African diaspora can benefit from using a framework based on embodiment. Since some practitioners of African derived religions are known to communicate across spirit, material, temporal, and spatial worlds, an additional approach beyond the materialist-based empirical model is necessary; scholars must find culturally appropriate ways to interpret religions of African heritage. James Sweet, scholar of Central Africans who forcibly migrated to Brazil, reminds us that many Africans in the diaspora view religion as a “way of explaining, predicting, and controlling events in the world around them” in much the same sense of what Westerners call “science” (2003: 108). However, contemporary African and African diaspora theorists are reexamining this position and promoting an understanding of varied African and African-derived practices on their own terms (Daniel 2005; Chidester 2005; Olupona 2006).

Since, the Lucumí, like certain African diaspora religious practitioners, do not limit their systems of knowledge to the material world, I propose embodiment as a theoretical framework to better understand African diaspora epistemologies, specifically focusing on Yorùbá practitioners in Cuba. Yorùbá practitioners in Cuba offer a poignant example of how Western science and African diaspora science can and do come together to form religion, medicine and science that is relevant in the daily lives of practitioners’ multiracial, mulitsited, and multivocal lived experiences.

² I choose the word specifically, since methodology refers to the overall conceptual framework about how to do research, as it prescribes how to link or relate theory, research practices, and result findings.

The previous chapter examines the roots of empirical epistemologies, in which the concept of a material world was separated from a spiritual one. The former was able to be broken into its constituents to be analyzed and known, while the latter—since it could not be empirically known—was banished from scientific inquiry and for all purposes, the academy. Thus, scholars have structured religions other than those of Northern European, white, urban, male individuals³ as the irrational “Other” according to hierarchical divisions founded upon the researcher’s own precepts and worldviews⁴. What gets to be accepted as knowledge then is the result of historically contextualized, political processes of power and legitimation (Harrison 2008; Latour 2004; Haraway 2001, 1988; Harding 1998; Chambers 1997; Escobar 1999; Foucault 1981). As I expressed earlier, that which is not accepted as knowledge is devalued as belief (Good 1994). Moreover, with individualism, rationalism, and empiricism defining our personhood, our Western worldview becomes a self-affirming model of reality (Sewall 1999: 247) that divides and separates subject from object, seen from unseen and mind from body. Instead, I propose embodiment as a critical concept for African diaspora scholarship to comprehend Yorùbá religion and ecology in Cuba, and the numerous other religions of the world that have special ecological knowledges that should be understood in their own terms.

Embodiment: Theoretically Imagined

In order to better understand embodiment theory, and its import for African diaspora scholarship, the following few paragraphs will proceed into a brief chronological and theoretical synthesis of differing interpretations of the body. During the Enlightenment in Western Europe, the body that appeared was shaped in the form of 18th century, privileged philosophers and

³ The Europeans systematizing and narrating typically were literate Northern European men mainly from the lower levels of the aristocracy and the middle and upper levels of the bourgeoisie (Pratt 1992:38).

⁴ Defined by Gross (1996) as “any belief that functions as the most significant arbiter for decisions and actions.”

scientists –in other words, white, aristocratic males who personified the civilized ideal due to their purportedly God-given reason. The body became a conceptual tool referring to a rational, civilized (i.e., white European) individual self (Rousseau 1973). Foucault (1979) theorized the body less as a rational individual and more as a common mass manipulated by the political artifice of the state’s control. Thus attention was brought to the politics and ramifications of the idealized “normal” body that the state cultivated through its legal and social institutions.

Bourdieu (1984) later clarifies that these masses of bodies and their cultivated desires and behaviors cannot be separated from either their political or their social constructions.

Consequently, Strathern (1996) elucidates three categories of bodies: political, social and individual. Yet, Wagner (1991) clarifies that these individuals are not static entities, but instead fractal, plural and continually changing selves. Similar to Wagner’s (1991) concept of fractal person, Young (1994) argues that we are all multiple selves or “quasi-selves” that constitute the subject of the person’s experiences at different points in time. Understanding and accepting the multiple selves of which we all exist, he explains, helps us examine our “mistaken faith in the unity of mind” (p82). He further clarifies: “the embodied person and not any particular self is the locus” (ibid.). Young (1994) emphasizes that the self cannot be located only in the mind or specific parts of the body, while Scheper-Hughes and Lock (1987) use the term “mindful body” to stress the inseparability of body and mind intrinsic to understanding the “body.”

This analysis of multiple selves helps us to interpret the Yorùbá diaspora for several reasons. First, the self encompasses many teachings and positionalities within everyday lived experience. Moreover, each individual encompasses different roles within society and within the religion, as this analysis will elucidate. Locating humans as constituted within and of a larger community is integral to African diaspora scholarship; these communities consist of spiritual,

temporal, spatial as well as human realms. Thus, there is a constant exchange occurring in relating to the universe that Bateson's (2002) explanation of cybernetics can help us comprehend. He counters the view of a unitary objective and object-like mind with an understanding of continuous, energetic exchanges as the base of relating with the world.

So what (or who) is "the body" of which we speak, make laws, prescribe medicine and study religion? Despite the myriad commentaries on the body, many Westerners, with our base of empiricism, look to biology and technology to explain the fundamental body. However, Merleau-Ponty (1962:314) suggests that we show caution:

We must learn to distinguish it [the body in which I live and experience, just as I live and experience it] from the objective body as set forth by physiology. This is not the body, which is capable of being inhabited by a consciousness.

The concept of body, person and self as a construct of distinct interpretations that are fluid, historically and contextually contingent is not new⁵. What is new and necessary (especially in a study with African diaspora peoples) is the concept of embodiment as a research tool for theory and praxis highlighting, "a way of living or inhabiting the world" (Csordas 1999: xiv). The term embodiment refers to collapsing the inside and outside, observer and object dichotomies. This is a critical term for scholarship:

There is ultimately no such thing as an observer or an object, only a foggy ground between the two. It's as if I have abandoned the place in the sentence that was occupied by the words "the observer" and I've taken up residence in the verb "looks," literally between the words "object" and "observer" ... what I have been calling the observer evaporates, and what really takes place is a "betweenness" (for lack of a better word): part of me is the object and part of the object is me (James Elkins in Sewall 1999:263).

Embodiment as a category is a social construction; it may have as many limitations as it does benefits, but minimally it as a category points scholars in the direction of integrating

⁵ Marcel Mauss argued that the human, "the person," is a cultural category with different attributes for different cultures at different times and places (Mauss 1979) through the notion of "body techniques" –walking, sitting and other bodily activities are learned and thereby culturally shaped.

experiences, relationships and processes of communication –bringing conceptions of segregated mind and body together into a whole of experiences contextualized in “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 1962).

The territory of religion, suggests Gill (1998), must be understood as lived experience, not just the objective sense of the mind. As scholars we must be aware of the effect that conceptual categories and methodological stances have on our perceptions and interpretations of expressed communicative acts with the divine. Gill astutely asserts that although the academic student of religion may not assume an essential sacredness or presence, (hierophany in Eliade’s terms), but instead only recognizes an act of participating in human creativity, the people which the student is studying may indeed ascribe and live through this cosmology, epistemology and phenomenology of sacredness.

Sharf (1998), however, raises questions concerning the possibility that anyone can know mystical experience at all, and especially of another. Nonetheless, Stoller (1998) argues for sensorial scholarship with expression of personal experience to overcome this obstacle of representation, authenticity and false separation of body and mind. He begins an essay on rationalism with his own personal experience of attempting to contact the woman Dunguri, a sorcerer, in 1979 in the town of Wanzerbe in Nigeria, West Africa (Stoller 1998). He tells of his own experience with not being able to move, seemingly under a magical spell. Thus, he gives up the notion of autonomous, rational self for a self that is a vessel of knowledge and sorcery: “like the Songhay sorcerers and griots [of West Africa,] that one does not master sorcery, history or knowledge; rather, it is sorcery, history, and knowledge that master us” (Stoller 1997: 252).

In societies where the body may be felt as well as read, Stoller encourages us to develop an alternative to a “mentalist” approach, particularly for African religions. In many North and West

African societies learning religion, history or cultural codes is accomplished less through the academic approach of unilinear “reading” and “writing” and instead through “gustatory terms of bodily consumption” (1997:6). Thus, Stoller (1997), along with Gill (1998) and Pinn (2000), suggests the expansion of the scholar’s sensoria to include different senses of different bodies with respect to embodied experiences like tastes, smells, visions, gender, culture, age and bodily ability.

Additionally, Stoller (1997) and Taiwo (2000) promote analytical models that include concepts such as those Gilroy (1992) proffers: mime, gesture, kinesis, and costume to be able to understand religions based on non-verbal (e.g., proxemic and kinesic) relations as well as verbal⁶ (see also Hall 1963; Birdwhistle 1968). Taiwo (2000) also suggests that scholars using the embodiment paradigm should listen to the rhythms of the drum in order to understand the para-linguistic, non-verbal codes that are rooted in the body. Daniel (2005) notes embodied knowledge is key in guiding adherents and onlookers alike in religious clues. These include: characteristic similarities between dance movements that are critical to understanding Yorùbá religion and ecology as well as other clues like colors of necklaces, types of food, and spatial access. Thus, if embodiment is an existential condition in which the body is the subjective source or intersubjective ground of experience, then studies under the rubric of embodiment are not “about” the body per se. Instead they are about culture and experience insofar as these can be understood from the standpoint of bodily being-in-the-world (Csordas 2001:143).

Within a phenomenological framework, and in response to Mauss’ (1935) call for an awareness of cultural variation in different “techniques of the body,” I propose embodiment as a critical concept for ethnography. Embodiment as an anthropological field of inquiry is the study

⁶ Instead of limiting descriptions to the written word, Stoller (1997) and Marks (2000) instead emphasize, the sensuousness of film to trigger cultural memories by images and words which *resensualize* us to our experiences.

of the body—understood as interrelated body and mind (Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987).

Bourdieu (1977; 1984) asserted that the habits of people were representative of their political and cultural structures. He explained that embodiment then, was “the process whereby history is turned into nature.” Thus, through our practices, we become normalized into a particular way.

Each of these theorists and their theories of the body are relevant to African diaspora scholarship. Earlier, we discussed how scholars were often placing the “Other” whom they studied as lesser in a hierarchical progression of thought and religion (and today called development or modernity). Yet, most individuals within the African diaspora are neither strictly white, European, aristocratic, and Christian, nor are they indigenous, rural, peoples who do not make distinctions between their bodies and the rest of the physical and spiritual world. Instead, they have elements of personhood that are in common with both and much more. I hope to call attention to the embodied epistemology of African derived religions, and the use of evocative ethnography to reveal an improved understanding that relies less on colonial discourse and instead attempt to illustrate aspects of the multifaceted religion through emic conceptual categories. I hope that this translation will help people who are in positions of policy in international conservation and development to broaden their understanding and be able to listen as well as advise in their conversations.

Many of the Africans who were transported to Cuba were highly trained urban craftspeople and Yorùbá priests, since Oyo Empire was the largest in its time. They had been the princes, queens and other figures of royalty before they were turned into slaves from the war. Some were also Christian and others Muslim. Foucault and Bourdieu emphasize the role of the state in a configuration and contemplation of the body, and indeed for the African diaspora, the state plays a decisive role in many ways. In the Caribbean and Central, South and North American regions,

the state determined whether people were brought together and created factions or were divided up because of forces dispersing ethnic cohesion. In Cuba, the Spanish fashioned self-help societies called *cabildos*, after their own groups of the same name. Thus, people of similar ethnic lines grouped together, and these spaces and times helped the lessons, the lifeways, and the ecological knowledge to continue to be known and lived. The process of knowledge transmission was and is embodied. Learning is accomplished through the drum's rhythms, the dancer's movement and the diviner's conversations with the plants and with the spirits.

Embodiment and African Religions

When we as a Yorùbá people have embodied the [drum's] return beat at an early age a whole virtual terrain opens up...it becomes embodied knowledge. ... [that helps] realize those important connections vital for decoding non-verbal signifiers in the process of communication (Taiwo 2000:184).

How do we interpret the world, and our place within it? Epistemology—or ways of learning to know the world—is critically important for religious practitioners, African diaspora scholars and anthropologists alike. We must be cognizant of knowledge systems, both our own, and those of the people with whom we do our research, recognizing the implications in terms of dynamics of gender, age, ethnicity, seniority, class, profession, region, religious commitment, and cosmology of self and world (e.g., Chambers 1997; Harrison 1991). Stoller, a scholar of West African Songhay culture and religion, reveals that contemporary scholars need to transcend the ill-representative mind/body divide for a more embracing, sensorial experience with the people and experiences of the people with whom we do fieldwork as well as with our analyses and descriptions. I hope to respond to Stoller's call.

In a similar vein, Geurts (2002) proposes that we expand our sensorium to include even more than just the five senses that we commonly acknowledge, in an attempt to understand more appropriately the experiences of the people with whom we work. Within a phenomenological

framework, and in response to Mauss' (1935) call for an awareness of cultural variation in different "techniques of the body," Geurts (2002) documented a sensory system of Anlow-Ewe speaking people of Ghana. In this West Africa ethnography, she systematically studied an epistemology that she argues is based on sensory experiences like balance. Geurts argues (in accord with Bourdieu 1977; Csordas 1994, 1999) that this process of embodied learning performatively elaborated through rituals and other cultural traditions (e.g., movement, myth and sound) develops the concepts and practices with the world.

Recognizing multiplicities of bodies and perceptions, scholars are beginning to reexamine the religions and the practitioners with whom they study. For instance, Chidester calls attention to scholars like Graham Harvey who redefine animism, as West African traditions have historically been labeled, to be interpreted instead as "relational epistemology" meaning "people gain knowledge by entering into humanizing relations with the natural world" (2005: 80). Pinn (2003) proposes that African diasporas and some Africans should be understood through a hermeneutics of style and bodily ways of knowing also known as corpospirituality.

To understand cultures based on experiential knowing, Michael York refers to the symbolic-ritual systems found throughout the world's religions, which he describes as "an affirmation of interactive and polymorphic sacred relationship by the individual or community with the tangible, sentient and/or nonempirical" (2003: 157). York recognizes the universalist tendency of categorizing so many distinct religions under any one label (in his case, Paganism), but he asserts that it "represents an epistemological, theological perspective and consequent practice that, despite its plethora of micro and local expressions, is a viable and distinguishable religiospiritual position that has in common a number of similar characteristics including: number of both male and female deities, magical practices, emphasis on ritual efficacy,

corpspirituality, an understanding of gods and humans as codependent and related, lack of belief in historical revelation, belief that this world and otherworld are intimately interrelated through active exchange, divine is to be experienced directly, and use of various techniques of divination” (York 2003:14).

Canizares elucidates that the embodied process integral to understanding the Yorùbá religion should not simply be an analysis of certain conceptual categories. Instead, a dynamic engagement with interrelationships between worlds, which is often carried out through performative actions or ritual, should be recognized. Material bodies and spirit bodies interact. Each uses the other to manifest itself interconnecting these worlds through practice and performance.

Memory is etched by peoples’ senses into their corporeal being, and they remember vividly the sensorial experiences. Lucumí is based on personal, embodied experiences incorporating the material and the spirit(ual) worlds into an integrated cosmology of conversations. The entire process is one of learning through embodied communication techniques. The community includes dead ancestors, *orishas*, nature spirits, and the religious family; consequently communication is achieved through embodied performances such as possession, divination and initiation. And the process of learning is bodily informed through dance, rhythm and story-telling. Through the practices we discern the bodies, from prostrating in salutation to possession, initiation, divination, sacrifice and storytelling, we comprehend the cosmology and the beings who live within.

Embodied Ecological Knowledge in the African Diaspora

To comprehend local ecological knowledge systems, researchers should include the unique knowledges and ways of knowing that locals have with their environment (Meffee and Carroll 1997; Berkes 1999), which incorporate their distinct processes of learning about and interacting

with the ecosystems they inhabit, sometimes perceived as extended community (G. Harvey 2005; York 2003; Morrison 2000; Apffel-Marglin 1998;). After all, what is traditional about traditional knowledge is not its antiquity, according to the Four Directions Council of Canada but “the way it is acquired and used” (1996 cited in Posey 1999:4). This is particularly true for Lucumí in Cuba since due to this religion’s way of integrating other religious icons and acts like Catholic Saints, Spiritist possession and Abakua secret society, it has grown to be one of the largest of Cuba and beyond.

For instance, Soyinka explains: “Continuity for the Yorùbá operates both through the cyclic concept of time and the animist interfusion of all matter and consciousness” (1993:30 in Taiwo 2000:177). Space-time is not seen as separate from matter and consciousness, but as a whole that unfolds like an onion in concentric spheres (Taiwo 2000: 177). Soyinka (1993) broadens this idea of the body to incorporate the notion of temporal existence, where the world of the living (the present) is seen, in a metaphysical sense as sharing the same spatial and temporal context as the world of the ancestors (the past) and the world of the unborn (the future). In traditional Yorùbá culture this responsibility is taken very seriously. Time and space seem to be experienced not as a singular absolute condition, but as a series of continuous coexistent states.

The concept that matter and consciousness are integrated, and that the boundaries among the spiritual, physical, temporal and spatial are crossable, is critical to apprehend and the major facet to which this work attends. For Yorùbá practitioners, these different worlds become accessible in the knowledge of communication across human, spiritual, physical, dead, living, seen, and unseen. This embodied communication—or as Oduyoye (1997: 7) calls transmitting ways of knowing the divine—is enacted through the body emphasizing communication among

plants, spirits, ancestors and humans through worship with song, rhythm, and dance as ways of “communing with God in prayer.”

Embodied Acts of Communication

Some of the commonly cited rituals or methods of communicating between the intersubjective Lucumí are through divination, music, and possession. Osainistas use all of these to divine, to listen and to request the alchemical powers of the plant-orisha world.

Divination

Divination, or using various means to understand the meaning of one’s life and the events of one’s future, traverses divides of the living, dead, material, spiritual, seen and unseen worlds. Just as the divine and ancestors can speak through a possessed person, so do they also embody their energy and speak through plants, stones, shells, coconut pieces and special stories. Human and suprahuman actions are interpreted through the divining system *Ifa*, through special stories (called *Pataki* in Cuba) and through coconut shells and cowries (*dilogun* or divination with sixteen cowries) following the practices in Yorùbáland (Daniel 2005; Bascom 1991 [1951]; Bastide 1978; Verger 1957).

One can communicate directly with the divine through divination. There are three major types of divining. The first one is restricted to only babalawos (the high priest and highest level of practitioner). It is called the *Oracles of Ifá* and consists of a body of sacred stories (*Pataki*) that a babalao memorizes. He knows which story to recite and interpret through one of two ways. One, he casts a small chain with eight concave oval or round pieces of leather, coconut, or calabash. Then, the babalao attains a configuration that tells which of the 256 *oddu* or chapters should be read for the particular situation. Next, the babalao must interpret the ambiguous stories to find correct application.

[Object 4-1. Clip of movie throwing the coconut divining shells \(dv, 9.1 MB\)](#)

The next more common method of divination is through the ‘*mediloggun*⁷ oracle,’ which uses cowrie shells (*caracoles*) as the mouths of the orisha. They are considered mouths, because they are understood to speak. The priest must know how to listen. There are 16 *letras*, equivalent to *oddus*, which are the Pataki stories. Pataki are the myths and stories that “tell eternal truths and valuable lessons they have passed on from one generation to the next for hundreds, and sometimes thousands of years” (Canizares 1993: 54-55). Although any person can memorize the Pataki, for divination and usefulness you need to know how to interpret the stories to be efficacious. The number of shells that fall with the natural opening face up determines which *letra* is to be recited. *Letra* 1-12 can be interpreted by any santero or santera, but 13-16 should only be read by babalaos.

The last and most often used divinatory technique, the *obi*, can be used by anyone to communicate with the orisha. It is a coconut-casting system that consists of four pieces of coconut, and questions should be asked in simple yes and no form. Depending on how many fleshy sides and how many shell sides face up, the practitioner can interpret the answers. In Matanzas, Cuba more often priests are priests but not high-priests (babalawos). Thus, it is through the reading of shells that most Osainistas in Matanzas divine the problems, the needs of a ceremony, and the proper plants to use. Once they know which plants and thereby which orisha they are requesting from, then they must know how to request. This is done through specialized music—chants and rhythms.

Music

Music (through drumming and incantation) can be an embodied vehicle to access the divine. Stoller expounds that, “In Songhay, sound is more than a means to the end of trance; it is

⁷ Mediloggun means sixteen in Yorùbá.

a foundation of experience” (1989: 104). Sound penetrates and thereby creates a sense of communication and participation between outside and inside, invisible and visible and between spiritual and physical worlds. Stoller continues to explore sound for the Songhay and other peoples around the world by explaining that many people consider sound “to have an existence separate from [only] the domains of human, animal, and plant life. Sounds carry forces which are not only good to think, but good to feel” (Stoller 1989:112). These are the feelings that evocative ethnography attempts to evoke.

Drumming. As Taiwo explains, “When we as a Yorùbá people have embodied the [drum’s] return beat at an early age a whole virtual terrain opens up...it becomes embodied knowledge ...in the process of communication” (Taiwo 2005:184). Canizares offers more specific details and elucidates that the divine can be accessed through the melodies produced in the throats and the complex rhythms of each of the six hands of the three drummers. Thus, highly trained singers and drummers, especially batá drummers develop an ability to create a confluence of sounds and rhythms that bridges the seen and the unseen, the material and the spiritual, God and humankind. According to practitioners, the orishas were able to cross the waters from Africa to Cuba in these songs rhythms and of their devotees.

Initiated drummers called *alaña* hold the secret to unite humans with the orishas via specifically executed vocal melodies and phrases. If the songs are precise, they may achieve the desired effect, neither missing a beat nor mispronouncing a word, and the orisha descend from heavenly abode and temporarily possess their devotees, initiating a mystic state of communion between the orishas and the participants (Canizares 1993: 69). As African theologian, John Mbiti argues: “African music is that aspect of life which provides the repositories of traditional beliefs,

ideas, wisdom, and feelings” (1999[1969]: 67). Hence, santeros consider properly consecrated batá drums to be living, powerful entities, the materialization of the great spirit Aña.

Chants. Verger explains how the *ofó* or chants for the Yorùbá enacts life since sound creates live vibrations. Utterances through music and through the mouth embody power as Ayoade elucidates, “to the initiated the sound of the words is the audible manifestations of its innate force” (1979:51). Prince notes that among the Yoruba, “to utter the name of something may draw that something into actual existence...not only within the mind and body of he who utters and he who hears the word, but also in the physical world as well” (1960:66). Hence, Verger (1996) uncovers how Yoruba incantations that are chanted during the preparation of medicines summon the *ashé*, or dynamic essence, of the plants. The chant comprises monosyllabic action verbs from each plant and ingredient in the formula. Additionally, Drewal explains that the sound quality of verbs, nouns, adverbs and adjectives in Yoruba incantations acknowledge a dynamic relationship between speech and action (1998: 257-259).

Movement

Not only do Yoruba practitioners acknowledge a strong correlation between power (*ashé*) and oral performance, but also movement in terms of dance and possession are key tools in the process of communicating religious and environmental information.

Dance. Dance is a critical tool to interpret Yoruba religion, access the divine, and understand nature in the process. As Drewal details:

...the phrase *kíkan* simulates verbally the effort quality of the dance, that is, one in which a dominant motif is raising (*kí*) and percussively dropping (*kàn*) the shoulders repetitively, i.e., *kíkan kíkan*. *Kí* is quick, sharp, and high (or up) in tone; *kan* is forceful, full, and heavy, dropping in tone. The dance further evokes, in its speed and thrust, the dynamics of lightening and thunder—in that order—associated with Shangó. In fact, from this perspective, the image of lightening and thunder can be seen, like the analogy to rainfall illustrated above, to derive meaning from its actual dynamic qualities, qualities which in turn reflect the nature of Shangó’s power.

Daniel, in her study on *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bhaian Candomblé*, reveals that the “movement sequence and motifs for the divinities conform to identifiable patterns that are recognizable across the African Diaspora” (2005: 63). Ogún’s dance exemplifies the common patterns since his dance has “explicitly, literal meanings and implied, abstracted meanings that are common in all three ritual communities” (*Ibid*). Aggressive warrior stances, kicking through tough terrain, and sharply using some sort of metal like machete to cut cut through the thicket or through an opponent are predominant movement themes that demonstrate the warrior-nature of this spirit. Thus “ritual dance performance was a repository of remembered movements and musical components but also a repository of complementary legends, beliefs, and attitudes, with contrasting and alternative resolutions for temporal problems” (2005: 64). These alternative resolutions for tropical conservation and development are precisely what I hope to more fully uncover with an improved insight of Yoruba religion.

Possession. With the music, rhythms, chants and dancing, people sometimes get “embraced” by the orisha. Orisha possession occurs when a priesthood holder’s consciousness is totally taken over by the consciousness of an orisha, thus making it possible for humans to have direct conversations with divine beings, receiving their counsel and advice.

The song to Obatalá also had satisfactory results; the greatest of all orishas descended from heaven to commune with mortals. Amanda became rigid; then a steady trembling like the passage of a strong electrical current began to come over her. Fully possessed by the divine Obatalá, Amanda danced a slow, stately dance that transfixed those present...A great circle formed around Amanda/Obatalá. The orisha began to single out certain individuals for counseling...Pointing to another woman’s stomach, Obatalá said, “You have a tumor right there. Tell my *caballo* [Amanda] to give you some omiero⁸ to drink and then go to the

⁸ Omiero is a magical herbal infusion. Often it comprises specific herbs combined with certain water to receive the necessary ashé, and then it can be used for cleansing self, spirit and/or location. A friend of mine in Florida, attested to the powers of the omiero when she told me about a time when she was instructed to go to the river and pour a certain omiero—that had been prepared for her—over her head. She said, within moments, she was completely exhausted; her energy had been depleted. Immediately after, she explained, she was forced to curl up on a couch and

white man's doctor to get an operation. Don't worry you'll be fine afterward" (Canizares 1999: 14).

As this vignette clearly demonstrates, Yoruba medicine is inclusive and assimilates that which works best for a human. This technique of assimilation is what has helped Yoruba to be one of the predominant religions in Cuba, despite it being an officially atheist state. Thus, the same person can make use of the two major medicines and bodies for which Cuba is acclaimed: physiological and orisha.

Platvoet defines spirit possession as processes of communication between human beings and unseen beings (2000: 83-7). Furthermore, possession has been a tool of communication between worlds from food gatherers in Neolithic times to modern religions of today. Some of the various ones that have incorporated this method are paganism, shamanism, prophetic movements, mantic oracles, exorcist rituals, spiritism, and certain forms of ritual healing up to current methods of channeling in New Age. In discussing spirit possession of the Bono of West Africa, Platvoet (2000) explains that messages are received through the mouth of the "possessed" person who sometimes offers an oracle of the future (*orare* means to speak in Latin). Believers understand this as a "face to face" contact with spirit (Platvoet 2000:80).

Through understanding not just the names and classifications but the ways of knowing the environment, I intend to further the field of religion and nature and ecological anthropology in understanding local ecological knowledge systems especially African and African diasporic religions concern with ways of knowing, interacting and communicating with nature.

rest for several hours. One woman's explanation of her recipe of omiero illustrates how location, environment, saints and time all interact together to help create the sacred potion: "I use rainwater collected from a crevice in the sacred iroko (silk cotton) tree during the month of May, river water collected on the festival of Saint John (June 24), and seawater collected on the early morning of Holy Saturday" (Canizares 1999: 102). Often, very specific chants are sung while preparing the omiero offering the sound vibrations as currents of energy and ashé to infuse the water that is meant to heal or initiate someone.

I propose video, under an umbrella of embodied ethnography, as a technique that may aid in this quest. Embodied ethnography offers a model for scholarship vital to the contemporary religious scholar and anthropologist alike since it can incorporate, “networks of relationships as models of communication and interaction between all parts of the community, including humans, spirits, ancestors and natural entities” (Gill 1998:311). Scholars must address the distinctive points of access, the ways of entering and the strategies of interacting (*ibid.*).

Evocative Ethnography Defined

To understand and to transmit embodied knowledge of the landscape, then, especially important for representing experiences and religions of Yorùbá practitioners in the diaspora, researchers must find additional means of methodological inquiry. The primary avenue that I suggest offers the possibility to merge academic research with embodiment theory and may be more applicable to understand some African diaspora ecological knowledges; it is what I call *Evocative Ethnography*.

Ethnography, as James P. Spradley in *The Ethnographic Interview* defines entails, “learning from people” rather than “studying people” (1979:3). Instead of “collecting ‘data’ about people, the ethnographer seeks to learn from people, to be taught by them.” (*ibid.*: 5). Ethnographers focus on interpretations or the special meanings of experiences, objects, behaviors, relationships and ideas that may help guide behaviors; these systems of meaning are often referred to as cultural knowledge. Though culture is neither equivalent to race nor ethnicity nor homogenous to a geographically bounded group, many shared constructs of meaning often exist and guide human interaction in the world. Certain specific techniques to understand these shared constructs are the focus of ethnography, particularly relying upon a verbal description (ethno, meaning cultural and graphy, meaning through writing). Even ethnographic films often include a narrative that explains the scenes and the people in the film.

Though both Malinowski “native point of view” and Franz Boas “if it is our serious purpose to understand the thoughts of a people the whole analysis of experience must be based upon their concepts, not ours” (1943: 11). Thus, in both the discovery and the description, ethnographers should “represent the meanings encoded in that language as closely as possible” relying predominantly on the concepts and meanings integral to that perspective. As Stoller extols, “And once we decide to follow their paths of wisdom, we leave the comforts of a world in which we are members of an intellectual elite and enter worlds of experience in which our...teachers scold us for our ignorance” (1989: 121).

Ethnographic Research Versus Social Science Research

Spradley (1979:30) in his book on *The Ethnographic Interview*, clarifies a pertinent dissimilarity between social science research and ethnographic. This distinction highlights a critical point of conflict that I have grappled with throughout my research.

Table 4-1. Social science research versus ethnographic research.

Social science research	Ethnographic research
1. What do I know about a problem that will allow me to formulate and test a hypothesis?	1. What do my informants know about their culture that I can discover?
2. What concepts can I use to test this hypothesis?	2. What concepts do my informants use to classify their experience?
3. How can I operationally define these concepts?	3. How do my informants define these concepts?
4. What scientific theory can explain the data?	4. What folk theory do my informants use to explain their experience?
5. How can I interpret the results and report them in the language of my colleagues?	5. How can I <i>translate</i> the cultural knowledge of my informants into a cultural description my colleagues will understand?

