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Willful Spirits and Weakened Flesh

Historicizing the Initiation Narrative in Afro-Cuban Religions

ELIZABETH PÉREZ

Abstract

This article examines the ceremonial practice of smallest scale and greatest prevalence in Afro-Cuban religions: elders' oral narration of initiation as an "unchosen choice," pursued solely as a response to affliction. This article marshals evidence to show that the conditions of scholars' involvement in these traditions have contributed to the dearth of analysis concerning these stories and proposes that the initiation narrative be classified as a distinct speech genre, with both traceable historical sources and concrete social effects. Drawing on several years of ethnographic research, the author contends that the verbal relation of such narratives has redounded to the enlargement of Afro-Cuban traditions, chiefly by promoting the spirits' transformative reality and healing power. Both the methodological critique and theoretical argument are offered in hopes of redirecting the study of Africana religions toward embodied micropractices that assist in the gradual coalescence of social identities and subjectivity.

[He] was learning to be a healer as part of his being cured from a deeply disturbing affliction. In so doing he was going through a cycle of affliction, salvation, and transformation that seems as eternal as humanity. Yet the power of this cycle stems not from eternity, but from the active engagement with history that affliction depends upon for its cure.

—MICHAEL TAUSSIG¹

In the study of Afro-Cuban religious formations, the lion's share of scholarship has centered on rites of passage, ceremonial protocols (including dance and the assembly of altars), and ritual discourse (such as oracular utterances and praise songs).² Lucumí, popularly referred to as Santería, continues to generate volumes of increasingly sophisticated studies elaborating on these themes, not only in the storied cities of Havana and Regla but also farther to the south, in Oriente, in a number of North American metropolises, and transnationally.³ Indeed, it was in a Lucumí community located on the South Side of Chicago that I came to base a long-term and ongoing ethnographic project on orisha worship. For over twenty-five years, the head of this community, called Ilé Laroye, has been Nilaja Campbell, a priestess of Eleguá, master of crossroads and messenger of the gods; renowned orisha praise singer; sixteen-cowries diviner; Spiritist medium; and elder in the Kongo-inspired tradition Palo Monte. It was within Nilaja's home—one that often rang with mischievous laughter—that I became most intimately acquainted with the institutions documented in the literature on Afro-Cuban religions, as well as aspects of everyday religious life that have eluded serious analysis.⁴

One of these was the language that practitioners employ to refer to initiation, both their own and others'. Among the younger members of Ilé Laroye, including the daughters, nieces, and other family members of elders, it was not infrequently announced that they were "initiating" me into African American culture, and that I was becoming "ghetto."⁵ Being ghetto was understood at that moment to be a matter of class more than color; being ghetto, in either the pejorative or positive senses of the term—cheap, ignorant, and ersatz; or real, resourceful, and adept at improvisation—did not mean inhabiting a geographical place but, rather, acting in a manner informed by a ghettoized social location.⁶ I was generally perceived as having a bourgeois, if not "bougie," upbringing, and my initiation into "ghettoness" was cast as the result of transformative pedagogical endeavor.⁷ For instance, after explaining that the nearby Evergreen Mall has been called "Ever-Black" by residents of the South Side for as long as anyone could remember, one of my companions interjected, with impeccable comic timing, "We're *inducting* you," into a style of relating to "ghetto" spaces that had to be learned, along with modes of bodily carriage, comportment, and internalized dispositions categorized as "ghetto."⁸ Signs of my successful initiation into this radically ambivalent modality of blackness would be teasingly identified and celebrated, then recalled triumphantly, days (or sometimes months) later.⁹

One afternoon, Nilaja's goddaughter Imani Crawford was washing dishes with me during an *ocha* birthday when she exclaimed, "Her is ghetto *now*. Her initiated!" Imani was describing with approval a recent instance of

behavior thought to prove, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that my catechesis was complete. Such initiation was constructed as a vector of power: I was a subject upon whom overwhelming forces had acted.¹⁰ There was no hint that I or anyone else could have resisted initiation into ghettoness, once the prospect had been raised, any more than one marked for *ocha*—that is, ordination—could possibly refuse it. I cite this hyper-local analogy of cultural and religious initiation not only to illustrate the “tactical essentialism” occasionally deployed by its African American members, and their appropriation of Lucumí discourse to express emergent, dynamic understandings of class and racial identity.¹¹ I am also interested in emphasizing that, for all of my informants, initiation meant acceding to a differentiation and hierarchical ordering of persons in which changes in one’s “socio-ontological” status were to be confirmed by elders through the assessment of conduct, not physical appearance.¹² And—to arrive at what is the central concern of this article—no one spoke of initiation as a decision, made with pleasure or at the behest of reason. It was instead discussed as a sort of unchosen choice.¹³

During my first tentative forays into the ethnographic field—first, in Chicago, Boston, and Miami, then in Havana and Guantánamo—I had made a point of posing the same question to Lucumí priests: “Why did you get initiated?”¹⁴ Beginning with William James in 1902, the scholarship on conversion had tended to locate causal explanations for religious change in interpersonal crises or persistent psychological tensions, resolved through the adoption of a new community’s beliefs and practices.¹⁵ I therefore expected my interlocutors to describe their discovery of and eventual commitment to the Lucumí deities in almost romantic terms, perhaps as a means of recruiting me to their service. However, again and again, the answers I received made it clear that they did not get initiated out of desire. In fact, the elders recounted their resistance to initiation in extravagant detail, emphasizing their initial hostility to the Lucumí tradition rather than their espousal of its spirits. Conceptualized theologically as a wedding between divine husband and human wife, *ocha* was portrayed not as the sacralization of a love match but as an arranged marriage or ritualized bride abduction. As in Ilé Laroye, initiates said they only surrendered to the orishas because they faced incapacitating infirmity or adversity, and *ocha* stood the only chance of saving them. Ordination into the priesthood was framed as an alternative of “last resort.”¹⁶

Shifting my focus, then, to the autobiographical stories of initiates, my purpose in this article is to establish that the oral narration of initiation as

an “unchosen choice” is the ritual practice simultaneously of smallest scale and greatest prevalence in Lucumí. I argue that the initiation narrative constitutes a distinct speech genre and may be observed across Black Atlantic traditions, although the metaphors enlisted to articulate the exigency of priestly service to the spirits differs depending on practitioners’ sociocultural milieu. In other words, while few may analogize getting initiated and becoming ghetto, elders consistently reproduce a conventional communicative pattern that calls out for greater attention. I begin by summarizing the main features of *ocha* and delineating the norms governing the recitation of initiation narratives. I draw on my ethnographic fieldwork to explore one story in depth and contend that accounts such as these have combined with other ritual performances to grind the hermeneutical lenses used to discern affliction, interpret illness as a symptom of nascent vocation, and present ordination as the ultimate healing ritual. After briefly considering the reasons that these stories remain under-theorized in the scholarship on Afro-diasporic religions, I conclude by suggesting some possible historical antecedents for the speech genre they comprise.

My principal objective is to reorient the study of Black Atlantic religions toward an interrogation of religious micropractices, in particular those that progressively implicate their performers in the material and conceptual worlds of virtuosi. This project is intended to complement, rather than supplant, sociologically informed efforts to track the transnational social and cultural networks that link practitioners to their communities.¹⁷ Both are of the essence, for the scholarly agenda concerning these traditions has tended to be nudged along by religious authorities, and the academic and popular literature on Lucumí has thus far provided a series of comprehensive yet diagrammatic mappings of the religion almost exclusively from the point of view of ordained elders—often from that of initiated scholars themselves.¹⁸ Many of the resulting investigations have given short shrift to devotees’ qualms concerning their ritual interventions, refrained from problematizing their autobiographical narratives, and left the somewhat misleading impression that practitioners understand the strictures imposed on them exclusively according to West African Yorùbá precedents. As a result, the question of religious subject formation has been elided, and the texture of embodied experience flattened.

In addition to compiling data that might engender more complex future scholarship, the methodological critique that follows aims to be instructive not only for scholars of Africana traditions but also for those engaged in the study of religion more generally, for it exposes analytical blind spots

unintentionally created by academics' involvement in the communities they research. Contemporary historians of religions in particular have tended to concentrate on rituals amenable to analysis as containers of "meaning," defined by a religious elite, and extrapolated from their placement within cultural systems, often themselves delineated by those advantageously situated within the economy of secrecy and power within their respective traditions.¹⁹ We have only begun to examine modalities of religious praxis that assist in the gradual coalescence of practitioners' social identities and religious subjectivity. Accordingly, the approach undertaken here connects the everyday acquisition of a spirit idiom in informal conversation to processes of religious self-fashioning among practitioners with varying levels of status. It enters through the door that has been left open for critical, praxeological, and reflexive accounts more attentive to the subtle transformations of both persons and objects in religious life.

Initiation as Ritual Process

It is a far cry from informal affiliation with a Lucumí community to initiation. In the most basic terms, Lucumí initiation denotes the ritual process that effects entry into the priesthood of the tradition. As the principal vehicle for obtaining seniority, and thus eldership, within houses of orisha worship, it is what Pierre Bourdieu has called a "rite of institution."²⁰ It has long been performed after practitioners have undergone a series of *rites du passage*, including ceremonial receipt of the beaded necklaces called *elekes* and the consecrated embodiment of the Warrior orishas and the spirit Olokún. Synonymous with "ordination," initiation turns mere *aborishas*, or "servants of the orishas," into *olorishas*, "owners of the orishas," since priests are given the ritual sacra of several deities, newly consecrated through sacrifice. This sacra not only represents but is thought to personify materially gods of the Lucumí pantheon, including an initiate's tutelary deity, and it numbers among the objects that must be present in order to initiate others. Practitioners describe the means devised to bring the priest and her orishas into being through initiation using metaphors of pregnancy, parturition, and motherhood; both new priests and spirits are said to be "born" through *ocha*. This language reflects the social fact that initiations ensure the religious community's reproductivity, guaranteeing the endurance of its most durable forms of sociality even after the deaths of its immediate leaders.

Initiation takes place over the course of a week, wherein neophytes undergo a series of transformative ordeals that have been quite extensively documented: they are ritually secluded, stripped of old clothes, immersed in a river, fed unfamiliar foods, and have their heads shaved and painted in preparation for the inducement of spirit possession.²¹ On the day after their ritual objects have been consecrated, called the “Middle Day,” initiates are dressed as their patron orishas and introduced to select visitors from outside the community. In the next day’s divination, called *itá*, initiates are bestowed new priestly titles and issued unique aggregates of sartorial, gastronomical, and behavioral taboos that must be observed for the rest of their lives.²² None of this can occur before the neophytes are declared symbolically dead, however, through such means as tabooing their given names and referring to each of them individually as *aboku*, “the dead one.” In order to be born as a priest, a practitioner’s identity must be sacrificed, as literally as possible without physically injuring the body soon to become a vessel for the vital energy and primordial substance of the spirits, termed *aché*. For the ill and otherwise suffering, healing is thought to begin with this death, and with the demise of old ways of feeling, behaving, and understanding, to be remade radically through the rigors of the first year of initiation.

Throughout this calendar year, initiates will be referred to neither by their religious titles nor by their given names; among other Lucumí practitioners, an initiate will be called simply *iyawo*, or “wife” of the spirits.²³ This is the case regardless of the priests’ gender, sex, or sexual orientation; the year itself is termed *iyaworaje*. In some communities, *iyawos* are prohibited from seeing themselves in mirrors for the first three months, until after they have offered a ritual sacrifice called the *ebó meta*—sometimes made long after three months’ time, bearing in mind the financial cost of this ceremony.²⁴ In the words of one initiate, an *iyawo* goes from infant to toddler after the three-months’ *ebó*, which confers new privileges: after eating only on a woven mat, with her legs splayed in front of her, the *iyawo* may sit on a chair for meals; after three months of nearly head-to-toe coverage, save for her face, the *iyawo* may wear short sleeves, comb and cut her hair, and let her head go bare for short periods of time. The orishas’ physical position within an *iyawo*’s home echoes the latter’s religious state, for until the three months’ *ebó*, an initiate is unable to lift her orishas from the floor; they rest on it in their vessels as if asleep, and they cannot be aroused for ceremonial purposes. After the *ebó*, they are lifted

from the ground and onto altars, signaling that they have arisen from their slumber.

