

AFRO-CUBAN RELIGIONS AS RESISTANCE

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My revisiting religious issues in Cuba in preparation for this conference to commemorate the events of 1912 coincided with the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Cuba. I was intrigued by this second papal visit in 14 years to a formerly scientific atheist but now officially secular country. In his time as head of the Vatican Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the former Cardinal Ratzinger had been a vigorous opponent of liberation theology. Hence leftist Latin American presidents were wary of him and not responsive to his offer to visit their countries in 2012.

During his visit, Cubans turned out in their thousands to see Pope Benedict, though according to reports, they were trucked in to attend open-air masses in Havana and Santiago in much the same way as for other big rallies such as those to commemorate May Day or the Birth of the Revolution. The Pope had been invited ostensibly to commemorate the four hundred years of the Virgen de Caridad del Cobre, the national patron saint. However, it was clear that both the Pope and the Cuban leadership had their own motives for the visit. The 1998 visit of Pope John Paul II, which followed the loosening of restrictions on religious practice in Cuba, was an important milestone for both religious and atheistic Cubans. Pope Benedict was invited to Cuba by Raúl Castro in the hopes that he would criticize the ongoing US embargo, which he duly did, although he also criticized

Marxist ideology. But, as the Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka observed: 'As the Roman Catholic props of the Batista regime in Cuba discovered when it was too late, they should have worried less about Karl Marx than about Ogun, the re-discovered deity of revolution'.¹

Both the Cuban Catholic hierarchy and the revolutionary Cuban leadership are well aware that many more Cubans revere the Caridad in the form of Ochún, the Yoruba/Lucumí goddess. Cubans who look to the Catholic Church for spiritual guidance are few. Those who enter the churches are often there to fulfill ritual requirements in Santería practice, which include Catholic baptism, or to express their devotion to saints of the popular calendar such as Santa Barbara/Changó and San Lázaro/Babalú Aye. This reflects the culture of concealment of these traditions. At times when the external expressions of the African-derived religious practices were not socially acceptable, people concealed their gods and rituals behind a "mask" of Catholic saints and festivals in order to escape religious persecution.

Although the Afro-Cuban practices are gaining in status and have attracted many more adherents from all sectors of society in recent years, Pope John Paul II insisted during his visit, on at least three occasions, that the true Cuban tradition is Christian. He met with religious leaders from all

the Christian denominations and also the tiny Cuban Jewish community but not with representatives from the Afro-Cuban religions. The head of the Cuban Catholic Church, Cardinal Jaime Ortega, complained at the time about the Cuban leadership's attempts to promote Afro-Cuban rites, both as a political alternative to Catholicism and as a tourist attraction. During the visit of Pope Benedict, the Afro-Cuban practices were also consigned to the basement, as one babalawo, Lázaro Cuesta, observed.

In my book, *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution and National Identity* (2004), I examined the Cuban government's changing and contradiction-ridden policies towards Afro-Cuban religions since 1959. My conclusion was that since the 1990s, the socialist leadership has been obliged to acknowledge a collection of Afro-Cuban popular religious practices as essential to an expression of Cuban-ness. The government is prepared to align not only Afro-Cuban culture but also increasingly the religious practices with national narratives at a time of economic difficulty and growing inequality. Of course, as at earlier times, the Afro-Cuban traditions represent a unique selling point for Cuba as a tourist destination. Indeed, as one Cuban writer put it, the state could be said to have been more successful at exporting Santería than revolution. This seems to contrast with the situation in the early 20th century. Then the religious practices of Afro-Cuban origin generally formed part of the national discourse only insofar as the ruling classes struggled to eradicate them. Stigmatised as *brujería* or witchcraft, they were regarded as anti-modern and anti-social phenomena and used to discredit the Afro-Cuban population, often as part of the attempt to limit their political aspirations.

A NEW DAWN?

At the dawn of the Republic, there were expectations that the Afro-Cuban contribution to Cuba's liberation would be rewarded. Afro-Cubans were acknowledged as citizens of the new nation and a liberal Constitution was drawn up that conferred universal male suffrage, stated that African former slaves were now Cubans and promised equality. Yet the fear of Africanization, which had delayed moves toward independence from Spain, did not recede but instead had been exacerbated by US domination of the island. There were two periods of US rule; firstly from 1898-1902, when the US set up a military government to oversee economic reconstruction and then again from 1906-9. The first US government attempted to eradicate Afro-Cuban traditions and a 1900 ordinance promulgated in Havana prohibited the use of drums.²