Although Spradley identifies research through a distinction of social science and ethnographic research, he seems really to be talking about postivist social science research and not social science research in general, as a monolithic totality. After all, ethnographic,

phenomenological, and other qualitative research styles are a part of social science as well. Nonetheless, it is important to distinguish between the approaches to acknowledge the stance a researcher has in the field. As Spradley (1979:34) asserts, ethnographers through their actions, their words and in other subtle and direct ways express, “I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand?” This is the style and the stance that I have tried to take in both my research and my representation. Thus, I have chosen ethnographic techniques that are more participatory and collaborative and discarded ones that were tedious and hierarchical in knowledge extraction (e.g., dyads and triads in cognitive methods, and the for Russo’s Kluckhohn’s human-nature values questionnaire that took several hours to conduct). Particularly critical to my research is the iterative interaction of research, analysis, research and analysis that I have carried out over several years of return visits to many of the same families in Cuba. I note, that I am still fully in this process, and look forward to continuing the research in subsequent visits with the foundation that I now have. Hence, what I am calling Evocative Ethnography comprises participatory and iterative research through the primary three strategies of archival, cognitive and videographic work, which I situate within Sensorial Anthropology.

Participatory. In participatory research, the community members are also not considered “objects for observation, but...regard[ed] as equal partners who can themselves identify their needs and wishes (Ostergaard 1992). Thus, the power dynamic shifts from a uni-directional, top-down approach to one of facilitation by everyone for everyone in order to raise awareness about the circumstances and the possibilities. Consequently, the researcher chooses methods and

techniques that shift the balance from closed to open. Sometimes, this is accomplished through focus groups rather than individual interviews, using mainly visual rather than written tools and comparing rather than quantifying. As a result of training and sharing of information and experiences (both formally and informally), collaborative partnerships can develop (Chambers 1997; Wondollek and Yaffee 2000).

In terms of reliability, participatory research may be more accurate than some quantitative methods. For instance, a group from the Christian Medical College in South India compared a formal questionnaire survey with the more participatory wealth ranking to identify economic levels of the rural poor. The researchers found that the quantitative, questionnaire survey was only 57% accurate while the qualitative community classification was 97% accurate in identifying economic levels of households. They concluded that professional, outside classification, especially when it deals with economic levels, were limited by misconceptions (Chambers 1997: 143). The wealth ranking allowed for more complex and locally appropriate analysis of wealth that was more accurate for the community involved.

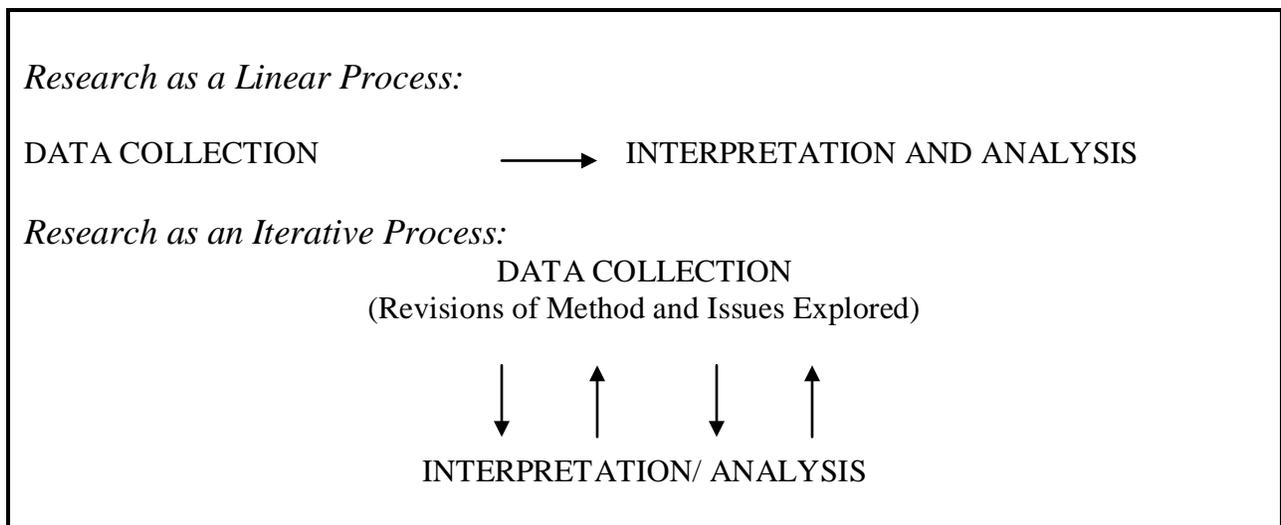


Figure 4-1. Illustration of a linear process versus an interative process of research.

In the participatory approach, data collection and analysis are iterative. The process builds upon continuous processes of exchange between the various actors in order to better comprehend the issues, the methods and the solutions. Gebert (2000) delineates graphically the difference between conventional and participatory methodologies:

So, in my explanation of religion –I do not start with an explanation of monotheism, but instead of *ashé* and *orishas*. And in my explanation of how the Yoruba practitioners with whom I talked understand nature, I demonstrate primarily through cognitive maps and videography some of the nuances that illustrate a communication and an integration of metaphysical and mundane. Thus, I do not classify the plants according to a taxonomic system often used in ethnobotany that compares like names, categories and characteristics with those of the Latin genus and species. Instead, I focus on Evocative Ethnography, or highlighting the communication that crosses the sometimes-perceived divide of the spiritual and physical worlds through music and movement.

Spradley suggests that “translation competence” or “the ability to translate the meanings of one culture into a form that is appropriate to another culture” is a critical task for ethnographers. Taking this recognition of semantic and therein semiotic differences, I suggest that the written word may limit the expression and thereby the interpretation of the categories and experiences of Lucumi human-nature conceptualizations and relationships.

For not only does using social science terms, questions and modes of representation to represent another community possibly force a conformity that could be ill-appropriate. A good example of this is the difference between how social scientists had been using their analytic concepts to study what become homeless men replete with their stereotypes rather than tramps, as they call themselves, and have their own form of language, communication and knowledge (Spradley 1979:23).

Social science and anthropology has a long history of imposing culturally specific frameworks upon other groups of people, often in derogatory ways. Indeed, much of Anthropology's long history is deeply embedded within racist ideology as Dell Hymes (1969) exposed in his edited book *Reinventing Anthropology* and Lee D. Baker (1998) expands in his monograph *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954*. Continuing in this vein of looking more closely at the roots of Anthropology as they have been tied to imperialism and an evolutionary and racist episteme, Johannes Fabian (2000) in his book, *Out of Our Minds: Reason and Madness in the Exploration of Central Africa*, offers specific examples of the forerunners to Anthropology: the Europeans who wrote the travelogues and early ethnographic reports of the 1800s. Additionally, he furthers this trajectory of delineating the science of anthropology (meaning an heightened focus on Enlightenment reason to make Anthropology adhere to the canons of empirical science) can create a process and a product that removes the senses in its effort to be logo-centric. Fabian elucidates that the process of removing the senses to be replaced by logic and ration also removes the humans and their experiences, leaving a disembodied shell of cultural interpretation. Thus, science may be an act of disembodiment, separating human from nature, and spirit from material. In the exploration of human differences and congruences, where is the space to interpret life in its many perceptions? Embodiment theorists like Schepher-Hughes and Lock (1987) attempt to unify mind and body in embodiment theory, yet their writing is still disembodied, focusing on the removed analysis of the mind to illustrate the logic behind why the body and the mind in their many facets are intimately connected and understood differently in distinct times and places.

I too have yet to find my poetic voice that contours my analysis with the textured details of lived experiences that should be the heart of ethnography. My prose is still much like that I

contest of embodiment theory, which talks the theory, but does not enact the merging, fluidity of the worlds of which the word attempts expression. This lack of ability on my part and/ or inherent to the written word (at least in academe) and the inherent assumptions upon which unilinear text are based, is in part why my direction has followed an alternative path of expression—that of Evocative Ethnography.

Sensorial Anthropology. Evocative ethnography is founded upon the Anthropology of the Senses or Sensorial Anthropology. David Howes (1991) in his edited book called *The Anthropology of the Senses*, defines this field as:

primarily concerned with how the patterning of sense experience varies from one culture to the next in accordance with the meaning and emphasis attached to each of the modalities of perception. It is also concerned with tracing the influence such variations have on forms of social organization, conceptions of self and cosmos, the regulation of emotions, and other domains of cultural expression. The most basic tenet of this emergent field of study is that it is only by developing a rigorous awareness of the visual and textual biases of the Western episteme that we can hope to make sense of how life is lived in other cultural settings.

Michael Lambek in the foreward to the book states, “[t]o appreciate a cultural world composed more immediately of touch and smell than of sight is to engage in an act of imagination. To report on our experience rather than merely to go native is to engage in translation. To reflect on it is to engage in theory” (1991:xi). This quote appropriately summarizes some of the major tasks of my research: to imagine, to translate, and to reflect. In contrast to removing the senses from the analysis, the Anthropology of the Senses celebrates and attempts to examine different sensoriums. For instance, Paul Stoller, an anthropologist of the Songhay in Niger and author of *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology* (1989), wrote that when “he became truer to the Songhay through increased sensual awareness... he stopped just looking at their world and started also to hear, taste, and touch it...[and] to appreciate the vital role senses other than vision play in any society” (bookcover).

Anthony Seeger writes in *Nature and Society in Central Brazil* (1981):

Just as time and space are not perceived by the vast majority of human societies as a regular continuum and grid, so the [sensorium] is rarely thought of in strictly biological terms...The five senses are given different emphases and different meanings in different societies. A certain sense may be privileged as a sensory mode. It is important to analyse how people think they perceive.

Take for example, Luce Irigaray (1980), who has argued that touch is more relevant to women than sight (see also Bordo 1986). Or, Steven Feld (1991) who demonstrates how sound and specifically the sounds of the drum are integral to Kaluli epistemology.

Why is this sensorial realm of knowing critical to tropical conservation and development you may ask? Well, problems of Western philosophy, economics, politics and environmental degradation that are fundamentally engaged with a dichotomized worldview that separates subject and object, and mind from body may dissolve when and “be resolved by inverting or otherwise altering the conventional Western hierarchy or sensing” (Howes 1991: 14). So, possibly if we understand alternative perceptions of human/nature relationships, we may be able to lessen global environmental degradation.

For example, if people could hear nature’s voices, then maybe some of the environmentally devastating acts of exploitation and consumption would be lessened, maybe people would honor and respect their extended community because they might feel the intimate connection. As David Abram explains, these voices are not English, Spanish or Arabic, but instead are relational and resonant:

In indigenous, oral cultures, nature itself is articulate; it speaks. There is no element of the landscape that is definitely void of expressive resonance and power: any movement may be gesture, any sound may be a voice, a meaningful utterance. To directly perceive any phenomenon is to enter into relation with it, to feel oneself in a living interaction with another being (Abram 1996: 116-7).

As I explained in earlier chapters, Yorùbá epistemology as it is often lived in the diaspora⁹ is founded upon embodied means of knowledge transmission. Text is important (particularly in modern, highly literate Cuba) but not as tantamount as the spoken word, the rhythmic drum, the moving body, and even the language of the plants themselves. Thus, recalling Robert Chambers (1997) work *Whose Reality Counts? Putting the First Last*, I opted not to conduct a quantitative-based survey that ultimately might reveal more about my understanding of the world than the people from whom I was attempting to learn. Instead, he proffers participatory techniques that are ground-based and visual; and I add to that, fun!

Cognitive Techniques

Another visual technique that can aid in evocative ethnography is cognitive mapping, which visually maps how people understand certain concepts, and can also be based on collaborative research that is on the ground, experiential, participatory and fun. This technique combines statistical analyses with creative visual maps of ideas and relationships according to the perspectives of the community members themselves.

Since I was investigating how Yorùbá practitioners in Cuba make sense of their reality according to their own categories, I chose to use cognitive techniques. Cognitive methodology is based on the principle that people understand and organize their world (including material objects, events, and experiences) according to their own cultural logic. Thus, to understand how they perceive their world, I had to first understand those concepts and categories on which they base their perceptions.

Cognitive anthropology is founded upon the contributions of five leading scholars: Ward Goodenough, Charles Frake, Harold Conklin, Roy D'Andrade, and Kimball Romney (Robertson

⁹ Note that contemporary Yoruba in Nigeria are about 50% Muslim, 40% Christian, and 10% other according to the World Religions (2009). For more detailed information on Nigerian religions and Nigeria see Chapin (1991).

and Beasley n.d.). Goodenough (1956; 1964)¹⁰ established a methodology for studying cultural systems that was based on componential analysis, or feature analysis. Framing his contribution in linguistics, he constructed the study of a domain (e.g., kinship) as a matrix of plus and minus (the presence and absence of a trait). Thus both co-occurrence and distribution of traits could be analyzed.

While Goodenough restricted his research to primarily kinship studies, Charles Frake expanded his data collection to ideas and objects that went beyond kinship. Frake's contribution to cognitive anthropology is his emphasis that ethnographers "should strive to define objects according to the conceptual system of the people [they are] studying" (1969:28¹¹). In other words they should not limit their study to elicit evidence of so-called primitive thinking, but instead investigate native logic or processes of cognition when attempting to understand a domain.

Harold Conklin attempted to do this with his study of Hanunoo color categories (1955). Using the degree of agreement among individuals in a community, Conklin divided their classification of colors into two levels. Level I included all colors whereas level II defined greater distinction. Nonetheless, as Charles Adams points out, "Far more cross-cultural research has been undertaken on the topics of visual illusion and colour classification than on the perception of timbre or tactile qualities" (1986:307 in Howes 1991: 15), and Howes adds "not to mention the perception of olfactory or gustatory qualities" (1991:15). And, I am confident that

¹⁰ "Componential Analysis and the Study of Meaning" (1956) and "Componential Analysis of Konkama Lapp Kinship Terminologies" (1964). Several years later he analyzed the terminology of Yankee kinship to critique an apparent flaw with the method. That it was possible to construct many valid models using the same data was problematic. Essentially, he challenges the reliability of the results produced stating this finding had "profound implications for cultural theory, calling into question the anthropological premise that a society's culture is 'shared' by its members" (1969: 256). He concludes that the relationship of componential analysis and cognition must remain inconclusive until further debate has been settled. Indeed, componential analysis presently serves as only a part of analytic methodology instead of its primary method.

¹¹ Goodenough, Ward. 1956. Componential Analysis and the Study of Meaning. *Language* 32(1):195-216.

Katherine Dunham (1959; 1947), Margaret Thompson Drewal (1998), and Yvonne Daniel (2005; 2001,1998) would concur that movement and dance are fundamental elements to understand religions and peoples of African-descent.

Contemporary cognitive anthropologists have offered seminal theoretical and methodological contributions. For instance, Roy D'Andrade critiqued the reliability and validity of informants' judgment—explaining that human memory must be considered. He also wrote the book *The Development of Cognitive Anthropology* (1995), which outlines the theoretical underpinnings, the historical development, and the methodological techniques of cognitive anthropology. A. Kimball Romney's work on consensus theory and the reliability of collaborator's information has also been pivotal. He and his co-authors Susan Weller and William H. Batchelder outline how this method evaluates individual "expertness" or a particular person's knowledge of a domain as it corresponds to that knowledge of the same domain as expressed by several other community members in *Culture as Consensus: A Theory of Culture and Informant Accuracy* (1987). Numerous scholars have tested the validity of using a consensus model for a variety of domains and have proved it to be reliable. Thus, the value of consensus theory for my research is that it shows that I will only need a sample of 20- 40 people to gather internally accurate data (Romney *et al.* 1987) assuming modest consensus on religious concepts like ashé, orishas and specifically Osain.

My research, however, is not limited to validity and reliability of conceptual ideas and patterns. Instead, a primary aspect of my work is the attempt to translate Yorùbá embodied and multisensory ways of interpreting the world into a style of representation that can be understood by many different audiences, while not losing the substance, the essence, one might even say the

ashé of these alternative ways of understanding nature. To accomplish this translation of certain diaspora epistemologies, I propose video as an integral technique of evocative ethnography.

Videography

Video is a significant tool to document multisensory practices of embodied epistemology (Banks and Morphy 1997; Trinh 1991; Bateson and Mead 1942). As an instrument of evocative ethnography, it has tremendous capacity for representing visceral sensations and diasporic epistemologies since it is characterized by experimental styles that can attempt to represent the experience of living between two or more cultural regimes of knowledge (Tamblyn 1995; Marks 2000). This genre of ethnographic film may capture the enminded body (or mindful body [Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987]) as vessel of social memory, mediator of individual perception, and experiencer of landscape (Heckenberger 2004; Ingold 2000; Tilley 1994) via performance and practice (Bell 1997,1998; 1993 [1977]).

Guiding my research is Laura Marks' (2005) work, *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment and the Senses*, in which she asserts that video uniquely maintains the ability to accomplish an evocation of alternative epistemologies, particularly those of diaspora cultures. As Marks points out, "Intercultural cinema draws from many cultural traditions, many ways of representing memory and experience, and synthesizes them with contemporary Western cinematic practices" (2000: 1-2). Julie Dash's (1992) *Daughter of the Dust*, Haile Gerima's (1993) *Sankofa*, and Trinh Minh Ha's (1985) *First Name Viet Last Name Nam* are three powerful and exemplary pieces that illustrate some of the potential of videography as evocative ethnography.

The French filmmaker and anthropologist Jean Rouch created evocative films of the Songhay and Dogon people. By this I mean that he did not analyze through a metanarrative their

experiences. Instead, he used the images available to film that created powerfully visceral sensations in the viewers as in the much cited *Les Maîtres fous* (1954) possession scenes.

Ultimately, respect, seems one of the most important indicators of Evocative Ethnography.

“This kind of respect,” Stoller (1989:156) argues:

demands a different kind of text or film; it is a text or film in which the sensuality of life is fused with the filmic or narrative image; the smells, the tastes, the sounds, the colors—lyrical and unsettling—of the land. This kind of respect, born of deep immersion in other worlds, demands that nameless informants be portrayed as recognizable individuals who suffer defeats and win victories in their social worlds. This kind of respect directs writers and filmmakers onto a radically empirical detour along which we can achieve the most simple yet most allusive goal of ethnography: to give our readers or viewers a *sense* of what it is like to live in other worlds, a taste of ethnographic things.

Challenges

Although video has tremendous potential as a methodological tool, we must be aware of some of the major pitfalls and challenges of videography in research. For instance, Ong depicts the common trap of ocularcentrism (1982), which is the Western tendency to hierarchialize the senses, unequally favoring sight. However, this may be ill-representative of some of the world’s cultures, which highlight other senses like balance (Geurtz 2000; see also Csordas 1994 and Howes 1991). This idea that viewing is the foremost way of understanding another culture highlights another problem that Foucault, based on Bentham’s panopticon, elucidates with the concept of the gaze. The gaze is the center of power viewing the rest, which often exoticizes and seeks to control the image, the perspective and the representation. Lastly, one must also take into consideration the colonization and the ownership of images and representations implicit with foreign-run technology, the taking of an image (as Braun reflects upon through his film *Little Girl Passing/Riverside: A film by Kwame Braun* (1998), as well as MacDougall ponders in his article, “Whose story is it?” (MacDougall 1991).

Potential

Despite these serious drawbacks, video has tremendous potential to access community voices and perspectives. Through recognizing the filmmakers¹² via self-reflexive moments during the video, the filmmakers' biases and background are open to inspection and included into the process and the product, vital to a more transparent production (Ruby 2000). Particularly within collaborative video-making, video may lend itself to illustrating local, plural stories, (Ginsburg 1991; Turner 1992; Ruby 2000). By showing faces with the stories, voices become people who with their individual and collective perspectives, transform “informants” into persons with their own voices. By recording and showing local knowledges, the status of those ways of knowing is raised and no doubt to the ownership of that knowledge is left (Protz 1998).

Like Victor Masayesva Jr. *Itam Hakim Hopiit* (1985), I hope to allow the privacy necessary for Yorùbáreligion, while offering appropriate connections for actual practitioners or scholars. While Masayesva image-ing Hopi life that protected sacred life from outsiders by representing the most important aspects of Hopi life obliquely –using the life cycle of corn –the Hopi staff of life, to structure the film. *Itam Hakim Hopiit* is a life history of the Hopi people and speaks in Hopi about Hopi rituals and traditions. For instance, in one scene, a Hopi woman is painting ceremonial patterns on a pot so that non-Hopi or Hopi that do not speak the language will comprehend that she is describing something sacred, but the sacred elements of her speech are not translated. This style of video production helps to protect cultural traditions from prying eyes and defies views of conventional expectation that the image is the window onto a culture (Marks 2000: 39).

¹² I use both film and video interchangeably to refer to digital videography; I also use filmmaker and videographer interchangeably.

Image, in Bergson's terms is, "the complex of all sense impression that a perceived object conveys to a perceiver at a given moment" (1988[1911] in Marks 2000:40). However, each perceiver will accept different perceptions. Perception is always partial and interested, since it is located in a specific perceiver, it is necessarily embodied, located and contingent (Bergson [1911] 1988 in Marks 2000:41); the thing is never perceived in its fullness but only in those aspects that interest the perceiver or relate to the viewer's previous experience (Deleuze 1986 in Marks 2000). Since meaning comes through reference, each person in the audience may access distinct denotations and connotations from particular scenes, imagery, voices, words depending on the knowledge, experiences and background of that individual. The construction of this film accepts this premise from the beginning, and does not attempt to explain with an omniscient narrating voiceover (metanarrative), nor with a barrage of titles and names, but instead through guiding/inviting the viewer into a participatory, sensorial interaction using the medium of video to cooperate, and intermingle thought, with memory and sensations, and thereby achieve a *sense* of knowing.

Video may offer a medium that uniquely situates itself for this kind of sensorial experience (Marcus 1990; Marks 2000), and this is accomplished through specific techniques which foster haptic learning, or the feeling sensations made possible through film. This type of filmic experience would replace subject centered and linear models with ones "employing repetition, associative editing and non-narrative structures" (Macdougall 1990:9). David MacDougall and Alison Jablonko envision cinema practices as an "experiential or perhaps gnosiological, repetitive, poetic form of filmic organization that would foster 'haptic learning, learning by bodily identification' (Jablonko 1988:182 as cited in Nichols 1994: 73). These efforts would move away from speaking rational mind to rational mind, in the discourse of scientific

objectivity, and toward a politics and epistemology of experience spoken from sensorial body to sensorial body. Hierarchical structures designed for the extraction of knowledge (the interview, the informant, the case study) might yield to more fully personal, participatory encounter that makes an expansion or diffusion of the personal into the social and political inevitable. Rather than extract concepts and categories, falsifiable rules and generalizations, ethnographic film might respond to the call for evocation rather than representation in order “to provoke an aesthetic integration that will have a therapeutic effect. It is, in a word, poetry” (Tyler 1986:125 as cited in Nichols 1994:73).

Video, as a hybrid medium, preserves traces of oral and written speech, and thus can be employed to facilitate new forms of intersubjectivity that link artists to their audiences (Tamblyn 1995). Video is uniquely situated to accomplish such a feat because, “the world of video images and signs is situated between directly lived experiences and thought processes” (Tamblyn 1995: 27). Music, talk, ambient sounds and silence are all important to feelings of embodied experience. Technically, the use of layers through a technique of superimposition can place the viewer between images, sounds, memories, thoughts and representations encouraging access to those liminal spaces of “betweenness.”

Some other aspects of cinema that allow distinct experiences include “spatial configuration of the flow of time, an innate relativity and perpetual shifting of point of view, and a vivid discontinuity of the narrating material by means of montage, or the multiple layering of images and/or sounds. Dynamic aspects include simultaneity or the depiction of two separate points in space at a single instant of time, multiperspectivism, or the depiction of a single event from radically distinct points of view, and montage, or the discontinuous disposition in the narrative of diverse story elements (Cohen 1979: 208-209). All of these techniques while fundamentally at

odds with the unilinearity of language are critical to the use of video as an alternative space of knowing.

Through montage, and other specific techniques, video may illustrate and evoke nonunilinear experiences (Marcus 1994; Taussig 1994). As Marcus explains, “[n]ot to crack, by schematic representation of its structure, another culture’s cognitive or symbolic code, but to give voice to the qualities of oral genres of communication in performance through the visual medium of film or writing is perhaps the main purpose of the resort to montage techniques in ethnography” (1994: 47). These techniques are vital to this endeavor to evoke (Tyler 1986:125) nonwestern epistemologies through “embodied knowing” (Taussig 1994: 208), or a sensorial, tactile, haptic experience through creating a sense of feel through multisensory images and sounds (Marks 2000). The ethnographic site becomes not only transnational (Gupta and Ferguson 1997; Appadurai 1991), but what could be called transmaterial.

How cinema can and ought to express the inexpressible is a challenge. Since video¹³ can appeal to senses that it cannot technically represent: the senses of touch, smell, taste, and closeness, then video might be used to not only speak of this type of sensorial learning, but also may help evoke these senses in the viewer. Cinema can be an extension of the viewer’s embodied existence –and thereby is fundamentally mimetic –meaning not solely communicated through signs but experienced in the body (Sobschack 1992 as cited in Marks 2000: 149).

Through the use of haptic imagery, video works evoke memories –both individual and cultural— both of the subjects in the film and of the subjects in the audience. In this way, video may encourage a more embodied and multisensory relationship to the image in films especially

¹³ Cinema, video and film will be used interchangeably to refer to the same medium.

in combination with sound, camera movement, and montage to achieve sensuous effects (Marks 2000).

Collaborative videography

Collaborative videography, in this case means that every chance I had, I handed the camera off to a wanting or willing person. Most every interview, unless I was alone, was filmed with a Cuban visual perspective. This technique of collaborative filming, offers several advantages and a few disadvantages. An obvious advantage is that I can be in some of the shots, as interviewer or as part of the conversation, and not just a faceless voice from off camera. Recognizing that self-reflexivity is a key component to research since the body that I bring to a conversation, to a home in Cuba is a critical factor in reception and information, this collaborative filming helps document that aspect. I became not omnipotent, but another human with particular history, face, story and delving into the conversations at hand. In addition, I get to learn about what views, framing, manners of filming different Cubans appreciate—and what a difference. For instance, one woman who readily took the camera from my hands during an interview with a babalawo and resident scholar in his home, took control of the space like no other. She experimented with viewpoints from up high by standing on chairs, and down low by crouching under us. She explored the environs of his home and took video of his photos on the walls, his books, his sculptures and altar. Since she was already a close friend, she also took the liberty to go into other rooms of the house and video what she found there. She took close ups and far away shots at a multitude of angles. Thus, I was able to attain footage, that as a newcomer and mere acquaintance I would not have felt comfortable taking, nor necessarily allowed. Another benefit is that the person whom I was interviewing has now created his own videos on Afro-Cuban religion. One disadvantage though was at a few points in the conversation when he was talking, she was disinterested, and instead of filming him, she was filming other material items of his

home. Since I was busy conversing with him, I missed a couple of shots that would have been useful to my research.

Sadly, the few times when people turned back to me to interview me—which I encouraged, the camera would get turned off. Since I was not always in control of the camera, and often the questions came after the “formal” interview, I had difficulty taping these sessions. However, not only is it good for the ethnographer to experience the possible discomfort of being on the other side of the camera—without the power to control the camcorder, it is also beneficial, I think, to be on the other side of the questioning. Both the researcher and the visitor should benefit from thinking through and responding to the inquiries of the people with whom she or he is sharing concepts, space, and practice.

Evocative Ethnography in the Field

In this section, I will first summarize my series of visits to Cuba from 2003-2006 and how I selected the research consultants with whom I spoke. Then, I will highlight the triangulated methodological strategy that I used while conducting research in Cuba. While I include archival, cognitive, and visual techniques in this ethnographic framework that I employed in my fieldwork, I primarily attend to the use of videography as a way to direct attention toward embodied aspects of learning and knowing vital to understanding Yorùbá knowledge and ways of knowing nature.

Field Visits and Consultants

In 1996, I spent my first month on Cuban soils—the middle of the Special Period, I indeed witnessed first hand the empty stalls of the markets, the lack of gasoline for transportation, the spilling over camellos, and the bikes that became the main transportation for entire families. I stayed with doctors, psychologists, teachers, nurses, hairdressers, and accountants in Alamar, Havana, Cienfuegos and a small rural town outside of Cienfuegos. I traveled by hitchhiking. And

mainly I asked along the way—what do you [who live here] think of Fidel and Cuban socialist policies and life?

At the University of Florida, I attempted to do my investigation for the Master's degree studying ecotourism in Pinar del Rio, Cuba, but I could not navigate the redtape to obtain permission from the United States government to conduct my research. Instead, I went to the Dominican Republic and hoped to return to Cuba for my doctoral studies, possibly doing a comparative analysis. The redtape on both the United States' side and the Cuban side was a constant challenge even during the investigation. For instance, when Florida passed a state-wide legislation that stated it to be illegal for Floridian scholars (this law was not applicable nationwide) to visit terrorist nations, which Cuba was relegated, I was forced to begin to write proposals for Brazil and Nigeria and continue only to hope that I would be able to legally finish my dissertation research on Yoruba religion and ecology in Cuba.

In 2003, a few African diaspora scholars from the University of Florida decided to go to Oyotunji and visit. Thus, Dr. Robin Poynor, University of Florida professor of Yorùbá art history and Dr. Ade Ofunniyin, at the time a graduate student of Anthropology and now provost of a American College of the Building Arts (ACBA) in South Carolina, along with a few classmates who were all studying African diaspora religions and life, went to Oyotunji, South Carolina. There, we interviewed different babalawos on camera, filmed a tour of Oyotunji, as well as filmed the procession of the main Queen's birthday.

As Ofunniyin describes the history of Oyotunji in his dissertation (2009).

In the early 1970s, the group of African Americans rejected Yorùbá/Catholic syncretism as an outdated “compromise to a slave religion” (Hunt 1979) and moved their Yorùbá Temple away from Harlem, New York, to Sheldon, South Carolina, to build Oyótúnjí African Village. The village was to serve “as a commune devoted to the practice and study of African religion (Holloway 1991: 123). It was also designed to be a space for the initiation and training of priests and adherents, “to establish an independent African society, and to

recreate Yorùbá culture within the United States” (Hunt 1979: xii). As the spiritual center for this movement, residents of Oyoútúnjí were to rebuild a new life for themselves and create a Yorùbá Kingdom in South Carolina, based on Yorùbá traditions, “including patterns of work, marriage, language, dress, and social organization” (ibid).

The word Oyoútúnjí means, “Oyo again awakes” (Oyo-tún-jí) and was chosen to express Efuntola’s desire to see Yorùbá culture revived and recreated in the United States . The city of Oyo is in Nigeria and is the capital of the kingdom of the same name . Oyo is said to have been the largest and most powerful Yorùbá kingdom (see Johnson’s “History of the Yorùbá, Clarke’s “Mapping Yorùbá Networks).

An important distinction is Obàtálá as the Patron deity of Oyoútúnjí , whereas Šàngó is the patron of old Oyo . Other differences that are evident in Oyoútúnjí include the use of cigars and candles in ancestral rituals , and coconut instead of kola nut for divination . These ritual elements are New World /Cuban influenced and are prevalent in many Oyoútúnjí ceremonies.

