

RELIGION, RACE, AND ETHNICITY

General Editor: Peter J. Paris

Public Religion and Urban Transformation: Faith in the City

Edited by Lowell W. Livezey

Down by the Riverside: Readings in African American Religion

Edited by Larry G. Murphy

New York Glory: Religions in the City

Edited by Tony Carnes and Anna Karpathakis

Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity: An Introduction

Edited by Craig R. Prentiss

*God in Chinatown: Religion and Survival in New York's Evolving
Immigrant Community*

Kenneth J. Guest

*Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and
Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*

Margarite Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert

Creole Religions of the Caribbean

*An Introduction from Vodou and Santería
to Obeah and Espiritismo*

Margarite Fernández Olmos and
Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert



2003

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS

New York and London

(ocha). As the orishas in Cuba were referred to by the Spanish word *santos* the practice came to be named *Santería*, the worship or way of the saints. The orishas are spiritual entities that have been anthropomorphized and identified with a force of nature and an aspect of human character or personality, the representation of multiple spiritual metaphors. To obtain their *aché*, however, the orishas must be propitiated through an *ebó*—sacrifice, offering, spell—which has the double purpose of honoring the deities and communicating *aché* from spiritual being to human. The sacrifice can range from a simple offering of fruit, candles, food, or flowers appropriate to the attributes of a particular orisha to a blood sacrifice involving a specific sacrificial animal for a serious problem, if so indicated by divination. The offering is then transformed into *aché* to carry out the needs of the petitioner.

The *egún* (the dead) must also be honored with small offerings. Ancestor worship, although not an evolved or distinct cult, is a central tenet of the religion: “the dead come before the saints.” The concepts of ancestor and family extend to the religious community: initiated devotees are called *omo-orisha* or “child of an orisha,” the *santero* or *santera* who initiates them is their *padrino* or *madrina*, “godfather” or “godmother,” and the ancestors who are honored at all ceremonies include one’s ritual family in worship, the lineage of the house-temple. A “here and now,” crisis-oriented religion, the herbs, stones, amulets, necklaces, and other ritual objects used in worship are vital to achieving its magical or healing purposes. As in the Yoruba worldview, *Regla de Ocha* does not polarize goodness and evil; they are perceived as complementary and relative. Bad things will happen, but humans can find holistic balance and peace by maintaining personal, social, and cosmic harmony, living in accord with their destiny (discovered through divination), proper character, appropriate behavior, and a relationship with and worship of the orishas.