For the rest of the year, however, the *iyawo* is still not allowed to be photographed; eat from china and silverware other than her own special set; go out after sunset, unless accompanied by a godparent; imbibe alcohol; spend time in crowded or noisy public places, such as shopping malls; use scented soaps, deodorants, and other toiletries; and have sexual intercourse, unless she is married. The *iyawo* must sleep on white sheets and pillows and attend to her godparents whenever they call on her. Priests sometimes expound on the theological purpose of these regulatory practices, yet it is indisputably the case that disrupting an initiate's daily routines and curtailing her movements act to assert ritual godparents' kinship and seniority, redrawing her bonds of affiliation, sentiment, and obligation within the boundaries of the religious community. The *iyawo* must in effect withdraw herself from circulation, as when she must refuse to be handed anything and instead request that objects—such as spare change at a grocery store—be set down on another surface first. She cannot touch anyone, even socially, but blood relatives, spouses, and other initiates. This attitude announces to her social world that the *iyawo* expects different treatment after initiation and that her role within it has changed irreversibly. She no longer occupies the place she once did.

Both the ethnographic record and my own research suggest that elders intend for the *iyawo* period to support the cultivation of diverse forms of virtue, in the conventional meaning of the term. Apart from humility, patience, and integrity, the qualities to be fostered include the willingness to assume gender roles associated with the opposite sex in ritual performance, the control of “involuntary” physical responses (for instance, in spirit possession and animal sacrifice), and the capacity for reasoned critique in defense of communal norms. Elders also promote initiation as fostering virtues in the archaic sense, as “powers,” and as those capacities for ethical action inculcated by corporeal training that Talal Asad has called “moral potentialities.”²⁵ As an *iyawo* copes with both drastic yet temporary restrictions shared by most new initiates, and lifelong strictures exclusive to her, such virtues are supposed to take firm root. For all of my ethnographic interlocutors, the virtue of obedience was stressed, and after initiation, elders interpreted an *iyawo*'s behavioral submission to them as a sign of the ritual's felicity and of a corresponding elevation in the neophyte's “socio-ontological” status.²⁶

The Initiation Narrative as Speech Genre

While the initiation ritual, the *iyawo* year, and these traditions' role in the life of a religious community have animated a number of pioneering studies, the scholarship on Lucumí has yet to grapple with a fundamental irony: the vast majority of practitioners have been initiated as adults and may thus be categorized as converts, but they almost invariably have said that they "made *ocha*" without wanting to do so. In textual records of elders' narratives, as in my own research, illness and injury have been the main catalysts for initiation. Rather than sing the praises of the tradition in recounting their ordinations, practitioners have professed themselves alarmed by the financial burden imposed by *ocha*, suspicious of elders' ulterior motives, and wary of its reputation as a witchcraft cult for the destitute and credulous. Their resistance is invariably recalled as futile—even dangerous to their health. In the seminal 1954 study *El monte: Igbo fínda, ewe orisha, vititi nfinda*, Lydia Cabrera was the first to record multiple accounts of rebellion against the orishas' wishes for practitioners to become initiated, but she was certainly not the last.²⁷ The ethnographic literature on Afro-Cuban religions is replete with such stories. They are most pronounced in texts reliant on oral histories as a means of ascertaining practitioners' points of entry into Lucumí.

The stylistic and linguistic conventions of the initiation narrative are so widely observed that they can be said to form their own category of verbal composition or "speech genre." A speech genre is defined as a type of utterance that shares both the thematic concerns and situational context for the performance of similar communicative acts.²⁸ The stability of speech genres over time derives, in part, from the frequency of their recurrence within groups or among members of particular social strata. In his early study of speech genres, Mikhail Bakhtin gave the example of the military command and oral business contract; the courtroom jury summation, Roman Catholic confession, and the individual therapy session and self-help meeting mandated in drug addiction programs are a few others.²⁹ Those competent in a speech genre may not realize that they are replicating a well-worn pattern, yet the relatively predictable structure of a given utterance assists in rendering it intelligible and generating meaning. Speech genres are far from fixed, however. Novelty may be introduced spontaneously into the expectations, sequential organization, content, rhetorical form, or physical circumstances of a speech event, to dazzling ideological and intersubjective effect.³⁰

Despite the constraints imposed by conversational discourse, speech genres expand and contract according to the needs of individuals and the institutions they inhabit.

Social actors tend to appropriate the speech genres of those whose beliefs and practices align with their own.³¹ This observation seems to be particularly accurate with regard to religious specialists and virtuosi. In the literature on prophets and shamans, for instance, they often claim to have resisted the pull of their vocations until brought to a crisis. While Lucumí priests' stories bear a family resemblance to those of healers in other cultures, certain features are specific to their experience within Afro-Cuban religions and merit consideration on their own terms.³² Their oral narratives have been rife with admissions of aversion not only to *ocha* itself, but also to discharging the functions of priesthood, such as officiating during initiations for protégés, termed "godchildren," and performing divinations. In the mid-1980s, for instance, one of David H. Brown's informants told him that, when approached to serve as a ritual sponsor for *ocha*, he has been liable to respond,

"I don't want any more godchildren! I'm tired of this shit, I told you I never wanted to [get initiated], and every time I don't want to [officiate another *ocha*], everybody tricks me into making it. The Saints and everybody are always blackmailing me into doing something, I'm sick of it. I don't go to nobody's house, I don't do readings. . . ." And as you can see, every one of [the initiations over which I have presided] has been a trick. I just look at him [my patron orisha] and I say, "Boy, you really know how to screw me don't you." And everything that comes to my house is this way. I don't go out looking for it. I don't read [the cowrie shells oracle], I do nothing, it's brought by other people.³³

I would contend that only the vehemence and profanity of this diatribe is unusual.

In the scholarship on Afro-Cuban traditions, the spirits most frequently accused of extortionary behavior—and indicted in tirades peppered with obscenities—are the ritually enslaved spirits *nfumbi*, of Palo Monte. The elder above appears to put himself in the role of his orisha's *nfumbi*, a manipulated, ritually objectified bondsman, performing alienated labor for his deified masters.³⁴ Although Lucumí practitioners have characteristically depicted their relationships with the orishas in terms more heavily reliant on idioms of

familial intimacy and mutual nurturance, the historical record shows that their occasional complaints have not differed very dramatically, regardless of devotees' gender, race, or ethnicity. Nilaja Campbell instructed her godchildren, "Don't recommend me to nobody."³⁵ Quoting Bing Crosby's character in *White Christmas* (1954), Nilaja told visitors that initiation "costs somewhere 'between ouch and boing."³⁶ This was an onomatopoeic way of conveying the painful surprises involved in supplying the herbs, vessels, cloth, sacrificial animals, travel expenses of visiting priests, ritual fees (*achedís*), food, and myriad other objects needed for *ocha* and the neophyte's post-ceremonial seclusion. As Mary Cuthrell Curry put it, "If a person decides to make *ocha*, (some people resist this decision for years, some perhaps indefinitely) then they have an expensive proposition ahead of them."³⁷

Another indispensable component of the "initiation narrative" speech genre is the assertion that, despite the financial, emotional, and social price to be paid for becoming a priest, the orishas literally saved one's life. There is a "speech genre among practitioners analogous to 'being saved,'" although "salvation" for priests has not entailed redemption from sin but, rather, a reprieve from an impending death sentence, whether imposed by illness or calamity.³⁸ Some elders, such as my interlocutor Yomí Yomí, cited oracular speech as proving decisive in their understanding of *ocha* as a ritual death and rebirth that staves off physical mortality. In one typical exchange, Yomí Yomí referred to both the divinatory sign, or *odu*, cast for her in her *ítá*, and the pronouncement of an *Espiritista*:

EP: You said to me before . . . that you feel like the religion saved your life.

YY: It did. My [priestly] name, "Yomí Yomí," means "salvation." And my *odu*, and my *odu* in . . . *ocha* is, "The debt is paid." I know Yemayá saved my life. Well, my health is [still] an issue, but I was one time at [a Spiritist medium's home], and this other *babaláwo* who was a *palero* too, he was sitting there in the basement. . . . All of a sudden it was like [the medium's] *muerto* [or possessing spirit] just came down on him—we were just sitting there chit-chatting—and he said, "If you didn't make *ocha*, you'd be dead." See, I get those confirmation messages, and you may get them six years down the line—that's when mine was given to me—but they'll come.³⁹

This statement strongly resembles other initiates' recollections, particularly in its characterization of *ocha* as the life-prolonging settlement of a balance with the orishas.

The Emplotment of Affliction in the Initiation Narrative

As has been documented for other West and Central African-inspired religious formations, in Lucumí "affliction is potentially a boon, not merely a present pain, for it is the royal road to ritual eminence in a cult."⁴⁰ In the course of my research among not only African American, but also Latino/a and Anglo practitioners, a lone interlocutor told me that she was "crowned" simply out of what she called "love" for the tradition. Even those whose families were involved in Lucumí did not say they wanted to get initiated. In fact, these were the cases in which *ocha* was initially opposed with the greatest tenacity. Tomás Fernández Robaina asserts that in colonial and early Republican Cuba, "one only initiated a person as a *santero*, *babaláwo*, or *palero* who really needed to enter the religion for reasons of health, or in the search for material or spiritual improvement."⁴¹ However, in relating their experiences, initiates in Ilé Laroye, as in other communities, did not say that they made *ocha* in the pursuit of any concrete result but release from affliction, and attributed not merely their well-being but their very existence to the intervention of the orishas.⁴² Oral performances tended to progress from the onset of unexplainable and ineradicable symptoms; frustrated appeals to medical authorities; struggle against the suggestion of initiation; to eventual acquiescence.⁴³

In their autobiographies, initiates have vividly described the symptoms of corporeal affliction, signs from the spirits they said that they had been determined to ignore or did not yet understand how to decipher. My interlocutors have told of disease and injury, of sudden diminishments of vigor, lingering infections, temporary paralysis, nausea, unpredictable lapses of consciousness, and heart-stopping medical diagnoses in which they were warned that "the hole in the ground is open, waiting for [your] body," forcing them to conclude, "If I stay the way I am, I am going to die . . . not too long."⁴⁴ Such stories are not exceptional, and find corroboration among practitioners consulted by scholars throughout the twentieth century. Rodolpho Martin, a Cuban priest interviewed by John Mason, told him with reference to the pre-Revolutionary period,

Look, in those days everybody cooperated. You never had to give anyone a tip [for assisting in an *ocha*]. No, No, they'd tell you when you offered. The majority of them were poor and made their initiations to avoid that which cripples you (sicknesses).⁴⁵

It is difficult to gauge the veracity of Martin's claim, as much a critique of contemporary mores as a comment on the relationship between health and *ocha*. Yet it would be even harder to transcribe an oral history from an initiate that did not contain some version of the following statement: "One makes saint for two reasons: for health or because one is born with that [oracular] sign, with the *odu* to walk down that path, whether we like it or not."⁴⁶

Theresa Varela documents several contemporary examples of initiation for health in the context of practitioners' struggles with HIV/AIDS and cancer. Varela's informant Tanía explained,

My brother . . . who had been a priest in Santería for many years, did a spiritual reading for me. We were instructed, spiritually, that I should be initiated into the religion of Santería in order to save my life. Everything just hit the fan. I'd gone to readings and to *misas* but here I was being told that before I had the mastectomy, I had to be initiated, to make Santo. I had to get crowned to save my life. I really didn't know anything about the religion. I asked, what's that? *What's Santo?* And I was told it would save my life and I went for it. Santería turned out to be the most beautiful thing.⁴⁷