In January 2004, 2005 and 2006 I attended the Casa de Africa conference called the Scientific Workshop of Afroamerican, Social and Cultural Anthropology in Havana, Cuba. There, I met and solidified relationships with scholars, practitioners and professionals in the field of Afro-Cuban religions, while I stayed in El Vedado, Havana Vieja and Alamar. By staying in different locales, I immediately understood the difficulty that most Cubans draw attention to: that of transportation. Between walking, hitchhiking, *camellos*, national *carros* that hold several people and go along set routes, bicycle taxis, and tourist taxis, transportation is unreliable and time-consuming most of the time. Nonetheless, Cubans know to allow a lot of extra time to arrive anywhere. Additionally, I noticed how even an *academic* conference in Afro-Cubans stresses the importance and integration of art, dance and music by scholars, by artists, and by both, since many Cubans seamlessly incorporate multiple identities.

Cuban Collaborators

My research attempts to delineate some of these identities in different people and in their overlapping convergences in the same person. In this vein, I am following a methodological framework that calls for researchers to integrate multiple perspectives within their

methodological frameworks (Rojas 2000; Schmink 1999; Harrison 1998; Feldstein and Jiggins 1994). Thus, the Cubans whom I interviewed were chosen primarily through snowball sampling and included Lucumí practitioners, scientists, scholars, government workers, nongovernment workers, and laypeople with diverse roles and occupations. These interviews are in addition to the ones conducted for the cognitive methods (N= 33). Of these thirty-three individuals, twelve were female, and eleven male. Their ages can be split into five main groups: 20-29; 30-39; 40-49; 50-59; and 60-79. In both the youngest and the oldest group, there were the fewest at three and two people respectively. The rest of the three middle groups composed the majority of the collaborators mostly equally divided among the three with a few more in the their thirties. As for the Orishas that they followed, Chango and Oshun had three followers each while Yemaya and Elegua had two each. Oya, Babaluaye, Orula, Arguye and Ochosi all had one follower each. And four respondents were either not practicing the religion or were not yet initiated, and three did not respond.

Table 4-2. Table of Interlocutors by age, sex and Orisha.

20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
#9F28None	#3M35Oshun	#2F40None	#5F53Ndios	#1F63Chango
#11M21Elegua	#4F39Oshun	#6M46Chango	#10F53None	#22F76Yemaya
#12F28Argallu	#8M30Orula	#7M44None	#14M55Chango	#30F67Obatala
#24M20Yemaya	#13FWilmaAssYor	#15F42Yemaya	#16M51Chango	
#26F27 Elegua	#17M31Obatala	#18M41Ochosi	#31F57Obatala	
#27F26Oya	#19M36 Elegua		#23F55Babaloaye	
#33F25NoneYem	#20M36Oya		#25F50Ochun	
	#21F32Ochun		#29F52Ochun	
	#28M32Yemaya			
	#32F36IdOchun			

Cognitive Techniques in the Freelist “water” and on the other side of the paper, “individual practices of conservation” (D’Andrade 1995). Similar to the freelists I conducted with residents in Gainesville, Florida whom I asked to write down everything that comes to mind when you think of “spirituality and nature,” in Cuba (Appendix A for the freelists of Nature and

Spirituality compiled), I asked for respondents to write down everything that comes to mind when they think of “water.” I selected “water” instead of “nature” because by that time I knew that water was a key natural element significant for Matanzas residents and Yorùbá practitioners as well as a natural resource issue in terms of degradation and conservation.

Then, I conducted pile sorts (Appendix C shows the concepts used for the pilesorts) and semi-structured, open-ended interviews with a Yorùbá-affiliated population selected through convenience and snowball sampling (N= 33). Additionally, in Matanzas, I interviewed temple priests (*santero/a*) selected through stratified convenience sampling. The sample included females and males, individuals with dark and light skin color, and those who were less and more materially wealthy (according to the criteria of a local scholar of Lucumí). These research participants did pile sorts and semi-structured interviews with me (N=12); Appendix D (in English) and Appendix E (in Spanish) for a list of semi-structured questions that I used to further the open-ended conversations. Since, I had recorded the interviews with microcassette tapes, I was able to transcribe them upon my return. Then, with the aid of qualitative analysis books and articles (e.g., Wickham and Woods 2005; Ryan and Bernard 2003; Corbin and Strauss 1990) and a dissertation study group comprised of other students (Omaira, Geraldo, and Wendy-Lin) who were analyzing their data and writing up their dissertation, I found common themes in the responses and color-coded them (Appendix F). Later, when my next dissertation study group (Rosanna, Ermitte, and Jai) was reading through my chapters that entailed data analysis, they helped me to see that Osain was the focus—the node of difference around that my research should help unravel.

Videography in the Field

Therefore, in January 2005, I digitally videotaped some of that year’s Casa de Africa conference, and in February 2005, I began digitally videotaping interviews with scientists,

scholars, and Lucumí practitioners, especially Osainistas (initiated priests of herbs and healing) on Lucumí learning practices, concepts and interactions with nature, environmental concerns and Yorùbá performances, street scenes, and television shows. I was also able to videotape scenes of *el monte*—the forests and waters where many of the herbs are selected for healings and initiations in the Havana area.

Additionally, I showed the video (Chapter 7 with Spanish subtitles) to the consultants featured in it, Lucumí scholars and videographers in Cuba, to get their feedback.

Figure 4-2. Pictures of Havana and Matanzas, the two primary locations I conducted freelists and pilesorts.

In November and December 2006, at the tumultuous time when Fidel fell ill and conceded power to his brother Raúl Castro, I conducted more interviews (digitally videotaping most of them) with scientists, scholars, practitioners, and laypeople on development and how they envisioned and would like to imagine their future in Cuba (Appendix G for a list of the open-ended questions). I also videotaped images of street scenes, television shows, and the Communist mother and the Russian mother-in-law of a couple who had just moved to Guatemala. The mothers were putting up a Christmas tree together in the Russian's home, and talking about their children in Guatemala; life, health, and religion in Cuba; and comparing Cuba life to that in the Soviet Union for the past and the future. Then, we hitchhiked to the beach and

celebrated by drinking from a fresh coconut that a local man had climbed up and gotten for us— opening it masterfully with his machete.

I was able to use video as a more visual approach along with focus groups, on the floor pile-sorts, and open-ended semi-structured questions to allow for a more conversational approach to learning which concepts were most important to Yoruba practitioners in Cuba when discussing their religion, particularly in terms of understanding their views of nature.



Figure 4-3. Photo of El Capitolio.

Almost everyday while I was in Havana, I would visit the Yorùbá Association, which was located just beyond the Capitolio. When the Capitolio began to offer internet services, I would also go there frequently, and then go to the Yorùbá Association just down the block.

Thus, I primarily explore the use of video as a tool of evocative ethnography for data collection, interpretation and illustration in addition to cognitive, archival and traditional ethnographic techniques in order to more fully comprehend the distinctive relationships that the Lucumí share with their environment. My research uses collaboratively filmed interviews, dances, sacred songs, medicinal herb collection and preparation, among many other religious and quotidian Cuban activities to illustrate and contextualize Lucumí religio-ecological relationships within a contemporary Cuban landscape. In addition to using visual techniques for data collection, I also use them for evocation. Therefore, my dissertation incorporates still photographs, video segments and music clips in order to highlight and evoke the sensorial feel of Lucumí relationships with nature.

Summary and Conclusion

Embodiment is an epistemological tool that reminds us not to separate so categorically the mind from the body, the spirit from the world, the empirically verifiable and the supposedly less so, and instead to research connections, relationships and communications. In questioning the importance of categorical differences, Geertz reminds us that we should look less for unyielding laws, and more for meaning. Indeed, our diligent mental and mindful work of separating, categorizing, and naming may not get us any closer to understanding what is meaningful to the people with whom we are studying.

Thus, embodiment becomes a critical concept for religious studies scholars and ecological anthropologists alike to gain greater insight into worldviews that integrate relationships with and communication among seen and unseen beings, spirit, matter, mind, soul and energy in an intersubjective universe. Lucumí cosmology, practices and practitioners illustrate an embodied epistemology through their use of music, possession and divination that collapse boundaries of spirit and matter into fluid, communicative embodied experiences. And hopefully as the rest of

this work and the documentaries illustrate, an evocative ethnographic methodology holds a possibility to not only interpret but also to experience these ways of knowing that collapse a divide between the material and the spiritual into a cosmos of conversations among subjective and spiritual beings.

CHAPTER 5
LUCUMÍ RELIGION: SPIRITS ARE THE WATERS AND THE SACRED FOREST

Javier exclaimed to me that he wanted people to learn about his religion, to understand its beauty—how beautiful it is. Most people don't understand it he said, but it is truly marvelous, and its beauty should be understood. It is true, when you mention Santería to most people in the States, if they have heard of it, it is of the slaughter and blood use. "It seems barbaric," one person told me. The imagery does not offer the nuances, or the foundation of what the religion is about—immersed in a colonial perspective—it is seen as witchcraft.

To better understand Lucumí religion and how Lucumí practitioners conceptualize nature, Tylor's animism—which locates animist religions as evolutionarily inferior to monotheist ones—may not be sufficient. Perhaps, "relational epistemology" would aide the endeavor, because it highlights the notion of the intersubjective relationships between spirits, nature, and humans (Bird-David 1999). Yet, it too does not necessarily access the embodied and sensorial elements, which are fundamental to the religion—and how nature becomes to be understood in a Yorùbá diaspora context in Cuba.

Yorùbá practitioners do not appear to understand their world within a conceptual framework of spirit versus matter. Instead, followers of Regla de Ocha seem to interpret the landscape as repositories of *ashé* and *orishas*—of power that can be brought from the spiritual world into the physical (and vice versa) and of subjective and spiritual beings who have human bodies, personalities and environmental attributes. This factor of human intervention in the world of matter through embodied techniques of ritual, which access and harness the spiritual, is a key finding and is located at the core of not only this chapter, but also this dissertation.

In contrast to most research on Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), this chapter does not attempt to find or explain taxonomic categories that are similar to scientific nomenclature

(e.g., Conklin 1954; Berlin, Breedlove, and Raven 1974) nor does it try to delineate similarities to a Linnean-based, hierarchically structured, organizational model in order to explain how nature is understood for the Lucumí. Instead, the traditional ecological knowledge that I attempted to gather and now attempt to express has more to do with the conceptions and relationships that the literature, my interviews and my experiences signal as meaningful to the people with whom I collaborated. Accordingly, I begin this section¹⁴ meant to offer insight into Lucumí religion through translating (via textual and visual means) two of the fundamental concepts of the religion itself—*ashé* and *orishas*. Both of these conceptual portholes develop from a firm conceptual foundation that the boundary between material and spiritual worlds is negotiable; and that nature should be understood not as an inert object but as multiple subjective agents of change—therein the title: *who* is nature? While I illustrate how nature is conceptualized as both material and spiritual, both mundane and sacred, both an object and a subject, I will continue to illustrate how nature, religion and humans enact what I am calling embodied epistemology. In other words, their learning of the religion, their interaction with nature, the deities, and the rituals serve to navigate the meaning and the use of power meant to improve lived reality. The religion is focused on improving the present and future conditions of living in this world. They connect with spiritual powers to improve material realities, which include problems of finances, health, and love.

In an effort to employ what I call evocative ethnography, I use video clips, sound clips and photography to help entice the reader to become not a passive viewer, or a cognitive examiner, but a participant in the act of learning Lucumí realms of embodied knowing. These realms

¹⁴ I had first begun this section on Lucumí religion with the belief in one universal God even though, according to the system, and the quote that I have illustrating the genesis, *ashé* is first. Yet, instead of beginning the Religion chapter with *Ashé*, I felt the need to create a new section, called *Cosmology* to explain the principles of belief. Interesting demonstration of how my culture guides my scholarship and explanatory prose.

include a more fully integrated comprehension of religion, human-nature relationships, knowledge transmission, and environmental conceptions and practices. The next chapter will delve specifically into getting to know the orisha Osain—the owner of the sacred forests of healing herbs—and his followers the Osainistas, who are the Lucumí practitioners, initiated into the secret knowledge of accessing and mobilizing the ashé of the plants. They are the healers and the herbalists using traditional medicine and magic to improve the longevity and quality of life on earth.

The Embodiment of Spiritual and Material

“A human being is an integral part of nature--the stone, the tree is part but they are not equals. Nature is mystery. Nature is everything¹⁵” explains the Obatalá follower, Vitalia in the restaurant at the Yorùbá Association in Havana, Cuba.



Figure 5-1. Obatalá practitioner, Vitalia in the Yorùbá Association, Havana, Cuba

¹⁵ “Un ser humano es parte integrante de la naturaleza, la piedra, el árbol es parte pero no son iguales. La naturaleza es misterio. La naturaleza es todo.” Vitalia (Obatalá)

Ashé

Genesis.

In the beginning was Ashé [spirit] and Ashé was everything. When Ashé began to think Ashé became Olodumare. When Oludumare began to act, Olodumare became Olofi, and it was Olofi who created Obatalá, the first orisha. In those days there was no separation between heaven and earth. (Canizares1999:40)

Ashé is fundamental to the Yorùbáreligion; it is the embodiment of spiritual and material worlds. Ashé (also spelled Ase, Asé, Axe, Ashé) is the life force that runs through all things; ashé is the "power to make things happen" (Thompson 1984:5). It is an affirmation that is used in greetings and prayers, as well as a concept about spiritual growth. As Ramos explains, "Ashé is the embodiment of power, energy, and authority" (2005).

In Cuba, ashé is known commonly as luck. Some people are recognized to have more ashé than others; they have more power, health and harmony. People are said to have ashé in a certain skill or task too. As A., a local scholar of Yorùbá defines ashé, "if you look at it from Yorùbá philosophy, it is a vibration, it is a ... power, like a benediction, like a 'power of blessing.' It is a grace that each person has."¹⁶

It is a Saint. And also it signifies luck. Ashé is luck. ...For instance, there are people who have luck in life, and you tell them that they have ashé, because they have their own individualized luck" (pers comm 2005).¹⁷ Even people who are not practitioners speak in these terms. A friend of mine, who is not a practitioner, was telling me about her daughter, and tried to explain that her daughter did not have luck, meaning this luck of life. Javier, a Matanzas

¹⁶ "El ashé, el ashé, en realidad si lo miras de la filosofía Yoruba es una vibra, vibración, es un... poder, como bendición, poder bendición una gracia que tiene una persona." (A:2004).

¹⁷ T: El ashé es, como decir, un, algo que se prepara, en el cuarto, lo que es el cuarto ya del orisha como tal, y es lo que le pone la madrina a un ahijado." (T) "Es un santo. Y también significa suerte. Ashé es suerte." "Que hay personas que tienen suerte de la vida, y tu lo dices que tiene ashé porque tiene su suerte propia."

Osainista speaking to me, continued to attempt to define ashé: “Ashé is virtue, it is health, it is gastronomy, the person... Ashé, how do you say, is to have virtue, to have a proficiency (grandiose) in something. You have ashé in this investigation that you are doing. In other words, I have ashé with herbs, I have ashé in Santería, I have ashé in life, ashé. ... How can I explain to you with only a/one word. Virtud is something, virtue, luck...”¹⁸ I then commented, “I had understood before that ashé was more like a spiritual life force¹⁹.” Immediately, though Javier retorts that “Ashé doesn’t have anything to do with spirituality... Everything good is ashé, a person who has ashé is happy, ashé is used to heal someone, to cure, so that people feel good, to be able to resolve their problems... There are many kinds of ashé, ashé Olofi, ashé babalao, ashé orula, numerous ashés. The spiritists do not say ashé,” he continues, “they say light (*luz*), a lot of light”²⁰. When I had said spiritual then, he understood Spiritist, and he was distinguishing between the two.

An important distinction to make for many, even though –or maybe because—a lot of overlap exists, according to the practitioner and scholar, Canizares, is that ashé is “a single primal force [that] evolved into awareness–Olodumare—and then into action–Olofi (1999: xxi). “Ashé is the ultimate source of everything” (Canizares 1999: 5) as referenced in the story of Genesis that began this chapter.

¹⁸ “Ashé es virtud, es salud, es gastrologo, la persona... Ashé como dices tener virtud grandiose en una cosa. Tu tienes un ashé de la investigación que estas haciendo. O sea yo tengo ashé en la herba, tengo ashé in la Santería , tengo ashé en la vida, el ashé... Como decirte una palabra. Virtud es una cosa, virtud, suerte.(J. 2004).

¹⁹ A: Yo habia entendido antes el ashé mas como vida espiritual, algo asi como la..

²⁰ J: El ashé no tiene que ver nada con la espiritualidad. ..Todo lo bueno, el ashé, una persona que tiene un ashé es dichosa, es que, un ashé para sanar un a persona, para curar, para que las personas se sientan bien, para poder resolver tus problemas... Hay mucho ashé, ashé Olofi, ashé bacalao , ashé orula, algunos ashéses. (Los espiritistas no dicen ashé –dicen luz., mucha luz).

Although no single definition can express all that ashé encompasses, Pierre Verger who studied the African diaspora on its different continents as a photographer, self-taught ethnographer and babalawo (Yorùbá priest of Ifa) clarifies:

The Yorùbá have never seen the asé (ashé), and cannot pretend to personify it. Nor can they define it by determined attributes and characteristics. It embraces all mystery, all secret power, all divinity. No enumeration could exhaust this infinitely complex idea. It is not a definite or definable power, it is *Power* itself in an absolute sense, with no epithet or determination of any sort...it is the principle of all that lives or acts or moves. All life is asé” (in Ramos²¹ 2005, my italics).

Ashé is a primary example of how the divide between material and spiritual get collapsed and traversed. As such, it is illustrative of this concept of embodiment, which I note is critical to understand Lucumí conceptions and interactions with their environment, or Lucumí religion and ecology. Ashé does not have its own physical form—its own body—instead ashé is spirit or pure consciousness that brings luck, prosperity and blessings to each body within which it resides.

Ashé, the divine force, is within us all. Ramos discusses a myth that he says illustrates that ashé is part of everything, and he sums this up in the following sentence: “When the calabash of wisdom²² fell from the hands of *Ogbedí*, *ashé* and knowledge were dispersed to every corner of the earth” (2005: 4). This story indicates that every element of earth has ashé. Not only does everyone and everything have some amount of ashé, ashé can be transmuted, created and passed on. Note that the ability to create the vital energy of the universe, ashé, is in direct conflict with most scientific epistememes, yet is a fundamental aspect of Yorùbá epistemology.

Ashé also refers to certain material objects. As Ramos explains (2005: 8):

²¹ Ashé: Divine Essence of Existence, Miguel Ramos presented at the 54th Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America for a panel discussion entitled "Possible Contributions of Afro-Cuban Religion to Catholic Theology of Grace: An Interreligious Dialogue." Miami, June 11, 1999.

²² You'll notice a very similar story in the next chapter on Osain too.

Ashé is both abstract and concrete. It is important to make a clear distinction between *ashé*, the energy or force, and the materials that *Olorishas*²³ use in rituals and offerings, possessors of this energy, that are also called *ashé*. Herbs, fruits, roots, animals, foodstuffs, stones, soil from different points in nature, and so forth, are compounded according to established formulas. The mystic energy contained within these elements is materialized and its animative energy directed toward the resolution of life's crises. This is one of the most important qualities of *ashé*—the fact that it not only exists, but that it can also be used, manipulated, and brought to further fruition.

The *ashé* of a specified orisha is the vital element that is physically placed in the head of an initiate through an incision during the first initiation ceremony. The work of a practitioner sometimes is to access the *ashé* of something or infuse an object with the power of *ashé*. In conversation with A., another practitioner T., explains another aspect of *ashé*, “*Ashé* is ... something that one prepares, in the room, that which is the room that is already dedicated to the orisha as such, and it is that which the “godmother” –*la madrina* –spiritual mother- puts on/gives to her godson.

The bodies in which *ashé* resides are human, orisha, geographic, plant, stone, and other vessels. The material world is not considered profane in contrast to the spiritually sacred as Eliade has noted in some religions. Plato's explanation of God as the tailor and humans as merely the cloth that the tailor sews, yet separate from the actual tailor, also does not fit. Instead, the sacred and the divine are integral part of humans, nature, and everything. In fact, the concept of evil as opposed to godly (good) does not exist. Instead, as humans are part divine, the divine is part human. The divine is immanent, and makes mistakes. To err is human and divine; it is part of life and living. The *patakí*, or the stories are not meant to show perfection, but utter humanness instead. Each divinity and each story is packed with human flaws, shortcomings, and consequences. They are full of lessons to live more appropriately in this world.

²³ *Olorishas* are the children of the orishas, or practitioners.

This earthly world is not reduced to an inferior matter while the Godly spiritual lies in a faraway ever after. As such, the goal of this life does not revolve around reaching the next life. Instead, living a high quality and long life on earth tends to be the focus of the religion. Relationships between the entities (human, environment, and spirit) are emphasized.

Humans are able to communicate and interact with, receive guidance and ask permission from, and even embody the divine. From initiation rituals, in which the *ashé* (energy, consciousness and power) of the orisha is placed into the head of the initiate through an incision, to possession through drumming and dancing; to communication through shells, coconut pieces, and oral stories; to requesting permission to use the powers of the plant world, the energy and power of the orisha relationships with humans is an embodied one.

Orishas

Who and what are the orishas? The Yorùbá universe, according to Canizares is “inhabited by co-dependent beings who have responsibilities to one another” (1999:5). These beings are called orishas (also spelled Orisas, Orixas and Orichas). Although the amount of orishas number more than 600 (Gonzales Wippler 1999:239), the most popular amount to fewer than 24, with only about a dozen considered important in Cuba.

As the chart clearly shows, each of the orishas embody specific environmental elements, human pursuits, colors and in Cuba and the much of the Yoruba diaspora, Roman Catholic saints. Certain days of the week and dates of the years are saved as holidays to celebrate and venerate specific orishas. Each orisha has specific foods and certain herbs that are under her and his domain.

Table 5-1. Chart of a few of the most popular Cuban orishas.

Orisha	Environmental element	Human pursuits	Roman Catholic saint	Color	Number	Day of Week	Day of Year
Ellegua Altar photo	Paths, crossroads	Messenger of gods, mischeivous, trickster	Devil/ St Anthony of Padua	Red n black	3 and 21	Mon	Jun 13) nov 2)
Obatala	Mts, hills	Purity, peace, thinkers	Our Lady of Mercy	White	8	Thurs	Sept 24
Chango	Thunder/lightening	Drummer, warrior, Woman-chaser, war	St. Barbara	Red n white	4 and 6	Fri	Dec 4
Yemaya	Oceans, seas	Motherhood	Mother Mary/ Our Lady of Regla	Blue	7	Sat.	Sept 7
Oshun	Rivers	Fertility, Love, beauty	Our Lady of Charity of Copper (La Caridad del Cobre)	Yellow	5	Sat.	Sept 8
Ogun	Forests	Blacksmith,	St. Peter	Green and black		Tues and Wed 4th of each month	Jun 29
Ochosi Babaluaye Orunla (Orunmila)	Forest Divination	Hunter sickness Wisdom personified	St. St. Lazaro St. Francis of Assisi	Green Purple Green, yellow	 16	 all	 Oct 14

Each orisha is the embodiment of the physical realm (representing a natural element), the spiritual realm (a deity) and the human realm (a personification of human emotions –vices, virtues and talents). Each orisha, or deity, is associated with environmental elements, colors, human emotions, human pursuits, and Roman Catholic saints as Table 5-1 illustrates.

For instance, Obatala's day to be celebrated during the year is September 24, as well as each Thursday during the week. I know a Puerto Rican woman in Gainesville, Florida who is a follower of Obatala, and says she must venerate her orisha by wearing white every third day. This orisha is considered one of the supreme orishas for s/he¹ is one of the first orisha created and is known as the god of peace. Obatala in all of her and his 24 avatars is equated to white and purity. Practitioners who follow Obatala wear white beaded necklaces and offer the foods s/he likes including everything white, like milk, rice pudding, doves and hens. This orisha avoids alcohol, and so should his followers. Plants and herbs like cotton, onions, tamarind, *maravilla*, *biedo blanco*, and *almendro* are intimately connected to Obatala. Notice in the Figure below how the altar for Obatalaa is almost all white. Obatala rules bones and a person's head. As an orisha associated with the mind, s/he is said to help thinkers like doctors and lawyers. Also, the biophysical features that Obatala reigns over are the mountains and the hills (Gimenez n.d.)

Many orisha followers claim that Fidel Castro is associated with Obatala, and that is why he is so protected from harm. One instance that illustrates this connection (that I was told repeatedly by both Yoruba practitioners and Cubans who were not practitioners) is when Fidel gave his first speech on the historical date of 8 January 1959, 7 days after Batista had fled the country. On this occasion, he was standing in front of the crowds, and three white doves came

¹ Obatala is considered androgynous and contains both sexes. Sometimes people refer to this orisha as male, and other times as female. In Cuba, the male pronoun is often used.

circling around him. One landed on his shoulder. This connection with the white dove was extremely significant for Cubans, including Orisha followers.



Figure 5-2. Obatala altar.

Obatala is significant for Oyotunji, the African Village in South Carolina. The whole village is dedicated to his veneration. Oba Osejiman Adefunmi I, who founded Oyotunji, was initiated into the Yoruba religion in Cuba as an *ajiado*, godson, of Obatala.

In sum, the orishas help connect the material world to the spirital worlds in different geographic locations; they are the intermediaries. They are spirits that reflect one of the manifestations of Olodumare, the creator God in the Yorùbá spiritual and religious system.

Olodumare: One Universal God

For the Lucumí in Cuba and other Yorùbá practitioners, there is only one universal God, and that God's name is Olodumare. Olodumare combines spirit with matter through personifying

thought and action. Ashé (spirit) became Olodumare (thought or self-reflective consciousness, ration), which then became Olofi (ability to act and enact): to be—to become to change.

Although, it was not always this way, Olodumare is too remote from the human world for direct communication, thus intermediaries are needed. The following parable, or Pataki (story to help guide) explains the original separation of the material and spiritual realms as well as the origin of these intermediaries known as the orishas.

Embodied in the orishas are concepts of how humans must relate between the worlds of materiality and spirituality. The implications of these are significant in the attempt to understand the “who” aspects of Yorùbáconceptions of nature. Consider Canizares’ rendering of the following Pataki:

Why God Left the World.

In the beginning, Olofi, the orishas, and the humans all lived in harmony...What really made Olofi leave the earth, however, was that he had become so identified with the earth that every time a root was pulled to be cooked, he felt as if his hair was being pulled out by the roots. Fed up, Olofi left the earth, creating a chasm between his abode and the world; only Obatalá and Eleggua know how to reach him. Olofi deserves veneration because he is God, but one should not ask him favors; that is why he left the orishas behind, to take care of human needs (Canizares 1993: 63).

Perhaps the following conversation that I shared with a practitioner will help elucidate the role that orishas play in human lives. Javier expressed, “They help me a lot in my life, they help me have the strength to live...they have helped me to have health, tranquility, to have a reason, you have to get to know them, don’t you? In order to learn and to coexist with them.... They are saints.”

When I inquired, “what is a saint?” he responded, “a saint for me is, that which is the closest to God ...they are the ones who are the closest to god Olofi. ...They are the ones who help you in everything, they give you a lot of health, they try to resolve your problems, not that

they can resolve everything, because each one of us is born with a destiny” (pers comm 2004).² He further elaborates what he means by destiny by explaining, “If you are going to get sick from a cold, you have to get sick... [same thing, if you are going] to die from an illness that has your life marked, you die. But they help you live.” This concept that the orishas help you live is potent. The main focus of the Orisha religion is on bringing the spiritual into the physical and transforming the physical into the spiritual so that humans may live a better life. J. continues to explain, “ I know people who have been very sick. They ‘han hecho sus santos’ [have been initiated] and they have changed. Or I know people who have been alcoholics...and the saints helped them.”³

Canizares acknowledges this process of transformation that can occur through knowing the orishas: “With knowledge of the correspondences between celestial forces and the mundane, the adept can effect change on the physical plane and personal growth on the spiritual” (Canizares 1999: xxii). Thus, the orishas function and help connect (enact change) in the macrocosm and the microcosm with their essences being human and divine at the same time. To illustrate the material and spiritual conceptions of natural elements and I conducted some cognitive techniques.

Cognitive Mapping of Nature Conceptualized as Material and Spiritual

Yoruba cosmology conceptualizes water as both material and spiritual. Thus, I used cognitive mapping techniques to test and illustrate how water may be conceptualized as both

²“me ayudan mucho en mi vida, me ayudan a tener fuerza para vivir, no se, me han ayudado a tener salud, tranquilidad, a tener una razón, hay que conocerlos no?/// para aprender a convivir con ellos. ...son santos [que es un santo]... un santo para mi es, lo que mas cerca de dios esta... son los que mas cerca estan de deos de Olofi. Y son los que, la palabra santo lo dice. Son los que te ayudan para todo, te dan mucha salud, tratan de, de resovlete tus problemas, no que te los pueen resolver todos, porque cada cual nacemos con un destino.”

³ “de cual enfermarte de un catarro, tiene que enfermarte... Morirte de una enfermedad que tiene marcada tu vida, te mueres, pero te ayudan a vivir... mucho. Conozco peronas que han estado muy enfermas. Se han hecho sus santos y han cambiado, o han sido alcoholocios, o han sido una vida y el santo los ayuda.

spiritual and material for Lucumí practitioners —how a biophysical element like a river may embody a human emotion like love and a spiritual goddess like Oshun.

Water is and has been vital in Cuban human-nature relationships, as we saw in Chapter 2 on the historical interactions of Cubans, Africans, Afro-Cubans and their landscapes. Water, in Chapter 2, was analyzed through an historical lens examining specific political, economic, agricultural and hydrogeological relations. Yet, another fundamental feature of water must be considered when attempting to understand Yoruba religion and ecology—its spirituality.

In July 2004, individuals (N= 20) selected through convenience sampling primarily from the Yorùbá Association in Havana were asked to freelist *water* and *individual practices of conservation* (D' Andrade 1995).

Like the freelists I did in the States, I simply had the word(s) at the top of the page with some other sociodemographic⁴ questions, and then requested that people write down anything and everything that the concept(s) brought to their minds. In Gainesville, Florida, the top of the page had *nature and spirituality*, since I was not confident that people would offer me any spiritual aspects unless I directly requested them. And, as the cognitive map illustrates (Figures 3-6 and 3-7), the biophysical elements of nature were clustered together, yet physically and thereby conceptually at opposite ends of the spectrum where the elements of spirituality were clustered.

After collecting the responses from the freelists in Cuba, I performed a frequency analysis to gather the most utilized concepts. Then, I placed each of the forty-two⁵ most common

⁴ Name, Sex, Occupation, Level of Education, Religion, Orisha, Age, Place of Birth, Place of Growing Up, Time Involved in the Religion, Time with this Orisha, How Many and Which Family Members Involved in Religion and Philosophy of Life.

⁵ According to cognitive techniques, forty is the appropriate number to be able to gather sufficient results for the pilesorts (Romney et al. 1987).

concepts on individual cards. Next, when I went to practitioner, scholar, and Yorùbá artist houses, offices, and to the Yorùbá Association, I would bring several stacks of these cards and ask Cubans to sort them.