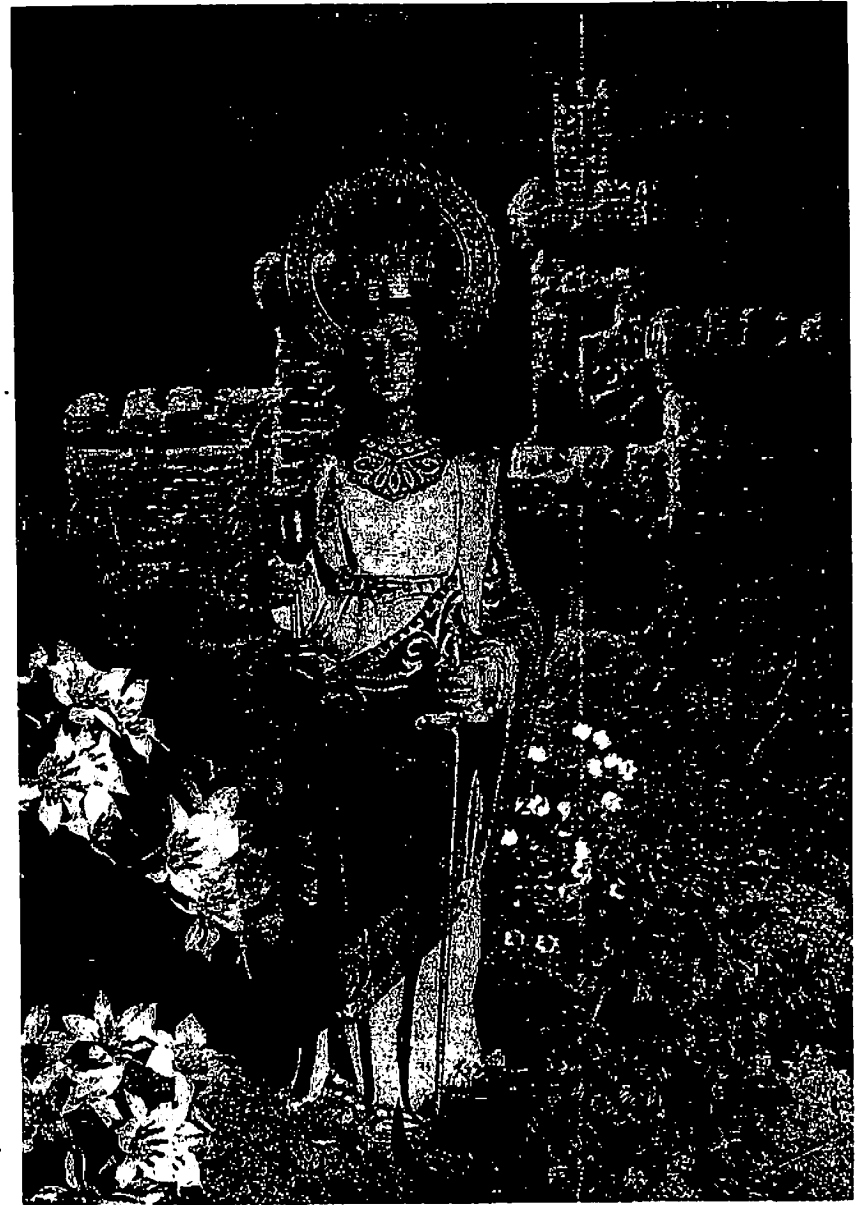
The Orishas

Occasionally compared to the gods of Greek and Roman antiquity, the orishas have been defined as “archetypes, primordial beings, magical agents, the receivers of prayer and sacrifice.” They are the “axis of worship in *Regla de Ocha*” (Matibag 1996: 46).¹⁹ Neither gods nor deities in the Western sense, orishas are personified natural forces that interact with human beings. Whereas in Africa each orisha had his or her own priests,

fraternities, and sanctuaries, in Cuba the dispersion caused by slavery precluded this specialization. However, the “generic” orishas of agriculture, the seas, thunder, iron, and the like persisted, resulting in a reduced Afro-Cuban pantheon (Cros Sandoval 1995: 84–85). As Bastide has observed, a process of selection occurred in which the collective representations brought over from Africa were reoriented. Gods who protected agriculture were discarded or forgotten, for example. Why sacrifice for a bountiful harvest to benefit an exploitative slave master? Slaves worshiped Ogún, the protector of blacksmiths in Africa, as a deity of war; Changó, the warrior orisha, became identified with exacting justice. In like fashion others would reflect qualities of self-identity and legitimacy valued by people living in oppression (Bastide 1978: 66). Miguel Barnet describes this dynamic process within Cuba:

Four hundred and five divinities have been identified in Nigeria, whereas in Cuba they do not exceed thirty. The passage of time has eroded the Yoruba pantheon, and many santos worshipped in the nineteenth century are almost unknown to practitioners today. However, ongoing syncretism has atomized elements of old deities and incorporated others from religions of Bantu origin or from Catholicism itself. Divinities who occupied an important place in the Yoruba pantheon of Nigeria, like Oddúa, for example, have been nearly lost in Cuba; some who had not been tutelary [protector] gods gained primacy and are today the object of preferential worship. The process of accrual and loss typifies the transfer of elements from one culture to another and gives evidence of the permeability of a religion when, forced not so much by sociological as by ecological circumstances, it has to adjust to a new environment. (Barnet 1997: 87–88)

For nearly every orisha there is a correlating Catholic saint based on associations made by the slaves between the mythology of the orishas and attributes or qualities identified with Catholic saints, particularly as perceived in the iconographic representation of the latter in the statues and chromolithographs that were an important element of colonial popular Catholicism and religious instruction. The hagiography of the saints that described their lives and legacies would bring to mind characteristics that could be associated with a particular orisha. Thus, Changó, the Yoruba orisha of fire and thunder, for example, was identified with Santa Bárbara, the patroness of Spanish artillery, due to her iconographic representation in chromolithographs in which she is dressed in red—Chango’s symbolic



Santa Bárbara

color—and her identification with the thundering artillery cannons. An alternative explanation takes into account the legends surrounding Santa Bárbara's pagan father who, in order to separate her from the Christians, had her locked up in a tower. Upon discovering her Christian faith her father Dióscoro gave her up to the authorities who condemned her to death for her faith and beheaded her with a sword—one of Changó's attributes—which appears in many of her iconographic lithographs. Her association with Changó is made clearer in the version of the legend that states that her father was struck by lightning (Cros Sandoval 1995: 85; Bolívar Aróstegui 1990: 112).

The Regla de Ocha/Santería system reflects the creolization process: the orishas were syncretized with divinities from other African traditions and with Roman Catholic santos,²⁰ a process of accommodation to social realities and a way for Africans to incorporate native culture into their spirituality. Whether adding the Christian gods to their pantheon was a pragmatic choice of incorporating the potent “magic” of Catholic rites, or was based upon a desire for upward mobility, one ought not ignore the fact that Catholicism was superimposed on African beliefs and that “at first the saints were no more than white masks covering the black faces of the ancestral divinities” (Bastide 1978: 162).

If their specific origins are varied and complex, so too are the Christianized representations which vary from one locale to the next within a particular country, and from country to country in the African Diaspora.²¹ These variations are based on historical and environmental factors; orishas changed as a result of their transplantation to the New World and in their adjustment to the various regions of the Diaspora. As a result they have numerous caminos—avatar, aspect, path or road, identity, form, or manifestation. Changó's aspects include both the male and female, Eleguá is young and old, and so on. And orishas are protean and multifaceted in character. While their principal forms can have a Catholic equivalent there may be several for the same orisha, which helps to explain the variety of Christianized representations in Cuban Santería and other creolized practices. The process of merging deities begun in Africa continued in Cuba where, for example, the Yoruba Shango merged with the Kongo Kanbaranganje, a blending that, when added to the syncretization with the Catholic saints, “presents no distortion of their ‘true’ identities but rather successive variations on the same theme of the caminos, paths, or avatars that the orisha takes up in certain life stages or incarnations” (Matibag 1996: 57).