Other scholars have recorded similar narratives, underscoring either their animus toward or unfamiliarity with Lucumí, before they realized that *ocha* is the healing ritual par excellence.⁴⁸ Although initiates generally refrain from setting forth the precise mechanics of their restoration to health, elders of Ilé Laroye maintained that in the initiatory rite of investiture, the heads and bodies of *iyawos* were "sealed" corporeally by the *aché* of their orishas. Most academic accounts of initiation have focused on the placement of consecrated substances on the freshly shaved and incised head of the initiate, but according to David H. Brown, the ritual has engaged the entirety of the body. The efficacy of "Santo" has depended, Brown argues, on forging a connection between the energies of the earth and heaven, as between the lower half of the body and its upper limit.⁴⁹

In accounts depicting corporeal affliction as a catalyst for initiation, practitioners have emphasized the puzzling, supernatural nature of their somatic complaints, and that the suffering they endured lay beyond the skill of allopathic physicians to diagnose or assuage. These testimonials have dramatized the misrecognition of both the narrators and their doctors, the “men of science” whose inability to detect the hands of the orishas in their patients’ torments symbolizes the limitations not only of biomedicine, but also of Enlightenment-derived secular epistemologies more generally. Tomás Fernández Robaina records the story of an Abakuá initiate named Tato, whose narrative is a case in point. Tato said that he grew up in a family of Lucumí practitioners, and while he did not hesitate to pay for his young son’s *ocha* when illness threatened his life, he was loath to invest in his own after he began experiencing deep pain and fatigue:

Thirteen years passed after [my son’s initiation] before they did the same to me. I didn’t have another choice. Health problems. I felt very tired, without enough energy even to walk; I didn’t go to see my brothers in [the Afro-Cuban secret society] Abakuá or go to our gatherings because of how bad I felt. That made me feel bad, very bad with myself. I went to the doctor, and after he reviewed the tests, he told me that I didn’t have anything serious, a little anemia, nothing more, and something in my spine. . . . But none of these ailments caused my major illness. Because I pestered him too much about my suffering, they referred me to a psychiatrist.⁵⁰

Tato was diagnosed with hypochondria, and his wife suggested that he consult a diviner, offering the opinion that his condition might improve with initiation.

As Kristina Silke Wirtz writes, the narrators of such stories are adamant that they adopted commonsense courses of action before pursuing ritual intervention.⁵¹ In consulting the medical establishment first, the narrator enhances his portrayal of himself as a reasonable—rather than naïve or gullible—person by showing his awareness of some ritual specialists’ nefarious motives.⁵² Accordingly, Tato said that he was dismayed to hear that his son would need to undergo initiation since he was well aware of the way some Lucumí ritual specialists profit from their clients’ desperation. He also claims that he was uneager to follow his son into the religion because he was

torment between his desire for wellness and his social obligations to his Abakuá fraternal group:

But the Abakuás don't have any remedy so that one might alleviate one's pains, besides [those that] help you with money and with friends, those can facilitate your stay in a hospital or money for medicine. . . . Because of that, there was no other path [open to me] but to make saint; that's how I was initiated into Santería as an Abakuá.⁵³

The distinction Tato draws between Santería and Abakuá is instructive. The word used for remedy, *remedio*, means both “recourse” and “medical remedy,” implying that, although his Abakuá group operates as a mutual aid society, he perceives Lucumí as holding a monopoly on the resources necessary for healing. While complying with the directives of *ocha* could have reduced the amount of time he was available to devote to Abakuá and strain relationships with his brethren, Tato assures his interlocutor—and Fernández Robaina's readers—that *ocha* was the only avenue open to him.

Tato's choice of words—“*there was no other path*”—was not coincidental. The depiction of a choice as a “path” by practitioners is not merely a linguistic trope, but an emplotment device.⁵⁴ It is also a chronotope, a spatiotemporal figuration that has historically organized the perception and representation of reality for servants of the orishas, themselves understood in terms of “roads” or manifestations.⁵⁵ The chronotope of the path in the Lucumí tradition fuses the ideas of egress, progress, itinerary, circuit, milestone (or “turning point”), and way, in the sense of both “thoroughfare” and *modus vivendi*.⁵⁶ Multivalent iconographic, mythological, and ritual condensations of these concepts have been generated in this chronotopic matrix, as epitomized by the figure of Eleguá, the orisha with no less than twenty-one “paths”; “owner” of human feet, and by extension, all perambulation; and master of intersections and thresholds, prime sites for life-altering “meeting, separation, collision, [and] escape.”⁵⁷ While Mikhail Bakhtin focuses on the road as the vehicle of fate or chance, in Lucumí narratives, the path embodies the divinatory paradox of destiny as both multi-determined and preordained. The proverbs of sixteen-cowries divination are strewn with paths, and its verses are said to “walk the earth” the instant the shells are thrown.⁵⁸

In practitioners' accounts of their “journeys” to initiation, they have repeatedly incorporated the image of the road as a place of transition, where

time momentarily stops, and its recommencement propels narrators in unexpected directions. To offer only one of many examples, when one interlocutor related his initiation story to me, he remembered Eleguá saying in a dream, “Hey! . . . I cleared the road for you. *Are you ready to walk?*”⁵⁹ Yet for initiates, the road symbolizes the possibility of becoming disoriented and getting lost, as well as advancing. They maintain that Eleguá both removes impediments from practitioners’ paths and ignores them, depending on whether he has received the proper offering. For Bakhtin, the road, as a chronotopic motif, pertains to “the adventure novel of everyday life,” composed according to the theme of metamorphosis:

Metamorphosis or transformation is a mythological sheath for the idea of development—but one that unfolds not so much in a straight line as spasmodically, a line with “knots” in it, one that therefore constitutes a distinctive type of *temporal sequence*.⁶⁰

So it has been in accounts of initiation, where the path to *ocha* has tended to be constructed as bumpy, narrow, and tortuous. In verbally retracing their steps, practitioners have paused to recollect past blunders—not listening to advice from practitioners, refusing to recognize the interconnectedness of their misfortunes—and the gradual diminishment of their options until there was only one choice left. It was not between going one way or another; rather, it was between following the orishas or coming to a complete standstill, that is, death.

One Autobiography

Once the *orixá* calls, there is no other path to take.

—MÃE MENININHA DE GANTOIS⁶¹

Most of the elders I met through, and within, Ilé Laroye between 2000 and 2010—including Cuban elders from Miami and Anglo practitioners based in the suburbs of Detroit—maintained that they had struggled with initiation. The narrative recounted by Nilaja in January 2006 was a paradigm of the genre, portraying not only initiates’ gradual acceptance of the orishas’ claims over their persons—characteristically pressed with ever-increasing ardor—but also their use of both medical and social situations as evidence adduced to sustain

the validity of their decisions.⁶² Nilaja told me that her interest in Afro-Cuban religions had begun in the early 1980s, when she was babysitting for a Latino family involved in Lucumí: “I thought they were crazy.”⁶³ She had met the family’s godmother, and her “first impression was not good,” yet she came to feel “there was something calling [her] to [the religion].” One afternoon, after the family had gone elsewhere to perform a ritual for Shangó, she saw the vision of a man dancing toward her; he was wearing a crown on his head and a fringe of raffia at his waist. Nilaja maintained that this apparition arrived prior to her awareness of this orisha’s iconographical representation as crowned and dancing, and of his privileged role in *ocha*. She came to believe that Shangó had materialized in order to lead her down the path of initiation, because “[she] had been searching for something all the time.”⁶⁴

In this discussion as in others, Nilaja emphasized that since childhood she had longed for a religion that made the most of her talents and aptitudes. After her disenchantment with Roman Catholicism and other Christian denominations, she became fascinated by Buddhism and, for a time, by the Black Hebrew Israelites. She felt an affinity with Haitian Vodou and sought out a temple, finding one in Indiana, where she underwent the first level of initiation called *hounsi canzo*. She began entertaining serious doubts about the community at the same time she met the man later to become her godfather in *ocha*. Then she fell ill, and her first major indication that “something was wrong” with her religious family was that the healing rituals performed by her *mambo* did not succeed in improving her condition. She was diagnosed with an ectopic pregnancy and “was still alive by the grace of God” only because her fallopian tube had not ruptured, but she was given six months to live due to her response to the surgery. “I definitely could see myself separating from my body,” Nilaja said. This episode was not sufficient to precipitate her flight from the group, however: “I was feeling that I had to get initiated—why, I don’t know.” She leaned on the memory of her late grandmother for strength, and continued to “give [her Vodou community] the benefit of the doubt.”

When she left the hospital, she was drawn to a Lucumí community headed by a white Cuban initiate as well as another led by an Afrocentric African American figure.⁶⁵ When she visited the latter’s community in Detroit to consult a diviner, she was informed that her ancestors were displeased with her and that if she returned to the “white guy” she would become ill once again. Although she and other black nationalist practitioners “had [their]

own ideology”—she wanted to get initiated in “African garb” rather than the “creole style” favored by Lucumí practitioners—this obvious recruitment ploy enraged her. Nilaja felt, “I am learning this religion; if this guy is going to tell me this, I’m through [with the entire group].” On the drive home to Illinois with her spouse, she continued to stew over the priests’ presumption: “How are they going to tell *me* about *my* ancestors?” Just then, they were pulled over by police because her husband was speeding. Ironically, they were both dressed in Yorùbá-style clothing, and her fear of police harassment was so great that she silently appealed to the spirit of her late grandmother, promising her that if they were to emerge unscathed from the encounter, she would “go right to the [white] guy and get initiated.” The officer told them that they could go.

This was only one turning point in her journey to becoming a priestess of Eleguá, however. She had been told that the “owner” of her head was Obatalá, and then that she was Yemayá’s child.⁶⁶ About the time that she gave birth to her son—thus putting an end to a series of miscarriages—Yemayá addressed Nilaja through a woman able to mount spirits in the Spiritist rituals called *misas blancas*. She instructed Nilaja to do a cleansing so that she would not need surgery, because it would go badly. Nilaja ignored her advice, assuming that she had time to weigh her options, and soon thereafter found herself in the hospital with another tubal pregnancy. The operation to remove the fallopian obstruction did not go well, and she was instructed to eat normally before her system was prepared to deal with solid food, leading to nausea and vomiting. At the same time, the incision was refusing to heal, and her stitches were coming apart. Nilaja was a “terrible patient,” acting uncooperative because she wanted to go home. After her ordeal, she went to her godfather—the “white guy”—and, to her surprise, he determined that her tutelary deity was Eleguá. She had to return to the hospital once again, and for protection, her godfather told her to put a glass of water by her bed and pray to this orisha. She did so, but also used it to administer a sort of religious paternity test, challenging him, “if [you are] my father, get me out of the hospital.” She was out in the number of days that Eleguá governs: three.

When Nilaja was informed that she had to return to the hospital in order to resolve what had been diagnosed as an intestinal problem, she tried strenuously to avoid surgery, but when she inquired about it through sixteen-cowries divination, she was told to go through with it. Nilaja also interpreted it as a positive sign that her doctor’s surname turned out to be Shangold, confirming

for her the presence of Shangó in her personal struggle. She had been told in divination that in the surgery, her attending physicians would go after one thing and come out with something else; accordingly, instead of an intestinal abnormality, her doctors discovered the remains of another, previously undetected tubal pregnancy. This was the third time that oracular speech from the orishas had proven correct—at least to her satisfaction—thus reinforcing her perception that she had chosen the right godparent. In anticipation of the next medical procedure, she also received the ritual paraphernalia of Inle and Babalú Ayé, following the precedent of receiving these *addimú*, or auxiliary, orishas in order to improve one's health. Nilaja credited them with her survival: "Inle and Babalú Ayé saved my life. I shouldn't be alive."⁶⁷ It was thus with both astonishing understatement and aplomb that Nilaja had announced at the start of our conversation, "I didn't come to the religion because I had [health] issues, but I did have issues."