In Matanzas, I asked these twelve Cubans who were Lucumí practitioners (including temple priests [*santeros/as*] both, female and male, of dark and light skin color and less and more materially wealthy [as according to a local scholar of Lucumí]) to categorize the concepts by grouping together the cards that they found to be conceptually similar. The only rules were that they could not put all of the cards in one pile, nor each card in its own pile. Figure 4-1 shows an example of one of these pilesorts. You can see that Caridad del Cobre, río, and Oshun lie in the top middle group. The top middle column of cards places Oshun, río (river), and Caridad del Cobre together into a group that signifies similarity. Oshun is the goddess of the river, and her syncretic rendition is La Caridad del Cobre.

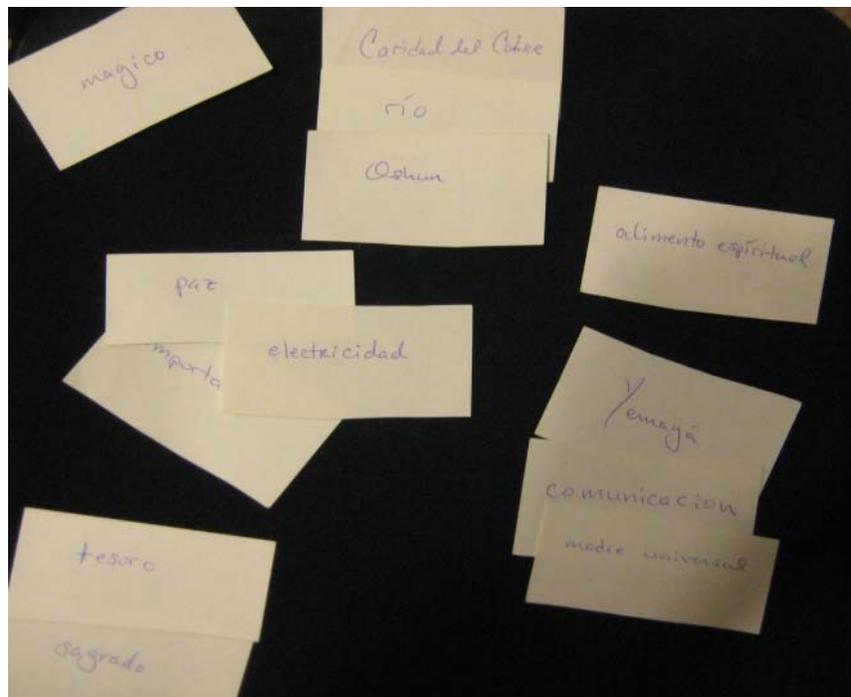


Figure 5-3. An example of a pilesort of “water”.

Field Story:

Conducting Pile sorts in Matanzas, Cuba

Sitting on yet another refreshingly cold cement floor, I hand out one set of forty-two cards to each of the Yorùbá practitioners present; I hand out a copy of the index cards—which I had made and brought from Florida for this purpose. As per protocol, each card displays a word that other practitioners had listed as integral to their definition of water. From these freelists, I was able to cull the most frequently mentioned ideas and put each one on a separate card that I cut into approximately one by three inch squares. And there I was, on one more floor asking practitioners in Matanzas, Cuba to sort and categorize these words—these concepts of water—putting whichever ones they felt belonged together together and whichever ones deserved a separate category separate. The only rule, I explained, was that all of the cards could not go in one pile, nor could all forty-two of the cards go in separate piles.

In order to examine the unique ways that different Lucumí practitioners conceptualize nature within their religion, one of the techniques I chose was cognitive mapping. Through pile sorts, semi-structured interviews, open-ended interviews and multidimensional analyses with a Yorùbá-affiliated population⁶ selected through convenience and snowball sampling (N= 33), I was able to visually map their conceptions in a participatory way (Chambers 1999; Feldstein and Jiggins 1994).

⁶ I say Yorùbá-affiliated to call attention to the different degrees of participation by the Cubans I interviewed.

Using the data from these pilesorts and Stephen Borgatti’s Anthropac®, I was able to create a cluster analysis and a multidimensional scaling (MDS). As Borgatti (1997) who created the software to conduct the cognitive analyses including MDS, explains⁷,

From a non-technical point of view, the purpose of multidimensional scaling (MDS) is to provide a visual representation of the pattern of proximities (i.e., similarities or distances) among a set of objects. For example, given a matrix of perceived similarities between various brands of air fresheners, MDS plots the brands on a map such that those brands that are perceived to be very similar to each other are placed near each other on the map, and those brands that are perceived to be very different from each other are placed far away from each other on the map. (Borgatti 1997).

Through a multidimensional analysis (MDS), the groupings or clusters are visually mapped. And, much like a map of the Americas where Canada is distant geographically from Chile. In a MDS mapping, the spatial distance equates to perceptual difference. Thus, nature and spirituality

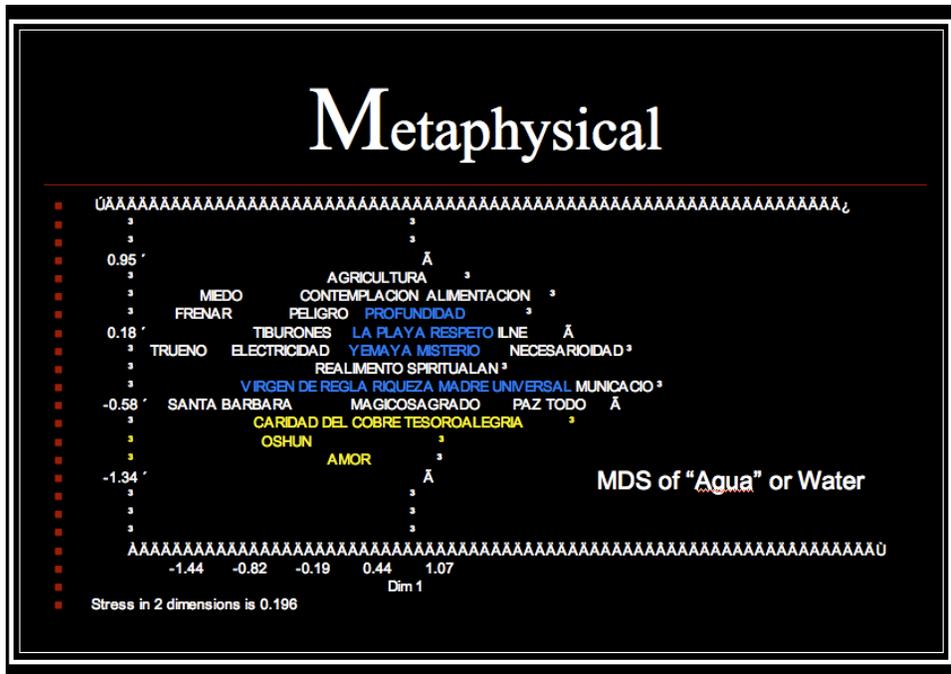


Figure 5-4. Metaphysical conceptions of water and nature.

⁷ “From a slightly more technical point of view, what MDS does is find a set of vectors in p-dimensional space such that the matrix of euclidean distances among them corresponds as closely as possible to some function of the input matrix according to a criterion function called *stress*” (Borgatti 1997).

were perceived as very different for Gainesville residents. Yet, for Yorùbá practitioners, nature and spirituality were conceptually linked; the physical and the metaphysical mingle (see Figure 4-2). If you observe the words in blue (i.e., profundity, beach, respect, Yemaya, mystery, universal mother and virgen of la regla) as well as the words in yellow (i.e., *caridad del cobre*, *tesoro*, *alegría*, *oshun*, *amor*), then you should immediately recognize that human qualities like happiness (*alegría*) and love (*amor*) are interspersed with the Yorùbá orisha Oshun and the syncretized saint of Caridad del Cobre. Thus, the water of the rivers are considered sweet and contain love, happiness and all of the other qualities of the orisha Oshun.

Through a cognitive analysis employing freelists and pile sorts, a map of the primary concepts of nature illustrate that practitioner's conceptions of nature are not separate from their spirituality, but deeply integrated. This mapping of conceptualizing nature concurs with the literature and my ethnographic data. The physical and the metaphysical merge together reinforcing the perceptions of nature as bio-physical elements and as specific deities with human characteristics. Notice the difference between this map and the nature and spirituality map of Gainesville, Florida residents (Figure 3-6 and 3-7).

Life and mystery, though, and the mysterious, was (probably) the most mentioned aspect of nature. However, this mystery was not conceptualized as unknowable in their epistemology or in their empirical practices. The body and the physical realm are not considered so separate from the spiritual realm that there cannot be a crossing of the divide; instead the body and the physical realm house the spiritual realm, thus are the manner/medium to access and even communicate with the spiritual. And, it is through communicating appropriately with the spiritual realm that humans can access the powers and the mysteries of the natural realms.

The orishas are not only fundamental in the transformation of the human experience, but also in the conception and interaction with nature. Javier exclaims, “And no one, and no one who doesn’t know the religion, no one who doesn’t know the language, who doesn’t know the saints, is going to tell you that in the river there’s love, but in the river, yes there’s love, because in the river lives the Our Lady of Charity, who is the queen of gods... the reigning Saint of love⁸” (pers comm 2004).

Oshun

Javier is referring to Oshun (Caridad del Cobre), who is the patron saint of Cuba. She is the Yorùbá Goddess of love, beauty and sensual delights. She is the Aphrodite of the Yorùbá pantheon; she is the goddess of love, fertility, frivolity, and seduction. Her story (although not always her representation) is as a mulatta (brown woman of mixed African and European ancestry) dressed all in yellow, the color of gold, money, prosperity, sun, and happiness. Her symbols are mirrors, jewelry, honey, golden silks and feather fans. She also is equated to the sweet river waters. She is a *mulata* with a uniquely Cuban story in which she wanted to come to the Caribbean island of Cuba from Africa to help out her followers, the enslaved Africans who were forced to come. Oshun is the queen of rivers and the epitome of female beauty and sensuality. Her color is yellow. Figure 5-5 shows a representation of Oshun in Matanzas, Cuba with her bright, satin, yellow dress and headdress, and Figures ... and ... show two different altars for Oshun. Notice the yellow dress, the yellow flowers and the boat in the water.

⁸ “Y nadie, y nadie que no cocozca la religion, que no conozca la lengua que no conozca los santos, te va a decir que en el rio hay amor, pero en el rio si hay amor, porque en el rio vive en el dia la Caridad del Cobre, es la reina de los dioses... la santa reñia del amor” (pers comm. 2004). Javier exclaims



Figure 5-5. Doll representing the orisha Oshun.



Figure 5-6. Altars for Oshun

Story of Oshun

One of the few stories that is key to the Yorùbá-derived religion in Cuba, yet does not appear on the African continent, is about Oshun: Canizares (1999: 65) tells a version that he

notes is similar to that which appears in Mercedes Cros Sandoval's *La religion afrocubana*

(Madrid: Playor 1975:11-12):

Oshún, goddess of love and of the rivers, watched sadly as great numbers of her children were forcibly taken away to a far-away land called Cuba. Confused about the situation and her inability to stop strange white men from abducting her followers, Oshún went to see her older sister, Mother Yemayá, to ask her advice. 'Wise sister, what is happening? Why can't I stop this tragedy from occurring?'

'It had to happen this way, Oshún,' answered Yemayá sadly. 'Our children will tell the entire world of our wonders, and millions who have forgotten us will worship us again.'

Moved by an intense desire to be with her suffering children, Oshún decided on an impulse to move to Cuba. But she had never before left her kingdom, the Oshún River, and was afraid. 'Tell me, Yemayá, you whose seven seas caress all of the lands of the world, what is Cuba like?'

Thinking pensively for a moment, the stately queen answered, 'It is much like here: hot days, long nights, lush vegetation, tranquil rivers.'

'Is there anything about Cuba and its people I should know before I move there?'

'Yes,' answered Yemayá. 'Not everyone is black like us; there are also many whites.'

Impulsive as she is, Oshún asked Yemayá to grant her two wishes: 'Make my hair straighter and my skin lighter so that all Cubans can see a bit of themselves in me.'

With a majestic sweep of her hand, Yemayá granted her sister's wishes. That is why Oshún in Cuba has long, wavy hair and light skin; this is why all Cubans worship 'Cachita.' (the pet name for Oshún), regardless of the color of their skin.

[Object 5-1. Oshun's story in spoken word by Camille Feanny \(MP3, 2 MB\)](#)

Oshun is the Yorùbá Goddess of love, beauty and sensual delights, whose symbols are mirrors, jewelry, honey, golden silks and feather fans. She is the sweet river water—Caridad del Cobre. Cobre means copper in Spanish. Ochun is identified with Our Lady of the Charity of Copper. She is the patron saint of Cuba, and an orisha who is indispensable to most of the Yorùbá and Yorùbá diaspora.

Yemaya

Yemaya is known as the Yorùbá goddess of the beach, profundity and motherhood. She is the mysterious sea, and is also known as La Virgen de la Regla. She is the queen of the oceans.



Figure 5-7. Yemaya statue located at the Museum of the Route of the Slaves, Matanzas, Cuba.

She is the part of the ocean where the sunlight hits; she is the edge of the ocean that tumbles onto the shore. Figure 5-7 is a photograph of a statue representing her donned in her color of blue, in front of the ocean's waves—her element. In Cuba, terms like mystery, life, and respect are used frequently to define her.



Figure 5-8. Yemaya representation.



Figure 5-9. Altar for Yemaya.

The Yorùbá orisha Yemaya is cognitively understood as overlapping with qualities like profundity, the beach, respect and mystery. She is connected to the mysteries of the ocean, although she is not Olokun, who is the owner of the depths of the seas. Thus, the biophysical becomes integrated with the emotional and the spiritual. As these results indicate, the orishas embody material and spiritual conceptions of the world.

Embodied Epistemology Translated into Evocative Ethnography

Knowledge is passed through the body from generation to generation via religions, rituals, oral histories and daily practices. As Heckenberger (2004)--in line with Bourdieu (1993 [1977]) and other scholars--points out, cultural memory becomes collective memory through the body. Ways of knowing through invocations, praise poetry, music and dance are essential to nearly all Yorùbá ritual in which spiritual forces are actualized--evoking and thus invoking spirit into human form. The Yorùbá employ these embodied techniques to transcend boundaries and open communication between spirit, material, temporal and spatial worlds (Daniel 2005; Harding 2000; Thompson Drewal 1998; Daniel 1998). This embodied knowledge is, as Daniel argues, "rich and viable and should be referenced among other kinds of knowledge" (2005:4).

With music, rhythms, chants and dancing, people sometimes get "embraced" by the orishas. Orisha possession makes it possible for humans to have direct conversations with divine beings, receiving their council, advice, and knowledge. Dance, as Daniels has demonstrated, is another form of knowledge transmission:

Yorùbá dance/music is recognizable because of its impressive visual symbols and its diverse array of divinities, who enter the bodies of worshipers and dance sweetly or fiercely. ...The dance/music comprises a continuum of varied, codified movement sequences and identifying gestures that represent differing divine personalities. The divinities dance as chartering characters of very general terms and in comparison with the other three nations of African music/dance traditions of Cuba, Yorùbá movements are lyrical and often make the dancer seem to undulate vertically and repeatedly from the pelvic area up through the chest, shoulders, neck, and head. (Daniel 2005: 137).

Daniel posits that Cubans reveal the deity through arm gestures. For example, Oshun's dance includes splashing and spreading water or honey with her arms and hands (Daniel 2005: 77). And Yemaya's dance of sacred choreography, Daniel contends, illustrate the ideas of community, "the caring force, the essence of nurturing, the source of existence, the salt sea waters, the oceans." (*Ibid*: 266). Yemaya's dance is performed in circles and spirals defining the circles of community

In Object, 4-8, you see three men sitting down behind each of the three batá drums. They bring on the rhythms of Yemaya and her incarnate—in human form replete with her signifying symbols of blue dress, headdress and stylized moves. Her charged body dances across the scene of the Yorùbá Association in Havana, Cuba. According to Daniel (2005), her codified gestures, movement sequences, motifs, and identifiable patterns are recognizable across the African diaspora.



Object 5-2. Video clip of Yemaya dancing at the Yorùbá Association (.mov, 3.5 MB Quicktime Required)

In contrast, notice Oshun's dance. She is slow and sultry as she moves across the floor, slowly and subtly encompassing the sides of her yellow dress into her motion. Her movements are graceful as she dances soft, fluid even seductive motions of Oshun's dance.



Object 5-3. Video clip of Oshun dancing at Yorùbá Association in Cuba (.mov, 4.7 MB Quicktime required)

Chango is one of the most common orishas in Cuba. He is a deceased king of Oyo, from where many Lucumi are reported to have come. He is also the god of thunder, the drum and dance. He is a ladies' man. One story tells of how he used to have the knowledge of the herbs and traded that ecological knowledge with Osain who knew the rhythms of the drums. Now, Osain has the plant knowledge, and Shango is king of the drum. In his dance, you will notice a definitive movement of the arm towards the ground. He is showing his power and force connected to his double-edged axe—one of his key symbols.



[Object 5-4. Videoclip of Changó dancing \(.mov, 4.8 MB Quicktime Required\)](#)

As the above video clips illustrate, each orisha is associated with specific dance movements. Each also has her and his own chants and drum rhythms. Although the above dances were part of a performance, practitioners also dance out these deities and therein an embodiment of human emotions and biophysical characteristics.

Nature, then, has subjective and divine voices and modes of being, which promote relationships based on intersubjective communication and thereby listening as well as requesting. For this reason, I label this section and research *Who* is Nature? so that the reader takes note of the subjective nature of the environment. Following this vein, I use the term “intersubjective” in much the same way as Morrison (1998) employs the concept. He uses it to express the way some indigenous peoples understand and interact with their environment—as multiple subjects or conscious beings sharing a world—all of whom deserve recognition and respect. These conceptions of the environment that emphasize respectful relations with subjective beings of agency may have a powerful influence on human relationships with the environment.

“While others pray to an invisible god hoping someday to see him,” Canizares a university educated scholar in religion and a Cuban-born and raised practitioner of Santería draws the distinction that “the Divine is manifested in Santería as living, breathing beings one can touch, kiss, love” (1993: 14). Orisha followers experience a sensorial and personal relationship with their God and gods that traverses the material and spiritual within embodied techniques of communication. Yet, not all orisha followers are equal, and not all people who use the Yorùbá religion for its healing are followers at all.

Bodies of Humans and Roles within the Religion

Different kinds of relationships transpire between different kinds of humans; not all humans are the same, nor are their roles within the religion. As I mentioned earlier, Lucumí practitioners comprise a wide continuum of involvement with the religion in Cuba; in fact, some are not practitioners at all. Canizares depicts a hierarchical model indicating the amount of involvement in Lucumí depending on the integration into the embodied performance (initiation) the participant has undergone. He divides people into the three major groups of *aleyo* (noninitiate), *santero* (initiate/priest) and *babalawo* (high priest) (Canizares 1993:51). He makes further distinctions within these categories by discerning nine specific steps or levels of involvement—namely, those of interested observers, occasional clients, habitual clients, amulet recipients, Eleggua initiates, guerreros initiates, collares initiates, santeros and babalaos. The *aleyo* or noninitiate, then has access to healing and even teachings of the religion without the time, money, commitment and practice necessary to be fully initiated. To undergo full initiation requires a period of preparation—traditionally about three years in Cuba. The ceremony, called *asiento* or *hacer santo* (“making saint”) involves the truly embodied performance of a *kariocha* (Lucumí for “to seat on the head”) initiation. During *kariocha*, one’s ruling orisha is ritually embedded in one’s head through a process that includes shaving the head and cutting a small

wound in the scalp where the secrets of the orisha and the *ashé* become forever a part of the santero's being (Canizares 1993: 7). After the *kariocha* initiation, the neophyte wears white for one year and follows strict taboos on diet and practices. This novitiate year is called *Iyabó* or *Iyawó* in Yorùbá, literally the wife. She or he is marrying into the religion⁹. In Cuba, those who rely on the healing relief of African derived religions may not be initiates at all. The following vignette indicates some of the complex multiplicities of Cuban bodies integrating forms of Afro-Cuban religions. These intersections of religions, government, natural science, and health must be properly understood to comprehend modern Cubans and Cuban life.

A Story of Multiplicities Embodied

In the outskirts of Havana, Cuba in November of 2006, four women and one young man assembled in an apartment on the fourth story of a typically Russian-style concrete housing complex that the residents themselves helped build. The central woman, who can be called Soledad, for whom these neighbors and family members have gathered, is a self-ascribed and self-defined communist and atheist. The reason for this gathering was that she was stuck in the depths of a deep depression.

This woman, my friend's mom, a communist, a soils scientist, and a Cuban revolutionary for whom the people in the room had gathered, was suffering a pronounced depression. She could barely get out of bed to get dressed. Her face showed little emotion and her whole body moved slowly and with stiffness; her form appeared more robotic than human --almost like a slab of clay that was on two short yet elongated motorized wheels. She began her day of shuffling and sitting around her apartment by making the exertion to get out of bed. She was on sick leave from work because of her depression; she was suffering. She had recently gone to a

⁹ Another example of parallel metaphors with the Roman Catholic religion in which the nuns "marry the Church." They also wear white wedding dresses for the ceremony.

medical doctor and had been prescribed medication that she had recently begun to take. So far, it had not made any difference at all.

Spinning Soledad around in three concentric circles, the woman who was presiding over the gathering, a ceremony, and had by that point been mounted (by spirit) was chanting over Soledad. Pronouncing Soledad, pronouncing her the daughter of Changó. Thus, red cloth she must wear, and a prescription she must enact to the letter for the next seven days including drinking this glass of water that would sit through the ceremony and through several other rites, and on the seventh day she must imbibe the liquid along with its spirit into her physical, biological, mental and metaphysical system. In addition to her red kerchief, she must wear white for the ceremony and for enacting the rituals, and after seven days of following these specific rites, she must finally drink the glass of water that shares the space with the spiritist ceremony in which we are participating.



Object 5-5. Video clip of ritual washing of flowers (AVI, 22.4 MB)

She is ordered to collect several specific kinds of flowers and with these bathed in water (Figure 5.5), she must conduct certain rites of cleaning her apartment and thereby her spirit. These cleaning rituals were to incorporate seven coconuts, a broom and a special mixture of water (*osain/omiero*) that she must prepare with specific herbs and flowers. As Voeks explains, the washing of the herbs in water helps to release the *ashé* or power of the plants.

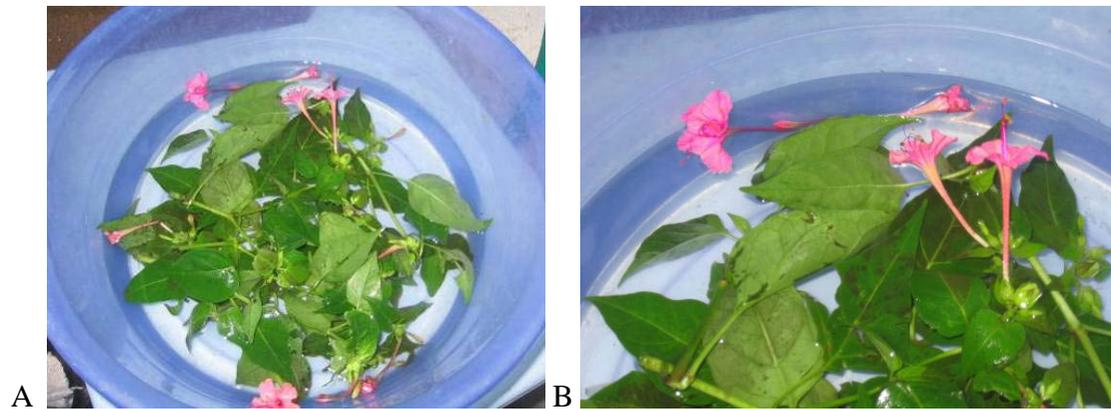


Figure 5-10. Photos of water with flowers for healing and cleansing. A) Photo of flowers and leaves in bowl of water. B) Upclose of flowers and leaves.



Figure 5-11. The coconuts, plants and broom to enact the cleansing. A) The coconuts, plants and broom to enact the cleansing in corner. B) Upclose of the coconuts and plants.



Figure 5-12. Required flowers used for cleansing and healing.

Stomping on the cement floor (surely the neighbors below can hear the ruckus, and as they are not practitioners—and normally neither is Soledad—won't they think something is weird exclaims the distorted face of discomfort on Soledad's face as she described in words after the ritual)... but Soledad had given permission to the woman to conduct the ceremony to allow what came to be, and it would have to be ok. She can't stop it now, or quiet the process down.

The smoke fills the crevices of the room, the chanting reverberates off of the concrete walls and floor, the liquid of aguardiente mixes with the saliva and is sprayed over the participants, the material items and the floor. Cleansing, the mounted one wets her hands and with them she pats her own hair, then pats the hair of Soledad, spinning her gently but decisively in three circles—speaking what was an unintelligible language to me—then speaking specific prescriptions for Soledad to follow.

Soledad was told to repeat what the mounted one said –and she did. But her face expressed disbelief with a slight smirk and glint to the eyes indicating an uneasy feeling of participating in something she neither understood nor really believed in (as she had explained to me before the ceremony). Yet, there she stood. She circled when guided to—the full three times—and repeated what she was told. When directly asked if she had faith—because, she was told, if she didn’t have faith this ceremony would not work for her—she stated that she did believe, with a voice that was shy and small yet with a noted urgency since she needed something to take hold and lift this shadow from within her heart that was encompassing her life. She already had paid sick leave from work, and was taking pills from a biomedical doctor. Yet, she was still seeped in depression. If this ceremony would do it, then she would believe....if she needed to believe first, then she was willing. Wasn’t she? Would she follow through though, and follow the very specific instructions that were being given to her –daily assignments for the next seven days?

Religion, nature, science, culture. Science, religion, nature, culture. Nature, religion, science, culture. Culture, religion, nature, science. Where do they diverge, where do they converge?

“*Misericordia*” Compassionate Mercy. “*Misericordia*” Compassionate Mercy, the mounted one called, and all in the room responded in unison, “*Misericordia*.” She in turn stomped on the floor with her foot and ninnied as a horse does when she is mounted—indeed this woman was no longer solely the sister of Soledad’s neighbor. She had been mounted by spirit—her body was now a channel for the spirit. Her frame was embodying the ancestors, the orishas and wisdom incarnate. She was accessing her special skill—the predisposition that she inherited from her mother, she explained later. This woman’s body was now a vessel to express information from the spirit world to pass on to those in the room. She circled each person around

three times, and then pronounced something that they must know about themselves and their future. First, she had Soledad circle around three times, and through the heavy smoke of the room pronounced her ritual assignment that would help make her well. After Soledad, she spun Soledad's daughter (who was about to leave her mom, her home, and even her country for the first time to go meet up with her husband in Guatemala), then the mounted one's own sister (who was soon to go into surgery) was circled three times. Next, she spun her own daughter (a dancer and dance teacher in the east) and her own son (who seemed to be mixed between discomfort and belief) offering them the guidance of the spirits to lead their lives. Lastly, she spun me, pronouncing my needs and necessary practices including taking my necklace of seeds off of my wrist and placing it in the bowl of water and flowers to gain *vital energy*, and in the future only to wear it long around my neck and continue to wash it to cleanse and gain energetic force. This water was infused with specific plants and with the ceremony itself. Specially picked from bushes outside in *el monte*, the flowers lay in the water as does my necklace of seeds—purifying and embodying *ashé*. After each spin, she patted the bodies and hair of these family members, neighbors and friends with the energized water. Then, she blew smoke to encompass them (and all in the room) and spoke words of advice to help each improve her and his individual life.

Like many Cubans, Soledad professes atheism as her faith, or lack thereof. Yet, she too can be placed along a fluid continuum of nonbelievers, practitioners and priests in Afro-Cuban religious practice. Canizares (1999) depicts a useful heuristic tool to comprehend this continuum in Cuba specifically for Lucumí, the Afro-Cuban religion based on Yorùbá heritage. The hierarchical model indicates the amount of involvement depending on the integration into the embodied performance (initiation) the participant has undergone. He divides people into the three major groups of *aleyo* (noninitiate), *santero* (initiate/priest) and *babalawo* (high priest)

(Canizares 1999: 51); however, he further distinguishes among religious practitioners in view of eight specific categories: interested observers, occasional clients, habitual clients, amulet recipients, Eleggua initiates, guerreros initiates, collares initiates, santeros and babalaos. Although Soledad was involved in a Spiritist ritual, and not one that was purely Lucumí¹⁰, I suggest that this continuum remains useful to interpret Cubans and their involvement with religion. Whether speaking of Lucumí or Spiritism, Soledad would be a noninitiate and with this ceremony could be considered an “occasional client.” Occasional clients like Soledad are common in Cuba. I heard several similar stories throughout my visits to Cuba including a few days after the ceremony that I described above, when I was conversing with Soledad’s daughter and friends. A friend of Soledad’s daughter told me how she had gone to a babalawo as a last resort to figure out what was wrong with her son, when he was a baby. So, even though she is not a practitioner, she invokes the faith when necessary. This is similar to what the South Carolina babalawo states as happens in Nigeria.

Typically a health problem of oneself or a loved one sends people urgently seeking the curative influence of spiritual and material medicine. When in medical need, Cubans of either African or Spanish descent (like Soledad and her family, who are the latter) commonly employ West African derived practitioners as healers. As Chapter 2 discusses, this connection may relate back to the 1800s when West Africans were first coming over in great numbers, and their healing knowledge would often serve colonists, enslaved Africans and free people of color.

¹⁰ As I have previously noted, Cuba’s religious practitioners tend to integrate religious pluralism and transcultural influences. Specifically, many santeros may also follow certain beliefs and practices of French Kardecian Spiritism along with those of Congolese Palo Monte and Spanish Catholicism. Many overlapping identities and religious constructions exist, including sharing many of the same deities (though with different names). Chango for instance is a principal orisha (or Lucumí spirit) as well as one of the Seven Powers that Spiritists recognize as essential. In Catholic doctrine, this orisha is known as Saint Barbara.



Figure 5-13. Photo of a religious offering at a nonpractitioner's home in Cuba.

As the above vignette illustrates, participating in a religious event does not secure belief or faithfulness. Instead it illustrates an aspect of Cuban culture and identity—that of complex interrelationships and plurality of practices. Catholicism, Santería, Spiritism and atheism can blend seamlessly with communist ideology and natural sciences neither blending nor erasing distinctiveness or a dedication to any individual positionality. This amalgam of traditions, beliefs and practices is not complex at all for many Cubans, for the use of variety and variation is common and historically integral to Cuban cosmology and daily living.