The caminos of the orisha, while multiple and varied, comprise a specific theme identified by qualities and objects (*atributos* or attributes) associated with a specific orisha's “universe.”²² Ogún's universe, for example, is that of the forge and the mountain, and includes iron tools and implements, miniature representations of keys that signal the orisha's syncretization with Saint Peter. The attributes—qualities, traits, aspects, characteristics, domain, or powers—are central to the ritual operations that summon the orishas or represent them in devotion.

The primary representation of the orishas, however, is found in the *otanes* or sacred stones that are kept in a soup tureen and “fed” with the blood of sacrificed animals and the ritual liquid *omiero*, “so that in and through the otanes the orisha can drink up nourishment in the form of aché. As transmitters of aché, the sacred stones call to the gods, inviting them to come down and take possession of their omos [children], to give the sign that they accept the sacrifice and feel strengthened by it” (Matibag 1996: 48). Along with the otanes in the tureen go the orisha's own set of twenty-one cowrie shells that will be used in divination rituals (see below) in order to communicate with a specific orisha.

Orisha Profiles

First among the gods in Regla de Ocha, the Creator and Supreme Being, is Olorun/Olodumare/Olofi, a single Ultimate, ranked above the lesser divinities, the orishas. His triplicate form in Cuba, different aspects of the supernatural being, liken him to the Christian God: Olorun, the origin and Creator of being; Olodumare, the Almighty, the divine essence of all there is; Olofi, the creation itself, he who dwells in all creation. Julia Cuervo Hewitt observes that Olodumare is a “cosmological replica” of the sociopolitical structure of Oyo; analogous to an earthly king, the heavenly counterpart does not rule personally: “In the cosmological realm the orishas, as Oyo's elders, carry out the governing duties. Otherwise, Olodumare follows the archetypal characteristics of all universal Sky Gods equivalent to Zeus, Yaweh or Alá” (Cuervo Hewitt 1984: 67). In one of the many myths of the orishas it is said that they left the sacred land of Ile Ife one day and descended to earth where their presence remains in stones that resonate with their aché: “Devotees can find these orisha stones among ordinary ones if they can learn to listen carefully enough. For the orisha stones are alive with the orisha's ashe. They are most likely to be

found in the element most expressive of their force—ocean stones for Yemaya, river pebbles for Oshun, meteorites for the thunder king Shango” (Murphy 1993: 41).

Orishas are identified with specific numbers, foods, and plants used in their worship, and explicit chants, drum rhythms, dance movements, and sacred narratives of their lives and relationships. Thus spiritual work to venerate Ochún, for example, would be done using her number and attributes: five yellow candles and cakes, amber beads, and the like, in order to obtain Ochún’s aché. In the following profiles, we present a brief overview of the more familiar *caminos* or avatars²³ of several of the principal orishas favored in Cuba and in the Diaspora, those more commonly consecrated ritually or spiritually invested in a devotee in initiation.²⁴

The myths surrounding the orishas—their family ties, adventures, affairs, problems, arguments, loves—referred to as *patakí*, are the explanatory stories of Regla de Ocha. In Cuba, as in all societies generally, these stories contribute to the formation of a social, moral, and even political consciousness, essential for an understanding of Cuban culture: “myth here functions as a powerful cultural homogenizing factor” (Barnet 1983: 158–159). The mythology of the orishas changed in the course of their travels to Cuba: the family of orishas was transformed in the syncretic process which created kinship relationships among them—father, mother, sister, husbands, wives, children—that did not exist in African mythology. “In Santería there is a tendency to create relationships among the gods in the most diverse fashion, due to the desire to establish order and a hierarchy in the mismatched celestial family” (Cros Sandoval 1975: 159). These narratives, which are part of Cuban popular culture, also inform the divinatory practices of Regla de Ocha (and other Afro-Cuban practices). An example of the Cuban mythical narratives or *patakís* associated with the orishas and the natural world are included in the brief profiles below to demonstrate the concept.²⁵