Narrative Transformations

Although Nilaja was initiated approximately six months after pouring out her first glass of water to Eleguá, her story was far from a linear one. She related instead the piecemeal acquisition of a hermeneutic, or an interpretive frame of reference, that she adopted to read her body as exhibiting symptoms of the orishas' possession. She portrayed herself as afflicted by physical complaints as well as social scourges—the threat of racist violence, on the one hand, and the limitations of Afrocentrism, on the other. To the extent that Nilaja presented herself as changing in the course of her narrative, it was in her growing ability to recognize key moments of adversity as "knots" to be unraveled: indexical signs of the orishas' clamor for recognition. In this, she hewed closely to the theme of metamorphosis favored by Lucumí practitioners, among other converts. As Bakhtin put it, "metamorphosis serves as a basis for a method of portraying the whole of an individual's life in its more important moments of *crisis*: for showing *how an individual becomes other than what he is*."⁶⁸ Her crises led to a chain of revelations akin to *anagnorises* in classical drama, crucial discoveries made through hardship.⁶⁹ The peripeteia of rebirth through *ocha*, accompanied by renewed health, comes with the concomitant realization of the orishas' reality and that of her identity as their child.

Of the many descriptions of religious transformation assayed in analyses of conversion narratives, the initiation stories of Lucumí practitioners such as Nilaja most closely match Huon Wardle's, portrayed as "an experience of disambiguation, spiritual commitment, and semantic closure," in which the "narrative of religious calling and engagement . . . describes a sequence of moments of experience understood in decreasingly ambiguous ways."⁷⁰ When Nilaja started her story, she seemed to "subjunctivize [her] reality," appreciating the possibility of understanding major events in her life according to multiple frames of reference.⁷¹ She depicted herself testing them out, as if sitting in an optometrist's chair while one lens after another flips before her eyes, until she hits on the degree of magnification that her vision of herself requires. The ambiguating social practices that had permitted her access to a wide range of resources and relationships were cast as failing to fulfill her twin quests for self-definition and well-being. In her telling, the ambiguity, or blurriness, of her existence—perhaps augmented due to the "world-destroying" effects of agonizing pain—resolved itself only with the adoption of Lucumí as a semiotic system through which her existence finally achieved "spatio-temporal order and teleological significance."⁷² Accordingly, Nilaja remembered her affiliation with her godfather's Lucumí community displacing other sources of meaning, and she imbued her recollection of religious groups with distance and critique.

The rupture with her past was not total, however, nor was the closure final. "It is the economy proper to metamorphosis," Italo Calvino wrote of Ovid's epic, "which demands that the new forms should recover the materials of the old ones as far as possible."⁷³ Tracey E. Hucks has characterized black religion in terms of "religious coexistence and dual or multiple religious allegiance," and scholars of Black Atlantic traditions have written at length on the necessity of negotiating different traditions in heterogeneous religious environments throughout the Americas.⁷⁴ This experience was reflected in Nilaja's narrative: Nilaja maintained that during her most perilous episode of illness prior to receiving Inle and Babalú Ayé, it was her current husband 'Tunde's devotion to St. Jude and persistence in offering prayers for her in Roman Catholic churches—rather than the intervention of any orisha—that probably extended her life. Yet her story corresponded to her "disambiguation" by progressively shedding human characters such as 'Tunde and her religious mentors and replacing them with divine agents; by the end, the orishas alone possess momentum, purpose, and energy—*aché*, in other words. The feats performed

by Inle and Babalú Ayé eclipse those of her physicians; Dr. Shangold does not restore her confidence in the medical profession, but instead, confirms her faith in Shangó.⁷⁵

There are as many types of religious transformation as there are traditions, with practitioners telling stories that accent human agency to a greater or lesser degree—representing personal change as an achievement as opposed to an undeserved gift, for instance, or vice versa—as well as expressing different configurations of personhood, institutional values, and descriptions of the arc of divine involvement in the process.⁷⁶ In most cases, privileged stories, such as conversion narratives, recapitulate religious ideology or a tradition's internal logic.⁷⁷ Accordingly, I would submit that Lucumí initiation narratives are as much a product of socialization into a community and its repertoire of spatiotemporal practices as *ocha* itself. Since priests have enforced a code of secrecy regarding ceremonial procedures, the understanding of its curative effect among the uninitiated has derived not from detailed verbal elaborations of the ritual, but from recollections of its outcome: the stories elders have related about their own illnesses and the orishas' role in their affliction and recovery. Initiation narratives have consistently placed orishas in telling relationship to practitioners' bodies—much as eyewitness accounts might place a suspect at a crime scene—thus demonstrating the manner and degree of the spirits' implication in the mundane world.⁷⁸

In order to grasp the rhetorical significance of affliction in such narratives as Nilaja's, it is necessary to contemplate not only the emplotment of maladies and the pursuit of cures, but also the circumstances that formed the context for initiates' storytelling. Elders in Ilé Laroye shared their experiences from the perspective of those professed to be healed by the orishas and regarded as healers themselves. The definition of "healer" within the community was analogous to "master of transformative ritual power," broadly conceived. Enacting their expertise, priests told me again and again that they saw their actions as falling under the rubric of "healing," whether they excelled in collecting herbs, mounting spirits, memorizing praise-songs, turning sacrificial animals into meals for the orishas, or teaching ("the healing of ignorance," as Hasim once put it).⁷⁹ One aspect of their identity-formation as healers involved the redaction of genealogies that privileged ancestors reputed to possess mystically endowed healing abilities, as in *misas blancas*.⁸⁰ The relation of initiation narratives may be

viewed as another rite of self-fashioning that molds elders' perceptions of themselves, bearing in mind that religious subjectivity is continually in the process of accomplishment.⁸¹

The Initiation Narrative and the Scholarship on Afro-Cuban Religions

Those who do not believe in saints cannot be cured by the miracles of saints.

—ALEJO CARPENTIER⁸²

The initiation narrative has yet to excite substantial interest in the writing on Afro-Cuban religions due to several factors. The first of these is the overwhelming emphasis that has been placed on accounting for the continued survival, if not the globalization, of Lucumí in revolutionary Cuba and the United States.⁸³ Particularly after the Mariel boatlift of 1980, the literature on orisha worship chiefly sought to quantify the amount of “syncretism” operative in Afro-diasporic initiatory traditions and situate their growth within economic and sociocultural macro-trends.⁸⁴ The latter included the increased politicization of black religious identity in the wake of the civil rights movement, greater geographical mobility and improved communication technologies among practitioners, and the expanded transnational market for African-inspired cultural production. Such research created an historical record of inestimable value by ceding precedence to the viewpoints of informants, but it tended to replicate their discourses of “auto-legitimation” by elucidating orisha worship in terms of self-empowerment and resistance.⁸⁵ While earlier writings predicated upon the “secularization thesis” cited social deviance or psychological pathology to explain conversion to Lucumí, these studies joined converts themselves in presenting initiation as an indictment of their political oppression and material privations.⁸⁶

A significant subset of this research sought to explore Lucumí's potential as an alternative medical system and to explain its popularity in Latino communities through an appeal to its social and therapeutic efficacy.⁸⁷ Initiation narratives have largely conduced to the interpretation of *ocha* in these terms, and not in the service of inquiry into the discursive construction of healing as the domain of the spirits. In investigations less attentive to the role of illness in practitioners' lives, the motives that elders have declared for their original

attraction to the tradition have been conflated with the impetus for their entry to the priesthood. As a result, these studies have tended to assume that elders sought *ocha* for the same reasons that they gravitated to Lucumí in the first place. This has perhaps been inevitable, for the sociological models for interpreting escalating commitment within religious formations have not been formulated with initiatory traditions such as Lucumí in mind. Unfortunately, in delineating the purported bases for Lucumí ordination—a profound longing for aesthetic and cultural authenticity, an interest in conceptually innovative resources for subverting gendered and racialized forms of domination—scholars have unwittingly minimized the issues of pedagogical praxis, cognition, and affliction, obscuring the complex matrix of ideological operations that precipitate *ocha*.

It is important to underscore that the issue of conversion, as a change in belonging and association, has not been neglected in the scholarship on Lucumí, especially in a handful of fine studies concerning African American practitioners.⁸⁸ Some of the sociological literature on Cuban immigrants has illuminated the imperative among these exiles to create community in a “strange land”—the United States—as a reason for their high rate of conversion between the 1960s through 1980s. Initiation was undoubtedly a part of their search for *gemeinschaft*.⁸⁹ Yet practitioners’ own words about their desire for *ocha* itself, or the absence of it, have fallen beneath scrutiny as oral performances, and a disproportionate emphasis on voluntaristic intentionality and conscious identity formation has continued to dictate the terms of the wider discussion. Practitioners’ stated ambivalence concerning their own financial and emotional investment in much-maligned “prohibited epistemologies” have been either downplayed or dismissed as a refusal to claim their cultural patrimony. And since Lucumí practitioners do not proselytize, “micropractices of persuasion” that have gradually convinced them of the spirits’ power, the elders’ authority, and their need for initiation have seldom attracted the notice of researchers.⁹⁰

The most common iteration of the initiation narrative, with its claim that *ocha* transpired against the will of the practitioner, may have also militated against its close analysis. In the early scholarship on Lucumí, researchers collected ethnographic data almost exclusively from authoritative senior Cuban and Puerto Rican practitioners steeped in a lifelong familiarity with the traditions they came to embrace. Academics collaborated with ritual specialists in rationalizing the practice of their traditions into systems expressive

of a codified cosmology and consistent worldview.⁹¹ In the interest of representing the tradition in a manner that would refute patently racist, sensationalistic accounts and in order to corroborate practitioners' claims to a foundational African past that would ennoble them in the present, scholars moved to cast Lucumí in the mold of familiar monotheisms, accentuating the beliefs ostensibly to be deduced from practices, and bowdlerizing references to those that seemed irrational or superstitious according to the hegemonic "litmus test of legitimacy."⁹² To the extent that an informant was portrayed as wrestling with divinatory mandates and her religious vocation, the story was cast as a comedy: a series of blunders that ended in a marriage, only in this case, those joined together in holy matrimony were a divine husband and human wife.

Moreover, the tendency of scholars themselves to "get hitched" to the spirits—for to be a bride of the orishas is often to be their "horse," or possession mount—has also fostered inattention to the typical initiation narrative. While seldom discussed as a research phenomenon, it has been customary for scholars to become ordained while gathering data on Black Atlantic religions, and to concede as much in print.⁹³ They have largely been forthcoming about their "double-consciousness" as both practitioners and academics, to the point of operationalizing religious dreams, sensations, and encounters in their analyses.⁹⁴ Yet, with the exception of Michael Atwood Mason, scholars have proven averse to tracing their own and others' gradual implication in Afro-Cuban traditions.⁹⁵ More importantly, perhaps, the anomalous circumstances surrounding their ordinations seem to have colored their depictions of *ocha* as a desideratum. The authors of academic monographs have tended to say that they sought to be initiated out of an affinity with the traditions under examination, combined with an aspiration to obtain ritual expertise and information.⁹⁶ This situation is decidedly at odds with that of most initiates, for they overwhelmingly profess to have become priests not because they wanted to, but because the spirits wanted them.