The story of Soledad illustrates an integration of material, spiritual, syncretic, and seemingly opposing worlds into one life of a Cuban reality. Soledad's friend's sister becomes mounted embodying the spiritual into human physical form. Soledad is told that her spiritual guide is Chango and for that reason she must wear red. Though Chango is a deceased king of a Yorùbáempire, this ceremony is not a Lucumí ceremony; it is a spiritist one. Soledad is an

atheist, yet she is ill and is seeking relief through means that are available. According to the ritual overseers, she must use specific herbs and rituals with plants and water to help herself heal. Although an Osainista does not select her herbs, she herself selects and prepares them. The water embodies the spiritual vibrations, the *ashé*. And by imbuing the water's content after several days, she gains the spiritual powers of the ceremony.

When I asked Yemaya followers in Matanzas, "Which do you go to more, the river, the ocean or the forest?" "All three," two sisters respond immediately. "We use all three. We go there, to the river, [and] at the river we have to do a principal ceremony. At the ocean, we must do another type of ceremony; it is the principal source of our religion. And the bush, well, that is the secret of the religion."

Conclusion

The fundamental elements of the Lucumí religion are based on an embodied and sensorial understanding and on intersubjective communication with the world. Through this process of sensorial engagement with the world, the Lucumí religion guides humans through learning about nature, humanity and God through a process of embodied epistemology. The body is the key tool for transmission. Lucumí religion is an integral—literally, an integrated—part of the body through installing the orisha's *ashé* into the head of the initiate, drumming and dancing, to possession (allowing the orisha to enter the body). With the boundaries of spirit and physical world collapsed, santeros can use their physical bodies to communicate with spirit bodies like the orisha as well as ancestors through divination.

This chapter has explored some of the fundamental elements of the Lucumí religion, and by so doing guides us to the idea of learning through embodied performance and communicating between material and spiritual worlds. The body is the key tool for transmission. But do all bodies learn the same, and understand the religion in the same way? Lucumí is hierarchically

formed; thus, there is a process of initiation that brings people further into the ways of knowing, as discussed above. Also, though there are different roles and responsibilities offered distinctly to women and men, one of the primary ones is expressed in the role of Osainista, which the next chapter discusses.

Most important for this research are the Osainistas, since they are the ones most connected to collecting the plants from the forest. They are the ones who are trained and sometimes initiated into the secrets of communicating with the orishas and plant spirits to be able to access their powers. This next section then delves into the question *who* is Nature? In providing an answer, I will expand the description of Osain and the role of Osainistas. Subsequently, some Osainistas will explain how their religion defines and influences their practices with the environment. Lastly, we will wrap up with what this connection between the conceptualization of nature and environmental behaviors means within the larger theoretical and practical context of tropical conservation and development and African diaspora studies.

CHAPTER 6
*WHO IS NATURE?: OSAIN AND COMMUNICATING ACROSS MATERIAL AND
SPIRITUAL WORLDS*

Who is Nature? Osain.

Fundamental to Yorùbá religion, Osain (spelled Osanyin in Yorùbàland) is an orisha who may be understood as the embodiment of nature and medicine including herbs, plants, trees, and the forest. Osain embodies many different aspects of the religion, particularly the embodiment of ashé, orisha and nature. He is not only a deity, but it is also a ceremony that allows the powers to be extracted from the plants. Osain is also considered to be an *omiero*, sacred water that holds the powers of the plants. Thus, I found out, I had to distinguish between asking *What* is Osain? and *Who* is Osain?

“Without Osain, there can be no religion” states Osvaldo. Everything is based on Osain’s powers. Reinforcing Osvaldo’s point, Javier asserts, “Osain is the owner of the herbs. Without Osain... we do not have the blessing/benediction that the herbs will be fomented/ made into natural medicine¹.” A prominent scholar of Lucumí explained, “Osain is to use the herbs for a ceremony; Osain is the owner of the woods, as a deity, but there is also a ceremony that is called Osain. Osain is a deity, is a supernatural entity and Osain is a ceremony... the ceremony to be able to access the ashé [power] of the plants in order to use them in the initiation ceremony and for other religious needs².” Osain is the deity of the herbs, the wilderness, the sacred forest. He

¹ Osain es el dueño de las hierbas. Sin Osain,no tenemos la bendición para que las hierbas sean, fomento, medicina natural Javier.

² “Osain para usar las hierbas para una ceremonia. Osain es el dueño del monte, como deidad, pero hay una ceremonia que se llama hacer Osain. Osain como deidad como deidad como entidad sobrenatural y osain como ceremonia en la cual se hace la ceremonia de coger el ashé de las plantas para usarlas en la ceremonia de hacer de la iniciación, en alguna cuestión religiosa.”

resides in the woods, though each plant also has its own orisha to whom a practitioner must appeal in order to access the healing essence of that stalk or leaf's potency.



Figure 6-1. A portrayal of Osain.

Osain is one of the most vital orishas, for without him and his kingdom of the sacred forest and the herbs within, there would be no religious rituals:

Without Osanyin's knowledge the diviner can offer no balm for ailments diagnosed. No purported herbalist would dare set foot in sacred woods or traffic in blessed leaves without proof of membership in Osanyin's exclusive cult suspended from his ceiling. There would be no ilkede presented to outsider-now-turned-devotee, no devotee-become-priest, no preparation of sacred omiero (water of propitiation), and no bathing of ritual emblems waiting to be charged with red life force, if there were no Osanyin. Osanyin is also referred to as Orisa funfun –Orisa of whiteness. He is the hidden power, the power of the mind (Mason 1985: 45).

The above quote explains how Osain is fundamental to the Lucumí religion precisely because of the spiritual/material connection with medicinal herbs, the sacred forest, and the preparations of water.



Figure 6-2. Plants recently collected and being made into medicine.



Figure 6-3. A close-up of the plants being ground into medicine.

John Mason, a Babalawo and author on Orisha worship for the YorùbáTheological

Archministry continues to explain Osanyin's role:

Osanyin is medicine. He is that aspect of God which governs the maintenance of health and the prevention and alleviation of disease both physical and spiritual. He is called, Agbe N'igi –the one who lives in trees. ...As Ewe Gbogbo Kiki Ogun –one who turns all leaves into medicine, Osanyin is recognized as the master physician armed with the knowledge of how to release the medicinal power trapped in every leaf. Becoming either surgeon's knife or wizard's wand, each leaf is transformed by Osanyin's touch. The forest, mother of clouds, grandmother to rain, keeper of the earth, and protector or respirating life, is the kingdom of Osanyin. For it is here in the cool corridors of the great tropical rain forest that God performs a wonderful feat of alchemy transforming basic elements into elixirs both potent and terrible, and then secreting them in the bark, roots and leaves of this kingdom's many inhabitants (Mason 1985: 42).

A Matanzas practitioner and Osainista asserts, "Osain is the sacred wilderness; wherever you go there is Osain³." Wilderness has a double connotation here. He is referring to the wilderness, far from urban development, as well as wilderness as potent herbs and weeds that can be collected from the roadside and gardens along the roadside.

He continues to explain, "Osain is a prophet... a follower of Jesus Christ... follower of the creation... the *sostenedor* of the created. All of this he was given by Jesus Christ himself. This is nature, this is the owner of nature⁴." Osain distributes his powers to all of the orisha, because he comes being [*el viene siendo*] a creator, from this, from him, from him you gather how you are going to be the power.⁵

³ "Osain es el monte". "donde quiera que tu vayas es Osain"

⁴ Osain es un profeta... seguidor de Jesucristo... seguidor de la creación... el sostenedor de lo creado. Osain.. eso se le dio el propio Jesucristo. Esa es la naturaleza, esa, es el amo de la naturaleza"

⁵ "Osain reparte sus poderes a todos los orishas, porque el viene siendo un creador, de ese, de el, de el se recoge como tu vas a ser el poder."



Figure 6-4. Opa Osain, symbol of healers and Osainistas.

Osain is the orisha who is the owner of the woods (*El monte*), wilderness, medicinal plants and everything that is nature. Osain is the sacred grove and the elements of nature. He is the owner of the plants to whom you must ask permission, and accept no as an answer. Osain is a person, a deity, a water infused with ashé, and an action. Thereby, Osain is both a who and a what, and even a how. “Nature is the reason for everything...the wisdom of nature is one of the things most elaborated...there is a ceremony...when we make a ceremony of osain. Osain is an orisha, but it is also a ceremony”⁶. Osain illustrates some of the fundamental points of my research.

Patakí and Osain. As I mentioned in the last chapter on Yorùbá religion, the story (patakí) is one of the major ways that the Yorùbá pass on information. The story integrates several

⁶ Natureleza es la razon de todo...la sabiduria de la natureleza es uno de los mas elaborado...hay una ceremonia ...cuando hacemos una ceremonia de Osain..Osain es un orisha pero tambien es una ceremonia.

characters in different scenes in life, and thus no person(ality) is ever acting alone, but instead within the context of life—i.e., a much larger web of altering situations of different temperaments and situations. In the previous story, then, the relationships of the other characters of Ogun, Inle and Elegua are all vital, as well as the final relationship with the rest of the orisha: Osain becomes humble and shares his information of the plants with all of the other orishas—again note the power aspect of integrating interdependence and sharing. This interdependence factor of heightened power is vital for not only the orishas, but also for the plant medicine. Indeed, Verger notes that the plants themselves are not used individually, but instead together they build a recipe of magic and medicine.

Many stories exist that explain the beginnings and the life of Osain; some of them contradict each other; and some simply change certain elements maintaining the ultimate integrity of the story.

Osain doesn't have father nor mother. He came out of the earth like a plant. Osain had a thing for Orula, though this one was not interested in him. Osain did *iká* [cast spells] on her and she didn't know how to protect herself from so many nightmares. Finally she decided to consult Changó to know who her enemy was. He told her to do a magical working [ritual] with ignited cotton matchsticks and twelve lightning rocks. Osain was in the woods looking for herbs to harm him when Orula was doing this *ebbó* [magical working or spell]. As soon as Orula started to do her summonings and ignited the matchsticks a lightning bolt fell on the wood and Osain fell prisoner between two *uegos* [the name of a plant]. That is how he lost those two limbs and the eye he is missing. When Orula saw Osain all injured and stuck, she knew who was her enemy⁷ (Bolívar 1990: 159).

Osain sprang up from the soil. He keeps to himself, and he is fond of Shango. His body is particularly noticeable, because it is malformed; he has only one foot, one eye and one arm

⁷ Osain la tenía cogida con Orula, although this one didn't metia con el. Osain le hacía *iká* y Orula no sabía cómo protegerse contra tantos trastornos. Por fin se decidió a consultar con Changó para saber quién era su enemigo. Este le mandó a hacer un trabajo con doce mechas de algodón encendidas y doce *odduará* (piedras de rayo). Osain estaba en el monte buscando hierbas para perjudicarlo cuando Orula estaba haciendo este *ebbó*. En cuanto Orula comenzó a hacer las invocaciones y a encender las mechas, cayó un rayo en el monte y Osain quedó preso entre dos *uegos*. Fue así como perdió los miembros y el ojo que le falta. Cuando Orula vio a Osain todo maltrecho, supo quién era su enemigo.

(Figure 6-1). His ears are asymmetrical, one very big and deaf, the other tiny but so hypersensitive it can hear a leaf fall on the other side of the world. His oversized head is normally hidden behind a mask of straw. He is a master hunter like Ochosi.

Many stories exist that help explain Osain, how he gained his vast and potent knowledge of the sacred herbs, and his relationships with the other orishas.

Osain had a strong relationship with Ogun, Inle and Elegua who all live in the forest and hunt (thereby the bow and arrow as both tool and symbol). Olodumare (Olofi) was to decide who had the powers of all the plants, and h/she endowed Osain with the powers of the mountain—all in his gourd.

However, Osain became too powerful and full of himself—growing and growing—until envy and jealousy surrounded him and he fell—tumbling into humility. Thus, as the story goes, he survives and continues to live in the wilderness, but is now malformed. He has one tiny ear and one enormous one. Though with the enormous ear he is deaf, and with the tiny one he can hear a leaf drop on the other side of the world. He is left with only one leg with which to walk, yet with only one leg, he can run better than most with two. This deformed specimen of a human maintains the wealth of plant knowledge necessary for all Santería practitioners. He was not always this way, according to some of the stories, he used to be a fine prince with the clothes of royalty and the bird on top of the head which signified royalty?... but his ego matched his highness, and he did not want to share the riches of the natural world. He hoarded its wealth until his fall.

Now, although he maintains the most knowledge of the plants, every orishas is assigned to certain plants. Although the goard and the ultimate distribution of the knowledge and powers of the plants is similar as is the image of the body of Osain—his beginnings are very different. In Cuba, he comes from the earth itself without parents, while in Nigeria, he wears the signs of royalty, and so like Changó is recognized a fallen king.

Either way, by creating situations in which human egos are played out within different worldly contexts, these stories help humans understand how material and spiritual worlds are integrated in life. These stories help us to understand nature including human nature. They help the listener and the diviner to see beyond just the initial sight and incorporate a multitude of senses, since the visual may often be deceiving. A prime example of this is the description of the

ears—though one is huge, it cannot actually perform its function. It is not “the bigger the better.” Instead, the tiny one that can barely be seen is the ear that outperforms and is able to do the humanly impossible and hear the wings of a butterfly flap on the other side of the world.

This story not only illustrates how Osain became the owner of *the monte*—endowed with the powers of the sacred forest of herbs—but also demonstrates how the two major themes of relationships and communication work within Yorùbácosmology of nature. By creating situations in which human egos are played out within different worldly contexts, humans learn about different roles and relationships. Particularly important to note is the conception and thereby the manifestation of power. Yorùbácosmological systems are not built upon an ultimate good and evil. Instead, good, bad, and many other aspects of life are conceptualized within contexts of relationships. These relationships traverse material and spiritual planes through specific techniques of communication. These communication techniques are some of the knowledge skills that an initiate into Afro-Cuban religions learns. And the Osainista is the initiate who specializes in learning the specific knowledge to speak with the plants, and thereby is able to attain (and offer) the power of ashé.

In addition to the stages of initiation, specific roles and functions exist within the religion. The most important for this exploration of the relationships between religious values/cosmology and environmental behaviors is the role of Osainista. He (and in Cuba this role is filled almost inevitably by a male—with the caveat that women past the age of menstruation can also fulfill this role) is the person who searches for the herbs and knows all of the secrets of the plants. Unlike most of the other saints though, Osainistas do not “hacer santo.” In other words, they do not get Osain placed physically in their heads—because according to a local scholar—Osain is too massive, “Osain can’t go to the head because he is too big; there isn’t a head that can hold

the sacred grove in the head⁸.” Instead, Osainistas receive Osain through a ceremony.

“Osainistas are those who search for the herbs and know all of the secrets of the plants.

Osainistas are not “hecho santo” in Osain. That which they have is knowledge (*conocimiento*). In Cuba, they don’t initiate someone into Osain, there are not practitioners initiated under Osain, Osain, doesn’t go to the head of anyone. Osain, a person receives. Because there is a difference between saints that you seat (*se asientan*) and saints that you receive. That which you seat is that which you initiate; it is the one that goes to the head and that which you receive is the one that doesn’t go to the head and it is delivered/given” (A.). “And how is it delivered?” “Through a ceremony, there are ceremonies” he affirms.

The figure below shows a symbol of healers and osainistas, the Osain-related diviner’s staff...you’ll notice the bird on top and the numerous birds appearing in flight. The African arts scholar Robert Farris Thompson proposes that these birds are highly significant. They symbolize not only an actual bird –and the divinity that entails, but also the “Great Mothers” which apparently in Nigeria point to sorcery. The birds are also associated with “original creative spark placed in every person’s mind by God” (Thompson 1975:56).



Figure 6-5. Photo of Yaw’s Osain staff.

⁸ Osain no puede ir a cabeza porque es muy grande, el monte, no hay cabeza que aguante el monte en la cabeza.

The following object is a slideshow of an Osain staff made by Yaw, a Gainesville Yorùbá practitioner. After a series of photos of the staff itself, some photos appear of the iron instruments integral to ogun worship and the blacksmith trade—iron-shaping tools. The slideshow ends with a photo of Yaw, the artist, the Ogun follower, and the Gainesville resident himself. The music that accompanies the slideshow comprises the drumbeats associated with Osain that come from the renowned Cuban artist Lazaro Ros; the song is called, *Oro Seco*.

The following videoclip is Yaw explaining the creation of the Osain staff as well as some of the symbolic significance. The relevance of this clip is to not only show the actual Osain staff and its import to the Yorùbá religion and to understanding Osain, but also to show how very similar ideascapes flow across waters, nation-states and other constructed boundaries. Despite fluctuations of nuanced and sometimes key differences of meaning, ritual or form, major similarities cohere a larger group of Yorùbá practitioners through their religious views and practices—and critical to this dissertation—how they conceive of and interact with nature.

In his essay on Osanyin, Thompson continues to explain that the traditional ruler of Iperu-Remo in the fall of 1962 explained that the “single bird atop the staff signified the carrying of prayers from the king to God” (1975:56). Furthermore, Thompson suggests that the bird-mounted *osun* staff carries a secret connection with the head or mind of the initiate (1975:57). The bird signifies the head and intelligence while the 16 birds that surround it are symbolic of the powers of the mothers (*ibid*).

For instance, the following videoclip illustrates how Yaw understands local herbs in central Florida. He explains that “local is better,” and he regularly selects the barks of trees, along with the leaves of different plants to make his herbal concoctions. It is not only this herbalism to which I wish to call attention, but more importantly the relationship with the plants

that occurs through this kind of relating: an affective bond. Moreover, it is this emotional bond that Louv and Bruhner claim to be missing from not only natural science classrooms, but also from Western lifestyles.



[Object 6-1. Videoclip of Yaw explaining the Osain staff \(.mov, 435.2 MB Quicktime required\)](#)

In describing initiation, “To make osun is a private and extremely sacred matter. The priest shaves the entire head [of the adept], then proceeds to paint it white, indigo blue, red, and yellow... When the initiator or initatrix has finished applying the colors [in concentric circles about the crown of the head] (s)he [cuts small incisions in the crown and inserts, within them, four important materials:] obi kola, eru, tushe, and osun. These guard destiny and the head.” At first I understood this to be in Nigeria, since I had heard from practitioners and scholars alike that you could not initiate someone into Osain in Cuba; the knowledge of the forest was too big. Yet, Thompson states in the footnote appended to this quote, that this was a phrase of Yorùbá and

Spanish that he took from the text by Teodoro Diaz Fabelo, *Olorun* (Havana: Ediciones del Departamento de Flokllore del Teatro Nacional de Cuba, 1960) (cited in Thompson 1975: 67).

“You must understand very clearly what is Osain,” Osvaldo laughs. “He is a savior, he is a savior. That means that it is not a lie, if you wish to find, if you continue searching ... the plants themselves will teach you their own mystery. The plants themselves, nothing else, it is the plant itself.... These are the mysteries that we respect.” This small quote from Osvaldo highlights some of the most important aspects of Osain and Lucumí perceptions of nature. Nature is personified as a savior, as a deity and as a person along with health/healing and sacredness incarnate. The spiritual is embodied in the material; through the material, humans can access the powers of the spiritual. The plants not only symbolize these alchemies, but indeed embody them. So it is the plant as a subjective agent who teaches and guides the initiate on the journey of understanding how to access the plant’s power as medicine and as magic. Osvaldo acknowledges the mystery of this process, but does not conclude to disregard that which he cannot fully understand, but instead to respect it⁹.

Osainistas

In this section, my intention is to look at Yorùbá practitioners’ perceptions of nature (and what kind of relationships with the natural world those perceptions encourage and codify). The best way to accomplish this—according to my research—is through exploring Osain and the followers of Osain called osainistas, who, as explained in the previous section, are the ones

⁹ Tiene que entender bien claro lo que es Osain, jejeje...

...El es un salvador, el es un salvador, entonces quiere decir que no es mentira, se desea encontrar, se seguira encontrando porque a medida que tu avanza con las plantaciones las mismas plantas te va enseñando su propio misterio. Las mismas plantas, no hay mas nada, es la misma planta. Pero tu la ves aquí con una hojita así, la misma planta, y cuando tu ubicas aquí tu vas a ver la misma planta, tu la ves con la hoja así. Y dice, si es la misma planta como aquí se crecio mas las hojas y allí se quedo con la hoja chica....E, esas son las cosas, que no son los misterios, esos son los misterios, que adonde nosotros respetamos.

initiated into the knowledge of plants. As Femi Osofisan suggests in her critique of Soyinka's emphasis of Ogun:

We have had a history, a long history of violence, of Ogun figures, violent kings, violent rulers, conquerors, empire-builders and so on. And I think it's time for us to turn away from these images to other images. Who were the healers, the doctors in ancient times? ... Who were those herbalists, who discovered those herbs in the forest? (81 in Aiyejina).

I take on the call to emphasize the healers, the doctors, the herbalists and those who go to the forest and collect the herbs—in Cuba, these persons are called Osainistas. The key Osainista with whom I worked, Osvaldo Cardenas Villamil, had lived for 70 years when I met him in July 2004.



Figure 6-6. Osvaldo selecting and preparing herbs for a ritual.



Figure 6-7. Herbs being prepared by an Osainista.



Figure 6-8. Up-close of herbs being ground by an Osainista.

Of the multitude of temple-houses that can be found throughout Matanzas, only three *cabildos* exist that date back to the 1800s; Osvaldo Villamil is head of Sta. Teresa, one of those three. Osvaldo is an older man who presently in his mid-seventies lives and works out of the back of his house. The front room, the receiving room offers two couches made of typical Cuban wooden latticework across wood frames, and a chair of the same. This room connects to the dining room with two huge archways. Both of these rooms' ceilings are incredibly high showing off the typical Cuban architecture, though with prominent stains of weather and wear of time. The walls of these rooms are adorned with the paintings of significant ancestors in their family like Osvaldo's mom's sister.

Along a long corridor of bedrooms connected by curved archways, his room is the last alcove before the kitchen after passing his sister's and his mother's rooms –respectively. His room is his bedroom, his divination room, his altar as well as his place to prepare the plants and herbs for his godchildren. In his rocking chair by the window, he prepares the plants, sees visitors like me as well as welcomes family.

This room also serves as his divination room with the corner filled as a big altar space to Osain full of plants, fresh and dried, an Elegua head and rum. It is here on a mat on the floor that he listens “to the shells speak,” meaning where he does his divinations with caracoles. Each of the walls has different paintings-- his father on one wall, on another an apparently random one of a young Asian-- the other wall has his bed.

We go after a huge rainstorm, and hope that another one is not about to come. Together, we walk through pastures in front of peoples' houses and in their agricultural lands. Along the roadside, horse drawn carriages, bicycles and small motorcycles go by while we follow Osvaldo around the area--Osain's homeland--yet Osvaldo's backyard--not the middle of the woods of

faraway. Transportation is very hard, he comments, and a thunderstorm is approaching rapidly with even darker clouds traversing the already ominous sky. Yet still so full of useful plants connected to orishas and healing. Every corner—field or street was full of an array of medicinal and ritual plants, and Osvaldo pointed many of them out to me—stating their names, a couple of their possible purposes and the saint to whom they belong. The Lucumí system creates relationships with qualities of the orisha for plants, illnesses and initiations, and puts them together for *omiero* or Osain.



Figure 6-9. Osvaldo in front of his Osain shrine.

Ewe

Ewe refers to the plants. Since the orisha live in the plants, the plants have spirit(s), and they are alive in multiple ways. These plants can comprise a single tree or a thick rainforest. They can be found along the roadside or in the depth of the wilderness. They are said to have more power when they are wild—most Osainistas refute the possibility of cultivating the herbs; since they must be wild to have the power—the *ashé*.

Music

Oswaldo explained to me that the healing practices of the Osainistas are founded upon and manifested in the chanting “that the Osainista must do to enter into doing the Osain oration” He clarifies that in order to learn the mystery of Osain, you have to learn the chants: “This comes through the *metafonico* of conversations of prayers of Osain that they know at what time they can go and collect the plants that you will need and what you have to say to this plant so that it will give you the authorization for you to be able to collect from her, what she will give you. You see, this is something material”¹⁰ (pers comm. 2004). In future conversations, he sang some of the chants for several of the orishas to me that I recorded with the video camera.

Osainista in Cuba and Gender

“In Africa, there were no Osainistas, the concept of an Osainista is a Cuban concept,” explains one Havana scholar and practitioner of Yorùbá. This concept came about because of the first free people...They had the liberty to go around, they were learning everything to be able to provide to their...,” I take advantage of the pause and interrupt to ask if women as well as men were also osainistas. He replies, “the osainistas were generally men.” He explains that this is not due to gender discrimination, but instead to practicality. More African men were enslaved than

¹⁰ Eso viene a traves de metafonico de conversaciones de resos de Osain saben en que tiempo puede ir y recoger la planta que tu necesitas que le tienes que decir a esa planta para que te de la autorizacion para tu poder recojer de ella lo que ella te de. Vaya. Y eso es una material.

women. In other words, the plantations were more interested in “the strength of workers than the conditions of fertility.”¹¹ Logically, then, he further elaborated, more men were at first freed, allowing them to not only to achieve their liberty, but also to attain a certain ranking within the class-differentiated population of freedmen along with the possibility of holding a position like that of osainista.

He was careful to dispel the commonly thought notion that even though it is taboo in Cuba, women too could be osainistas, since there is nothing that inhibits it. “If you review all of the archeological literature that exists, there is no, really no not even a dogma, even a theological one, but there is no dogma that says that it is prohibited. I think that it is in this sense that you women have lost spaces. You have given up your spaces.”¹² He reminds me of this aspect of a talk he had given at a recent conference where I had just seen him, in which he demanded proof beyond taboo that women could not enact these social roles that were seemingly out of their position.

¹¹ The historical literature, however, shows that enslaved women in the Caribbean, at least some parts, were predominantly field workers, and less likely to be assigned to more skilled work roles, proportionately, than their male counterparts. Hard work and reproduction were not mutually exclusive at all. And in the harshest conditions of exploitation, fertility was adversely affected.

¹² En África no había osainistas, el concepto de osainista es un concepto cubano. Que surge porque determinadas personas, los libertos, los primeros libertos

A: Tenian la libertad para irse a

N: Tenian la libertad para irse, estuvieron aprendiendo todo eso para poderse suministrar a sus

A: Tan mujeres como hombres o

N: no, los osainistas generalmente fueron hombres. Claro eso tambien no es por un problema de discriminación de genero, sino es un problema de que evidentemente la trata negra la de la esclavitud, eran mas hombres que mujeres. O sea interesaba mas la fuerza de trabajo, que la condicion de fecundidad, en un principio. Por eso fueron primero hombres, los que lograron en cierto numero importante su libertad antes que las mujeres.

A: Umhu

N: Eso determino lógicamente si se quiere, una division e socioclasista de las libertades y consecuentemente de las posibilidades, de un oficio como el de ser osainista.

A: Pero ahora las mujeres pueden ser osainista o no?

N: La mujeres podian ser ser, porque no hay nada que lo inhiba

A: Pero he escuchado que no puede ser

N: Yo, e, un poco lo que dije, en mi conferencia que tu fuiste, cual es el tabu? Porque si tu revisas toda la literatura que existe arqueologica, no hay un, no hay, no hay realmente ni siquiera un dogma, aunque sea teologico no? , pero no hay un dorgma que diga esta prohibido, pro eso, por eso, por esto, por esto, por esto, no lo hay, realmente no lo hay. Yo pienso en ese sentido que ustedes las mujeres han perdido espacios. Han cedido espacios, jejeje (p12)

The further along in the Yorùbá initiation hierarchy, meaning the further involved a person becomes a dedicated practitioner, Canizares posits, the more one's perspective changes, specifically from a Eurocentric to an African worldview (1993: 28). As I have explained, in contemporary Cuba, Santería is no longer reserved for those people with direct blood lineage to Africa. In fact, although many of the interlocutors could name their lineage back to Africa, several of the practitioners with whom I interacted did not have this heritage. Instead, they cited their grandparents from Spain and the Canary Islands; the latter Yorùbá practitioners were not phenotypically black.

And Osainistas are initiated priests and sometimes high priests of the religion. Thus, as one completes the stages of succession, that person accesses communication and communion with the other planes of reality. And, it is through the embodied performances that bring these worlds into communication, so the spirit worlds become manifested and integrated into physical bodies through divination, drumming and dancing/ possession. The Osainistas particularly then report how they hold respectful relationships with the plant world based on their religion and interpretations of power.

Relationships of Power

Power is neither top down, nor bottom up, nor even horizontal; the power that *ashé* refers to is not exclusive to the social dynamics of a human world. Instead, plants actively possess this power and humans must learn how to interact with the plants in order to gain access. "In order to have access to Osain's powers, you must learn the mysteries of Osain," Osvaldo explained to me when we met in July of 2004. This phrase, like many was poetic and profound as it illustrates an intricately intertwined and interdependent relationship that practitioners of Lucumí have with nature. He then added, "Santoral es basicamente la naturaleza," the religion is basically nature --

practitioners access the powers of the religion through nature, and the practitioners access the power of nature through the religion.

This aspect of how the conceptions formed through religious belief inform environmental practices is the premise of this research. For, as this osainista and religious priest stressed immediately, this relationship is different than the nonreligious Cubans using herbs to heal as a tea. Instead Osvaldo clarifies, “we extract powers that the plants possess.” The nuances of these notions of power are vital to understand the relationships between the religion, the practitioners and nature, particularly the power of intersubjective communication. Relationships have become more prominent in ecological studies, though ecology itself highlights the relationship factor as well as the interdependent nature of a variety of organisms within their environment. Yet, here lies a major difference between established (Western) ecological studies and Yorùbá ecological cosmology and practice: the element of power.

Ashé is Power

In the last section we defined the concept of ashé in terms of the Lucumí religion, now we will unpack some of the nuances that the idea of ashé holds for how practitioners understand nature and their environment. The primary concept I wish to bring to your attention is that of power. Ashé is power. It offers spiritual power to act in the material world. It endows the material world with spiritual power. In a plant, ashé is potency and agency. It is the potency that humans need and attempt to access, also the agency to deny humans access. A person has ashé – blessedness—a power to communicate with the divine, to access the potency of the plants, and to alter reality, health and the future—to bring the spiritual into an improved material life.

To reiterate, power is conceptualized not just as top down, or horizontal, or bottom up. Not only do humans possess power to extract resources, but also the plants possess power to deny humans the ability to see the appropriate plants or obtain the inherent potency of the plants.

This aspect of power is related to the Yorùbáecological knowledge that teaches how humans (particularly osainistas) must communicate with the plants, because each plant has a spirit. This spirit is called an orisha.