Eleguá

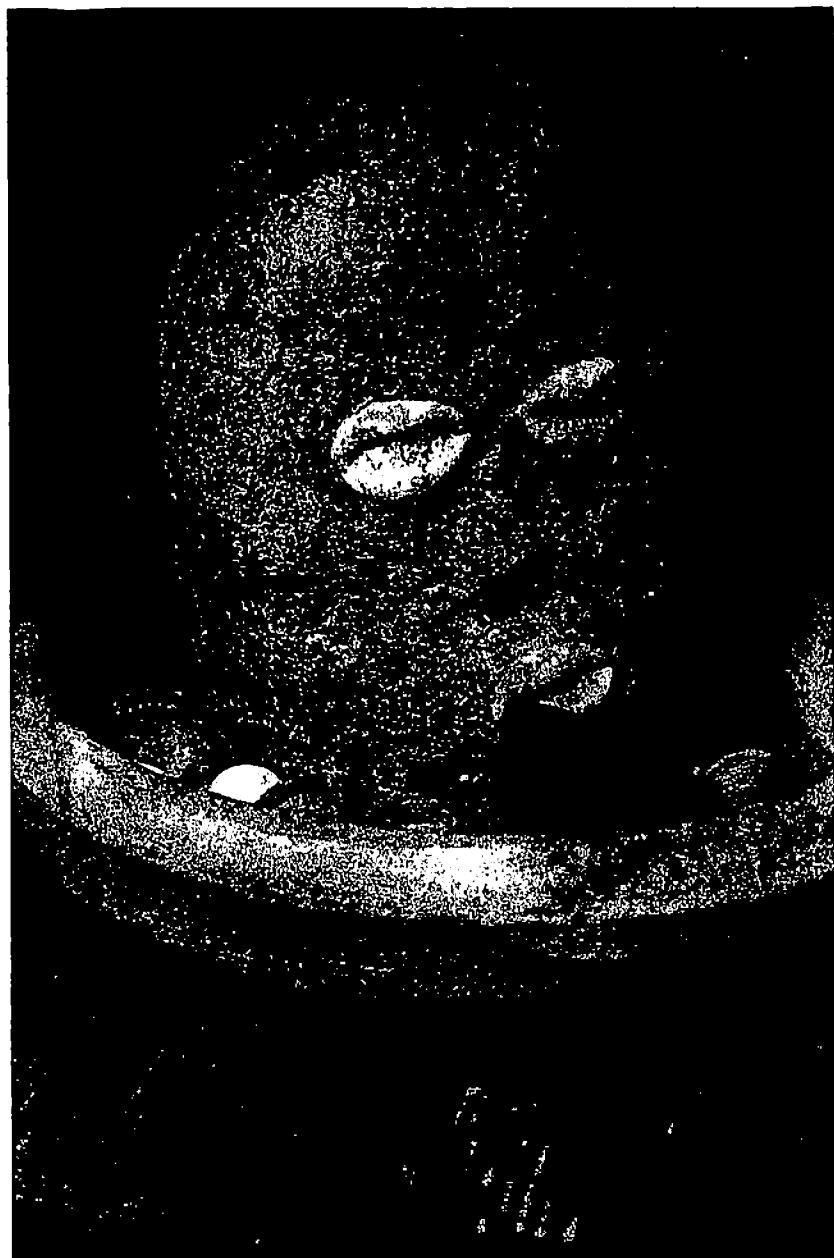
It is fitting to begin with Eleguá as all Santería ceremonies must be initiated with a request for permission from this powerful deity, the ruler of the roads, crossroads, and thresholds. Messenger between humans and the orishas, he reports the actions of humans to Olodumare. Eleguá, also called Echú-Eleguá, opens or closes paths, and indicates the crossroads—the future. Eleguá must be propitiated before any other orisha and must

be consulted before embarking on any important step in life. Characterized as a mischievous trickster, he can be severe in his punishment of those who ignore his commands, and is always justified in his actions.

Eleguá is usually anthropomorphized in an artifact of cement with eyes, ears, and mouth made of cowrie shells and placed behind the street entrance door, guarding the homes of santeros with Ogún’s cauldron containing Ochosi (the orisha of justice whose representation is a metal bow pierced by three arrows; usually stored all together in a small cabinet or in a *velador*, an appropriately named night table which in Spanish means “vigil-keeper”).

Called the “divine enforcer,” Eleguá visits misfortune upon those who fail to heed Olodumare’s commands as expressed through divination. “Fate, the unexpected, forgetfulness, tragedy, good or bad luck, any sort of triumph, and even our own actions and hopes depend on Eleguá and Echú. He is indisputably the most influential of the Lucumí santos who have exerted their authority over Cuba” (Barnet 1997: 89). Eleguá has twenty-one very different paths. He is often syncretized with the Christ Child of Atocha; San Antonio de Padua; the Anima Sola or Wandering Soul in Pain. In the guise of Echú he is the Christian Devil, closing paths and doors. In Vodou he is syncretized with Papa Legba or Papa La Bas. His attributes and symbols include a cement or clay head with cowrie shells, a coconut, or a large stone, among other things. Eleguá’s colors are red and black, his day is Monday, sacred number three, and the offerings appropriate to him include pastries, sweets, rum, tobacco, a rooster, or a male goat.

A story that demonstrates Eleguá’s role in enforcing justice concerns the coconut, which represents Prince Obi, one of the orisha Obatalá’s children.²⁶ Prince Obi lived in a beautiful castle high up in the palm trees where he held court in impeccable white robes of exquisite beauty and saw important visitors from the world over. But his brother Eleguá noticed that Obi was becoming vain and snobbish, neglecting his poor subjects, and receiving only the rich and powerful. One day at a feast in Obi’s castle to which only the richest kings were invited, Eleguá arrived disguised as a pauper. Obi had the guards remove him, indignant that someone should try to enter in such ragged clothes. Eleguá told their father Obatalá what had happened, so Obatalá also disguised himself and returned with Eleguá to the castle. Now Obi was even more furious. “Two good-for-nothings in my castle! To the dungeon!” But then Obi heard a familiar voice say, “I think you are mistaken, son,” at which he fell to his knees begging his father’s forgiveness. Obatalá cursed Obi for his vanity and pride, saying,



Eleguá. Photo courtesy of the artist Héctor Delgado.

“Henceforth your exquisite white clothing will be worn inside and you will always wear filthy brown rags without, you will fall from the palm tree and roll on the ground and be kicked about by children in the dirt, and your brother orishas and humans will cut you into pieces and use you as the simplest of oracles.” And thus Obi, the coconut, became the most commonly used of all the divination systems.

Ogún

Ogún, the orisha of war, of iron, the instruments of work, minerals, the mountain, and the forge, is a warrior and blacksmith, an important figure in African mythology with all that the technology of iron represented in the development of African societies. Ogún’s cult spread far beyond the Yoruba culture; as with Eleguá, Ogún is one of the most important *loas* in the Fon culture of Dahomey and in Haitian Vodou. Frequently portrayed as his brother Changó’s competition for the love of Ochún, astute and bellicose in war as in work, he has many avatars and is the protector not only of blacksmiths but also of all who drive vehicles made of iron or steel or work with the same—surgeons, butchers, carpenters, mechanics, farmers, policemen.