The Americans looked down on Cubans of all colors and saw themselves as fulfilling a civilizing mission. The influence of scientific racism and positivistic social thought

cast into question the ability of Latin American nations with racially mixed populations to meet international standards of progress. If the Independence movement had made Cuban national unity imperative to struggle against a common enemy – the Spanish colonial rulers – white fears of being dominated by what they still regarded as an alien black population persisted. Many white Cubans, suffering from an inferiority complex vis à vis the North Americans and keen to prove themselves capable of self-rule, now saw Afro-Cubans less as brothers, than as an obstacle to building a modern nation.³

Civilization and modernity became the defining tenets of Cuban nationality in formation. This meant that markers of Africanity had to be repudiated. According to Enrique Varona, a former independence fighter and writer who was responsible for implementing educational reforms under the first United States government of intervention:

'A los blancos de Cuba, por componer las clases dirigentes, les importa atraer a los negros a las normas rectoras de la cultura occidental: a su indumentaria, a sus bailes, a su teatro, a su música: les importa acercarlos tanto al conocimiento científico de las leyes naturales como ojearlos del fetichismo.'⁴

In terms of religious practice, a number of Protestant denominations arrived with the US invasion of 1898 and divided up the country between them. These became an important element in the North Americanization of Cuba. The Catholic Church, which had never successfully taken root in Cuba outside the urban areas and among the elite, lost even more acceptance among the population when it sided with Spain during the wars of independence. At that time, both Kardecian spiritism and Freemasonry had gained ground in Cuba and there was a strong freethinking and anti-clerical tradition. This was reflected in the republican Constitution which decreed that Church and State should be separate.

From the period of the abolition of slavery in the 1880s, Afro-Cubans had been encouraged to leave the African religious and cultural traditions they had preserved and recreated in the *cabildos de nación* and to gather in *sociedades de instrucción y recreo* where it was intended that they should acquire a European-style education and culture. Yet such attempts had limited success, it seems. As police chief Rafael Roche y Monteagudo noted in the early years of the republic, some of the sociedades were actually disguised cabildos:

'regenerando de una manera más o menos disimulada, escudadas por un permiso oficial, tan repugnante fetichismo, que está en

abierta oposición con las doctrinas y tendencias de la época'.⁵

Thus the African-derived religious practices became harder to monitor as the new structures drove them even further underground.

The desire to create a modern nation involved attempts to whiten the population by promoting immigration from Europe, including Spain. Importing migrant labour from neighboring Caribbean islands such as Haiti and Jamaica was also banned. But if racial homogeneity through *blanqueamiento* (whitening of the population) could not be achieved quickly enough, it was hoped that cultural homogeneity might also provide a defense against the Afro-Cubans who still formed a third of the population. Their cultural practices became undesirable per se, but even more alarmingly, also the source of possible contamination. Manuel Sanguily (1848 - 1925), a journalist and veteran of the Ten Years War who proposed the subsidized immigration of Spanish families, was told by an inspector of police that 90 Spaniards from Asturias were members of an Abakuá *potencia*.⁶ Conversely, some members of the Afro-Cuban elite, rather than asserting the value of their African heritage, campaigned vehemently against what they regarded as anachronistic religious and cultural practices not befitting their status in a free Cuba. They believed or hoped that minimising cultural differences would help to lessen discrimination against them.

BRUJOS AND WITCH-HUNTS

All of this meant that the early years of the Republic witnessed a period of intense repression of Afro-Cuban religious and cultural practices. This began when, apparently in response to public demand, the first Cuban president Tomás Estrada Palma launched a campaign against Afro-Cuban cultural expressions.⁷ From 1902 onwards, the press began reporting 'cases' of *brujería*, as the Afro-Cuban practices were known. Perhaps the most widely publicized case was that of Zoila, a White child who was allegedly abducted and murdered for ritual purposes by a *brujo* called Domingo Boucourt in 1904. It was suggested that her blood and heart had been used for ritual purposes. Juana Tabares, the African woman for whom the sacrifice was allegedly made, had gone mad as a result of a *daño* (magical harm) done to her by whites during the slavery period and which could supposedly be cured by the blood of the girl.⁸

Álvarez Chávez' study of a number of alleged ritual murders between 1908 and 1923 actually shows that three of the crimes were perpetrated by Whites who dismembered the corpses so that they would appear to relate to *brujería*. In most of the remaining cases, the accused were released

for lack of evidence. However, as Palmié has noted, the effect of the press campaigns against *brujos* (sorcerers) was to link Afro-Cuban cultural otherness with the murder of children.⁹

As religious freedom was enshrined in the 1901 Constitution, the officials who appealed to Congress to declare *brujería* a crime were forced to acknowledge that Afro-Cuban practices were religions.¹⁰ This meant that their suppression could only be justified by focussing on the alleged associated criminal activities. As Roche y Monteagudo put it:

'La brujería entre nosotros entronizada y por nosotros consentida con ofensa de todo progreso social aparece ser, no obstante su carácter religioso, contraria y enemiga de la humanidad'.¹¹

During the wave of anti-*brujo* mania, a young white lawyer Fernando Ortiz Fernández (1881 - 1969) began to research a book on what he called the *Hampa afro-cubana* [Afro-Cuban underworld]. At the time he was studying law in Spain. Following the publication of a book entitled *La mala vida en Madrid* (1901) by two Spanish criminologists, Ortiz was invited to write something similar about Cuba. As he had no prior knowledge of the subject, he read *Los criminales de Cuba* (1882), by police inspector José Trujillo Monagas, which described the campaigns against the Abakuá secret society. He also visited the Museo de Ultramar in Madrid which exhibited Abakuá ritual objects that had been seized by former Governor of Havana Carlos Rodríguez Batista during his own attempts to stamp out Abakuá.¹² Ortiz drew on the Italian criminologist Lombroso's theory of atavism. This assumed that criminals in a civilized society display primitive biological characteristics. Ortiz modified the theory, seeking cultural rather than biological explanations for such backwardness.¹³

Ortiz' book, *Los negros brujos*, was published in 1905. Despite its pseudo-scientific premise, the work was the first to study the Afro-Cuban religious and cultural forms in relation to their African origins. It acknowledged the African influence on national traits at a time when this was obscured by both the white elite and the Afro-Cuban intelligentsia. Though Ortiz was, as Stephan Palmié notes, 'compelled to construe hitherto fairly vague conceptions of cultural Africanity into a social pathogen, the extirpation of which would form a precondition for the achievement of Cuban modernity'.¹⁴

Ortiz also made extensive use of the newspaper reports of *brujería* cases. The theory he put forward was that the persistence of African atavisms could help to explain the apparent preponderance of Afro-Cubans in the criminal



Figura 42. Bocú, negro brujo condenado a muerte.

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Figura 43. Carta autógrafa del negro Bocú.

Fernando Ortiz, *Los negros brujos*

underworld.¹⁵ The apparent refusal of some Creole blacks to deculturate meant that adherence to Afro-Cuban practices therefore implied not only inherent backwardness but also wilful criminality. Ortiz proposed that suppressing the practices would liberate believers and enable them to ascend to successive zones of culture.¹⁶ Of course, for many Afro-Cubans, their practices were vehicles for cultural and religious expression, providing self-esteem and social solidarity in a situation of disempower-

ment. Ortiz also noted that the religious indifference which was characteristic of Cuba enabled blacks to preserve their own 'fetishism'. But he believed that this religious indifference would also eventually overcome all religions. Like many others of the period, Ortiz felt that 'intellectual progress' would inevitably lead to the eventual extinction of the practices. He observed that when the 13,000 African-born Cubans died, so would belief in Obatalá.¹⁷

'BARBARISM VS. CIVILIZATION'

The alleged battle between African 'barbarism' and Western civilisation was also used to promote and justify repression when the elite became uncomfortable with Afro-Cuban challenges to the status quo. Indeed, frustration at the failure of political parties to represent their interests led to several attempts by Afro-Cubans to organise politically along racial lines. The response to these indicates the degree to which they were perceived as threatening by the establishment. The most significant was the Partido Independiente de Color (PIC) [Independent Party of Colour], founded in 1908, which demanded social reform and full equality for Afro-Cubans. Despite the fact that the PIC neither advocated separatism nor prevented whites from joining, it was denounced as racist and threatening to national unity.¹⁸ The Party was declared illegal in 1910 and the fear of another Haiti was revived when some members were imprisoned for allegedly conspiring to establish a black republic. In May 1912, an armed protest against the ban was organized in the eastern province of Oriente, a province where its support base was strong, and up to 4,000 Afro-Cubans were massacred. The massacre was represented as a struggle between civilization and barbarism.¹⁹

The aftermath of the massacre saw an increase in raids on Afro-Cuban cult groups and revived the persecution of Abakuá. A rising tide of African witchcraft was seen to be complementing black political unrest in a dangerous manner.²⁰ This was in spite of the fact that, while the Partido Independiente de Color did not follow the Afro-Cuban elite in attributing Afro-Cuban disadvantage solely to educational and cultural factors, neither did it privilege Afro-Cuban culture. On the contrary, *Previsión*, the Party newspaper, proposed that *brujería* and traditional healing be eradicated as reminders of a servile past. Although the PIC did not promote Afro-Cuban practices, they were depicted in caricatures wearing attributes of *santería* and Abakuá.²¹

The Bando de Policía of 1913 forbade the use of African instruments and any found during raids were confiscated. There was also a campaign against *son*, a black popular musical genre. Many *son* players were also *santeros* and Abakuá members.²² While hitherto only Abakuá *potencias* had experienced persistent official repression, now all