Orishas are Subjective Agents

Humans are not the only subjective agents within an environment otherwise considered as an object without agency, or for the more forward thinking, at least animals within their environment. So we need to highlight the conceptual elements of subjectivity and intersubjective communication when attempting to understand the plant world within Yorùbá cosmology. Since the plant world is not subjugated to merely exist on the physical realm, practitioners recognize the spirit and spirituality inherent in the plants. Thus, as they acknowledge deities that govern and live within the distinct elements, practitioners are trained to interact and communicate with these spirited bodies/embodied spirits. The form they use is embodied and sensorial as we have already discussed. In this chapter, though, what we will focus on is the intersubjective element of the communication and the relationships of power that this conceptualization encourages and produces. For instance, when Osvaldo explains, “you need to ask the plant for authorization so that you can go and collect from her what she will give you. And this is material¹³”, he is expressing the ability to access the spiritual through the material as well as the common sentiment among the Osainistas with whom I talked, that the plant not only has subjectivity but more importantly holds power in the relationship. The plants have the power to offer the authorization, or not. He goes on to emphasize, “So, you can’t just arrive and take whatever you’d like that is not yours, you have to ask permission from the owner...She will give it to you,

¹³ O: Tiene que aprender el misterio de Osain. Eso viene a traves de metafónico de conversaciones de resos de Osain saben en que tiempo puede ir y recoger la planta que tu necesitas que le tienes que decir a esa planta para que te de la autorización para tu poder recojer de ella lo que ella te de Vaya Y eso es una material.

gift it to you, lend it to you, rent it to you, or sell it to you, but you have to, you have to ask permission from the owner, who is the custodian. Do you understand? This is the jealous part that you have to collect the powers...”¹⁴. ... Otherwise, “... you won’t find it even if you know where it is” affirms another Osainista within a different conversation...(Joel).

Understanding the plant world as persons is not unique to the Yorùbá. As Morrison notes (1998:31):

the concept of other-than-human person seems closely associated with Native American power concepts [Fogelson and Adams 1977]. Hallowell outlines aspects of Ojibwa thought that defy both impersonal and objective social –scientific methodologies. As one would expect in a cosmos constituted by persons, the Ojibwa think precisely in relational, rather than objective, terms [Detwiler 1992; Morrison 1992b; Pflug 1992; 1998].

Let me reiterate this critical concept, when a cosmos is conceptualized as persons or as intersubjective beings and in the case of Yorùbá practitioners in Cuba, the orisha are understood with familial bonds as are the practitioners themselves, then relationships themselves become more important than objectification. Such a philosophical system, Morrison continues to explain using the Ojibwa as a referent, “requires a shift from impersonal to personal and interpersonal modes of causality...” (1998:31). In other words, the type of relationship is shifted from one of a subject taking an object, to that of subjects with different kinds of agency involved in distinct interpersonal relationships that can create and cause different outcomes. These kinds of relationships then are founded upon not only the desire of the humans but also on that of the plants and the spirits. Consequently, humans must not only act, but also communicate and listen to the plants and the spirits. This aspect of communicating between material and spiritual worlds is emblematic of Yorùbáecological knowledge.

¹⁴ Entonces no puede tu llegar y usurpar ninguna materia que no sea tuya si tu no le pides permiso al dueño...te lo da, te lo regala, o te lo presta o te lo alquila, o te lo vende, pero tiene, tienes que pedirle permiso al dueño, de, que es el custodio. Tu me estas entendiendo. Que es la parte celosa que tiene recoger los poderes.

Communicating Between Material and Spiritual: Humans, Plants and Spirits

Yorùbá ecological knowledge emphasizes the communicative factor between not only deities in their world and organisms in this world, but also and most importantly for this study, the communication between material and spiritual worlds. The worlds of spirit and material, of past and future, of humans and plants are integrated and traversed with appropriate communication techniques. In the previous section, I discuss divination, dance and drumming as specific embodied techniques to achieve this communication. Now, I focus instead on how the ability to communicate between worlds holds implications not only for conceptualizing ecology but also for guiding environmental behaviors, specifically in that this focus on intersubjective communication manifests respectful relationships and therein behaviors, according to the *osainistas*.

Respect is a component that is reiterated consistently when speaking about how humans relate to materiality and spirituality. Osvaldo explains, “By its very nature “Por necesidad de construcción,” when we are in the material, we respect the spiritual. When we navigate the spiritual, we respect it. There is a pattern “patron” that says material. There is another pattern that says spirit” (pers comm 2004¹⁵). Since materiality is infused with spiritual being as spiritual beings are manifest in material things, respect is a necessary element of the human relationship with the material (and the spiritual). He goes on to elucidate that “[although] there are many religions, we navigate the saintly religion. And we see nature as something that we always respect, something scientific-spiritual” (pers comm. 2004).

Osvaldo, in his explanations of the role of nature in the religion, consistently brings up the terms, materiality and spirituality, not as completely separate and distinct elements, but as

¹⁵ Cuando estamos en lo material, la respetemos la espiritualidad. Cuando navegamos la espiritualidad la respetamos. Hay un patron que dice material. Hay otro patron que dice espiritu.

interrelated aspects of one. The material is not completely separate from the spiritual, and the relationship of respect that humans share is one based on a complementary scientific-spiritual collaboration.

Since humans are not the only subjective agents within an environment for the Yorùbá , Yorùbá cosmology emphasizes the communicative factor between not only deities in the spirit world and organisms in this material world, but also and most importantly for the communication between these worlds. The worlds of spirit and material, of past and future are allowed to communicate through words, rhythms and movement. With appropriate communication, practitioners can communicate between worlds, and vital to communication skills, learn to listen.

Listening. One of the most important aspects of communicating with the plants, and a fundamental element to this collaborative relationship deals with listening. Communicating with the spirits of the plants does not appear to be equivalent to how some people envision “talking to God” in the form of prayers (i.e., asking for and requesting that personal needs be met). Instead (though also in addition to), communication takes the form of listening to the spirits of the plants: “Osain speaks... according to tradition, Osain speaks” (Andres). Listening to nature is a vital principle inherent in intersubjective communication. For example, Javier, a 32 year old male Yemaya follower who goes to the forest daily to request and collect herbs for healings and rituals in the temple of Xiomara (dedicated to Oshun) commented that “religious practitioners respect, care for/take care of “cuida,” and listen to the plants! I know how to communicate with the plants” (pers comm. 2004).

Yet, heightening one’s perceptions to environmental clues is not the only way that practitioners listen. Additionally, you must ask permission from the owner of the plant, to the

spiritual owner. As one osainista explains, “So, you cannot arrive and take any material that is not yours if you do not ask permission from the owner” *Entonces no puede tu llegar y usurpar ninguna materia que no sea tuya si tu no le pides permiso al dueno*” Hence, intersubjective communication implies the need to ask permission in an appropriate way, and listen to the response. The knowledge of how to interact, then, is through learning specific Yorùbá ecological knowledge.

Reported Respectful Environmental Behaviors

Es muy presumido el que se crea sabio mas que la naturaleza ---Jose Marti

The primary concepts that are vital to understanding Yorùbá religion that we have discussed in the last chapters of this section are A., ashé B., orishas and how a focus on C., communicating between material and spiritual worlds influences respectful relationships. Specifically, osainistas report that their relationship with the environment is one based on respect. This chapter builds on these concepts to call attention specifically to how Yorùbá ecological knowledge in Cuba informs environmental practices, particularly among osainistas. Thus, this chapter explains how Yorùbá religion in Cuba, which understands nature as an intersubjective family with individual agency, has interfused and influenced osainista reported environmental behaviors.

Respect is one of the most frequently reported concepts when discussing Yorùbá environmental practices, and it is also a major difference between (western) ecological studies and Yorùbá cosmology and practice, thus the major focus of this section: the concept of respecting natural entities.

How does Yorùbá ecological knowledge influence environmental behaviors? Through understanding the physical world as spiritual, Osvaldo suggests that Osainistas have less harmful practices. Specifically, he details how environmental behaviors like herb collection are

respectful. The exact ways that he details are echoed by all of the Osainistas with whom I spoke, based, they say, on a pattern of respecting life. As one renowned Osainista reports:

We don't damage/hurt/tamper with the forest. For example, if right now we go to the forest and we need to collect a plant, we always respect this plant's roots. Already, this is a form of helping the forest. You take the branches that you need but you respect the roots. If you pull out the roots, you are killing it. She could have reproduced but you are radically killing her. Because you didn't leave any part of her so that she can survive. This is to say that, she will reproduce, do you understand, the birds on one side, the owners of the forest who are the animals, also make their trails ... humans make one and the animals make another. Now, the careful person knows that a little plant that is sprouting, you don't step on... In this aspect, we respect. Because we do not need to practice this, what we do comes from learned knowledge. And the herbs for the orisha, we don't use absolutely anything like a herbal tea, nor anything like that. It is natural, natural nature of the herb itself. ... But, that's where you have to be an Osainista, so that you know what you are asking from these plants, these plants can offer you¹⁶.

Learned knowledge is key to understanding Yorùbá ecological knowledge, and Osainistas are particularly privy to this special knowledge due to initiation and through daily practice. For instance, when I asked how often one Osainista goes to the forest to collect herbs, he responded, "Well, I go almost every day to the forest, but it depends on what I need to get¹⁷." Going daily to the forest and getting only what one needs for that day is a form of respectful practice. This Osainista emphasized this aspect of only getting what he needs when he needs it (and no more) by stressing immediately "you can't bring the forest here, no, you can't do that, that is a lack of

¹⁶ NO bien, no hay mucho estropeo. El monte nosotros no lo estropeamos, o sea, porque si ahora vamos al monte y tenemos la necesidad de coger una planta, y siempre le respetamos a esa planta sus raíces, ya esa es una forma de ayudar al monte. Tu coges los gajos que tu necesitas pero le respetas la raíz. Si tu la arrancas de raíz, ya tu la estas eliminando. Ella puede reproducirse pero tu la estas matando radical. Porque no le dejaste ninguna herencia para que ella pueda sobrevivir. Eso quiere decir que, ella se reproduce, tu me estas entendiendo, los pajaros por un lado, los duenos del monte que son los animales, tambien hacen su, su trillo, tu me estas entendiendo. ... Os. El hombre hace uno y los animales hacen otros. Ahora el hombre cuidadoso sabe que hay una plantita que viene retoñando no la pisa, pero e anima si, porque el anima depende de, de la botanica. El se come la hierba, el depende de la hierba, hay lugares, hay valles ¿???? 549 ¿? Comiendose la hierba, nosotros comemos hierba tambien pero la hierba que nosotros comemos es elaborada, tu me estas entendiendo. A no ser una hierba que sea para uno, un curantismo de un cocimiento. Nosotros en ese aspecto respetamos. Por que nosotros no tenemos necesidad de practicar eso, lo de nosotros es toda la sabiduría. Y la hierba para el orisha, que no se utiliza nada de candela ni de cocimiento ni nada. Es natural, la naturaleza natural de la hierba. A pero, tiene su ¿?? 563 ¿?? Porque ahí hay que ser Osainista, para que lo que tu le estas pidiendo a esa plantas, esas plantas te puedan ofrecer

¹⁷ Bueno yo, yo casi todos los dias estoy en el monte, pero depende lo que uno va a buscar

respect¹⁸.” He continued to express, “That’s the forest...you go and collect from the forest what you need. But you must leave the forest there.” Then, he went into more detail and said, “You never bring the forest here, because if you bring the forest here then you are creating damage/harm¹⁹.” I then asked him if he cultivates plants (here in the states there are many home gardens of medicinal plants). He exclaims, “Nooooo oo, I dedicate myself to nothing else but to collect them.” He smiles and continues, “And to collect them (*contadas*)[exactly the number of what I need], when I need them, and no more²⁰.”

As a plant, she/it is a material that we consume, but no one cultivates, she is born in the wild. Are you understanding me?

He differentiates between the power of a plant that is born in the wild, and that which one might cultivate. Although wild can be used in different ways since many of the herbs that osainistas use are common weeds that grow along an overgrown yard or near a sidewalk. Nonetheless the conception of *el monte* as the sacred groves are implicitly wild.

When I asked Javier how his religious practices are affecting the forest, he responded that they don’t affect it. “Because we cut the branches, we do not cut the trunks, do you understand, they are the branches. The people who make charcoal and these sorts of things, they cut the *mata*, and they destroy it, no, we do not cut the trunks.”

Many of the *santeros* and Osainistas were adamant about the value and power of wild plants over domestic ones, and many commented on the contemporary alterations of the forested landscape. In addition, Osainistas in Matanzas, as opposed to Havana where herbalism is a burgeoning business, appear to be the only ones sanctioned and the only ones who actually go to

¹⁸ No se puede traer el monte pa’ aca, no eso no, eso es una falta de respeto.

¹⁹ Nunca traes el monte pa’ aca, porque si tu traes el monte pa’ aca entonces tu estas haciendo daño.

²⁰ Nononooo, yo me dedico nada mas que a recogerlas, jejeje. Y a recogerlas contadas, cuando, las que necesito no mas. Que va, si asi mismo en todo no me da chance, dime tu si me pongo a cultivar.

pick the herbs for healing and initiation rituals. While women and men have different roles and responsibilities fundamental to Lucumí, seeming contradictions appear among practitioners, scholars and texts. Lastly, the scientific community in Matanzas seems to be disconnected from the values and motivations of environmental behaviors with the Yorùbá community. Although both groups are stakeholders in local land and water resources, and despite scientific and governmental organizations' attempt at collaborative management efforts, a cultural divide of understanding seems to create an impasse. Some of the scientist with whom I spoke referred to Afro-Cuban religions as getting in the way of conservation efforts because of a lack of natural science understanding of the ecosystems. Additionally, some of the scientific and government literature explains that the lack of an environmental ethic is one of the primary causes of ecological degradation without recognizing the distinctions between residents, including the specific roles and knowledge that certain religious practitioners hold and convey to their extended religious families. In chapter 9, I will continue this discussion by proposing ways to help create conversations between distinct yet overlapping epistemologies.

In conclusion, this chapter is an analysis of a cosmology that emphasizes communicating between spiritual and material worlds through exploring the implications among ecological conceptions and behaviors. The element of communication is critical, and it is founded upon listening as well as asserting since the plants and the spirits are understood within an intersubjective conversation. Thus, two of the primary elements of communication that this chapter examines are subjectivity and power—for they are two of the key elements that help shape practitioners' relationships with their environment. Specifically they are the primary elements that help shape practitioners' – particularly Osainistas' reportedly respectful relationships with their environment.

CHAPTER 7
A DOCUMENTARY. OSAIN IN TRANSLATION: YORÙBÁ DIASPORA RELIGION AND
ECOLOGY

Videography offers another path to understanding, representing and experiencing world religions, ecological knowledges and local peoples' perceptions. In so doing, researchers are not only attempting to experience the world, they are offering the possibility of an alternative epistemological space through video production and viewing to experience other worlds. The result is hopefully an alternative way of knowing—not only accessing knowledge through categorizing, naming and sometimes othering, but also through feeling, sensing and evoking. In Chapter 7, I offer an example of a video that embodies these themes through haptic imagery. This chapter consists of a link to the ethnographic documentary that I created to translate Yorùbádiaspora religion and ecology through illustration and evocation. The subsequent chapter (Chapter 8) comprises a written discussion.

[Object 7-1. Osain in Translation: Yorùbá Diaspora Religion and Ecology Documentary \(.mov, 387.4 MB Quicktime required\)](#)

CHAPTER 8
OSAIN IN TRANSLATION: A DISCUSSION OF VIDEOGRAPHIC TECHNIQUES IN
EVOKING YORÙBÁ RELIGION AND ECOLOGY

With a black screen and a strong drumbeat, *Osain in Translation* begins. Lazaro Ros, the renowned santero and Afro-Cuban singer, invokes Osain, the deity of nature through his encantations and salutations “*Ashé ogbo orisha, ashé elegua, ashé ogun, ashé ochosi, ashé obatála, baba.*” In a specified order, with specific intentions, he salutes the ancestors, as is required by respect and ritual protocol. Then, he salutes Elegua, the one according to Pataki (stories) that must always be saluted next as the ruler of the crossroads, then Ogun the deity associated with metallurgy –especially important in Yorùbá culture. Next, with *ashé Ochosi*, he salutes and invokes the male hunter who lives in the woods, then *ashé Obatala*¹ he recognizes the hermaphrodite deity of white, of peace, and of honor. Lastly, he offers a salutation to *baba*, the father. The rhythms of the batá drums accompany his encantation.

Later in the video the batá drums are visually seen in a black and white photo, as photographed inside Havana’s Casa de Africa museum from a historically significant book by Cuban scholar Fernando Ortiz (1:10:23). The static drums of scholarly study come alive into action a few moments later (1:11) as filmed in the Yorùbá Association in Havana, Cuba. Three men sitting down behind each of the three batá drums, bring on the rhythms of Yemaya and her incarnate in human form replete with her signifying symbols of blue dress, headdress and dance style moves; her charged body dancing across the scene.

With music, rhythms, chants and dancing, people sometimes get “embraced” by the orisha. Orisha possession makes it possible for humans to have direct conversations with divine beings, receiving their council, advice, and knowledge. Dance is another form of knowledge

¹ Obatala is the patron of Oyotunji village.

transmission. Memory is embodied through experiential and kinesthetic knowledge, particularly through dance for the Yorùbá diaspora (Daniel 2005, 1998; Thomson-Drewal 1998). If the songs are precise, they may achieve the desired effect, neither missing a beat nor mispronouncing a word, and the orisha descend from heavenly abode and temporarily possess their devotees, initiating a mystic state of communion between the orishas and the participants (Canizares 2000).

“African music is that aspect of life which provides the repositories of traditional beliefs, ideas, wisdom, and feelings,” explains the African theologian John Mbiti (1999[1969]: 67). Hence santeros consider properly consecrated *batá* drums to be living, powerful entities, the materialization of the great spirit Añá. “Do you also use sounds and rhythms to understand the plants?” I asked Joel, a Matanzas santero and Osainista within the video. “Yes, of course!” he replied. The communication between the natural and human world is founded upon the embodied rhythms of drums and the sounds of salutations. As Taiwo (2000:184) points out, “*When we as a Yorùbá people have embodied the [drum’s] return beat at an early age a whole virtual terrain opens up...it becomes embodied knowledge....[that helps]realize those important connections vital for decoding non-verbal signifiers in the process of communication.*” Knowledge is passed through the body. From generation to generation via religions, rituals, oral histories and daily practices, as Heckenberger (2004) in line with Bourdieu (1993 [1977]) and other scholars point out cultural memory thus becomes collective memory through the body.

The video *Osain in Translation* alludes to this learning, and attempts to integrate the viewer into experiencing this type of embodied way of learning, in this case, learning about nature through dance, rhythm, chants, books, practitioners, and Osainistas. Since audio-visual technology can show motion, show the relationships between rhythm, movement, and knowing the divine, it may be one of the best methodological tools for representing, accessing and

evoking African-based religious belief systems. Thus, the video serves doubly as a means to represent embodied learning, and an attempt to integrate the viewer into embodied learning, acknowledging the continuous act of translation in the transmission of ideas, bringing us back to the issue of how do we know, and how do we pass on (transmit) these ways of knowing and knowledge systems.

As the Cuban filmmaker Gloria Rolando expresses, “We have a worldview in which our dialogue with nature is extraordinary because everything has life and is a carrier of energy...The world of images—cinema and video—is extremely attractive when the resources exist to create good productions. It speaks a powerful and direct language that develops our imagination” (2001:349). Much like her film *Oggún*, my film does not set out to delineate a religion or illustrate particular rituals, for these specificities the uninitiated should not know. To illustrate this aspect of the religion, I show the sequence of me asking an Osainista at the beginning of the video “How” he uses rhythms and chants to communicate with the orishas and nature, he responds, “Ahhh, these are things that I cannot tell you.” He cannot talk about many specifics in the Yorùbáreligion because the detailed knowledge is intended only for initiates to experience. Most viewers will not pick up on a lot of the information presented, unless they have had previous experience with Yorùbáreligion; and that is accepted. Instead, the images are meant to help the viewer discover and experience “a way of being” (Rolando 2001:348).

For instance, although drumming weaves its way throughout the video, with the majority of the soundtrack involving rhythms vital to Yorùbáculture and transmission of knowing nature, people who are not familiar with Cuban or Yorùbáculture will not recognize their significance. The video interweaves scenes of kids in Oyotunji village drumming with two *babalawos* on

*chekeres*², along with soundtracks of the renowned Lazaro Ros, the Orishas and Los Munequitos de Matanzas. Again, people familiar with Cuban music, will recognize these groups, and those familiar with Yorùbá religion will recognize the specific chants, salutations, invocations and rhythms; those details only enhance but are not vital to understand the project of embodied epistemology of nature, which is the focus of both this paper and the video.

For viewers, this lack of naming and classifying information to which they are being exposed may make some uncomfortable, if not even anxious. However, that is okay! This may even be the point, insofar as that feeling of discomfort engages the viewer into an active participation of “getting to know” rather than a passive recipient of accepting reductionist and commodified pieces of knowledge. The lack of explanation may prompt different reflections and circuits of recollection (or lack thereof) among the people in the audience. For instance, depending upon previous exposure to the elements of the orishas, one may notice the royal palm tree and associate the deity of war and drums Chango (also spelled Shango and Xango). Chango, the fourth king of Oyo in Yorùbáland, was deified into a very important Orisha after his death. He is owner of the Batá (3 double-headed drums) and of music in general, as well as the art of dance. Chango, is known as a warrior, as the master of drums and as a seductor. He rules the color red and white; his sacred number is 6; and his symbol is the *oshe* (double-headed axe, which you saw him dancing with in the video clip in the chapter on Lucumí religion), which represents swift and balanced justice. In Cuba, he is also symbolized by the royal palm tree, where he is reported to reside. A prominent photograph of a royal palm tree is held on the screen for several seconds in his recognition. There is also a scene with a ceiba (1:04) to honor the significance of this massive beautiful tree that for the Cubans seemed so similar to the revered

² *Chekeres* are gourds with beads laced around them used to make music.

Baobab tree in Africa. Few of the historical connections are explained, but their presence is irrefutable. The “blanks of information” that I allow (because I am focusing on a *process* of knowing) will be filled differently depending on the experience and thereby relevance of each viewer, whether he believes, she doubts, or they have never heard of the Yorùbá.

Many details in the video *Osain in Translation* are not explicitly analyzed in the video. Instead, they are visually available –to those who are familiar. In a similar vein as the Hopi filmmaker Victor Masayesva Jr. *Itam Hakim Hopiit* (1985), the video exposes but does not explain several elements. For instance, divination is fundamental to Yorùbá religion, and one of the primary ways to divine is through the use of four pieces of coconut shell. (In Nigeria, it was with the kola nut tree, but in Cuba and the Americas, practitioners use coconut), so the film has a brief up-close scene of a babalawo throwing down the coconut pieces, another image flashés onto the screen of *omiero* – sacred water, in front of Ogun’s shrine in Oyotunji Village (noticeable by the plethora of iron instruments and tools by the cauldron). Another scene has a dancing Oshun replete with yellow dress disappearing into a river (since she symbolizes fresh waters, particularly rivers) (1:11:23).

Oshun (Ochún, Oşun, Ochun, Oxum) is considered the Goddess of sweet water, rivers, patron of love, gold, marriage, intimacy, and beauty. She is associated with the color yellow, gold metals, copper, peacock feathers, and all that is sweet like honey. She is the patron saint of Cuba, and known as Caridad del Cobre. Oshun, also known as the second wife of Chango, on altars, is represented by honey, sunflowers, pretty yellow material and dolls dressed in yellow. In the movie, a doll dressed conspicuously of yellow represents Oshun within several overlapping images of an Osainista’s shrine, footage of vegetation in Matanzas, and images of

water and rivers while both the group *Orishas* sing about the religion of the orishas, and the famous Matanzan group *Los Muñequitos* chant.

This offering of overlapping information (visual, verbal and audio) is common in the video *Osain in Translation*. The scenes offer too much information that a single viewing would never be enough to take in all of the clues, symbols and data. I frame this technique on strategies executed by filmmakers like Victor Masayesva Jr. and Trinh Minh-Ha. Trinh Minh-Ha intersperses reality with poetics in *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1989). Written words, spoken poetry and visual images are all juxtaposed and overlapping in her film, sometimes repeated and sometimes barely heard. Her production becomes a poetic and political message of stories of Viet Nam women that may at times be confusing and disconcerting, yet always powerful.

In *Osain in Translation*, if someone recognizes the triple set of sacred batá drums, or Lazaro Ros' voice, or Fernando Ortiz's seminal book³, then good, but if they don't, then that is alright. For, the primary point of this set of scenes is the drumming itself, and to *feel* the drumming, not just *think* about it. Secondly, the goal is to viscerally connect the drumming to learning about and communicating with the natural environment.

Thus, the film begins with blurriness coming into focus implying or suggesting the project of clarification of Yorùbá conceptions of nature through the visual medium. The superimposition of tree and water is vital with limbs and sand blending into a nebulous "betweenness". A mirror image of me with video camera gives way to a shadow of me with a camera on the sandy banks of the Suwannee River; I (investigator, traveler, scholar) am using the camera to attempt to understand and to translate Yorùbá ways of knowing nature. Next, part of the image begins to

³ Fernando Ortiz (1881-1969) was a Cuban ethnomusicologist and scholar of Afro-Cuban culture.

move, we are moving, toward a sunset (in this case it is Payne's Prairie, Florida) but the movement is going forth attempting to find out through travel and thereby ethnographic analysis what is occurring –similarities and dissimilarities among perspectives and perceptions of nature.

Self-reflexivity is vital to anthropological research –especially in film (Ruby 2000). Immediately after the title and a blurry image of a tree that comes into focus, my shadow follows down the tree, which turns into a river, which turns back into a tree. I begin the film with an image of me with a camera—me using a camera to capture and understand “nature” from my interpretation of certain Yorùbá diaspora perspectives gathered through field and archival research. I am translating the ideas into images and sounds and these audiovisual images into ideas and perceptions for an audience: English, Spanish, Yorùbá; distinct histories, yet common underlying themes are inherent in the translations. This theme of learning and transmitting knowledge and ways of knowing is recurrent and fundamental to the video *Osain in Translation*.

Learning to Learn: Embodied Epistemology and Evocative Ethnography

How do we learn, how do Yorùbá practitioners learn, and how might that influence how the landscape is perceived? Westerners tend to highlight the written word and privilege learning through books. Orisha followers tend to learn through the spoken word, the written word, the chanted word, rhythms and dancing (Thompson-Drewal 1998; Daniel 2005; Thompson 1975). Hence, this video illustrates several scenes demonstrative of this kind of embodied learning.

In distinct countries and for all ages learning for Yorùbá practitioners appears to be based on embodied, experiential learning through experiencing rhythm and movement. Thus, there are scenes like two babalows playing *chekeres* while the young children play the djembes in Oyotunji, South Carolina. During one of these scenes, a small child arrives pulling his drum, which is almost larger than he is, and the children pull their chairs over making room for him

without stopping their playing. At another time, the image focuses on the adult babalawo emphasizing certain rhythms with his chekere to one of the children drumming.

Yorùbá practitioners learn through drumming, rhythms, dancing, elders pointing things out, writing, and reading. Thus, representative scenes of each are demonstrated in the film. For instance, a scene shows a student writing vigorously; he is taking notes while a babalawo at Oyotunji speaks about Yorùbá religion and culture (1:04:07). This emphasis on the written word as an important source of learning for the Yorùbá is referenced throughout the film with images of book titles fundamental to the Yorùbá in Cuba including Cabrera's (2000[1954]) *El Monte* – the most famous book on the natural world and Lucumí (and the one which many use as the primary guidebook); *Gender in Santería*; *Santería*; *Medical Bibliography on the Slaves in Cuba*; and *Sustainable Management of Natural Resources* (1:12:19:03).

These images of books and articles reference the research that has been done by both Cuban scholars and foreign investigators of religion and natural science. Furthermore, the placement of these images of book and article titles is meant to highlight critical themes. For instance, the slaves' knowledge of the surrounding plants for food and medicine within sacred forests called *el monte*. In addition, this information has been related to and transmitted through African diaspora based religions like Santería.

The film is about learning. Thereby, toward the end, while the women are dancing in white (for the Queen's Birthday), a scene alludes to the act of learning which is the aim of Oyotunji – “to teach all races about African American culture.” The image frames a number of students (visitors to Oyotunji) looking on at the dancing and drumming; an audience of varying ages, genders and ethnicities observes and learns (1:11:18:04). One has a cap that says “Jesus.”

I have shown the film and presented the information of alternative epistemologies at several conferences as well as for multiple university classes. I have shown it to my students of Environment and Cultural Behavior class for the last few years at the University of Florida during the Spiritual Ecology week. Students in my classes – are able to note that music and dance are critical vehicles of knowledge transmission and that communication includes that with plants. In fifteen minutes, viewers are able to gain readily the importance of alternative systems of knowing nature, including communicating across spiritual and physical divides as well as the importance of dancing and drumming to learning. Additionally, in 2005 when I presented it at a plenary session at the Religion and Nature conference, one woman from the audience commented during the discussion period that she at first I was trying to cognitively decipher the film and figure out who were the speakers and where was the landscape. Then, soon after, she admitted that the feeling of the film, the drum's rhythms and the liminal affect of the montage took over, and she let herself *feel*—rather than simply *think* through the translation of Yoruba religion and ecology.

One last example that demonstrates that the video *Osain in Translation* is in fact translating the ideas that I am intending to the audience for which it was meant concerns my father. My dad, as a professor of the Humanities, has been able to offer critical insight in most of my papers. Yet, when I began to talk about embodiment and embodied epistemology, he confessed not really understanding the point, or what I was trying to express. He situates himself firmly in an Enlightenment tradition. Yet, one evening in the Backroom of the old-wooden, house where I grew up, I showed him *Osain in Translation*. And, he said, immediately, that he finally understood; he finally got it, and he indeed was able to explain the idea of moving between worlds, spaces and epistemologies.

With these various and varied experiences of using this film to illustrate a point that to understand Yoruba ecological knowledge in the diaspora, one must understand Yoruba religion, which is founded upon communicating between material and spiritual worlds.

Conclusion

Because our diligent mental and mindful work of separating, categorizing, and naming may not get us any closer to understanding what is meaningful to the people with whom we study, I do not incorporate labels of people or places in the video *Osain in Translation*, nor do I offer geopolitical names, since they are not vital to my project. Instead, I integrate embodiment—through evocative ethnography—as an additional epistemological model critical to examine local knowledge and ways of knowing nature, particularly with practitioners of Yorùbá religion—whether they are located in Cuba, the United States, Nigeria, Brazil, Venezuela or anywhere else on the globe—who according to the literature and my own field research interpret nature as spiritual as well as material. This epistemology is intimately embodied in the sense of what is learned (e.g., chants, drum rhythms, songs, foods) as well as through what is experienced in the process of learning. *Osain in Translation* is not a typical ethnographic documentary in that it does not attempt to outline a linear story, replete with “the facts.” Instead, it offers the possibilities of an alternative epistemological space through video production and viewing. The result is an alternative way of knowing—not only accessing knowledge through categorizing, naming and sometimes othering, but also through feeling and sensing.