Finally, the initiation narrative has not occasioned more inquiry due to its very banality. An ordinary, vernacular form of Lucumí discourse, it has no place in the compendia of "secrets" that dominate the popular scholarship and trade publications; its recitation is as easy to take for granted in a house of *ocha* as wallpaper, and its prosaic design may seem to be just as monotonous.⁹⁷ The writing on Afro-Cuban religions may still be divided into the following, as delineated by Stephan Palmié,

three equally distinct genres: the academic monograph, the “eyewitness account,” and the *manual de santería* (the latter being one of what can be considered two distinct types of Afro-Cuban “insider” writing: the *libreta*, a handwritten or typed notebook containing ritual and theological information for the writer’s own religious use; and the *manual*, a published tract directed at the layperson and containing, characteristically, an exposition of the “true nature of *santería*,” schematic descriptions of the major deities and their attributes, a few myths, superficial accounts of divination procedures, and some “magical” recipes for home use).⁹⁸

While Raul Canizares’s 1993 *Walking with the Night: The Afro-Cuban World of Santería* occasioned these comments, they remain applicable to the sub-field.⁹⁹ Scholars with both personal and ethnographic experience in Lucumí tend to publish a synthesis of eyewitness account and manual, although with greater fidelity to the specifics of oracular methods and more erudite ideal-typical accounts of the participant trajectory of practitioners.¹⁰⁰ These volumes have furnished invaluable documentary material and theological introspection for the study of Afro-Cuban religions, yet in only the rare academic monograph has the question of the initiation narrative as a rhetorical construct, site of ritual performance, or analytical problematic arisen.¹⁰¹

Toward a Genealogy of the Initiation Narrative

The initiation narrative did not develop in isolation but drew on a range of preexisting utterance types, three of which it is necessary to mention here. The first would be the Christian conversion story. Despite the widespread notion that Saul’s epiphany on the road to Damascus set the template for such stories, historians of Christianity have shown that it did not emerge as a salient speech genre until the early modern period. As Karl F. Morrison has documented, the idea of conversion as a bolt-of-lightning moment, “a dramatic peripety,” is a quite recent phenomenon.¹⁰² The gradual interpellation by the gospel or “delayed reaction” to it best exemplified by the *Confessions* of Augustine of Hippo is congruent with, rather than a deviation from, earlier Christian understandings of conversion. Yet by the time Black Atlantic traditions

crystallized in the Caribbean and South America, both Roman Catholic and Protestant conversion narratives, often including the miraculous physical healing of an injured or ailing penitent, had become widely disseminated, if not ubiquitous. Afro-Cuban religious practitioners did not elude exposure to such narratives through popular devotional texts, such as hagiographies, saints' vitae, apologia, herbal lore, and adages; religious practices (such as pilgrimage); and oral traditions associated with holy sites.¹⁰³

Other possible precedents for the Lucumí initiation narrative are older Afro-Cuban modes of religious self-narration, including rhetorical forms that originated within Bantu drums of affliction, called *ngoma*. In contemporary *ngoma* and for centuries previously, the motive for participation has been cited as infirmity, identified by a diviner as a call to service from the spirits, "both the cause and the cure" of the sufferer's malady.¹⁰⁴ As John Janzen writes,

The [presenting] complaints [later] become stories, personal testimonials, that are repeated through song-dances within the *ngoma* cell composed of the sufferer-novice's therapist-teacher and all of his or her novices. . . . In repeated *ngoma* sessions the individual develops a song-story that interprets and culturally legitimates his understanding of the world.¹⁰⁵

Most slaves brought to Cuba between the sixteenth and the late eighteenth centuries were Central African, and scholars have speculated that one iteration of *ngoma*, the Lemba healing society, may have traveled with them and spread throughout the New World.¹⁰⁶ The crystallization of Yorùbá-based Lucumí in Cuba followed long after that of several Kongo-inspired variants of Palo Monte, and it is quite possible that, as multiple initiatory commitments among practitioners became normative, Lucumí incorporated and operationalized aspects of the *ngoma* song-story. Although the relation of its initiates' stories has not been accompanied by music or formally ritualized otherwise, their narrative contents and stylistic features—including the chronotopic invocation of paths and the employment of autobiography as metamorphosis—would reward comparison with those collected from *ngoma* practitioners.¹⁰⁷

Indeed, the most obvious point of convergence between such "drums" and Afro-Cuban traditions is their galvanization of the afflicted in propitiatory and commemorative ceremonial action that "re-stories" suffering as a god-send. Practitioners of the latter have tended to be initiated into Palo Monte

before Lucumí, and these traditions cooperate to instill in devotees a sense of indebtedness to their contrapuntally structured ritual complexes. Those initiated into either, or both, as a result of infirmity have presented almost identical symptoms in oral histories, and cast themselves as “wounded surgeon[s].”¹⁰⁸ Once cured of their most pernicious ailments, initiates are obliged to apply their talents and energies to the collective search for wellbeing. In initiation narratives, elders say that they have paid their dues—in blood, sweat, tears, and other effluvia—to bolster their “professional qualification[s]” as healers, and equally, as a means of grappling with illness as the “most unbeautiful” of aesthetic objects.¹⁰⁹ This, too, echoes the purpose of testimonials in *ngoma*.

However, Lucumí practitioners have not only incorporated recalcitrant idioms developed in eastern Cuba and central Africa; they have also altered them to reflect the historico-political context. It seems clear that the widespread stigma attached to Afro-Atlantic religions shaped discursive practices in addition to institutional norms. Since the late-nineteenth century, to state a desire for Lucumí initiation has been tantamount to rejecting God as well as science. Both the popular press and academic scholarship have placed the onus on practitioners to differentiate their practices from those of *brujería*, or witchcraft. In what was perhaps the first public defense of Lucumí, in July 1913—exactly one year after the massacre of over three thousand Afro-Cubans in a “race war”—a certain Fernando Guerra circulated a manifesto addressed to the president of Cuba and Havana’s mayor, among other government officials, and “to the general public.” On behalf of practitioners, Guerra conceded the existence of *brujería* but distanced Lucumí from it, exhorting journalists to aid the authorities in distinguishing between the two. Asserting that practitioners had not abandoned Catholicism, he nevertheless inveighed against infringements on their constitutional rights, declaring, “despite the fact that our ancestors are African, we do not practice *brujería*, nor do we use the objects required for its rituals, and if we practice the Lucumí religion, it is to console our suffering on this earth.”¹¹⁰

The source of Afro-Cubans’ suffering was left up to readers to infer.

Guerra was not a lone voice in the wilderness. He was secretary, and later became president, of the *Cabildo Africano Lucumí/Sociedad de Santa Bárbara*, “the twentieth-century reincarnation of the great Changó Tedún, the most widely remembered and important Lucumí *cabildo* in Cuba’s history,” with a vast “institutional reach and diverse membership.”¹¹¹ Guerra was a liaison between his *cabildo* and other mutual aid societies and represented them both to the general public. Guerra corresponded with Fernando Ortiz, as well

as with other members of the Cuban intelligentsia and literati. As a small group of Cuban- and African-born initiates strove to consolidate authority, standardize protocols for rituals such as *ocha*, and ascertain the issues on which distinct lineages could agree to disagree in the early twentieth century, they also collaborated on what—pardoning the anachronism—closely resembles a public relations strategy. A witch-hunting craze had begun in 1904 after a white toddler was abducted and murdered just outside of Havana. A “witch doctor” and his so-called accomplices, who had become acquainted through a local *cabildo*, were accused of extracting her heart and blood to restore an ex-slave’s health. Seven were eventually convicted, with two sentenced to death, and the rest to harsh prison sentences. Similar cases followed over the next two decades, inciting angry mobs to try, and occasionally succeed in, lynching alleged *brujos*.¹¹² No initiate—whether Lucumí, Palo, or Abakuá—was above suspicion.

Touted as Cuba’s foremost expert on *brujería*, Ortiz had advocated in 1906 for its elimination as a contagious disease or parasite enervating the body of the fledgling nation, and Guerra was responsible for courting him in hopes of modifying his diagnosis.¹¹³ Guerra appealed to his ambition by sending him exclusive, as-yet-unpublished information on Lucumí practices—such as *bátá* drumming—and to his vanity by granting him privileged access to the Sociedad de Santa Bárbara, even offering him an honorary presidency in 1911.¹¹⁴ Guerra and his counterparts in other *cabildos* recognized the threats posed to the religion by new forms of media spectacle and consumption, technical improvements in state surveillance mechanisms, and the advent of a “scientific” criminological discourse that marshaled “life-history documents,” such as autobiographical accounts, in the study and prosecution of populations branded mentally defective or morally delinquent.¹¹⁵ In boldly worded broadsides, Guerra waged his rhetorical campaign by admitting that his interlocutors had grounds for opprobrium, then ingeniously shifting its targets. Attuned to the prevalence of epidemiological metaphors in the political discourse of his day, Guerra denounced the notion that Lucumí initiates harmed others for physical cures and identified “the microbes infecting [Cuba’s] social body” as corruption, ignorance, and prejudice.¹¹⁶

Accounts of initiation and other modes of self-narration among the founders of modern-day Lucumí await further research. Yet it stands to reason that Guerra and his peers endeavored to portray their religious commitment as a response to their own suffering in terms reminiscent of Christian apologetics, at least when acting as criminal-cum-ethnographic informants. Moreover, it

appears that their efforts contributed to the adoption of the “unchosen choice” as a rhetorical convention among successive generations of priests, whether at the bidding of immediate elders, as a deliberate act of emulative self-fashioning, or due to the attainment of competence in this conversational register through everyday familiarity with its performance. Lest such an intimate relationship between practitioners and texts sound far-fetched, initiates have creatively appropriated the classic mid-century ethnographies of William Bascom and Lydia Cabrera, revising their own discursive practices—particularly in ritual registers such as divination and praise-singing—in light of their engagement with these “canonical” volumes.¹¹⁷ The leap from the page to the tongue has proven to be a short one for adepts, especially when the eminent personages quoted have appeared in their ancestral prayers (*moyuba*).

Practitioners’ narrative approach to the pain they endured prior to *ocha* also bears traces of the historico-political forces and discursive formations that produced Lucumí. As noted above, initiates have shown a propensity for itemizing the symptoms of illnesses that doctors failed to ameliorate and accentuating their incomprehension in the face of intractable ailments. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Cuban medical establishment conspired with the emerging disciplines of ethnography and criminology to impute moral pathologies to “atavistic others,” chiefly lower-class women, persons of African descent, and practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions.¹¹⁸ The “truth effects” of “social hygiene” discourses remain, and continue to have consequences for subaltern populations; the persistent effects of discredited discourses cannot be understood merely with reference to explicitly stated exclusionary and discriminatory policies.¹¹⁹ It should come as no surprise, then, that a speech genre elaborated by Lucumí priests has consistently rejected the central claim of medical science to be able to read the body. Their stories of initiation have bristled with “metacomplaints” concerning the systematic delegitimation of their subjective experience, and they have cataloged the myriad ways that medical science has failed to assist them in mastering the quandary of corporeality.¹²⁰

Practitioners have limned the almost unverbalizable severity of their symptoms in terms that gesture toward somatic and semantic excess—“*I felt very tired . . . very bad*”—and faulted doctors for a startling dearth of understanding.¹²¹ The impotence of physicians, usually held in esteem as “paragons of learning and virtue,” has functioned as a rhetorical foil for both the orishas’ power and that of Lucumí as a ritual technology and structure of signification superior to

medical science.¹²² This is not to insinuate, however, that the narrators have always secretly longed for *ocha* while telling their interlocutors otherwise. It is, instead, to historicize their speech practices and pursue the logic of their statements, instead of—with all the exasperation of Tato’s doctor—referring them to psychiatrists.¹²³ The “language-game” of pain presupposes that the sensations others claim to feel cannot be externally verified, and it is beyond the scope of this article to assess any given story as a fact or record of true life experience. What the expression of pain may reliably denote, however, is an attempt to assign meaning to and operationalize affliction, particularly as a confirmation of the spirits’ reality and power. In recounting initiation stories, priests have shown their interlocutors how to articulate, and therefore comprehend, the spirits’ role in their wellbeing. These narratives thus have redounded to the conversion of speakers and listeners alike into religious subjects.

Conclusion

In the foregoing, I asserted that initiation narratives not only constitute a speech genre but also play a major role in habituating practitioners to the intersubjective frames of reference employed by Lucumí initiates to interpret pivotal experiences, particularly as media for communication with the spirits. Far from idle chitchat, these stories have helped to enlarge the tradition by persuading interlocutors of the reality of the orishas, and the efficacy of rituals deemed to be felicitous, especially when formerly profane objects are consecrated and endowed with agency. In relating anecdotes about their pre-initiatory struggles, priests have celebrated what is seen as the spirits’ complete ownership of comparatively weak human bodies and capacity to override any conceivable opposition to their divine will. The subtext of practitioners’ recollections has been that Lucumí’s ritual protocols provide a uniquely potent channel for the spirits’ energy, as harnessed by their authoritative representatives. Although it behooves us to acknowledge that speech genres spring partly from pre-existing sources, it bears repeating that priests’ stories do not simply mobilize narrative formulae concerning religious transformation. They have themselves been ideologically transformative. This has surely been the most consequential social effect of initiation narratives.