Afro-Cuban religious and cultural practices were associated with criminality, a view that persists even today. The response to the PIC also exposed the divisions within the Afro-Cuban community. The *sociedades de color*, along with Juan Gualberto Gómez and the Afro-Cuban senator Martín Morúa Delgado, opposed it, claiming that the 1895 revolution had erased racial difference.²³

The events of 1912 also highlighted the antagonism between black and white Abakuá members. Regla, a predominantly working class town located across the bay from Havana, had many Abakuá *potencias* or societies, even though the majority of its population was white. Manuel de Jesús Capaz (or Chuchú), a contractor on the docks and a personal friend of President José Miguel Gómez, was the *iyamba* or head of a white Regla *potencia*. In 1912 a strike at the Havana docks was broken by Capaz and the *reglanos* (workers from Regla), used the excuse of the so-called race war to justify crossing the bay to take work away from black habaneros.²⁴

Yet as this incident also demonstrates, links between members of Afro-Cuban cults and politicians also appeared to be hampering the drive to remove markers of African-ness from the nation. Despite attempts to limit the universal voting rights enshrined in the constitution through literacy and property ownership requirements, the Afro-Cuban electorate was significant enough for their vote to be sought by political parties for white candidates, in particular those of the Liberal Party. The Liberal President Gómez, who held office from 1909-1913, visited the black societies and apparently used Afro-Cuban symbols in political rallies. *Comparsas* or carnival processions, which were banned at various times by legislation, were customarily hired to promote white candidates. Though the opportunistic manipulation could as easily be reversed, with the same politicians signing legislation banning *comparsas* and *rumba*.²⁵ Ortiz felt that the *brujos'* political influence was ultimately more threatening to the project to civilize the Afro-Cuban population than their propagation of outdated superstitions. He stated that if they received political protection it would lead to ethnic discord and 'un retroceso en la civilización de la raza de color en Cuba'.²⁶

In contrast to the British Caribbean and US, few among the Afro-Cuban elite favored black separatism or pan-Africanism as the strategy for achieving equality. While many Afro-Cuban intellectuals attempted to distance themselves (at least publicly) from African-derived cultural and religious practices, some because they believed or hoped that acquiring Western culture would help lessen discrimination against them. Others, like the West Africans of the same period, did so because they felt the practices were inappropriate to the modern era.

Yet by the end of the second decade of the century, members of the Afro-Cuban elite did finally respond to the anti-*brujo* campaigns, expressing concern that the alleged cultural differences between black and white Cubans was being used to stigmatize the Afro-Cuban population. In a series of articles in the newspaper *El Día* in 1918, which invited prominent Afro-Cubans to suggest a remedy to the problem of *brujería*, most correspondents emphasized that the persistence of *brujería* was a reflection on the moral and cultural environment of the whole nation rather than of one race. A letter from a 'brujo arrepentido [repentant brujo]' referred to 'esa canalla sin raza [these scoundrels of all races]'. All the correspondents concurred in stating that presenting the practices as an Afro-Cuban problem overlooked the fact that whites, not just members of the lower classes, but also the rich and powerful, were participating in the practices, 'some because they genuinely believe and others because it suits them to do so' and were also the protectors of the *brujos*.²⁷ As Walterio Carbonell would later observe: '[s]us santos no fueron proscritos porque la burguesía continuó adorándolos'.²⁸ Public condemnation frequently went hand-in-hand with private participation. Interestingly, one correspondent estimated that 70% of Cuban homes displayed objects relating to *brujería*. Overall, most correspondents felt the solution was not repression but education.²⁹

A correlation can clearly be drawn between the anti-*brujo* campaigns and particular moments when Afro-Cubans were demanding their rights as citizens. There were further outbreaks in the 1920s and 1930s when immigration from other Caribbean islands, particularly Jamaica and Haiti, raised fears that the mestizo Cuban nation would be swamped by members of the black race who were bringing even more savage forms of *brujería* with them.³⁰ There was another wave when Afro-Cubans pressed for legislation to enforce the clause prohibiting racial discrimination in the 1940 constitution.

The repression of 1912 discouraged further black separatist political organization. Both the white and Afro-Cuban elites used the version of Cuban nationalism created in the wars of independence to stifle such movements by decrying them as unpatriotic. It left Afro-Cubans with a limited range of options. Some attempted to use what leverage they had within the mainstream political parties. It has also been suggested that the on-going frustration of Afro-Cuban aspirations led to a flourishing of the Afro-Cuban cults, which permitted collective self-affirmation and resistance to the ideology of the white elite.³¹

AFROCUBANISMO

Nevertheless, in the 1920s there emerged a movement that did not insist on the wholesale elimination of the African

cultural heritage. The continuing US takeover of both land and the economy fuelled a sense of nationalism and, as during the wars of independence, some whites once again began to ally themselves with their Afro-Cuban compatriots in order to resist a foreign enemy. Elements of Afro-Cuban culture now began to be appropriated as nationalist alternatives to US dominance. The bongo drum became an 'antidote to Wall Street' as Alejo Carpentier put it.