These feelings of ecoscapes and of alternative epistemologies are vital. I support Bruhner (2002: 65) in his assertion that we need to understand *feeling* tones as well as ecotones:

A two-thousand-year-old tree or an ecosystem filled with a tumultuous, complex riot of interacting plant species *feels* markedly different from a lone sapling surrounded by the grass planted in the front yard of a new housing development, or the Norfolk pine in the

corner of the kitchen. The green orderly lawns surrounding children's homes do not bear any relationship to the up-and-down, uneven landscapes filled with giant, craggy outcroppings of the immeasurably ancient stones of Earth that wild landscapes often possess. Although often difficult for reductionists to accept, differing landscapes each project different and distinct *feeling tones*.

I suggest that Osainistas are the Yorùbá practitioners who share stronger feelings with their environment since they are more intimately and practically involved with their relationships with the plants. Thereby their conceptions of the plant-world as well as their interactions involve specific environmental practices, which they say are respectful.

Through this research and this video, I hope to connect environmental policy-makers, scholars and students to alternative epistemological spaces that affirm the integrity and the spirituality of nature when thinking about, learning about and talking about/referring to the universe. In this respect, I would like to offer another language to describe and thereby perceive our natural world—one that is not solely based on mechanistic structures of reality or mathematical equations of certainty.

Cuba seems to be a complex case-study that demonstrates not only Western science at its best—with a ratio of the most scientists on the small island than in the rest of Latin America; with the creation of a vaccine for Hepatitis; with the technology creation for solar power; but also with the high percentage of an amalgamation of material-spiritualist—of whom I have mainly highlighted but one small portion of a small yet significant segment of the population. Additionally, the development and conservation agenda politically is strides ahead of most nations including the United States.

The next chapter delves briefly into contemporary Cuba's ecological import, governmental policy on conservation and sustainable development, and conservation as Cubans envision it. The premise of the chapter is that to put political ecology into practice, not only methodology,

but also pedagogical techniques must integrate an emphasis on hearing alternative epistemologies as well as finding solutions that are locally meaningful.

CHAPTER 9 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CONSERVATION, AND CUBA'S ALTERNATIVE MODERNITY

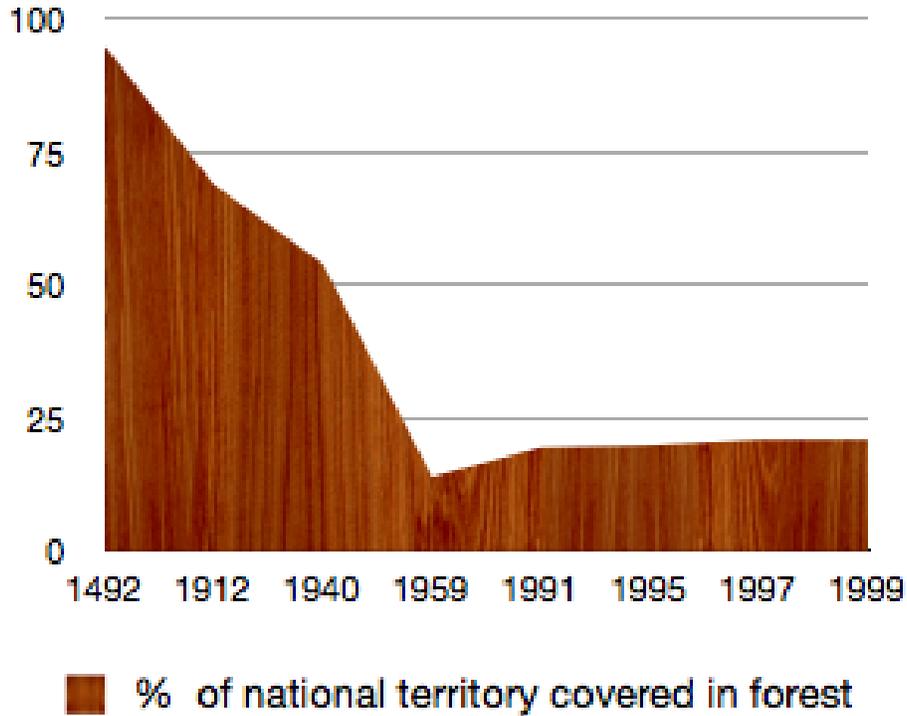
I have focused my doctoral research on improving methodological and pedagogical inquiry to better understand and represent Lucumí or Yorùbá-derived knowledge and ways of knowing nature in Cuba to make a theoretical and methodological intervention in the field of tropical conservation and development, African diaspora studies and religion and nature research. In recognizing the significant theoretical interest and the great practical importance in studying and better understanding local ecological models and practices, I highlight the anthropological import of improving the historical record and representation of certain African diaspora people's ecological knowledge, particularly in Cuba. This chapter underscores the need to collaborate—meaning share scientists' multiple knowledges of socio-environmental relationships along with Afro-Cuban varied eco-religious knowledges and techniques of communication and transmission to create a more relevant conversation of conservation for Western Cuba.

Revolution and Sustainable Development

Cuba is a key area to explore human-nature relationships due to the significant influence Afro-Cubans have had on the fabric of Cuban modernity (as I hope the previous chapters have shown) as well as to the Cuban government's focus on sustainable development. Notably, Cuba's government became environmentally conscious only after the revolution. Notice in the chart below, the drastic decline in forested areas from 1492 until 1959.

The revolution of 1959 fundamentally altered environmental policy in Cuba. On 10 April 1959, the Forestry Department of the Rebel Army was created with the *Ley de Repoblacion Forestal* (Law of Reforestation). This law focused on forest preservation and created nine new national parks along with reforestation plantations. From 1959 until 1992, 14,000 hectares had been reforested annually.

Table 9-1. Percentage of Cuban national territory covered in forest 1492-1999.



Additionally, Cuba amended the constitution incorporating the need to focus on sustainable development⁴. To integrate sustainable development into policy and practice, Cuba created specific organizations and agencies as well as allocated monies to fulfill the outlined goals. For example, Cuba created Cuba’s Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment (CITMA), which states:

⁴ The concept of sustainability gained emphasis in the 1980s, and was addressed systematically for the first time through the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) which published the report “Our Common Future” (WCED 1987), more commonly known as the Brundtland Report (Filho 1996: 63). In 1992, more than 100 heads of state met in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). This Earth Summit was held to tackle critical problems of environmental protection and socio-economic development. The assembled leaders signed the Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity; endorsed the Rio Declaration and the Forest Principles; and adopted Agenda 21, a 300-page plan for achieving sustainable development in the 21st century. This conference, as well as many others focused on defining in practical terms the meaning of sustainable development and how it could be implemented. The primary premise centered on the triple bottom line: economic growth, social equality and ecological conservation.

The vision of Cuban environmental policy is focused on a development that is economically and socially sustainable, that supports three basic pillars of knowing: social equity, economic growth and the protection of the environment (CITMA & PNUMA 2001: 80).

It also created:

the reforestation proposal, Plan Mantatí, which encourages reforestation of mainly fruit and fuelwood trees, environmental impact studies for new businesses and industries, which are obligatory previous to fulfillment of investments in fields like mining, industry and construction, measures for protecting, preserving and improving ecosystems through the Center of Research and Management of Coastal Environment in Coco Key for tourism (Gutiérrez and Rivero 2002: 211).

One of the organizations the government created to regulate conservation and environmental impacts is the National Commission for the Protection of the Environment and Rational Use of Natural Resources (COMARNA), which claims that for every hectare of forest harvested, 16.9 hectares of trees must be planted (or 110,000 replanted per 6,500 harvested). Today, you cannot cut down a tree without permission, and if you gain permission, then you must plant another two trees. In 1981, Law 33, the Law of the Protection of the Environment and Rational Use of the Natural Resources was created. These policies have apparently made some difference since Cuba is slowly gaining more forested land according to the Ministry of Agriculture (MINAGRI: 1999) as you can see from Table 9-1 above. And in 1992, at the Río Earth Summit International Conservation Meeting, Cuba earned an A+ for implementation of sustainable development practices.

In 2002, at the ten-year follow up conference in Johannesburg, government officials discussed alternative livelihoods that would aid in poverty alleviation and development strategies for small-island states. They announced that the local people and their cultural heritage would play a pivotal role:

The survival of small-island developing States is firmly rooted in their human resources and cultural heritage, which are their most significant assets; those assets are under severe stress and all efforts must be taken to ensure the central position of people in the process of sustainable development (United Nations 1994).

Cuba, since 1959, has focused its development efforts much as the United Nations offered as a priority in 1994, “firmly rooted in their human resources.” Since the 1959 Revolution, human development has been a critical issue to which the government has placed a priority in rhetoric and in policy. Notably, modern Cuba has attempted to bring education and medicine not only to the elite, but to everyone—including those who had been most marginalized by the previous class and color-based system while Cuba was a colony and while it was a Republic: people of color, rural dwellers, and women.

Some of the following statistics from the World Health Organization Report 2008 referring to 2006 illustrate a few of their outstanding achievements in this respect, despite overwhelming obstacles (WHO 2008). In all of the Caribbean and Latin America, Cuba has realized the highest development indicators rivaling industrialized nations, especially when including inner cities and other marginalized minority groups in industrialized nations. Specifically, Cuba’s literacy rate is 98%, child mortality male/female (per 1000) is 8/7, adult mortality in Cuba is 127/82 respectively for males and females, while in the United States it is much higher at 137/80. Also life expectancy at birth for males and females is 76 and 80 years old respectively.

Access to education for the rural, the poor, and women has been a major achievement for Cuba. I remember many years ago when I went to Cienfuegos—a small town off of the ocean a few hours southeast of Havana—and I was sitting across from a psychologist at her round, wooden dining room table. In the confidentiality of her home, I asked how she really felt about having Fidel Castro as her country’s leader. She exclaimed that she was proud of having Fidel as her president because of all of the changes he had made possible. She would not have been able

to go to school had it not been for the policy changes enacted after the Revolution—for she was a woman of color who was from a farming family. She would have been limited to a life of agriculture, and instead she was offered free education that took her through her master’s degree and allowed her to become the psychologist that she is. Throughout my various visits to Cuba, I heard this style of story repeatedly. Although many problems exist in Cuba, the conception of development there appears to emphasize human potential rather than solely economic gain for a limited few.

Due to the excellent education that Cubans enjoy, along with a focus on Marxist materialism, it boasts over 11 percent of the scientists of Latin America (including a cadre of professional foresters, wetland and soil scientists)—even though it only comprises two percent of the population (Rennett). Although the small country has only 11 million people, it “52 scientific research institutes in the capital and more than 12,000 scientists on the whole island” (Fawthrop 2004). Cuba has made remarkable contributions to science. For instance, Cuba’s scientists discovered a cure for Meningitis B in the late 1980s, whose vaccine was not sold but gifted to other countries in need.

Yet, due to Cuba’s development policy that is based on human resources⁵ rather than solely increasing economic gain as is the thrust of internationally implemented developmentⁱ policy (and sometimes enforced through structural adjustment programs), they did not sell the treatment, but instead gave it to the humans who needed it.

⁵ Despite the tremendous gains in science, medicine and education that Cubans have enjoyed, two severe backlashes should be acknowledged. One, due to the increased access to education, more Cubans received higher educations. Yet, because Cuba reached their goal of a more equally and higher educated populace, they have incurred difficulties with people wanting to stay farmers and grow the food needed by the nation. The second situation that I encountered that was directly attributable to Cuba’s focus on developing its human resources had to do with its current policy to “lend” its residents to other countries to aid in mostly medical, but also other endeavors.

Since the 1959 Revolution, Cuban policies and practices are focused on sustainable development –or integrating environmental consciousness and conservation *with* their economic goals. Despite numerous challenges, the bulk of which are too great and multifaceted to flesh out here, Cuba’s decision to support sovereign governance and development strategies may be a much-needed model for the Caribbean, Latin America, and the world.

Development, for the Cuban government, means more than merely economic growth, as the following quote from the science ministry makes clear:

It is also knowing that the underdeveloped world cannot aspire to “develop” repeating the same disposable and consumerist model, for which it would require several planets like ours. Of this key model of the issue of not renouncing economic growth, but doubting the harmonious character that would permit the arrival of an authentic society of well-being. For this, it is essential that Cuba maintains and defines its socialist model of development, that which has permitted it to construct a society that is economically prosperous, socially just and environmentally sustainable⁶. (CITMA& PNUMA 2001: 80)

The Cuban government displays this position of protecting the environment through billboards such as the following:



Figure 9-1. This is a series of environmental billboards in Cuba that show A. “The world needs the globalization of solidarity” B. “Protect the Ozone layer” C. “Defend our hope”

⁶ “Es también sabiendo que el mundo subdesarrollado no puede aspirar a “desarrollarse” repitiendo estos modelos dispendiosos y consumistas, para los que se requerirían varios planetas como el nuestro. De este modelo clave del asunto transita por no renunciar al crecimiento económico, pero dotándolo de un carácter armonioso que permita llegar a una auténtica sociedad de bienestar. Para esto, es esencial que Cuba mantenga y defina su modelo socialista de desarrollo, lo que le permitiera construir una sociedad económicamente próspera, socialmente justa y ambientalmente sostenible.”



C.

Figure 9-1. Continued

Since the revolution, each year in Cuba is dedicated to a specific goal. In 2005, the goal was energy efficiency; it was the Year of Energy. For that goal, Cuba geared up to reduce its carbon footprint and improve the energy efficiency of every home on the island. So, each and every home received energy efficient CFL light bulbs. Each home also received free pots and stoves. Additionally, the government replaced old refrigerators with new ones at low costs to the houses. People also received rice cookers and pressure cookers to make the meals that they most



A.



B.

Figure 9-2. Photos of energy efficient appliances subsidized by the Cuban government for every household.

often cook (rice and beans respectively) using much less energy to prepare. The photos below are examples of these energy saving technologies that the Cuban government supplied to *every* household.

Cuban Ecological Significance

Cuba is home to the world's smallest bird, a bee hummingbird called *zunzuncito*, which is smaller than a toothpick. It also boasts the world's smallest toad *ranita* as well as several other endemic fauna.

Moreover, the autochthonous flora of Cuba is the richest in the Antillean region of the Caribbean—due to its endemic character of around 8000 species. Cuba is considered the main species biodiversity center for the region (61). Many plants, including fruit trees, became naturalized in Cuba about 450 years ago. Additionally, Dr. Angela Leiva Sanchez, botanist and director of the *Jardín Botánico Nacional* (National Botanical Gardens) and president of the *Sociedad Cubana para la Protección de la Naturaleza* (ProNaturaleza), which is the Cuban Society for Environmental Protection, calculated that 14% of all wild flora and 27.7% of endemic taxa from vascular plants are included in some category of extinction. About 3000 species of endemic plants are only found in Cuban territory (p62).

For instance, although Cuba boasts more than 90 types of palm tree, it is the Palma Real that is the most recognized. This tree, that can tower over 40 meters tall, is also the national tree and is symbolic of Chango. The Palma Corcho (cork palm) is estimated to only have about 500 individuals left in the wild. This tree is linked to the Cretaceous period (between 65 and 135 million years ago)—as such it is considered a living fossil. The ceiba is a spiritual and national icon.

Matanzas Ecological Significance

Matanzas holds geological, biological and human marks of historical and contemporary Cuba experiences. Since the continental drift through some of the major tectonic and neotectonic geological alterations, Matanzas' geological structures show the geomorphological alterations. In addition, this region holds artifacts that represent the biological (flora and fauna) diversity from Eocene Age as well as remnants of the first settlements of travelers.

Matanzas, has a high biological diversity profile including numerous endemic species (around 900 species of indigenous plants, 115 national endemic and 5 local and of the fauna represents 12 mammal species, 160 birds, 31 reptiles 5 amphibians and a great number of vertebrate fish) (CITMA 1998), and houses one of the richest wetlands in all of the insular Caribbean, (with predominantly mangroves making up 52% of the covered forest). The remaining 4% is located between the north and central region of the territory.

Additionally, Matanzas has a biosphere reserve (71% of 10,499 km² is core zone), wildlife refuges and national parks. Officially, Matanzas has 29 Protected Areas, which equals 339, 387 hectares (32.6% of the total area of the territory). Ciénaga de Zapata swamp covers the majority with 28.6% (CITMA).

Of all the provinces in Cuba, Matanzas had the least percentage of deforested land in 1995 with 344.8 ha or only 3.6% of the area. Despite that in the mid-nineties, the province of Matanzas was one of the least deforested in the country. In 1996, it improved its rating, and dropped to only 2.9% deforested land with 342.6 Mha and in 1997, it drastically dropped to .3 of the area was deforested (by far the lowest in the entire country) and increased its forest cover to 402.6 Mha –the second highest in the country in 1997 (ONE 2000/2001: 38).

Matanzas boasts 29.12% forest cover in the province including Cienaga de Zapata. In the province, there are 343, 898.3 ha of covered forests that represent 29.12% of the total Province.

311359.5 ha are natural forests (90.5%) and 32539.3 ha are planted. In 2002, 22% of the national territory (1,331,900 ha) was in protected areas (Gutiérrez and Rivero 2002: 210; 10).

This forested territory is critical to many residents, including Osainistas selecting specific medicinal plants to heal Cuban people, and birds going north and south between North and South America. Due to the migratory corridor that exists, these winged-travelers take refuge, make nests, and feed in this terrain.

Due, in part, to a cadre of dedicated natural scientists, Matanzas maintains focused efforts on reforestation (as well as efforts to limit deforestation). Yet, I question if only scientists—working primarily on premises of Western, empirical science—are to be lauded for these achievements? Or more specifically, I wonder where are the nodes of knowledge production occurring in modern Cuba; where are the links between Afro-Cuban religion, ecological knowledge and conservation practice? For the future, I inquire about the possibly very logical collaboration potential for natural tropical forest and wetlands scientists to work more closely with Osainistas (and healers and herbalists from other religious traditions).

In order for this kind of a collaboration to work though, scientists must be able to acknowledge and *listen*⁷ to worldviews that are alternative and maybe even contradictory to theirs. Thus, specifically conservationists and Osainistas may have a lot in common to be able to combine resources and achieve improved collaboration in the efforts of tropical forest conservation. So how might the conceptions of conservation differ in Cuba from government-enforced conservation policy? Lay Cubans appear to have distinct impressions of what the environment means than Osainistas. The following story is telling.

⁷ I emphasize that the listening skills of the scientists in this case, since Yoruba practitioners have illustrated historically this ability—through their synthesis of alternatives (even seemingly contradictory ones) into their discourse and their practices. For instance, practitioners will integrate allopathic medicine, herbal remedies and spiritual invocations to help in the process of healing a person.

Conservation and Cubans

One day I was walking to go swim in the nearby ocean in Alamar with a friend, as we often did at sunset. She had brought the typically Cuban one liter plastic bottle of coke with us (and, even more typically, she had put some Cuban rum in it). However, on the return trip, I was surprised to notice that we no longer had the plastic bottle, and even more surprised when I asked her what happened to it, and she stated she had thrown it out. Knowing that there were no trash receptacles on the rocky cliff of the ocean's edge, I realized she had just thrown it to the ground.

ⁱⁱMy friend was not a Lucumí practitioner, and, as a typical Cuban (as I was told and witnessed multiple times later with numerous different Cubans⁸), she was accustomed to throwing her trash in the street, in the sea and wherever she happened to be. This incident and this question led me to understand a little more of the everyday conceptions of conservation for Cubans as well as typical Cuban behavior. I've seen numerous occasions as well as had many people explain to me that behavior of throwing trash anywhere was part of Cuban norms. Once many people finish eating something, they will often just drop the container where they are—in the middle of the street, middle of a bridge, wherever, in the middle of a sentence...and keep walking. I observed this nonchalant discarding of trash, and my United States' sensibilities of conservation were stunned.

This incident made me question the ideas of conservation and how they might be different for practitioners and nonpractitioners. To inquire more systematically about Cuban conceptions of conservation and particularly this concern of trash and recycling, I did two things. One, when I asked people to freelist "water," on the reverse side of the page, I asked them to freelist "individual practices of conservation." In this way, I hoped to gain a more Cuban-oriented

⁸ Including children of practitioners and children of natural scientists and conservationists.

assessment of what conservation entailed. Additionally, I added the question “If you have an empty bottle and there is no trashcan around, what would you do with it?” to my list of semi-structured interview questions (Appendices D and E).

In response to the question of what people would do with an empty plastic bottle and no receptacle, the practitioners responded: carry it home, find a receptacle, and sometimes with a slight smile, admit that they would sometimes throw it away wherever. Some of the participants, when they answered the question about the bottle, then explained that they would take it home. For United States’ residents, this act of taking an empty bottle to recycle would be considered an identifying act of conservation; yet in Cuba, this act is not necessarily akin to what Europeans and North Americans would consider conservation. In Cuba, although typical to throw trash in the street, it is also typical to reuse items like plastic bottles. Large plastic bottles are useful and even necessary to access many other items, from water to wine. For instance, you would need to bring your own plastic bottle to refill with your neighbor’s vegetable oil (probably a side business because this neighbor skims off the top of the local factory where she works), or rum from another neighbor (because of the same). These are also the bottles that people bring to another neighbor to fill with the wine he makes at his house also part of the intricate and prevalent black market or informal labor system that is ubiquitous in Cuba. Moreover, the plastic bottles are frequently used to store both potable water and water for washing, since the timing of water availability is neither continuous nor consistent. In Cuba, then, reusing one-liter plastic bottles is common and necessary. The practice is not derived from a sense of conserving the environment, but because resources are scant and expensive.

Another issue to consider when thinking through this particular example of how to interpret what residents do with an empty plastic bottle is the infrastructure available. In Cuba,

with few resources available, the transportation infrastructure is minimal. As one young Cuban make explained, “everything is difficult here.” He highlighted the fact that transportation—due to lack of vehicles, lack of gasoline, and lack of parts for maintenance—meant that garbage trucks were rare. Also, the receptacles to store public trash are not common. Instead, people often find a corner that contains the piles of community trash and add to it until it is overflowing into the street. The frequency of trash pick up did change during my last trip in December 2006 because of an outbreak of dengue fever. Thus every single household was sprayed regularly with fumes to prevent the mosquitoes, and trash was picked up more regularly.

Another example of an act that would absolutely be considered “eco-friendly” or conservation oriented in the United States would be to reuse –not just recycle by finding an appropriate bin and throwing away your mass of plastic bags from the grocery store, or reusing a couple of them for your trash bin in the bathroom, but washing and reusing these same plastic bags the next trip to the grocery store. Yet, in Cuba, a mentality of consumption and waste is not



Figure 9-3. Plastic bags washed and hanging to dry to be able to reuse. A. Plastic bags on the clothesline, and B. Up-close of hanging plastic bags.

prevalent. Instead, items that are still useful are often reused. As the figures below illustrates, plastic bags from the grocery store are washed and reused.

Hence, that which would be considered an emblematic behavior of conservation in the United States, not just recycling, but *reusing* a plastic bottle or plastic bag, in Cuba is not equivalent to a practice of conservation due to its unique circumstances. So, what *would* be considered conservation to Cubans? To better understand notions of conservation, I asked Yorùbá practitioners at the Yorùbá Association and Yorùbá practitioners in their temple-houses to do some cognitive freelisting to ascertain what behaviors they attributed to “individual practices of conservation.” Their responses illustrate important items for Cuban living conditions and lived experience.



Figure 9-5. Photo of a typical wood-slate window in Cuba at night.

It is interesting that the conservation practices that Yorùbá practitioners interpret as “individual practices of conservation” (Appendix H) includes notions of sound like, “don’t make really loud noises, and don’t make unnecessary noises.” This aspect of pollution never once got

mentioned in the United States and European-based surveys that I pored over when I was attempting to create a system to define and measure a conservation ethic. Nonetheless in Cuba, this aspect is particularly relevant since loud music on stereos and *bembés* is rampant. Additionally, these aspects of pollution relate more specifically to a Cuban urban environment that lives with high-density populations with wood slate windows (Figure 9-5), which do little to filter the neighbor's sounds.

Also, some of the relevant Cuban ideas of conservation involved: teaching kids to love nature, placing factories (industry) far from the city, trash collection by the state, social protest and participation, not writing on the walls, and not smoking.

In addition to locally relevant aspects of conservation, practitioners also named practices that are more in line with international policy definitions of conservation: conserving live fish, planting new trees, taking care of parks and gardens, preserving cleanliness, using trashcans, keeping the environment clean, taking care of fauna, taking care of water and taking care of plants, protecting the plants, obtaining methods to conserve potable water, promoting hygiene, recycling paper, recycling cans in separate places, not using toxic chemical objects, not throwing papers on the floor, not damaging or dirtying the environment, not throwing out trash, not throwing trash in the sea, not throwing trash in the river, not destroying the trees, not contaminating the beach, not contaminating the ocean, not contaminating the streets, not throwing trash, avoiding contamination, not buying aerosols, not contaminating the sources of a natural precious liquid.

Although I asked for individual practices of conservation, some of the answers dealt with social and community acts like social protest and participation, and avoiding social contamination. Additionally, they included aspects that are related to national and international

government regulation and policy like state collection of garbage, locating factories far from the city, protecting the ozone layer and stopping the destruction of wars.

As this inquiry into different perceptions of conservation elucidates, not all Cubans conceptualize conservation the same. This acknowledgement is critical when considering potential for collaboration.

Collaboration in Cuba

Cuba is a ripe area for considering the potential of collaborative conservation. Nevertheless, some schisms may exist. For instance, in much of the scientific literature, one of the primary concerns is the lack of an environmental ethic, or a consciousness that in turn creates conscientious actions that are environmentally beneficial instead of detrimental. In Matanzas, this lack of environmental ethic is also labeled on the most marginalized neighborhood of La Marina, which is one of the worst sources of the contaminated water problems that affect the bay. The location of La Marina at the lowest elevation of the city, immediately bordering the water's edge, and historically a marginalized neighborhood, lacks sufficient sewers, so household waste runs down the streets and into the rivers and the bay. Additionally, the residents of La Marina are predominantly Afro-Cuban. And, despite Revolutionary policy and practice to eliminate racism, discrimination still exists. Much of this, I argue, comes from lack of understanding. Through conversations that are more equal in terms of attempting to understand alternative perspectives and learn from differences, I assert that improved collaborative conservation practices can occur. These efforts can help to promote ecological, economic and human development in ways that value the different knowledges of distinct populations.

In Cuba, this means that international organizations like the UNEP (United Nations Environmental Programme), government organizations like CITMA (Ministerio de Ciencia, Tecnología y Medio Ambiente [The Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment) and

nongovernmental organizations like FUNAPRO ("Antonio Núñez Jiménez" Foundation for Nature and Humanity) should work more directly with specific Osainistas to understand Yorùbá ecological knowledge as well as to work toward more open conversations (pace Spivak 1988) that attempt to listen as well as explain. In this way, Osainistas, Santeros and Santeras as well as Babalawos and Iyalawos may offer more culturally appropriate leadership and can offer their role as religious leaders and knowledge transmitters to guide their religious kin in environmentally friendly environmental knowledge, attitudes and behaviors.

As two sacred grove experts Nyamweru and Sheridan (2008: 289) explain in a recent journal volume dedicated to sacred groves in Africa:

Sacredness does not equal conservation, instead social, political, and economic arrangements mediate cosmology and ecology, and it is in these institutional arenas that Africans negotiate both spiritual values and pragmatic material goals.

Moreover, scholars interested in conservation must particularly understand the role of the Osainista, who seems to follow what Snodgrass *et al.* refer to as “an herbal healer’s conservation” (2008: 309). This distinction is critical, because it highlights the diverse roles, practices and knowledges of different religious practitioners. By focusing on the Osainistas’ roles and relationships with herbs in the Lucumí religion, I hope to attend to Snodgrass *et al.*’s call to move “the argument of anthropological and political ecological debates from a simple discussion of whether indigenous persons are conservationists to the issue of cultural variation within indigenous communities” (2008: 309). Just as Cubans should not be considered homogenous, Yorùbá practitioners in Cuba (and beyond) should not be considered monolithic in their values or their practices. Though Lachatañeré began to enlighten audiences that Afro-Cuban religions were several and varied and Canizares indicates a range of practitioner association and involvement within the Yorùbá religion, neither of them and few other scholars

mention the role of osainistas. Yet, Osainistas perform a special function in understanding and enacting Yorùbá ecological knowledge.

In sum, I hope that my contribution of evoking and explaining alternative ways of understanding nature—particularly through documentary video and what I call “evocative ethnography”—will be able to help students and policy-makers alike understand cultural systems that may integrate instead of separate the spiritual with the material. This task seems critical not only to improve our comprehension of global diversity—and thereby teach science to culturally and linguistically diverse students in the school system—but also to improve international standards for and implementation of conservation policy.

CHAPTER 10
CONCLUDING WITH A CONVERSATION ON CONSERVATION: POLITICS OF
CONCEPTUALIZING AND CONSERVING NATURE

This manuscript has highlighted marginalized epistemologies in the academy by reframing Afro-Cuban ecological knowledges. African knowledges have often been understood within an evolutionary hierarchical model denoting inferiority (and even criminality) in conceptualization and practice. Currently, Afro-Cuban knowledge more often is identified as folklore and limited to folklore studies (Moore 2006; Hagedorn 2001, 1995; Daniel 1998; Frías n.d.). Yet, the global flow of people, ideas, and practices deserves improved attention. I hope to raise awareness of alternative modernities that may deepen our understanding of diasporic ecoscapes, which include human/nature relationships by translating Osain, the Yoruba deity of healing herbs and the sacred forest, who despite his fundamental significance to Yoruba religion and practice, has gained little attention in scholarly or religious works¹. In unraveling different perspectives of overarching concepts like nature, power, religion and human-nature relationships, my point has been two-fold, one to illustrate a different way to illustrate certain black histories and experiences, particularly those that enjoy a keen sense of ecological knowledge, and two to employ this understanding in the efforts of an improved conversation for conservation and development in the tropics and beyond. In this process, I hope to expand an understanding of Yoruba religion and ecology as they are conceived and practiced in the black Atlantic. Yoruba ecological knowledge—particularly that of Osain—has important implications for conservation and development in the tropics as well as pedagogy of the environment in the world.

¹ Brandon (1997) has one sentence and Thompson (1983) has one paragraph on Osain for Cuba and Yorubaland respectively. Verger (1976, 1996) does talk about Ossaim in Brazil, particularly the plants. Yet, no one has mentioned the import of Osain and Osainistas for conservation and development.

Foremost, the images that I seek to illustrate are not of the typical Western media experience of the dismay and destitution—economically, physically, spiritually, and intellectually—of Africans in the black Atlantic. Instead, I use this research to respond to the role of media, African and transAfrican images as Jacob Olupona (2006) explains:

Responding to the Western media's image of the African continent in disarray—the majority of its people impoverished and despondent about their present and their future—scholars of African religion present a robust and creative Africa of deep religious sensibilities, the home of a cultural renaissance and an array of spiritual traditions reflecting complex hierarchies of power, agency, and authority. It is high time the broader academy took earnest notice, not merely to soothe the conscience of its racist past but to gain a truly holistic and balanced perspective about humanity's religious heritage. Virtually every story of importance in the study of religion can and should begin with Africa—the cradle of humanity.