The significance of religious narratives that are not “sacred”—not myths, praise-songs, or oracular speech—must be fleshed out in order for scholars

to develop a more sensitive approach to religious subjectivity as progressively embodied, and to the relations of force obtaining in the most casual of verbal exchanges. To this end, the argument I advanced here drew on assiduously collected oral histories, an underexploited resource in the study of Africana religions, to illustrate the prevalence of affliction, rather than desire, as the main catalyst for initiation in practitioners' stories. I identified some precedents for the initiates' self-representations, and showed that they have woven their experiences into narrative patterns that appear to manifest divine intentionality. I then demonstrated that their testimonials have been both descriptive and prescriptive, not simply reporting the details surrounding individual initiations, but also acting to pull interlocutors toward an understanding of themselves as implicated within the world of the spirits. The main incentive for scholars to conduct studies along these lines is that a better grasp on Africana traditions' mechanisms of socialization would offer insight not only into the logic of their ritual practices, but also into the ways that everyday speech genres have lent cohesion to religious identities, and meaning to unutterable pain.

Notes

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1. *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 142.
2. A small selection of significant titles include Fernando Ortiz, *La Africantía de la música folklórica de Cuba / Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba / Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana*, 5 vols. (La Habana: Editora Universitaria, 1965); Isabel Castellanos, *The Use of Language in Afro-Cuban Religion* (PhD diss., Georgetown University, 1976); Miguel F. Santiago, *Dancing with the Saints: The Dance Experience in Santería* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: InterAmerican University Press, 1993); Jesús Fuentes Guerra, *Cultos afrocubanos: un estudio etnolingüístico* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1996); Katherine J. Hagedorn, *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001); David H. Brown, *Santería*

Enthroned: Art, Ritual and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); and Yvonne Daniel, *Dancing Wisdom: Embodied Knowledge in Haitian Vodou, Cuban Yoruba, and Bahian Candomblé* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

3. I have in mind such volumes as Robert Alan Friedman, "Making an Abstract World Concrete: Knowledge, Competence, and Structural Dimensions of Performance among Bata Drummers in Santería" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1982); Steven Gregory, *Santería in New York City: A Study in Cultural Resistance* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999); Stephan Palmié, *Das Exil der Götter: Geschichte und Vorstellungswelt einer afrokubanischen Religion* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991); Kristina Silke Wirtz, *Ritual, Discourse, and Community in Cuban Santería: Speaking a Sacred World* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007); Claire Garoutte and Anneke Wambaugh, *Crossing the Water: A Photographic Path to the Afro-Cuban Spirit World* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007); and Jualynne E. Dodson, *Sacred Spaces and Religious Traditions in Oriente Cuba* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2008). Surveys of African American practitioners have also enlarged the field and drawn vital attention to the growing demographic importance of Anglophone converts to the tradition.
4. Most subsequent ethnographic references to Ilé Laroye and other fieldwork situations are based on four years of fieldwork, 2005–9, conducted with the approval of the University of Chicago Social and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board. I have changed the name of this community and all my interlocutors for reasons of confidentiality.
5. I hesitate to overstate others' even joking perception of me as "ghetto" outside the *ilé*.
6. See Cora Daniels, *Ghettonation: A Journey Into the Land of Bling and Home of the Shameless* (New York: Doubleday, 2007). I write at greater length on the effect of my gender and ethnic identity as a Cuban-American Latina within this community in "Narrative, Seasoning, Song: Praxis, Subjectivity, and Transformation in an African American Lucumí Community" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2010).
7. This was no doubt attributable to both my self-presentation and academic affiliation. I lived in painful awareness of the history of cultural appropriation that would render indecorous attempts to ingratiate myself through "common" speech or behavior to my interlocutors. For instance, I regarded the sort of verbal minstrelsy employed by some to mimic what is perceived as African American speech, or "black-'cent" (a play on the phrase "black accent") as not merely undesirable but offensive. Nevertheless, I heartily deserved any treatment as a figure of fun.
8. The "Evergreen Mall" is called "Ever-Black" by both Anglos and blacks on the South Side of Chicago.
9. The use of "ghetto" to mean bad, unclean, poorly made, or messy, is widespread. Rita Astuti writes, "Throughout my stay with the Vezo [of Western Madagascar], I witnessed a constant stream of commentary on the making and undoing of

- Vezo-ness,” and there are several parallels in my experience with ghettoness as “an activity rather than a state of being.” Rita Astuti, “‘The Vezo Are Not a Kind of People’: Identity, Difference, and ‘Ethnicity’ among a Fishing People of Western Madagascar,” *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 3 (1995): 469.
10. See Robin D. G. Kelley, “Looking for the ‘Real’ Nigga: Social Scientists Construct the Ghetto,” in *That’s the Joint!: The Hip-Hop Studies Reader*, ed. Murray Forman and Mark Anthony Neal (New York: Routledge, 2004), 119–36; David West Brown, “Girls and Guys, Ghetto and Bougie: Metapragmatics, Ideology and the Management of Social Identities,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 10, no. 5 (2006): 596–610; and Jennifer L. Cohen, “Global Links From the Postindustrial Heartland: Language, Internet Use, and Identity Development Among U.S.-Born Mexican High School Girls,” in *Latino Language and Literacy in Ethnolinguistic Chicago*, ed. Marcia Farr (New York: Routledge, 2005), 187–216.
 11. The term “tactical essentialism” is that of Alberto Moreiras, *The Exhaustion of Difference: The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001); Moreiras is building on Gayatri Spivak’s term “strategic essentialism,” used by Latino and African American youth “to claim the distinctiveness and exclusivity of their cultural space while they also make room for their own exceptionality (and thus chances of individual upward mobility) by challenging the biological bases of race.” Amy C. Wilkins, “Puerto Rican Wannabes: Sexual Spectacle and the Marking of Race, Class, and Gender Boundaries,” *Gender & Society* 18, no. 1 (2004): 113. See also Stuart Hall, “What Is This ‘Black’ in Black Popular Culture?” in *Black Popular Culture: A Project by Michelle Wallace*, ed. Gina Dent (Seattle, Wash.: Bay Press, 1992).
 12. Brian K. Smith, “Ritual, Knowledge, and Being: Initiation and Veda Study in Ancient India,” *Numen* 33, fasc. 1 (1986): 65.
 13. Paul Ricoeur uses this term in *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, ed. Mark I. Wallace, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 217.
 14. For the most part, they had come to embrace Lucumí later in life, after diverse experiences with a range of traditions.
 15. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature, Being the Gifford Lectures on Natural Religion, Delivered at Edinburgh, in 1901–1902* (London: Longman, Green, 1902); Max Heirich, “A Change of Heart: A Test of Some Widely Held Theories about Religious Conversion,” *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 3 (1977): 653–80.
 16. See, for example, Richard G. Gelb, “The Magic of Verbal Art: Juanita’s Santería Initiation” in *Latino Language and Literacy in Ethnolinguistic Chicago*, ed. Marcia Farr (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2005), 323–50.
 17. For instance, Stefania Capone, *Les Yoruba du Nouveau Monde: Religion, ethnicité et nationalisme noir aux États-Unis* (Paris: Karthala, 2005).
 18. David Scott, “‘An Obscure Miracle of Connection’: Discursive Tradition and Black Diaspora Criticism,” *Small Axe* 1:19–38.
 19. Roger M. Keesing, “Anthropology as Interpretive Quest,” *Current Anthropology* 28, no. 2 (1987): 164.

20. Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, trans. John B. Thompson (London: Polity Press, 1991), 117.
21. It is problematic to assume that these ritual protocols are normative within such a decentralized tradition, especially in light of recent attempts at codification and the formulation of orthodoxy among practitioners. However, I have furnished this ideal-typical description of the initiation ritual in order to suggest the arduous nature of the ritual process, at least according to published accounts. No part of it comes from the Chicago-based house of *ocha* mentioned above, for I have been neither an initiate—and therefore privy to the ceremonies I describe—nor in a position to interview any of my informants concerning these rites. The details in this section derive from the literature on Lucumí from the mid-twentieth century onward; for a selection of references based on ritual protocols in Cuba and several cities throughout the United States, including Houston, as well as in Mexico, see Teodoro Díaz Fabelo, *Olórun* (La Habana: Ediciones del Departamento de Folklore del Teatro Nacional de Cuba, 1960); Obá Ecún, *Oricha: Metodología de la religión Yoruba* (Miami: Editorial SIBI, 1985); Jorge Castellanos and Isabel Castellanos, *Cultura Afrocubana*, vol. 3 (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1988); Joseph M. Murphy, *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994); Mary Ann Clark, “Asho Orisha (Clothing of the Orisha): Material Culture as Religious Expression in Santería” (PhD diss., Rice University, 1999); Michael Atwood Mason, *Living Santería: Rituals and Experiences in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002); Heriberto Feraudy Espino, *Irna: Un encuentro con la santería, el espiritismo y el Palo Monte* (Santo Domingo: Editora Manatí, 2002); Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Elizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); and Noemí Quezada, *Religiosidad popular México-Cuba* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, Plaza y Valdés Editores, 2004).
22. Elders’ protégés are called godchildren, and the priests, godparents. Some Lucumí lineages employ the male diviners of the Ifá oracle, called *babaláwos*; other houses initiate using the priests termed *oríates* as “masters of ceremonies” for initiation, and they defer to the sixteen-cowries divination system—practiced by both men and women—in almost all cases.
23. Perhaps the best extended consideration of the resonance of the term is to be found in Mary Ann Clark, *Where Men Are Wives and Mothers Rule: Santería Ritual Practices and Their Gender Implications* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 65–91.
24. In other houses of *ocha*, they are barred from seeing themselves in a mirror for a year. The prohibition against mirrors may be thought of as interrupting the process of an individual’s never-ending self-fashioning, in deference to the community’s construction of her personhood through the regulations of *iyaworaje* and the dictates of *itá*.

25. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 92.
26. Brian K. Smith, "Ritual, Knowledge, and Being: Initiation and Veda Study in Ancient India," *Numen* 33, fasc. 1 (1986): 65.
27. Lydia Cabrera, *El monte: Igbo fínda, ewe orisha, vititi nfinda* (Miami: Colección del Chichereku, 1983 [1954]). In Rómulo Lachatañeré's *El sistema religioso de los afro-cubanos* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2004), published as articles between 1939 and 1946 and in 1961—and still partly unpublished, according to Jean Stubbs, Lila Haines, and Meic F. Haines, *Cuba* (Oxford: Clio Press, 1996)—the author writes, "Y como la iniciación no responde siempre a la necesidad obligatoria de ejercer el sacerdocio, sino que ésta es una cualidad vocacional del individuo—los cultos se nutren con 'hijos' de santo que se inician simplemente por su salud," 114.
28. Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. V. W. McGee, C. Emerson, and M. Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 60–102.
29. See Bettyruth Walter, *The Jury Summation as Speech Genre: An Ethnographic Study of What It Means to Those Who Use It* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins Pub. Co., 1988) and E. Summerson Carr, *Scripting Addiction: The Politics of Therapeutic Talk and American Sobriety* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011).
30. Alessandro Duranti, "Samoan Speechmaking across Social Events: One Genre In and Out of Fono," *Language and Society* 12 (1983): 1–22.
31. William F. Hanks, "Discourse Genres in a Theory of Practice," *American Ethnologist* 14, no. 4 (1987): 668–92.
32. Taussig, 142.
33. David H. Brown, "Garden in the Machine: Afro-Cuban Sacred Art and Performance in Urban New Jersey and New York" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1989), 202.
34. Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2003), 159–200.
35. Personal communication, December 18, 2005, and January 7, 2006.
36. Personal communication, January 22, 2006. As of this writing, I am unsure of whether Nilaja consciously chose these words as an invocation of the movie scene or if the words came to her unbidden. The cinematic exchange is as follows:

Phil Davis (Danny Kaye): How much is "wow"?

Bob Wallace (Bing Crosby): It's right in between, uh, "ouch"
and "boing."

Phil Davis (Danny Kaye): Wow!
37. Mary Cuthrell Curry, *Making the Gods in New York: The Yoruba Religion in the African American Community* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 90.
38. Wirtz, *Speaking a Sacred World*, 120.