Though he protects people against criminals, Ogún is also responsible for railroad and auto accidents and violent crimes that employ metal weapons. A symbol of war and violence, he is the orisha of the sacrificial knife and the force in bloodletting, of conflict as an element of human nature, “the archetype of the violent occurrences that result from man’s weaknesses and lack of control” (González-Wippler 1989: 45).²⁷ Ogún is syncretized with Saint Peter, who carries the keys of heaven; also with Santiago or Saint James the Elder. In Vodou he is Papa Ogoun. His attributes and symbols include all types of iron objects—keys, cutlasses, shovels, hammers, chains, and machetes are symbolic of Ogún, who is represented in the Ocha temple by an iron pot containing miniature implements, or simply a horseshoe or railroad spike. Ogún’s colors are black and green, his day is Tuesday, his sacred numbers seven and three, and fitting offerings include palm wine, salt, roasted yams, tortoises, and dogs.

In one well-known tale Obatalá was troubled; he noticed that his son Ogún was acting strangely toward his mother, Yemmu, who treated Ogún not like a son but as would a woman in love. The enchanted rooster Osún was supposed to inform him of the goings-on at home in his absence, but had not reported anything unusual. But Eleguá, his other son, was sad and

emaciated. "What is the matter, Eleguá? Tell me, why are you so sad?" "Baba-mi, it pains me to tell you this, but Ogún has been doing a terrible deed with my mother; he gives all my food to Osún to make him sleepy and then locks me out of the house so that I don't see what is happening, but I know." That evening Obatalá told Yemmu he was leaving for several days and hid. He returned to find Ogún and Yemmu together. Ogún then cried out in fear and shame. "Do not curse me for I curse myself. I will never again know the meaning of peace, and will work night and day and teach men the secrets of making iron." And as Ogún left Obatalá turned to Yemmu and declared, "the next male child you bear I will bury alive." The baby boy Changó was sent to live with his sister Dada on top of the palm tree, and when Yemmu's new son, Orula, was born, he suffered the fate Obatalá had determined.

Changó

Changó is perhaps the most venerated and popular of the Cuban orishas, one of the tutelary or protector-guardian gods; many consider him the strongest and most important. "He is a womanizer and drinker, quarrelsome, courageous, and daring; made for challenges and dares, proud of his masculine virtues, boastful of his strength and manly beauty, castigador (a heartbreaker)" (Barnet 1997: 91). Of great importance in the New World, Sango in Yoruba, Shango in English, Xangó in Portuguese, Changó in Spanish and French, "when his name is pronounced, believers rise from their seats making a drinking gesture and thus salute and revere him" (Barnet 1997: 91).²⁸ Both feared and venerated, his domain is music and he rules over the sacred batá drums, fire, thunder, and lightning. He is the protector of warriors, fishermen, and hunters.

Changó is believed to have been a historical figure, the fourth Alafin (another name for Changó in Santería) or king of Oyo, a victorious ruler who had earned a foremost place among the mythical founders and heroes of the Yoruba kingdom. All Changó's legends, which are numerous, concern some form of power—"procreative, authoritative, destructive, medicinal, or moral" (González-Wippler 1989: 40). Changó's most widely recognized Catholic syncretic form in Santería is with Santa Bárbara, but Changó has many paths and in other aspects is syncretized with Saint Patrick, Saint Mark, and Saint George. His attributes and symbols are the double-bladed axe or hatchet, *piedras de rayo*, thunderstones or flintstones collected after lightning storms, a mortar, a castle, the sword, and the cup.

Changó has his own type of tureen for his thunderstones, a wooden batea (pan) elevated on a mortar stool. His colors are bright red and white; his day is Santa Bárbara's feast day, December 4. His sacred numbers are four and six, and offerings to Changó might include a ram, tortoise, okra, bean fritters, and cornmeal with okra.

As one of the most popular of the orishas, Changó also has a great number of myths ascribed to him. One tells of his fabulous gift of divining which he traded with his brother Orula. Although he had spent years studying all types of divination, hoping to be the best in creation, Orula did not have Changó's talent. However, Orula was a talented dancer and drummer, something Changó envied. One day at a party the god of thunder told his brother, "I would happily trade my powers of divination for your musical talent." Orula was stunned that his brother would give up such a great gift and warned him against making a hasty decision, but Changó's mind was made up. "If I could dance and play the drums like you I would feel perfectly happy." So the two exchanged gifts and Changó became an even better dancer and drummer than Orula, whose powers of divination had no equal.

Yemayá

Yemayá is the great universal mother. The deity of maternity, the sea, and of salt water, Yemayá gave birth to all the orishas as well as to the sun and the moon, with which she is associated. Yemayá represents fertility and is portrayed occasionally as a dark-skinned mermaid. In some versions she is the adopted mother of Changó, who was given to her by Obatalá, his mother, and in one of her many avatars she is Yemayá Olokun who is found at the bottom of the ocean (although some categorize Olokun as a distinct deity). Yemayá is the orisha of intelligence and rationality. "Sister of Ochún . . . she is judgment and reason, but she can also be inflexible when she punishes. Majestic queen of the oceans, she is presumptuous and haughty. She protects her children in her skirt, feeds them, and raises them with absolute motherly rigor" (Barnet 1997: 92). Multiple myths and legends surround Yemayá and she has many avatars, but "there is no more than one Yemayá. A single one with seven paths" (Cabrera 1980: 30). When she takes possession of her children she swirls around quickly, swaying like the waves of the sea.