For this reason, I prefer a perspective that places the imagination and subjectivities in the foreground of social analysis. In accord, this research is about attempting to create bridges and cross barriers of misunderstanding through alternative approaches where the viewer gets a taste, a sensorial experience that helps in deepening an understanding of another cultural paradigm. One which does not necessarily separate so distinctly the material from the spiritual, the body from the mind, or the subject from the object—at the same time that it does not collapse these divides into oblivion—instead they become crossable and passable, with specific techniques of communication. Some techniques of communication that the Yoruba diaspora excel at are storytelling, dance, and music to transfer knowledge and maintain social behaviors—including environmental ones.

In this effort, I contribute an additional methodological and pedagogical, and thereby, theoretical framework to research conservation and development that I call evocative ethnography. I offer videographic and cognitive techniques to integrate into ethnographic fieldwork, analysis and illustration so that tropical conservation and development researchers and policy makers (along with ethnoecologists, ecological anthropologists, and religion and nature

scholars) can have an alternative and additional means of understanding African derived religious and therein ecological knowledge.

Hence, this work has argued that conceptualizing nature carries implicit assumptions, and those underlying suppositions influence perceptions, actions and policies. My research calls attention, then, to the values that many researchers may not recognize or assess. For instance, the environment cannot be conceived only as wilderness that is vacant of all human interaction; it is not accurate and may not be helpful in terms of long-term conservation planning, and worse yet, it may show environmental racism in the preferential treatment of certain bodies over the usurption of access to resources for others. Notwithstanding, this hegemonic imaginary of nature and human/nature relations is shaped by and for the worldviews of the economically and politically powerful also in turn shape internationally implemented policies, which affect local residents in unequal ways. Instead, conservation, like development, must be conceptualized to include cultural diversity (Nyamera and Sheridan 2008: 286).

Cultural Diversity in Cuba

For instance, many African-derived religions and lived experiences do not oppose the metaphysical against the mundane. Instead matters of kinship, agrarian change, ethnicity, political economy, and religion are interwoven into aspects of resource use and decision-making (Shipton 1994). Sacred ecologies can embrace greater policy diversity and research that combine a hybrid model of scientific and humanist methodologies. Toward this end, international and national policy makers must also look at the perceptions of other cultures' religions, cosmologies and environmental behaviors.

Yet, Strang acknowledges that “unfortunately the analysis also suggests that the integrated concepts of sustainability discernible in Aboriginal and other indigenous cultures are deeply

embedded in cultural concepts and forms of social identity that are not readily transferable to different economic modes, or to large-scale forms of social organization” (Strang 2003:52).

Nonetheless, unlike many interpretations of indigenous groups who may be predominantly rural and reside in very different ways than the West, Yorùbá people have been predominantly urban since before the 1400s. In SouthWest Africa, Yoruba have had complex social organization systems since Ife and Oyo from the 11th century. They have celebrated a highly metropolitan lifeway and are continuing to do so in the densely packed Matanzas. In addition, understanding how Lucumí practitioners understand and interact with their environment is critical to improving our understanding of human/nature relationships specifically because they are a predominantly urban population.

Moreover, what is all too clear is that the future of tropical conservation and development should include alternative models and conceptualizations of nature and human/ nature relationships—particularly locally relevant ones that encompass humans, environment and the divine. Specifically, I wish to call attention to how Yorùbá values of Orisha reverence in Cuba—in this case, the ecological knowledge of Yorùbá practitioners, and specifically Osainistas—should inform conversations on conservation. And, Cuba offers an exemplar of a complex alternative modernity that integrates Western science with Afro-Cuban religions. As I again quote Stephan Palmié who in *Wizards and Scientists* affirms the modernity of African diaspora cultural contexts in Cuba:

[They are not]...typological opposites, the meanings, associated with the terms Western modernity and Afro-Cuban tradition ...[Indeed] [w]hatever else Afro-Cuba religion is, it is as modern as nuclear thermodynamics, or the suppositions about the nature of our world that underlie DNA sequencing, or structural adjustment policies, or on-line banking. (2007:15)

Yoruba practitioners, particularly Matanzan Osainistas’ ecological and ritual knowledge, offer a space to rethink conceptions of nature, conservation and development. Cuba’s alternative

modernity offers an opportunity to explore a model of sustainable development that shares significant commonalities with some internationally implemented conservation and development projects. For instance, Cuba's government is invested deeply in positivist, empirical science; the literacy and health of Cuban residents soars above most countries in the world, and Afro-Cubans are already urban, cultured and market-familiar residents. Cuban modernity highlights the conjunctions of overlapping epistemologies. By that I mean most Afro-Cubans are urban—and their urbanity does not come from recent introduction, but for centuries as I noted in Chapter 2, their cultural predilections have been based on urban living—the highest population in Southwest Nigeria (Oyo and Ile-Ife). In Cuba, empirical, positivist science has played an integral role in development, conservation and medical science and policy. Additionally, Cuba since the Revolution has proclaimed atheism, based on Marxist materialism that would seem to deny any idealism or religion in the popular mindset. Despite this, Yoruba religion has flourished—in Cuba and abroad. And Yoruba religion offers stark contrast to positivist science, because it not only does not deny the spiritual, it offers embodied techniques that help humans communicate directly with these spirits, and thereby receive help from natural and spiritual elements for their modern, contemporary lives. Nor does following this religion eschew the incorporation of modern medicine or other aspects of modernity. Instead, Afro-Cubans tend to be highly savvy and inclusive to the multiple alternatives available to them. Like the story of Soledad and Canizares' vignette of the woman possessed illustrates, and Osvaldo emphasizes, they integrate what is useful, allowing each to work in its field of expertise, and thereby improving the health of the whole person.

Yet, some very specific distinctions exist. Cuba's development policy (in part because it is not obliged to abide by World Bank-driven structural adjustment programs) upholds the goal of

sustainable development, including human, ecological and economic. And, Afro-Cuban culture, particularly Yoruba religion, is subtly and not so subtly integrated into the very fabric of modern Cuban life. Taking into consideration the ecological knowledge that this research has uncovered, and how these ways of interpreting the environment may hold deep implications for environmental behaviors and policy, it is time to have more equal conversations on conservation to enable more equitable (socially and ecologically just) collaborations.

Conversations on Conservation for Collaboration

Why is a discussion on African diaspora interpretations of nature important if not critical in this temporal juncture of modern time? I began to ask myself this question after years of being immersed in the literature and approaching the closure of my research. Then, a few months ago, I picked up and read an article in *Cultural Survival Quarterly* on Nigerian conservation. I read about another typical, yet no less sad story, of how the local (indigenous) had been evicted from their residence, region, livelihoods, and medicinal and sacred healing site in the name of conservation. I felt reaffirmed about the contribution of this research and the almost seven years of doctoral work that I have dedicated to the project of expressing the need for conservationists—people, policy, and programs—to not simply advocate the exclusion of people from national preservation parks to safely preserve the biodiversity, but also to include locals in the planning and conceptualizing of the environment and conservation projects to be able to exchange and learn rich ecological knowledge, and various ways of knowing distinct facets of nature.

For as Peterson (1999) and Plumwood (2006) separately note in terms of environmental ethics, simply because nature is socially constructed does not mean that there is not an environment outside the human realm of thought, a prediscursive, nonhuman nature. Instead, different values and different practices create very different impacts. For this reason, I support conservation endeavors, but I do not support eco-imperialism or neocolonialism in the guise of

conservation and development, where the colonial mindset, trajectory and implementation of projects remains the same as the 1500s-1800s with its concurrent consequences of mass ecological and human destruction.

Instead, I hope to call attention to the differences of values and visions that can enable not only a more comprehensive, but also a more equal conversation that involves the listening (and hearing) of alternative perspectives. In this undertaking, I hope to avoid the (even unknowing) imposition of Eurocentric, value-laden prescribed notions of preeminent human-nature relationships that value nature as “wilderness” and the non-historically-accurate perception of nature meaning everything nonhuman and not touched by humans. In this view of nature, local residents can only hurt and not help ecological functioning and biodiversity maintenance. In this mindset, not only are the local residents perceived as the problem, they are portrayed often as ignorant and lacking of culture, knowledge, modernity, and development. This research seeks to dispel these myths particularly for African-derived ecological knowledge holders.

We as conservationists and ecological anthropologists must recognize that although humans can and do harvest destructively and overexploit the environment, which can degrade biodiversity and destroy ecosystems, they can also enact, as the botanist Charles Peters explains, “[d]eliberate planning, controlled harvesting, and forest management, [and] on the other hand, can greatly increase the distribution of and abundance of local resources” (1996: 242).

“Conservation is articulated at multiple sociopolitical scales” (Zimmerer 2003: 60). Cuba is no different; its conservation and development policies and practices involve international, national and multiple local constituents, or stakeholders. Consequently, the applicable aspect of this research is how to integrate distinct value systems and power differentials into policy and practice that will function and thrive at these different levels.

Conversations: Political Ecology in Practice

My question, then, is how do we listen to proponents of paradigms that are so different than our cultural norms? The answer to this question seems useful not only for conservation and for supporting sovereign development, but also for reducing discrimination and prejudice. This is not a new question, since the last three decades has produced scholars dedicated to research aspects of it. For instance, Chambers (1997) wrote *Whose Reality is it? Putting the First Last* to recognize not only the power differentials in Western researchers investigating nonwestern practices within a Western paradigm, but also the inappropriate and incorrect assessments that have come of it. Harding (1998), dedicates an entire monograph to the thesis questioning whether science can be multicultural? Or, she queries, does science with its gloss of objectivity, value and context-free research design and analysis not acknowledge its value-laden biases, which in turn disallow alternative visions, viewpoints and epistemologies to be heard. Spivak (1988) suggests that indeed, many erudite voices are spoken from the South, yet few are heard. Shiva (1989; 2008), in turn, exposes the different knowledges and practices of Western scientists and local practitioners in India, often with dire consequences for residents and particularly for the women.

In order to inform Western scientists with a methodological toolkit, which is more applicable and appropriate for alternative epistemological visions and practices, Schmink (1999), Rocheleau, Slayter and Wangari (1999) along with Chambers (1997) argue for methods that have a stance, which aligns itself more with feminist political ecology and I add experiential learning and evocative ethnography.

Like the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess explained, “ethics follow from how we experience the world” (1989: 20). Thus, it is the experience that I wish to highlight through a theoretical and methodological intervention that I offer called evocative ethnography. I hope to

contribute to this conversation a framework that highlights an Anthropology of the Senses through videography and haptic imagery since, as Marks explains in the *Skin of the Film*, “like memories, images are multisensory, and cinema [i.e., videography] uses its audiovisual means to build around memories...smell with sound, texture with memory” (2000: 71).

Pedagogy in Practice: Importance for U.S. and other Overdeveloped Countries

An underlying focus of this research has been on the transmission of ideas and practices and therein on pedagogy. The evocation of the practitioners, the spirits, the environmental elements, and the relationships with spirits and nature, hopefully evoke a feeling for the issues (the problems as well as the solutions) rather than merely retaining a cognitive assessment of the situation. Pedagogy and education that are experiential, sensorial and personally relevant are critical in this endeavor to improve communication and collaboration among different stakeholders.

Thus, a substantial aspect of my work encompasses improving methodological and pedagogical techniques, so that diverse conceptualizations can be better translated for distinct audiences. For instance, I employ visual techniques (including cognitive methods [or visually mapping conceptions], photography, videography, and sound recordings) to study the meanings of nature and corresponding human behaviors for Yoruba practitioners in Cuba. These experiential ways of learning are vital to the endeavor of understanding Yoruba conceptualizations of nature, and work well in and especially outside of the classroom to teach natural sciences.

In terms of the applicability for projects, I suggest that conservationists and development practitioners might take into consideration experiential learning to more intimately understand nature (e.g., Louv 2008, Roszak et al. 1995). They might also consider what Callicott 1997 and Seed 1988 separately propose: an environmental ethics that includes not only diverse

perspectives, but also diverse beings (physical, ancestral, spiritual, animal, plant and human) as interconnected parts of a greater community—all of whom deserve respect. Lastly, if we allow for greater biocultural and religious diversity, we (scientists and scholars) do not have to pretend to have an insular and self-righteous stance on knowledge production, and we might recognize the value of sharing with others in a conversation that hopefully can make more equitable decisions on policies that affect the world with less discrimination.

In this vein, Yorùbá ecological knowledge and ways of knowing nature may be pertinent for United States, European and other Northern countries' education systems of nature, since many are suffering from a lack of environmental education that helps students feel connected (Louv 2008; Bateson 2002; Sewall 1999; Roszak 2001[1992]).

In order to bring an understanding of African-derived ecological knowledge to a conversation of conservation, I assert that the categories used in the discussion should not only rely on empirical, positivist science perspectives. By this I mean, that *ashé* and *orishas* should also be integrated into a discussion of the environment along with other more locally significant ways of knowing.

Future Research

Future research I hope would involve videography and expression of different stakeholders' (including natural scientists, religious practitioners, scholars, and residents) interpretations of the problems and the solutions in Matanzas, Cuba. Then, through group watching of the videos and focus groups of examining them, a collaborative partnership could be created that fills in some of the gaps of knowledge, and merges perspectives and understanding. Conversations in which people who have overlapping epistemologies as well as contrasting ones could begin to understand how to integrate these divergent and nested levels of convergence. For instance, conservationists could work specifically with *Osainistas* who are not only learned in the

herbs and forests, but go regularly to the rural areas of the city, and hold tremendous influence with their numerous *ahijados*, or religious children. This accomplishment could have far-reaching effects as an analysis on their social networks is bound to reveal.

Indeed, Cuba (along with Bahia, Brazil) is associated with the "authentic" Yoruba religion of the diaspora. This means that Venezuelans, Miamians and New Yorkans travel² regularly to Cuba to learn religious knowledge and get initiated, and Cuban santeros and babalawos travel to many locations to initiate (i.e., instruct their religious families in Yorùbá knowledge). For instance, on my trip over to the island in 2006, I talked with the young man who was seated next to me. He was flying with his father. Though the son was currently living in Jacksonville, his father still lived in New York City. They were both going to Cuba to do some Orisha work. The son was initiated Elegua and was proud to claim a wooden Elegua that he had. When I went to visit a babalawo, he had a friend babalawo come over and with his friend was an entourage of his *ahijados*. One had come in from Venezuela where he is currently living. Two Italian men were being initiated at a bembé my first night there.

Thus, various and dynamic manifestations of Yoruba diaspora practitioners are located in Brazil, Venezuela, New York, Florida, Nigeria, Benin, and multiple other cities around the globe. The social networks and patterns of knowledge transmission should be examined better to be able to understand how to include Yoruba ecological knowledge and practices in improved collaborations in conversations of conservation.

To reiterate my conclusion, I hope that this research aids in creating a collective imaginary of humans, natures and their relationships, which may in the near future be collaboratively

² These exchanges are also where the lines get blurry between folklore for sale and the consumption of the religion for tourists, and dedicated practitioners from different continents coming to Cuba to make their ties to their religion have more depth.

created and shared by Cuban scientists, Lucumí practitioners, the Cuban government and international organizations to be able to work together to envision and co-create a Cuban future (Holmes 2008). In concert, I hope that these lessons and expressions may be understood and implemented internationally within pedagogical strategies and conservation and development policies.



Figure 10-1. A sign on a Cuban building that asserts “With our ideas towards the FUTURE.”

APPENDIX A
FREELISTS FOR NATURE AND SPIRITUALITY COMPILED

#One33m
tree spiking
tree forts
nudlittes
Marjorie Douglas
Eco-defense
Crossings of trees
Transmogrifications
Spirit walking sojourns
Cypress gnomes
Tree gremlins
human destruction
pristine old growths
Deep ecology
Natural knowing
#Two21mmethodist
feelings of enchantment
mood changing
clears the mind
provokes thought and emotion
empowering
gives true sense of existence and what is real
rejuvenation
life cycle
#Eight30f
pan pan the goat man
bushes
ocean like a great organism
trees
banyan
oaks
rewoods
shamanism
dynamic balance
caring for the earth
relaxing
refreshment
rejuvenation
fruit
white zapote
borojo
araz†
rollinio
guanabana

clouds
nebulous
hiking
running
rockclimbing
yoga
lying by a river
swimming in a mountain lake and lying in the sun
seeing that mountains other side
mountains
red roots
mopraceae
peyote
ayahuasca
san pedro
mescaline
freedom and love
chaos
gaia
eros
#Four24mmethodist
Jesus
God
Life
Beauty
Good and Evil
Predator and prey
Love
Forgiveness
Human and hell
Angelic songs
Sacrifice
#five.three24male
faith
intangible
harmony
peace
co-existence
hope
caring
amazon
enlightenment
drugs
#Five24magnostic
Beauty
Peacefulness

Balance
Harmony
Equilibrium
#Six30mmuslim
Supreme being
God
Nature connected with spirituality
#Seven19finternational
Religion
Faith in God
Bible
Pray daily
Ask god for guidance and wisdom
Trees
Green colors
Natural fragrances
Live
living
#Eight20fchristian
Jesus Christ
God
Trees
Personal relationship with God
Repentance
Grass
Sun setting over the horizon
Animals
Jungle
Bugs
Waterfalls
Bible
Church
Religion
Birth of jesus Christ
Christmas
Preacher
Decons
Choir
Gospel music
No relationship
human destruction
#Twelve21mchristian
prayer
church
God
Jesus

Savior
Grace
peace
Heaven
Hell
Cross
Comfortable
Powerful
Mom
Dad
Love
Sunday
Long walks
Freedom
#Ten22fspirituality
trees
peace
sense of self
grounding
happiness
animals
love
joy
meditation
hope
healing
sky
green
calm
spirit
soul
light
enlightenment
center
inner being
#Eleven?mbaha?i
Native Americans
Smoking sessions in teepees
At one with animals and plants
Buddhism
Meditation
Calm
Serenity
Environmental conservation
Symbolism of animals or plants for human emotions or qualities
Societal detachments, retreat into ancient origins of humanity

#Twelve22hindu

God

Praying

Trees

Animals

Ocean

Wind

Fire

Soul

Spirit

Love

Joy

Healing

Forest

Birds

Calm

Relaxed

sleep

#Thirteen22mChristian

related

God created

God glory

#Fourteen20mChristian

Beach

Sunset

God

Prayer

Depth

Flow

Belonging to God

Ebb

Retraction

Reflection

Out turning

Peace

Fitting

Growth

Origins

Honesty

Apology

Purpose

Intricacy

Integrals

Interaction

Return

Responsibility

Ownership
Humility
Perspective
#Fifteen19fChristian
evidence and faithfulness of God
beauty
meditation
place to find yourself connecting with them
you understand yourself
connection
taken for granted
powerful
order
inspiration
#Sixteen20mChristian
god
peace
green
devotion
adventure
connection
oneness
love
purity
trees
fulfillment
meaning
hope
happiness
instinct
longing
sight
beauty
#Seventeen21mChristianAsian
peace
quiet
act of freedom
air
time
sound
bright
outside
new leaves
tree
life
#Eighteen26mChristianLatino

water
Enya
Drums
Raccoons
Bugs
Mosquitos
Snow
Birds nest
Sex in the woods
Earthworms
Beach
Sand
Cool wind
Seashells
Little waves in toes
#nineteen20mChristianCau
Jesus
God
Trees
Cliffs
Mountains
Birds
Love
Hare krishnas
Paul
John
Preaching
Holy Spirit
The Passion of Christ
Movie about Christ
Lakes
Fish
#Twenty22mChristian
God
Jesus
Holy Spirit
Tree
Grass
Animals
Water
Rough
Aggression
Love
Cycle
Time
Transformation

Revelation
Skin
Cold
#2165fLutheran
Life
Trees
Sky
Birds
Animals
Water
Friendship
Love
Caring

APPENDIX B
PILESORT LIST OF NATURE AND SPIRITUALITY

Responsibility
Flow
Environmental Consequences
Beach
Center
Faith
Beauty
Life
God
Jesus
Fish
Lakes
Sex in the Woods
Bugs
Cliffs
Sunset
Green
Meditation
Waterfall
Shamans
Drums
Jungle
Animals
Prayer
Harmony
Healing
Yoga
Enlightenment
Hiking
Running
Balance
Mountains
Deep Ecology
Lying by a River
Christianity
Connection

APPENDIX C
LIST OF PILE SORT WORDS: WATER

1. vida	1. Life
2. comunicación	2. Communication
3. alimentación	3. Nourishment
4. río	4. River
5. mar	5. Ocean
6. misterio	6. Mystery
7. madre universal	7. Universal Mother
8. Oshun	8. Oshun
9. Yemayá	9. Yemaya
10. Changó	10. Chango
11. trueno	11. Thunder
12. relajamiento	12. Relaxation
13. Santa Barbara	13. St. Barbara
14. miedo	14. Fear
15. tranquilidad	15. Tranquility
16. importante	16. Important
17. necesario	17. Necessary
18. higiene	18. Hygiene
19. paz	19. Peace
20. todo	20. Everything
21. la playa	21. Beach
22. contemplación	22. Contemplation
23. alegría	23. Happiness
24. fundamental	24. Fundamental

25. Caridad del Cobre	25. Virgen of Charity of Cobre
26. Virgen de Regla	26. Virgen of the Regla
27. riqueza	27. Richness
28. tesoro	28. Treasure
29. sagrado	29. Sacred
30. magico	30. Magic
31. tiburones	31. Sharks
32. peligro	32. Danger
33. profundidad	33. Profundity
34. agricultura	34. Agriculture
35. util	35. Useful
36. fregar	36. To wash
37. alimento espiritual	37. Spiritual alimentation
38. electricidad	38. Electricity
39. respeto	39. Respect
40. amor	40. Love

APPENDIX D
JULY 2004 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (ENGLISH)

1. What is nature?
2. Is there a difference between humans and nature?
3. What should the relationship be between humans and nature?
4. How do you relate with nature?
5. What are the orishas?
6. What is ashé?
7. If there is not a trashcan nearby, and you have an empty plastic bottle in hand, what do you do?
8. What and Who is Osain?
9. Is there a magical-spiritual aspect to nature?
10. Is there a relationship between nature and mental health?
11. Do you cultivate plants?
12. Of what materials do you make your offerings that you leave by the trees, by the rivers and the ocean?
13. How have you learned about the orishas and nature? How have you learned the songs, the rhythms, the herbs and how to communicate with them?

APPENDIX E
PREGUNTAS DE ENTREVISTA (ESPAÑOL)

1. Qué es la naturaleza?
2. Hay una diferencia entre los seres humanos y la naturaleza?
3. Que debe ser la realación entre los seres humanos y naturaleza?
4. Como realaciona Ud. con la naturaleza/ medio ambiente?
5. Qué son los orichas?
6. Qué es el aché?
7. Si no hay un basurero cerca, y tienes una botella de plástico en mano, que hace?
8. Qué y quien es Osain?
9. Hay un aspecto magico-espiritual de la naturaleza?
10. Hay una relación entre la naturaleza y la salud mental?
11. Cultiva Ud. plantas?
12. De que materials hace los ofrendas que deja a lado de los árboles, al lado de los ríos, y al mar?
13. Como ha aprendido acerca de los orichas y la naturaleza? Y como aprendido los cantos, los ritmos, las hierbas, y como comunicarse con ellos?

Sociodemographic Questions For Interviews

Características socio-demográficos:

Fecha: _____

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. Nombre _____ | 2. Apellidos _____ |
| 3. Sobrenombre _____ | 4. Nivel de educación _____ |
| 5. Sexo _____ | 6. Ocupación _____ |
| 7. Teléfono _____ | 8. Dirección _____ |
| 9. Correo electrónico _____ | |
| 10. Lugar de nacimiento _____ | 11. Lugar donde ha vivido _____ |
| 12. Edad _____ | 13. Origen de sus antepasados _____ |
| 14. Religión que practica _____ | 15. ¿Cuántos años lleva en esta religión? _____ |
| 16a. ¿Se ha hecho santo? _____ | b. ¿Cuándo? _____ c. ¿Cual orisha? _____ |
| 17a. ¿Otros miembros de su familia se han hecho santo? _____ | 17b. ¿Quiénes? b.¿Que santo? y c.¿Hace cuanto tiempo? _____ |
| 18. ¿Como aprendió su religión? _____ | |

19. ¿Cuántas generaciones de su familia han vivido aquí en Cuba? _____

20a. ¿Desde dónde vienen sus padres? _____ b. ¿Abuelos? _____

c. ¿Bisabuelos? _____ d. ¿Tatarabuelos? _____

21. ¿Cuáles eran sus religiones? _____

22. ¿Cuáles eran sus ocupaciones? _____

23. ¿Hay otra cosa que le gustaría comentar?

Por favor podría escribir todo lo que viene a su mente cuando piensa en El Monte.

¿Qué podría contarme acerca del monte, las hierbas y los palos?

Podría Ud. escribir lo que viene a su mente cuando piensa en los problemas del medio ambiente más importantes en Matanzas.

Cuáles considera Ud. que son los principales problemas ambientales aquí.

Cuáles podrían ser las soluciones para esos problemas.

APPENDIX F
CODE BOOK FOR TEXT ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS

#	Color:	Includes:	Explanation:
1.		Themes, notes, terms, words,	▪ everything
2.		My questions, points	▪ What is nature ▪ What is the nature, human relationship ▪ Y como aprendio ud las proiedades de las plantas?
3.		Environmental behaviors	▪
4.		Santo, santero, orisha	▪ Anything to do religion, spirits
5.		Ser humano	▪
6.		Nature	▪ Anything to do with biophysical nature
7.		Animals, bugs, birds	▪
8.		Ecology	▪ The interaction or relationships
9.		Osain	▪ When Osain is mentioned specifically
10.		Aprender	▪ Learning, transmission Oswaldo p 1. “[Aprendi] trabajando con las plantas. ..
11.		Subjectivity, agency of plants	▪
12.		Cantar	▪ Chants
13.		Christianity, Jesus	▪
14.		Respeto	▪
15.		Poder	▪
		Cocimiento	▪
		Sembrar vs Silvestre Misterio Necesitamos	▪

APPENDIX G
LIST OF OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS: DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE

Name, age.

1. Tell me about your childhood.
2. Tell me about your life now (job, family, kids)
3. Do you follow a religion or philosophy of life? Explain.
4. What does development mean for you?
5. What are the most serious problems (environmental and other) here. (Cuba, Matanzas, Havana, Alamar)
6. How can these be fixed?
7. What can you do to help?
8. How do you see the future?
9. How would you like to see the future?
10. What does it mean to you to be Cuban?
11. What are the most important dates for you?

Nov Dec 2006

Nombre, fecha de nacimiento

1. tell me about your youth
 - a. from where are are your parents, grandparents, greatgreatparents
 - b. your life
2. tell me about your present life
 - a. occupation, married, kids, life
3. Do you follow a religion or philosophy of life? Tell me about your beliefs.
4. What is development for you?
5. Which are the biggest problems here?
6. Which are the best solutions?
7. What can you and your family do about them?
8. a. How do you see the future?
 - b. How would you like to see the future for the next generations of Cubans?
9. What does it mean to be Cuban for you?
10. What are the most important dates for you/ the country?
11. Anything you'd like to express...
12. Any questions you would like to ask?

APPENDIX H
CONSERVATION PRACTICES (INDIVIDUAL PRACTICES OF CONSERVATION)

Positive + :

- enseñar niño (amar naturaleza)
- conservar vida peces
- sembrar nuevos frutos/arboles
- conservar/adorar medio ambiente
- cuidar parques/jardines
- regar plantas
- fabricas lejos de la ciudad
- podar arboles, plantas
- crezca vegetacion
- preservar limpieza
- utiliza basurero
- mantenr limpio entorno
- recogida basura estatal
- protesta y participacion social
- cuidar las plantas
- cuidar el fauna
- cuida el agua
- proteger las plantas
- ahorrarla
- encontrar metodos para
conservar agua potable
- higiene
- recicló paper
- recicló latas en sus envases por separado

__Negative - :

- no usar objetos toxicos quimicos
- no echar papeles al piso
- no dana, ensucia medio ambiente
- proteger capa ozono
- no echar basura
- no ensuciar paredes
- no ensuciar pesos
- no tirar basurero al piso
- no pisar planta
- no escribir en paredes
- no fumar!!!
- no hacer ruido muy fuerte
- no hago ruidos innecesario
- no echo desechos al mar
- no echo desechos al rio
- talar arboles
- guerras –contaminacion, destruction
- no ensuciar la playa
- no talar arboles
- no contaminar playas
- evitar social contaminacion
- no contamina mar
- no contamina calles
- no botar basura
- evitar contaminacion
- no compro aerosols
- no contaminar ninguna fuente natural preciado liquido

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

She is a learner and a teacher, a dancer with the elements of life and an adventurer seeking to find creative solutions through community. She was raised in Florida, and has traveled extensively in Europe, Latin America, the Caribbean, and North and West Africa. She speaks Spanish and French, which aids in her endeavor to learn from people who follow alternative knowledge systems, particularly those that integrate nature, spirituality and experiential learning.

She finished her doctorate at the University of Florida in Anthropology, with concentrations in Visual and Ecological Anthropology, Religion and Nature , and Tropical Conservation and Development. During that time, she integrated alternative pedagogical strategies into the class she taught, which she inherited from Dr. Tony Oliver-Smith: ANT 4403 Environment and Cultural Behavior. These techniques included experiential learning, self-directed (therein personally relevant) scholarship, student –led discussions, and collaborative ventures. She has also worked at the Farmers’ Market throughout her time as a doctoral student, attempting to understand grassroots-based economies, local food systems, and fair trade practices. Her research and her life focus on spiritual ecology, crafting evocative documentaries and creating community (particularly through food, movement and music). She hopes her future research will continue this path of collaborative and transformational learning.

WHO IS NATURE?: YORÙBÁ RELIGION AND ECOLOGY IN CUBA

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Scholars must find culturally appropriate methods to interpret African ecological knowledges in order to improve our understanding of shifting, multisited, multivocal and multisensorial landscapes, especially concerning human/nature relationships. I use embodiment as a critical concept for African diaspora scholarship, and including the use of videography as a tool to access and evoke African diaspora ecological knowledge. My study of Yorùbá religion and Osain (deity of the sacred forests, herbs and healings) reveal an embodied understanding of nature through which the boundaries of subjects as well as material and spiritual get collapsed and traversed through specialized communication techniques. Ways of knowing through invocations, praise poetry, music and dance are essential to nearly all Yorùbá ritual in which spiritual forces are actualized—evoking and thus invoking spirit into human form. To improve representation or, more importantly, evocation of this form of understanding human/nature relationships, I employ video.

ⁱ Development became a topic of primary relevance during the 1940s, initially to address the devastation of the Second World War (Escobar 1995; Harrison 2001). Hence, global financial institutions based out of the United States of America were created (i.e., the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) (Chambers 1997; Escobar 1995). Soon after, the United States and other westernized countries promoted “development” with the purpose of increasing industrialization, economic motivation and material production (specifically for export to the “developed” or already industrialized and modernized countries) (Deere et al.1990).