39. Personal communication, August 13, 2007.
40. Victor W. Turner, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study in Ndembu Village Life* (Oxford: Berg, 1996 [1957]), 303.
41. Tomás Fernández Robaina, *Hablen paleros y santeros* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 2001), 2. Wirtz lists four motives for *ocha* identified by her main informant in contemporary Santiago: “family tradition,” “irresolvable problems,” “serious illness,” and “affinity for the religion” (2007, 89). Similarly, in his study of Candomblé, Umbanda, and Kardecist Spiritism in Brazil, Stanley Krippner lists “five pathways that allowed practitioners to receive their call,” but what he enumerates are entry points into the tradition, not participation trajectories, and they do not necessarily condition continued participation. Stanley Krippner, “Learning from the Spirits: Candomblé, Umbanda, and Kardecismo in Recife, Brazil,” *Anthropology of Consciousness* 19, no. 1 (2008): 8.
42. Although in some cases, death looms in retrospect as fatal accident or homicide, the death forestalled through *ocha* has most often been constructed by initiates as the outcome of illness.
43. See Hagedorn, 40.
44. Richard G. Gelb, “Literacy and Magic: The Role of Oral and Written Texts within a Santería Religious Community” (PhD diss., University of Illinois–Chicago, 1999), 106.
45. John Mason, *Ìdáná Fún Òrìṣà: Cooking for Selected Heads* (Brooklyn: Yorùbá Theological Archministry, 1999), 3; italics mine.
46. Robaina, 6. For instance, in Tabaré Güerere, *Hablan los santeros* (Caracas: Alfadil Ediciones, 1993), six of the seven practitioners questioned for his study pointed to illness or detection of sorcery as “confirmations” for the existence of the spirits, and fingered illness as motivating factors for initiation. But even this is to isolate phenomena that have been apt to coincide in practitioners’ narratives, where illness has prompted the divination that in turn mandates *ocha*, and forces a reevaluation of the religion.
47. Theresa Varela, “The Mirror Behind the Mask: Experiences of Five People Living with HIV/AIDS Who Practice Santería” (PhD diss., New York University, 2001), 77–78.
48. See, for instance, Argelio Frutos, *Panteón Yoruba: conversación con un santero* (Holguín, Cuba: Ediciones Holguín, 1992), and Juan Manuel Saldívar Arellano, *Nuevas formas de adoración y culto: La construcción social de la santería en Catemaco, Veracruz, México* (Madrid: Editorial Vision Libros, 2009).
49. Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, 193. This symbol belongs to Shangó, but priests hold that it would prove useless without the organic mixture placed inside of it, called *osain* for the herbalist orisha.
50. Robaina, 24–25; translation mine. This story resembles another recorded in Germany by Lioba Rossbach de Olmos: “He was not really enthusiastic when he heard that his son was going to be initiated into Santería, and he always remained skeptical. It was by chance that Alexander got in touch with the Afro-Cuban

- religion. . . ." Lioba Rossbach de Olmos, "Santería Abroad: The Short History of an Afro-Cuban Religion in Germany by Means of Biographies of Some of Its Priests," *Anthropos* 104, no. 2 (2009): 483–97.
51. Wirtz, *Speaking a Sacred World*, 91.
 52. Mercedes C. Sandoval writes of an informant, "Many times she had been told by other *santeros* that Yemaya wanted her head and that she had to be initiated. . . . She never quite believed what they told her, because she did not believe too much in this religion. . . ." Mercedes C. Sandoval, "Santería as a Mental Health Care System: An Historical Overview," *Medical Anthropology* 13, no. 2 (1979): 137–51.
 53. Robaina, 24–25; translation mine.
 54. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973).
 55. Mikhail Bakhtin and Michael Holquist, eds., and Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans., *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 120–21.
 56. In Lucumí, the metaphor of roads is privileged; for the different manifestations of orishas, the West African Yorùbá use the image of rippling pools in a river, or *ibú*, that are named extensions of the same body of water. See Karin Barber, "'Oríkì,' Women and the Proliferation and Merging of 'orìṣà,'" *Africa* 60, no. 3 (1990): 313–37.
 57. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 120. In fact, diviner Ócha'ni Lele writes, "In Ifa, it is said that there are 256 paths of Elegguá, one for each *odu*." Ócha'ni Lele, *The Dilogún: The Orishas, Proverbs, Sacrifices, and Prohibitions of Cuban Santería* (Rochester, Vt.: Destiny Books, 2003), 593.
 58. Personal communication. Lucumí rites of passage also put their subjects on paths, quite literally. For example, on the last day of an *ocha*, elders remove the new initiate from her confinement, take her to a market, and ask her to deposit offerings for Eleguá at the four corners around it. See Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, 167.
 59. Personal communication.
 60. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 113.
 61. Krippner, 9.
 62. On this occasion, I took notes by hand while Nilaja and another interlocutor, Bobbi, spoke.
 63. Personal communication, January 7, 2006.
 64. I asked, "Did you read [about the religion]?" And she replied, "There were no books to read, [just] Migene [González-] Wippler, that I now know is the worst."
 65. My field notes read, "contention between Black and Spanish folks in NY, 'there was a communication issue, nationalism, language issue, Blacks thought Spanish speakers talking about them.'" In retrospect, Nilaja said, "he was another one who was perpetrating."
 66. Field notes November 14, 2005.
 67. On the practice of receiving such orishas by practitioners for health reasons, see Brown, "Garden," 206–7.
 68. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 115.

69. To extend the analogy, narrators' peripeteia, or reversal of fortunes, would be the restoration of health experienced upon initiation.
70. "A Groundwork for West Indian Cultural Openness," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no. 3 (2007): 569, 570–71.
71. Jerome S. Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1986), 26.
72. Wardle, "A Groundwork," 572. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 29.
73. Italo Calvino, *The Uses of Literature: Essays*, trans. Patrick Creagh (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1987), 157.
74. Tracey E. Hucks, "'Burning with a Flame in America': African American Women in African-Derived Traditions," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 17, no. 2 (2001): 90.
75. See Amy Hollywood, "Gender, Agency, and the Divine in Religious Historiography," *Journal of Religion* 84, no. 4 (2004): 514–28; and, for North American Roman Catholics' portrayal of doctors in their accounts of miraculous cures and healing, Robert Orsi, "The Cult of the Saints and the Reimagination of the Space and Time of Sickness in Twentieth-Century American Catholicism," in *Religion and Healing in America*, ed. Linda L. Barnes and Susan Starr Sered (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 29–47.
76. "To study conversion is . . . to study the variety of conditions under which it makes sense to talk about being converted," James A. Beckford writes. "Accounting for Conversion," *The British Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 2 (1978): 250.
77. Clifford L. Staples and Armand L. Mauss, "Conversion or Commitment? A Reassessment of the Snow and Machalek Approach to the Study of Conversion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 26, no. 2 (1987): 144n2.
78. Martin Holbraad, "Definitive Evidence, from Cuban Gods," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14 (2008): S93–109.
79. "Enactment of expertise" is a term borrowed from E. Summerson Carr, in "Enactments of Expertise," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (2010): 17–32.
80. Personal communication, October 9, 2006. See also Elizabeth Pérez, "Spiritist Mediumship as Historical Mediation: African-American Pasts, Black Ancestral Presence, and Afro-Cuban Religions," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 41, no. 4 (2011): 330–65.
81. See Peter A. Dorsey, *Sacred Estrangement: The Rhetoric of Conversion in Modern American Autobiography* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993). This is not to say that these stories have served merely as ritualized declarations of bona fides. Although a longitudinal study would be needed to establish a correlation between narratives of *ocha* and the relative seniority of narrators, the members of Ilé Laroye I interviewed immediately prior to their initiations offered more diffuse and generally inchoate reasons for their *ochas*, while elders tended to observe the conventions of the speech genre with greater fidelity. Other factors that contributed to initiation—such as the corporeal training—were ignored or relegated to a subordinate position.

82. Alejo Carpentier, *El reino de este mundo* (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1984), 11; my translation.
83. I am thinking specifically of the work of Tracey E. Hucks, Mary Cuthrell Curry, Steven Gregory, and more recently, Stefania Capone and Suzanne Marie Henderson. See also Sixto Gastón Agüero, *El materialismo explica el Espiritismo y la Santería* (La Habana: Orbe, 1961); Anibal Argüelles Mederos and Ileana Hodge Limonta, *Los llamados cultos sincréticos y el espiritismo: estudio monográfico sobre su significación social en la sociedad cubana contemporánea* (La Habana: Editorial Academia, 1991); George Brandon, *Santería from Africa to the New World: The Dead Sell Memories* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); and Ivor L. Miller, "Belief and Power in Contemporary Cuba: The Dialogue between Santería Practitioners and Revolutionary Leaders" (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1995). In J. Lorand Matory, "The Many Who Dance in Me: Afro-Atlantic Ontology and the Problem with 'Transnationalism,'" in *Transnational Transcendence*, ed. Thomas J. Csordas (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 231–62, the author questions whether globalization is the appropriate term to use for the phenomenon in question. Although Matory had previously made similar arguments, this essay followed on the heels of Jacob K. Olupona and Terry Rey, eds., *Orisa Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yorùbá Religious Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008).
84. See Jesús Guanche, *Procesos etnoculturales de Cuba* (La Habana: Editorial Letras, 1983), and Natalia Bolívar Aróstegui and Mario López Cepero, *¿Sincretismo religioso? Santa Bárbara/Changó* (La Habana: Pablo de la Torrient, 1990).
85. In this vein, one should mention Eugene Berhard Filipowicz, "Santería as Revitalization among African-Americans" (MA thesis, Florida State University, 1998), and Carlos F. Cardoza Orlandi, "Drum Beats of Resistance and Liberation: Afro-Caribbean Religions, the Struggle for Life and the Christian Theologian," *Journal of Latino/Hispanic Theology* 3, no. 1 (1995): 50–61. Apropos of a similar dynamic, Matt Hills writes, "Previous fan-ethnography has largely erred on the side of accepting fan discourse as interpretive 'knowledge.' My aim here is to reconsider fan discourse as a justification for fan passions and attachments." Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (London: Routledge, 2002), 66.
86. The bulk of this scholarship also tacitly accepted a "push-pull model" of conversion that explains religious commitment sociologically in terms of converts' preadaptations. Rodney Stark and William Sims Bainbridge, "Networks of Faith: Interpersonal Bonds and Recruitment to Cults and Sects," *American Journal of Sociology* 85, no. 6 (1980): 1376–95. Among those hewing closely to this model, one could cite R. B. Simmonds, "Conversion as Addiction: Consequences of Joining a Jesus Movement Group," *American Behavioral Science* 20 (1977): 909–24; and Peter Worsley, *The Trumpet Shall Sound: A Study of "Cargo" Cults in Melanesia* (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1968). Various scholars have traced the "push-pull model" of conversion to a more general "deprivation theory of religion" that explains religious

- participation as “otherworldly” compensation for different types of secular disadvantage, according to a “rational choice” understanding of social action. See R. Stark and W. S. Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New York: Lang, 1987).
87. The examples are too numerous to mention here, but representative works include Anahi Viladrich, “Between Bellyaches and Lucky Charms: Revealing Latinos’ Plant-Healing Knowledge and Practices in New York City,” in *Traveling Cultures and Plants: The Ethnobiology and Ethnopharmacy of Migrations*, ed. A. Pieroni and I. Vandebroek (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007), 64–85; and Johan Wedel, *Santería Healing: A Journey into the Afro-Cuban World of Divinities, Spirits, and Sorcery* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).
 88. Suzanne Marie Henderson, “The African-American Experience of Orisha Worship” (PhD diss., Temple University, 2007); Tracey E. Hucks, “Approaching the African God: An Examination of African-American Yoruba History from 1959 to the Present” (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1998) and *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012); and Curry, *Making the Gods in New York*.
 89. One notable exception is María Elena Puig, “Perceived Social Support, Subjective Well-Being, and the Practice of Santería among Four Immigrant Waves: A Comparative Study of Cuban-Americans in Dade County, Florida” (PhD diss., Barry University, 1997). Puig found no empirical evidence to demonstrate that Lucumí gave practitioners either the social support system or sense of subjective well-being that previous studies—adopting the views of informants—had claimed.
 90. Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005), 106.
 91. Rane Willerslev, *Soul Hunters: Hunting, Animism, and Personhood among the Siberian Yukaghirs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 156. Occasionally this was based on the assumption “that a body of context-free, propositional knowledge about spiritual beings, their characteristics and interrelations, lies fully formed inside people’s heads.”
 92. Aisha Khan, “Isms and Schisms: Interpreting Religion in the Americas,” review of *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo*, by Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Anthropological Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (2003): 769.
 93. To compile a very abbreviated list of prominent scholars initiated in the course of research or thereafter, one could mention Maya Deren, Katherine Dunham, and Karen McCarthy Brown (into different levels of Vodou); Michael Atwood Mason, David H. Brown, Katherine Hagedorn, Suzanne Marie Henderson, and Yvonne Daniel (into Lucumí); Kamari Maxine Clarke (into the Oyotúnjí community); Roger Bastide, Mikelle Smith Omari-Tunkara, and Jim Wafer (into Candomblé); and Pierre Verger (into indigenous Yorùbá religion in Nigeria). The late Mary Cuthrell Curry also made *ocha* and initiated godchildren.