Some Afro-Cubans felt that the movement was a passing craze which ultimately did not benefit them. Romulo Lachatañeré would later describe it as a response to European trends which inspired white Cubans to romanticize something which they did not bother to try to understand and which they would again condemn when it suited them. Gustavo Urrutia concurred, pointing out that, instead of recognising this as an 'invasion of ethnic psychology', whites regarded it as a form of tourism and a spectacle. He also described it a new form of servitude for blacks.³²

By the late 1920s Ortiz, whose early work influenced the *afrocubanismo* movement, had also changed direction: 'The prosecutor of Afro-Cuban religions became proselytizer'.³³ Now, rather than simply seeking the African origins of Afro-Cuban culture he began to examine the processes of cultural syncretism. One important result was his theory of transculturation. Like José Martí, he sought to dismiss racial categories by proposing a new and integrated Cuban culture and a community in which purely racial factors would have lost their capacity for divisiveness. Yet, Ortiz also followed other Creole intellectuals in privileging the Hispanic component in Cuban culture and regarding African culture as an *aporte* [contribution] to Cuban culture.

Both Ortiz' influence and *afrocubanismo* made some Afro-Cuban cultural manifestations more acceptable. Ortiz organized the first public concert of Afro-Cuban religious music in 1936 using consecrated *batá* drums. The increase in nationalist sentiment after the Machado regime, the influence of North American jazz, and the need for local color by the tourist industry meant that many performers of Afro-Cuban religious music crossed over into the secular realm and back again.

Nevertheless, few among the Afro-Cuban intellectuals of the period openly defended the African religious practices. And indeed this may sometimes also have reflected the anti-clerical, freethinking belief that all religions, or at least their public manifestations, were undesirable in a modern, scientific state. One who did do so was Gustavo Urrutia. In four radio talks given in 1935, he lamented the failure of Martí's doctrine and the belief of *negros ilustrados* [enlightened blacks] that they must internalize the social and cultural codes of the dominant group in order to integrate.³⁴

At a time when black cultural traditions such as drums, dance and ritual were revolutionizing Western culture, Afro-Cubans themselves were not defending their culture. Yet, he himself indicated why they might be reluctant to do so, at least in public, when he stated that Afro-Cubans who exalted the merits of their race were accused of spreading *ñañiguismo* and *santería*. Nonetheless, he stated that, as Afro-Cubans advanced culturally, the manifestations of African culture would gradually disappear and only be preserved as folkloric elements:

**'No estamos en época de sociedades se-
cretas ni de grandes fervores religiosos. A
nuestra civilización maquinista y positivista
hay que acudir con una cultura técnica.'**

And for Afro-Cubans, this was regarded as particularly necessary in order to overcome the obstacle of prejudice.³⁵ Another defender of Afro-Cuban practices was Lino D'Ou, the mulatto intellectual, former PIC member and member of the Sociedad de Estudios Afrocubanos who also dedicated himself to his duties as an *Abakuá* member and gave talks aimed at obtaining respect and recognition for the *Abakuá* secret society.³⁶

A few years later, another Afro-Cuban, Romulo Lachatañeré, would criticize the studies of Afro-Cuban culture of the early years of Republic. Although they made this a legitimate area of study, he felt the studies ignored the views of Afro-Cubans and not only misrepresented but also trivialised their religious and cultural practices. He rightly linked the contempt for the study of this aspect of Afro-Cuban life as one of a number of forms of racial discrimination. Interestingly, Lachatañeré distinguished between African-derived elements which form part of Cuban culture in formation and those, like religion, which typified the Afro-Cuban character. He also called the *regla de ocha* or *Lucumí* religion 'la religión o subreligión extra oficial de Cuba'.³⁷

Like Urrutia, Juan René Betancourt, President of the Federación Nacional de Sociedades Negras de Cuba³⁸ would also later warn of the dangers facing Afro-Cubans who felt that assimilation was the route to progress as this meant absorbing everything of the dominant class and erasing themselves. As he stated in his book *Doctrina Negra* (1955), the dilution into a national whole transformed elements of the practices and also obscured the importance of Afro-Cuban religions, not only in their past role within a wider, national struggle, but for what they represented for black people:

**'A una raza como la nuestra; a la que han
privado de su base geográfica y de su idioma
vernáculo; sin economía, odiada y engaña-
da, si se le priva también de su religión y de**

sus tradiciones no le quedará motivo alguno para unirse y luchar por su destino.'³⁹

The Afro-Cuban cult leaders: the *babalawos*, *tata ngangas* and *lyambas* kept the religious traditions alive but also the spirit of rebellion. The dominant race had appropriated the drum and assimilated whatever could be assimilated from Africanity but Betancourt pointed out that something valuable would be lost if watered-down forms of the Afro-Cuban religions and traditions were used to symbolize *cubanía* at the expense of their role in providing a sense-of *black* self-worth.