In her Catholic syncretization, Yemayá is La Virgen de Regla, a black saint and patron of the Bay of Havana, who also looks to the sea. Her

attributes and symbols include seashells or stones found near the sea and she is symbolized by a sword, fan, the half-moon, a seashell, an anchor, and a silver or white-metal sun. Yemayá's colors are navy blue and white, her day is Saturday, her sacred number is seven, and suitable offerings made to her include maize, pigeon, ducks, rams, and cocks.

In one of many versions of a story that explains why women cannot use the oracles or divination systems of Ifá (the system reserved for the babalao priests, the sons of Orula, also known as Ifá), it is said that Yemayá was Orula's wife, but the marriage was rocky. One day while he was away he heard rumors of a famous female seer from his town who was gaining a fortune with her prophecies. Orula disguised himself and returned home to find the house full of people. He waited his turn, paid the *derecho* (fee) for the consultation, and Yemayá said, "You are my husband, but I wasn't going to die here of hunger." Orula made her leave his house but Yemayá continued until Orula found that she had used his divining board or *Tabla*. Now Orula was truly furious that she, a woman, had dared touch what he had prohibited. "A woman cannot know more than I! In this home I can be the only seer!" That is why women cannot use Orula's divining chain or table.

Obatalá

Obatalá is the god of purity and justice whose name means "King of the White Cloth." Always dressed in his characteristic white color Obatalá represents truth, purity, peace, and compassion. Obatalá has several male and female paths and is the archetypal spirit of creativity: he was sent down by Olodumare to create the earth and to mold the human race and is therefore of great importance in Regla de Ocha as the owner of all heads (*orí*) where the spirit, thoughts, and dreams dwell. "In the liturgy of Santería he is the head, birth, that which stands high, pure, and clean. . . . [I]n the rites of initiation the color white is used as a symbol of what is born pure in life . . . an extremely rigorous santo. His devotees must behave well; they must not utter blasphemies, drink, argue, undress before anyone" (Barnet 1997: 93–94). As noted above, though Olofi created the world, Obatalá created man and governs a person's thoughts and ideas. Oduduwa is believed to be Obatalá's wife by some, but is considered by others to be the oldest Obatalá and his female aspect. The first orisha and owner of the world, Obatalá's tureen (*sopera*) is located in the highest spot

of the *canastillero* or shelved cabinet where the orishas' *soperas* are traditionally stored in a worshiper's home, above all others.

Obatalá is syncretized with Our Lady of Mercy and his/her attributes and symbols include the white *iruka* (horsetail switch), *agogós* (chimes) of white metal, crowns of silver or white metal, and holy water. Obatalá's color is white and he/she is celebrated on September 4, the Catholic feast day of Our Lady of Mercy. The sacred numbers for Obatalá are eight, sixteen, and twenty-four, and appropriate offerings include coconut, cotton, cocoa butter, powdered eggshell (*cascarilla*), doves, pigeons, and snails (all offerings should be covered with cotton and be immaculately clean).

In a famous creation story Olofi, the supreme deity, decided to create the firmament and assigned the task to the pure and peaceful Obatalá, who would be assisted by Orúnmila, wisdom itself. After Orúnmila consulted the oracle and told him what he would require, Obatalá descended through a gold chain to the swampy ground beneath the sky and trickled some earth onto the marshy terrain; he then let loose a hen that dug into the spilled earth and dispersed it in all directions, creating solid land over the water. Olofi then showed Obatalá how to mold males and females out of clay. When the figures dried Olofi would come down and breathe life into them. One day, Obatalá became thirsty and drank palm wine to quench his thirst. The liquor made his hands clumsy and the figures were twisted and malformed. Olofi trusted Obatalá and gave them life without examining them, which is why deformed people exist and why their patron orisha is Obatalá, who has protected them ever since, and never touched liquor again.

Ochún

Ochún is the Lucumí Aphrodite. Ochún-Kolé (one of many names and avatars for the orisha, including Panchágara, Iyammu, Yeyé-Karí and the nickname Yeyé) is the deity of rivers, fresh waters, and gold, and she represents female sensuality, love, beauty, and sexual desire. She is identified with Cuba's patron saint, the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, and is the protector of pregnant women; in Haitian Vodou she is identified with the loa Ezulie. Anecdotes of Ochún's turbulent love affairs with Changó and other orishas abound, and in her avatar as Panchágara she is an irrepressible and capricious seducer of all men. She is usually represented as a beautiful, light-skinned *mulata*, who charms and attracts like her favorite

food—honey. “Among the orishas she is one of the most venerated, perhaps the most easily and naturally adapted to Cuba, not only because of the syncretism of the patroness of Cuba . . . but because she is thought to represent many Cuban women in her sensual grace and Creole mischievousness” (Barnet 1997: 95). In her Cuban Catholic syncretization, Ochún is the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre. Her attributes and symbols include a chime (*agogó*) of yellow metal, gold, copper, the peacock, mirrors, fans, canoes, and coral; pumpkins are sacred to her. Her color is yellow and she is celebrated on September 8, Our Lady of Charity feast day. Ochún’s sacred number is five, and fitting offerings to her include a female goat, fish, hen, beans, honey, pastries, and a dish made of shrimp and almonds.