94. W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (London: Longmans, Green, 1965 [1903]).
95. Stephan Palmié, "Santería Grand Slam: Afro-Cuban Religious Studies and the Study of Afro-Cuban Religion," *New West Indian Guide* 79, nos. 3–4 (2005): 284–85. A welcome reevaluation of the "emic" has resulted from the critique of positivist objectivity and postures of detachment in anthropology and sociology. But adopting an emic perspective in the very course of study may well militate against the formulation of that adoption process as an analytical problematic.
96. Brian Brazeal, "Africa, Exú and the Devil: Methodological Perspectives for the Ethnography of Candomblé" (Paper presented at the Brazilian Studies Association annual meetings, Chico Calif. March 29, 2008).
97. One could object that it is impossible to confirm whether elders in every house of orisha worship tell similar stories, and that this claim only goes further in the theoretically and politically dubious direction of trying to codify Lucumí as a tradition with characteristic ritual practices seen as authentic. I would counter that it is not necessary for every single Lucumí priest to reproduce the initiation narrative in order to point out that a great number have found it important to relate it, and the frequent incidence of its recurrence in the publications on the tradition requires some in-depth analysis. It may well be that the initiation narrative as outlined here will lose its force and be replaced with other autobiographical speech genres—and the tradition will still remain recognizable as Lucumí.
98. As Stephan Palmié, "Making Sense of Santería: Three Books on Afro-Cuban Religion," in *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West Indische Gids* 70, nos. 3–4 (1996): 291–300. See also Stephan Palmié, "Of Pharisees and Snark-Hunters: Afro-Cuban Religion as an Object of Knowledge," *Culture and Religion* 2, no. 1 (2001): 3–20. One example of a libreta would be Enrique Cortez, *Secretos del oriaté de la religión Yoruba* (New York: Vilaragut Artículos Religiosos Corp., 1980). The oldest libreta found by Erwan Dianteill is the *Folleto para uso del santero (Obba)*, which dates from approximately 1850. See Erwan Dianteill, *Des dieux et des signes: Initiation, écriture et divination dans les religions afro-cubaines* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des hautes études en sciences sociales, 2000). See also Nicolás Valentín Angarica, *Manual de Orihaté: Religión Lucumí* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1979 [ca. 1955]); Carlos Elizondo, *Manual del Italero de la Religión Lucumí* (Union City, N.J.: [s.n.], 1979 [ca. 1937]); and Lázara Menéndez, "Libreta de santería de María Antoñica Fines, Libreta de santería de Jesús Torregrosa," in *Estudios afrocubanos: Selección de lecturas*, ed. Lázara Menéndez (La Habana: Facultad de Arte y Letras, Universidad de la Habana, 1998). Possibly the earliest manual was Rómulo Lachatañeré, *Manual de Santería: el sistema de cultos "lucumís"* (La Habana, Cuba: Editorial Caribe, 1942). Among the more recent manuals with a distinct how-to tone, one could list Agún Efunde, *Los secretos de la Santería* (New York: Ediciones Cubamerica: 1978); Donna Rose, *Santería, the Cuban-African Magical System* (Hialeah, Fla.: Mi-World, 1980); Julio García Cortez (Obbá Bí), *El Santo (la Ocha): secretos de la religión Lucumí* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1983); Tomás Medina Pérez's *La santería cubana: el camino de Osha: ceremonias, ritos, y secretos*

(Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 1998); Ramón Andrés Quesada Suárez, *Secretos de santería afrocubana* (Barcelona: Ediciones Obelisco, 2007); Paulino Hernández and Marta Avedo, *Santería afrocubana: sincretismo con la religión católica, ceremonias y oráculos* (Madrid: Eride Editorial, 1998); Luis Manuel Núñez, *Santería: A Practical Guide to Afro-Caribbean Magic* (Dallas, Tex.: Spring Publications, Inc., 1992); and Ralph Alpizar and Damián París' *Santería cubana: mito y realidad* (Madrid: Ediciones Martínez Roca, 2004). Venezuelan author Héctor Izaguirre has published a series of short pamphlets, including *Los tambores de África en América* (Caracas: Editorial Panapo, 1997) and *Korí-Koto Yemayá: Dada Baldone, Obañeñe, Los Ibeiyis; sexualidad, maternidad* (Caracas: Editorial Panapo, 1998). This series combines the manual and the libreta form, in much the same manner as those of the American babaláwo Awo Fá'Lokun Fatunmbi concerning different orishas.

99. Raul Canizares, *Walking with the Night: The Afro-Cuban World of Santería* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1993). In Moreno Vega's *The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santería* and Luisah Teish's *Jambalaya: The Natural Woman's Book of Personal Charms and Practical Rituals* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), the eyewitness account assumes the form of a memoir, and borrows discursive modes from both the academic monograph and manual.
100. The "eyewitness account" also often attempts to explain the development of Lucumí as a tradition, as well as reveal its true nature or essence, as opposed to the distortions of wayward fellow practitioners or the general public. See Miguel A. De La Torre, *Santería: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004) and Mary Ann Clark, *Santería: Correcting the Myths and Uncovering the Realities of a Growing Religion* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2007). Migene González-Wippler's *Santería: African Magic in Latin America* (New York: Julian Press, 1973) and *Santería: The Religion* (St. Paul, Minn.: Llewellyn Press, 1989) both relied overmuch on Cabrera's research decades earlier, yet they remain popular today.
101. This is also the case for monographs focused, in large part, on religious language and the acquisition of ritual vocabulary as part of practitioners' socialization into ritual contexts and communities, such as Andrés Isidoro Pérez y Mena's *Speaking with the Dead: Development of Afro-Latin Religion among Puerto Ricans in the United States* (New York: AME Press, Inc., 1991).
102. Karl F. Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2002), xii. I suspect that the instantaneous conversion may owe much to television and filmic portrayals of the process, with their time-lapse photography encapsulations of human experience. Morrison writes that the term "conversion" originally referred to the process by which art was restored to a pristine state through a process of cleansing and reconstruction. *Ibid.*, xiii.
103. In many European cultures not only conversion itself, but also special devotion to particular saints, is still cast as the result of mysterious illness, either cured or ameliorated through the intercession of a beatified or canonized personage.

104. Kjersti Larsen, *Where Humans and Spirits Meet: The Politics of Rituals and Identified Spirits in Zanzibar* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2008), 42; Tracy Luedke, "Healing Bodies: Materiality, History, and Power among the Prophets of Central Mozambique" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2005).
105. John M. Janzen, "Self-presentation and Common Cultural Structures in Ngoma Rituals of Southern Africa," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 25, fasc. 2 (1995): 146.
106. See Todd Ramón Ochoa, *Society of the Dead: Quita Manaquita and Palo Praise in Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 9; Betty M. Kuyk, *African Voices in the African American Heritage* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 96–99; Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Wyatt MacGaffey, "Twins, Simbi Spirits and Lwas in Kongo and Haiti," in Linda M. Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 211–26; and John M. Janzen, *Lemba, 1650–1930: A Drum of Affliction in Africa and the New World* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982).
107. It bears mentioning that just as Lucumí initiates have tended to rely on multiple hierarchized and multiethnic spirits (*orichas*, *nfumí*, *inquices*, ancestors, and spirit guides), so too have practitioners of *ngoma* turned to categories of spirits differentiated by ethnicity and classed accordingly.
108. T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), 29; I. M. Lewis, *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession* (New York: Penguin Books, 1971); Oliva M. Espin, *Latina Healers: Lives of Power and Tradition* (Encino, Calif.: Floricanto Press, 1996).
109. Lewis, 172; Thomas Carlyle, *The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, 1897), 489.
110. Alejandra M. Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 95. See also Alejandra M. Bronfman, "'En Plena Libertad y Democracia': Negros Brujos and the Social Question, 1904–1919," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82, no. 3 (2002): 549–88.
111. Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, 70.
112. Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886–1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995).
113. Fernando Ortiz, *Hampa afro-cubana: Los negros brujos: Apuntes para un estudio de etnología criminal* (Madrid: Librería de Fernando Fé, 1906).
114. Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*, 250.
115. Alfred Lindesmith and Yale Levin, "The Lombrosian Myth in Criminology," *American Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 5 (1937): 653–71.
116. Cited in Bronfman, 94.
117. See Kristina Silke Wirtz, "How Diasporic Religious Communities Remember: Learning to Speak the 'Tongue of the Oricha' in Cuban Santería," *American Ethnologist* 34, no. 1 (2007): 116; David H. Brown, "Review of *Africa's Ogún: Old World and New*,"

- American Ethnologist* 19, no. 2 (1992): 377–78; Edna M. Rodríguez-Mangual, *Lydia Cabrera and the Construction of an Afro-Cuban Cultural Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 64–65; Erwan Dianteill and Martha Swearingen, “From Hierography to Ethnography and Back: Lydia Cabrera’s Texts and the Written Tradition in Afro-Cuban Religions,” *Journal of American Folklore* 116, no. 2 (2003): 273–92. Other written materials, such as dream interpretation pamphlets, glossaries, and the *libretas*, or manuals, continue to serve as initiates’ personalized reference guides and records of religious training. They have also played a part in practitioners’ “processes of entextualization to create a seemingly shareable, transmittable culture.” Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, “The Natural History of Discourse,” in *Natural Histories of Discourse*, ed. Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 2.
118. Bruce Braun, “Biopolitics and the Molecularization of Life,” *Cultural Geographies* 14, no. 1 (2007): 6–28.
119. Michel Foucault, “Truth and Power,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972–1977*, ed. C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 109–33. As John Kirk writes, “During the first two decades of the Revolution, people who insisted on continuing their religious practice were routinely referred to psychologists, and some were sent away to work camps for ‘anti-social elements,’ including homosexuals, deviants and criminals—that is, ‘those who were not trusted for incorporation into the regular armed forces.’” John Kirk, *Between God and Party: Religion and Politics in Revolutionary Cuba* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1989), 111–12.
120. James M. Wilce Jr., “‘I Can’t Tell You All My Troubles’: Conflict, Resistance, and Metacommunication in Bangladeshi Illness Interactions,” *American Ethnologist* 22, no. 4 (1995): 927–52.
121. Jean Langford, “Doxic Bodies/Docile Bodies,” in *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*, ed. Margaret M. Lock and Judith Farquhar (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 376–82; David B. Morris, “About Suffering: Voice, Genre, and Moral Community,” in *Social Suffering*, ed. A. Kleinman, V. Das, and M. M. Lock (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 25–46.
122. John Walton, Paul B. Beeson, and Ronald Bodley Scott, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Medicine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 322; Lydia Cabrera, *La medicina popular en Cuba: médicos de antaño, curanderos, santeros y paleros de hoy* (Miami: Ultra Graphics Corp, 1984).
123. Palmié has quoted a diviner as saying, “none of my clients are any crazier than you and me,” and this is also my assumption. Palmié, “Santería Grand Slam,” 283n4.