Walterio Carbonell followed Urrutia and Betancourt in stressing the role of Afro-Cuban religion and culture in building the Cuban nation and defining Cuban-ness. He was also critical of the view, expressed by Ortiz, that Afro-Cuban forms were merely an *aporte* or contribution to national culture. He pointed out that this was a misrepresentation of Cuban history as between 1800 and 1850 the majority of the population was African. This meant that African religions had more adherents than Catholicism.⁴⁰

CONCLUSION

The socialist Cuban revolution continued the anticlerical tradition and also had its own modernization project involving the creation of a 'New Man'. Religion was deemed to be one of the ideological influences likely to hinder social development. In the 1970s, when scientific atheism was introduced and all religions were regarded as un-revolutionary, the inherited secretive nature of the Afro-Cuban practices made them easier to hide from official scrutiny than attending Sunday mass. Maintaining internal aspects of the practices if not the external ones allowed some Afro-Cuban religious practitioners to accommodate the double identity of believer and revolutionary. This explains why, although the revolutionary policy on religion produced a significant drop in the practice of Christianity, some of the spaces occupied by the Afro-Cuban practices remained largely untouched. Not only that, the revolution even appeared to have given a new impulse to the Afro-Cuban religious practices.

Walterio Carbonell had feared that the Afro-Cuban religious organizations, like all others, would be denounced as the opium of the people, emphasizing their progressive role in the past as political organizations which combatted slavery and Spanish colonialism. Yet the revolutionary leadership felt that the sector most strongly associated with the religions had benefited most from the social transformations of the revolution and was thus more likely to support it.

The shifting and often contradictory response to Afro-Cuban cultural forms by successive Cuban governments is

complicated by the fact that, as Afro-Cuban intellectuals demonstrated during the anti-*brujería* campaigns, predicated cultural allegiance on the basis of race can often prove misleading. They themselves rejected practices of African origin, while members of the white elite frequently participated in them. As a result of on-going processes of cultural exchange, the Afro-Cuban heritage is not exclusively black, nor is the cultural heritage of black Cubans exclusively African. While marked off from 'white' society as a sphere of supposedly powerful mystical energies, 'African' cultural forms have also provided an alternative set of cultural practices that can be activated by different sectors of the population in different ways, at different times. Carbonell also observed that during the Republic, the conflict between the populations of Spanish and African origin had appeared to diminish in the face of North American culture. Whites then adopted African music as their own and turned to the religions they had condemned. This explains why, in certain historical periods, repression contained an element of more or less deliberate preservation of these practices; what Stephan Palmié has called the 'collusion between the Cuban state and its African deities'.⁴¹

One consequence of the appropriation of Afro-Cuban cultural and religious forms has been that it has limited attempts to set apart a black culture of and for black people as opposed to a component of national culture.⁴² Afro-Cubans and their cultural forms can still be located both inside and outside of Cuban-ness and blackness can either be subsumed under rhetoric of *mestizaje* or used as a discriminating factor. The origins, endurance and past role of the religious and cultural practices are testimony to the resistance of African slaves and their descendants. As such they can and do represent a black identity that is, as Betancourt Bencomo stressed in the 1950s, important for Afro-Cuban self-esteem. The *convivencia* [spirit of co-existence] of the 1990s was certainly inspired by fears on the part of the leadership that religion could create an attitude of resistance in the population, especially in times of economic and ideological crisis. While most practitioners today stress that theirs is an inclusive religion some, drawing on past role of these religions and also inspired by foreign models of racial discourse, also use them to contest the racially unmarked visions of Cubanness that the State would now like the Afro-Cuban religions to represent.