Clearly a New World creation, one story of the deity tells about the sadness of the goddess of love as she watched her children forced from their home to be taken to a new land named Cuba. Ochún visited her sister, Yemayá, to ask her advice. “It must be this way, Ochún. Our children will now go through the world spreading our wonders and millions will remember us and worship once again.” But Ochún wanted to be with her children and asked Yemayá, who had traveled the world over, to describe Cuba to her. “It is much like here: hot days, long nights, calm rivers, abundant vegetation, but not everyone is black like us; there are also many whites.” Ochún decided to join her suffering children in Cuba and asked her sister to grant her two favors before leaving: “Please make my hair straighter and my skin lighter so that all Cubans can see some of themselves in me.” Her wish was granted and Ochún became Cuba’s beloved patron saint.²⁹

Oyá

Oyá is a female warrior deity who often fights at the side of Changó, mistress of lightning, the wind, and gatekeeper of the cemetery. She is the protector of the dead, owner of the rainbow (seven is her number), and, like Changó, she inherited fire which she shoots from her mouth when angered. Sister to Yemayá, Ochún, and Oba, she competes with all for Changó. “In some Lucumí ceremonies, like that of *Itutu*, meant to appease and refresh the dead, Oyá fulfils an important role. On the day a person dies, Oyá ‘descends’ and shakes the iruke over the deceased’s face as a signal of welcome to the cemetery. The dead must enter clean into the kingdom of Oyá (Yanza)” (Barnet 1997: 94). In Cuba Oyá is represented by the color black in the iruke, and her personality is likened to that of the Greek

Medusa and Hecate and the Hindu Kali in her fierceness, as well as to the Greek Hera in her relentless battles for Changó’s affection (Cuervo Hewitt 1988: 173). Oyá is syncretized with the Catholic Virgen de la Candelaria (*candelaria* means “conflagration” in Spanish) and Santa Teresa. Her attributes and symbols include the black iruke (horsetail switch). Oyá’s colors are deep maroon and white, her day is Friday, and sacred number nine. Suitable offerings to Oyá include hens and goats.

In Cuba, as in Africa, Oyá is identified with death. Among her avatars are Yansa Oriri, the streak of lightning, and Oyá Dumi, the owner of the cemetery. In one legend Osain gave Changó a small gourd and told him to stick his fingers into it every morning and trace the sign of the cross on his tongue to shoot fire from his mouth when he spoke. Oyá became curious about her husband’s strange ritual and one day attempted the same, observing in horror the fire that blasted from her mouth each time she spoke. Horror-stricken, she hid in a palm tree until Changó discovered her hiding place and began to chastise her. But Oyá quickly explained, “But now, husband, I can go by your side to make war with Ogún,” which accounts for the beginning of warfare in the world and is the reason why Oyá is usually portrayed as a fierce female warrior next to Changó.

Orula

Also called Orunla, Orúnmila, or Ifá, Orula is the tutelary divinity in the Lucumí pantheon, the master of divination, owner of the *Opon-Ifá* or *Tablero de Ifá*, the divining board that is the domain of the babalao priest, of whom he is also the patron. As he was present during the creation of mankind, Orula knows everyone’s destiny and can give proper guidance, communicating through his *ekuelé* divining chain and the Tablero or divining board; his prophecies are always fulfilled. Respected and venerated, Orula is the true secretary of Olofi, mediator between humans and the gods, the orisha who must be consulted before all major events in life to seek guidance and instruction for proper procedure, including those related to such religious ceremonies as initiation, sacrifice, and possession. “Wise, old, cantankerous, he exerts limitless power over the lives of the babalao and his clients. With a will of iron, tending to drastic decisions, this santo is one of the most beloved of Cuban Santería” (Barnet 1997: 91). He is syncretized with Saint Francis of Assisi (perhaps because Orula’s divining chain recalls the beads of the rosary); his attributes and symbols are the Tablero, which is a symbol of the world, and the ekuelé chain. Orula’s

colors are green and yellow, he is celebrated on October 4, the feast day of Saint Francis, and his sacred number is sixteen. Offerings to Orula include chickens and doves.

To demonstrate the origins of Orula's talent for divination it is told that Yemmu became pregnant after Ogún was banished from the home by Obatalá and gave birth to a baby boy. Given his earlier command, Obatalá ordered that Yemmu bury him alive. So the suffering Yemmu buried the child, whom she named Orula, from the neck down under the sacred Iroko (ceiba or silk-cotton) tree. From Iroko, Orula learned the secrets of divination and became the greatest seer of them all, the father of the mysteries. People came from all over to hear their fortunes and fed him in exchange. Orula became famous and one day Eleguá came to see him and recognized his brother, assuring him that he would ask their father to forgive Orula. Eleguá was very persuasive and Obatalá finally relented, crying when he saw his young son buried in the earth. He then lifted his arms, asking the earth to release Orula. When he told Orula to come home the young man was reluctant to leave the shadow of the Iroko that had been his mother for so long. So Obatalá turned the ceiba tree into a round tray that Orula could take with him to keep his Iroko by his side as he cast his fortunes.