NOTAS

- ¹ Wole Soyinka, *Myth, literature and the African world* (Cambridge: CUP, 1991).
- ² Aline Helg, *Our rightful share: the Afro-Cuban struggle for equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), pp. 96-97. After independence, American political control of and intervention in Cuban internal affairs was enshrined in the Platt Amendment, an appendix to the Cuban Constitution that was imposed by the US as a condition of withdrawal.
- ³ See Louis A. Pérez, *On becoming Cuban: identity, nationality, and culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), pp. 11, 94.
- ⁴ 'It is incumbent on whites in Cuba, who make up the ruling classes, to win blacks over to the guiding principles of western culture: its apparel, dances, theater, music; it is as much in their [the whites'] interest to bring them [the blacks] closer to scientific knowledge of the laws of nature as it is to drive them away from fetishism', cited in Elias José Entralgo, *La Liberación Étnica Cubana* (La Habana: Imprenta de la Universidad de la Habana, 1953), p. 172.
- ⁵ Regenerating, in a more or less covert way, or shielded by an official permit, such repugnant fetishism, which is in open opposition to the doctrines and tendencies of the age', Rafael Roche y Monteagudo, *La policía y sus misterios*, 2nd ed. (La Habana: Impr.de la Rambla, 1914), p. 117. See also Fernando Ortiz, *Los cabildos y la fiesta afrocubanos del Día de Reyes* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1992 [1921, 1920-5]), pp.12, 17.
- ⁶ Cited in *La Liberación Étnica*, p. 172. It has been said that one of the reasons that Andrés Petit, the Isué (head) of the Bacocó potencia sold the secret of Abakuá to a group of whites in 1857 was because he hoped that the admittance of whites would help shield Abakuá from persecution by the authorities if it were no longer a "cosa de negros" but a "cosa de cubanos". Though as the first multiracial associations in Cuba where whites were not only associating with blacks but in some cases also being ordered around by them, the Abakuá potencias or brotherhoods were seen as very threatening in a slavery society and thus actually suffered more repression than other Afro-Cuban associations.
- ⁷ Estrada Palma, the candidate backed by the Americans in the first republican elections, had been living in the US since 1883, spoke English, had converted to Quakerism and acquired American tastes and views, like many other Cubans of his class.
- ⁸ Helg, *Our rightful share*, pp. 107ff; Ernesto Álvarez Chávez, *El crimen de la niña Cecilia: la brujería en Cuba como fenómeno social (1902-25)* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1991), pp. 29, 56. This story clearly underscores white fears of black revenge for slavery.
- ⁹ Álvarez Chávez, *El crimen*, pp. 27-8; Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), pp. 30, 211-212.
- ¹⁰ The Constitution stated that the profession of all religions and of all cults was allowed, 'without other limitation than respect for Christian morality'.
- ¹¹ 'The brujería entrenched among us and which we tolerate with injury to all social progress, seems to be, its religious character notwithstanding, contrary to and an enemy of humanity'. Roche Monteagudo, *La policía y sus misterios*, pp. 99- 100.
- ¹² The Governor was so knowledgeable about Abakuá that Ortiz believed he had been initiated. See Lydia Cabrera, *El monte* (La Habana: Ed SI-MAR, 1996), p. 193.
- ¹³ Ortiz, *Los negros brujos* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, [1905] 1995), p. 17.
- ¹⁴ Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*, p. 30.
- ¹⁵ Ortiz, *Los negros brujos*, p. 17. Ortiz made a point of noting that the practices did not habitually lead to homicide and also that what he called "brujería fanaticism" could be inspired by charitable motives, despite using criminal methods to achieve its ends, *ibid.*, p.130.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 193.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.* pp. 138, 181.
- ¹⁸ The PIC was the first black party in the hemisphere, preceding the Frente Negra Brasileira which was set up in Sao Paulo in 1931, Helg, *Our rightful share*, p. 4.
- ¹⁹ Tomás Fernández Robaina, *El negro en Cuba 1902 - 1958: apuntes para la historia de la lucha contra la discriminación racial* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1990), pp. 68ff; Helg, *Our rightful share*, pp. 165, 218ff.
- ²⁰ See Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*.
- ²¹ There is, however, some degree of ambiguity as PIC material also made references to African influences in Spain and to Olorun-Olofi, the Yoruba supreme deity. In fact, a horse [associated by some with Changó] was the Party's symbol. Some PIC members certainly held to Afro-Cuban traditions, for example, Lino D'ou, the mulatto intellectual who became a congressman, was an Abakuá member. See Helg, *Our rightful share*, pp. 3, 148ff. Trial reports in the National Archive list Abakuá attributes among items seized from the home of one alleged conspirator, Audiencia de La Habana 529-1, Causa 321/910. Relación de las piezas de convicción ocupadas en la Causa no 321/910 por conspiración para la rebelión. Juzgado Especial.
- ²² Ortiz, *Los cabildos*, p. 22; Robin Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness: afrocubanismo and artistic revolution in Havana, 1920-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), pp. 31, 71, 94ff.
- ²³ Helg, *Our rightful share*, pp. 126, 146; Alejandro De la Fuente, *A nation for all: race inequality and politics in twentieth-century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), pp. 77, 360 n.100. (1854-1933). A mulatto, born of slave parents, Juan Gualberto Gómez was one of the most outstanding Afro-Cuban intellectuals of his time. A journalist and politician, he acted as the Cuban representative of the revolutionary party founded by Martí. Morúa Delgado had presented an amendment to electoral law in February 1910, passed several months later, which proscribed the formation of racially exclusive political parties.
- ²⁴ Rafael López Valdés, *Componentes Africanos en el Etnos Cubano* (La Habana: Editorial Unión: 1996), pp. 169ff.
- ²⁵ See Ortiz, *Los cabildos*, pp. 21-22; De la Fuente, *A nation for all*, p. 220.
- ²⁶ 'a setback in the civilizing of the colored race in Cuba', *Los negros brujos*, pp. 149-50.
- ²⁷ 'El problema de la brujería tratado por los hombres de color', *El Día*, 3 September 1918, p.1; *ibid.*, 7 September 1918, back page.
- ²⁸ 'Their saints were not banned, because the bourgeoisie continued worshipping them'. Walterio Carbonell, *Crítica: como surgió una cultura nacional* (La Habana: Editorial Yaka: 1960), pp. 25-6.
- ²⁹ *El Día*, 25 September 1918, p.1.
- ³⁰ Álvarez Chávez, *El crimen*, 33. The ban on black immigration was lifted in 1913 when President Gómez allowed the US United Fruit

Company to bring in Haitian laborers. The sugar plantations had expanded eastwards to Oriente and Camagüey, zones which had the lowest populations. There was a shortage of labor and around 150,000 Jamaicans and Haitians entered over ten years.

³¹ Hugh Thomas, *Cuba: or the pursuit of freedom* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1971), p. 524; Helg *Our rightful share*, pp.246-7.

³² Rómulo Lachatañeré, *El sistema religioso de los afrocubanos* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1992), pp. 84, 401; Gustavo Urrutia, *Cuarto[sic] charlas radiofónicas* (La Habana: n.p. 1935), pp. 6-7. Lachatañeré (1909-52) was the first Afro-Cuban intellectual to write extensively on Afro-Cuban religious practices in the republican period. Urrutia (1881-1958), an Afro-Cuban architect and journalist, was one of the most important black intellectuals of the Republican period, though his work has largely been ignored since the 1959 Revolution.

³³ Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *The Cuban condition: translation and identity in modern Cuban literature* (Cambridge: CUP: 1989), p.161 n.20). Ortiz' change of heart is attributed by practitioners to his becoming initiated into Santería.

³⁴ I am indebted to Tomás Fernández Robaina for providing me with a copy of the published version of these radio talks.

³⁵ «We are not in an age of secret societies or of great religious fervor. Our mechanistic and positivist civilization requires technical culture», Urrutia, *Cuarto charlas*, p.19.

³⁶ Urrutia, *Cuarto charlas*, p.19. The son of a Spaniard and a black woman of mixed descent, who apparently could have passed for white, D'OU worried that equality could mean the loss of black values. He declared that he was proud to be black and acknowledged his devotion to his black mother rather than seeking to deny her in order to melt into the "white torrent", 'Ideales de una raza', *Diario de la Marina*, 27 July 1930.

³⁷ Rómulo Lachatañeré, *El sistema religioso de los afrocubanos* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1992), p. 192.

³⁸ This organization was disbanded shortly after the 1959 Revolution for purposes of national unity,

³⁹ "For a race such as ours, which has been removed from its geographic base and deprived of its vernacular language; without an economic foundation, despised and deceived, if its religion and traditions are also removed there will be no reason to unite and fight for its destiny...the religion which suits a people best is its own", Juan René Betancourt Bencomo, *Doctrina negra: La única teoría certera contra la discriminación racial en Cuba* (La Habana: P. Fernández, [1955]), p. 65.

⁴⁰ Walterio Carbonell, *Crítica: como surgió una cultura nacional* (La Habana: Editorial Yaka:1960), pp. 110-111. An intellectual, historian and specialist on slavery and Afro-Cuban religion who was a member of the Communist Party from the 1930s. He was responsible for the Party's renewed interest in the racial question in the early 1950s but he was expelled from the Party in 1953 for being perceived as a black chauvinist and *Crítica* was banned by the Castro government.

⁴¹ Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and scientists: explorations in Afro-Cuban modernity and tradition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), p.232.

⁴² On the occasion of the Pope's visit in 1998, the (white) novelist and then Minister of Culture Abel Prieto claimed that, by attracting white followers into an expression of African culture, Afro-Cuban beliefs played an important role in helping stamp out racism in Cuba.