Babalú Ayé

Of Dahomeyan origin (where he was named Chankpana or Shonpona),³⁰ Saint Lazarus for the Christians and nicknamed Babá, Babalú Ayé³¹ is the crippled orisha who preaches good habits, receiving the veneration of all. Like his Catholic counterpart in the parable of the rich man and the leper in the New Testament, he limps about covered with sores, dressed in sackcloth, and with a shoulder bag (*alforja*) filled with toasted corn crisscrossed on his chest, accompanied by loyal dogs that lick his wounds.³² He is the god of illness, owner of epidemics and diseases—especially leprosy and skin diseases, and at present, also AIDS.³³ His messengers are mosquitoes and flies, and he both cures and infects, punishing through leprosy, syphilis, gangrene, and smallpox. He is fierce and implacable toward those who forget to fulfill their promises or disobey him. He is the owner of grains and women, whom he counsels in matters of love. His devotees flagellate themselves; every seventeenth of the month they dress in sackcloth like the orisha and on December 17 they lead a procession that is traditional in Havana each year: on foot, on their knees,

pulling stones on chains, they crawl from distant places to the sanctuary and leprosy hospital of Lazareto in the village of Rincón where San Lázaro is worshiped. "Arará or Yoruba, his origin is no longer of much concern. A transculturated divinity, he has become Cuban more by sustained modifications in his worship than by preserving those characteristics that he brought to Cuba during slavery. Model of hybridity and fusion, Babalú Ayé maintains to this day a certain allure throughout the country" (Barnet 1997: 96). He is syncretized with the Lazarus described in a parable by Jesus Christ as a leprous beggar followed by faithful dogs and with Saint Lazarus, Bishop of Marseilles. His attributes and symbols include the *ajá*, a whisk of palm fronds, the *tablillas de San Pedro*, three pieces of wood tied together to sound a warning of his arrival; his colors are royal purple, white, and blue. December 17, Saint Lazarus's feast day, is Babalú Ayé's day as well; his sacred number is seventeen, and fitting offerings include bread soaked in olive oil or spread with palm oil, toasted corn, and different grains.

Babalú Ayé dresses in sackcloth like a beggar and the shoulder bag he crosses on his chest contains toasted corn, his favorite food. It is said that he was originally from Yorubaland but had to leave when his disrespect for the elders caused him to contract smallpox. All the others threw water behind him in contempt but Eleguá took pity on him and took him to Ife for a consultation with Orula. Orula informed him that he would be venerated again some day in Dahomey if he cleansed himself with grains first and kept a dog by his side. Babalú Ayé cleansed himself and traveled to Dahomey where Olofi sent rains down to wash away his ailment in forgiveness. There Babalú Ayé established his kingdom and became a powerful king who was venerated and well loved.

Ochosi

Ochosi is the orisha of hunters and belongs to the triumvirate grouping of orishas, with Eleguá and Ogún, known as the orisha *guerreros* (warriors). The protector of prisoners, transgressors, political dissidents, and of those who seek justice, in slang the expression to "have the letter of Ochosi" means to be on the way to jail or in trouble with the law. Ochosi and Ogún "eat" and "live" together: "That is, their implements are kept together inside a small cauldron, and when one receives a sacrifice, the other usually partakes of it. But Ochosi is for the most part a solitary who shuns others" (González-Wippler 1989: 51). Ochosi's Catholic syncretization is

San Norberto, his attributes and symbols include a metal bow pierced by three arrows, kept in Ogún's cauldron. His color is violet, Tuesday is his day, three and seven are his sacred numbers, and offerings to Ochosi include male fowl, a drink of milk, honey, and cornmeal.

The close relationship between Ochosi and Ogún is explained in a myth in which both combine their talents to solve a problem: hunger. All the animals used to run away from the sound of Ogún's machete in the forest and the density of the trees caused them to be blocked from the great hunter Ochosi's view. One day the two orishas decided to combine their talents: Ogún cleared the field for Ochosi's sure arrows to reach their mark, and thus both orishas were able to appease their hunger together.

Osain

Osain is the patron of *curanderos* (folk and herbal healers, often referred to in Osain's honor as *osainistas*). The deity of *el monte*,³⁴ the forests, the bush, and of medicine, Osain is herbalist, healer, and master of the healing secrets of plant life. Portrayed as lame, one-eyed, and one-armed, Osain has one overlarge ear that is deaf and one small ear that hears extraordinarily well. He was never born: he simply sprang from the earth. Osain is represented by a *güiro* (gourd) that hangs in the *Santería ilé* or house-temple, and he must be propitiated before any of his plants and herbs (*ewe*) are used in the ceremonies, spells, or cures of Regla de Ocha. "The woods have everything the santero needs to preserve his health and to defend himself against evil. But he must always remember to ask the woods' permission before removing a stone or a leaf from a tree. . . . All the *ewe* is the property of Osain, and without enlisting his aid beforehand, it is not possible to do any work in *Santería*" (González-Wippler 1989: 55). Osain is syncretized with Saint Joseph, Saint Benito, or Saint Jerome (also Saint Anthony Abad or Saint Sylvester). His attributes and symbols include the gourd in which he lives (a good luck talisman) and a twisted tree branch; his color is green, reminiscent of vegetation.

Initiation

Afro-Cuban religious practices focus on the relationship of devotees with the deities and the spirits. Followers celebrate the spiritual entities, offer sacrifices, consult their will in divination, follow their advice, attempt to