Almatourism

Journal of Tourism, Culture and Territorial Development

Santurismo: The Commodification of Santería and the Touristic Value of Afro-Cuban Derived Religions in Cuba

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ABSTRACT

Santurismo (*Santería + Turismo*) refers to the popular formula of Afro-Cuban religions and tourism and initially served the Cuban government in the 1960s to promote Santería as a folkloric product of Cuban identity through staged performances in touristic surroundings. Gradually, it became a coping strategy by Cuban people to deal with political and economic hardship during the Special Period in the 1990s which led to the emergence of *diplo-santería* by so-called *jinetero-santeros*. While the continuous process of commodification of Cuban Santería is marked by local social, economic and political influences, it also relates to current tendencies in comparable religious and spiritual phenomena at a global level. This research paper is based on an extensive literature review as well as on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Cuba in 2016. It aims at showing in which ways Afro-Cuban religions have worked their way up from a stigmatized and persecuted religious system to a widely valorized religion in the spiritual and touristic sphere. While warning for the consequences of its commodification, it also shows that, over time, Santería has proved to serve as a weapon for resistance and struggle, which is still ongoing in Cuban society today.

Keywords: Santería; Tourism; Afro-Cuban Religions; Jineterismo; Commodification

Santurismo (*Santería + Turismo*) refiere a las prácticas coincidentes de las religiones afrocubanas y el turismo e, inicialmente, sirvió al gobierno cubano en los años 60 para la promoción de la Santería como producto folklórico de identidad a través de actuaciones mostradas en ambientes turísticos. Con los años, esta práctica se convirtió en una estrategia de supervivencia en Cuba para lidiar con dificultades políticas y

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económicas durante El Periodo Especial en los años 90, lo cual resultó en la emergencia de la llamada *diplo-santeria* por los '*jineteros-santeros*'. Aun cuando el proceso continuo de commodificación de la Santería cubana es caracterizada por influencias sociales, económicas y políticas a nivel nacional, también se relaciona a tendencias contemporáneas de fenómenos religiosos e espirituales comparables a nivel global. Esta investigación se basa en una revisón extensa de la literatura académica y el trabajo de campo etnográfico en Cuba en el año 2016. Tiene el objetivo mostrar cómo las religiones afrocubanas se han transformadas desde una práctica estigmatizada y perseguida, a una religión ampliamente valorizada en el ambiente espiritual y turístico. Aunque el artículo apunta a las consecuencias de la commodificación de las prácticas religiosas, también muestra que la Santería ha probado servir como arma de resistencia y lucha, aun existente en la sociedad cubana.

Keywords: Santería; Turismo; Religiones Afrocubanas; Jineterismo; Commodificación

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Introduction – Pricely *Bendiciones*

Plaza de la Catedral is a prominent tourist attraction in Cuba's capital Havana. More than often one will see black ladies with white-yellow dresses and cigars in their mouth gathering near this place. While many tourists are enthusiast to photograph these colorfully and authentically dressed women, some also consult these so-called *santeras* (female Santería priests) for a *cartomancia* (fortunetelling by reading cards) session with complimentary *bendiciones* (blessings) for a fee of approximately 10 CUC per consultation. The outdoor desks of these spiritual consultants are usually covered with stones, *naipes* (tarot cards), necklaces, and Santería manuals amongst others (**Figure 1**). Whereas the government invites professional *santeras* to decorate the touristic landscape in Cuba with powerful religious elements to create and sustain a certain cultural image of Cuban identity through such folkloric image of Afro-Cuban religions (of which Santería is the most popular one) nowadays, I argue that practitioners of these belief systems increasingly use tourism as an advancement strategy to gain money and social status.

Figure 1: *Santera* at work at Plaza de la Catedral, Havana Vieja (Cuba)
Source: personal picture by Julie Rausenberger

This research project focuses on Santería Tourism (coined *Santurismo*). The article is based on an extensive review of existing academic literature, as well as my travel experiences in Cuba over the course of the summer of 2016 and ethnographic fieldwork in October 2016 in Santiago de Cuba, with support of Dr. Jorge Duany of the

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Cuban Research Institute in Miami; Dr. Albert Kafui Wuaku and Dr. Jeff Gonzalez of the Florida International University; and Ms Sonia Téllez Vigueaux of *Casa del Caribe* in Santiago de Cuba. I also acknowledge the willingness of my informants (who remain anonymous due to privacy protection) who introduced me to various Santería practitioners and priests. It is my aim to introduce the Afro-Cuban religion Santería in this paper from an 'outside-in' perspective as I approach Santería as an outsider, a tourist, and an anthropologist getting to know the religion more profoundly by looking for 'inside' knowledge. This ranges from governmental visions on secularization to market-oriented approaches of religious tourism. A central focus to my research has been the question what the role of tourism is in the increasing popularity of Santería as an African-derived religion in Cuba, especially since the island went through a rough economic period – the Special Period in Times of Peace – in the 1990s.

In the first section, I explain what she understands as Santería, and I present a historical overview of the formation process of Santería while expanding upon the connotations this religion had during different periods in history in both popular as state views. Secondly, I examine the emergence of *Santurismo* as a consequence of Santería's renascence due to the state-sponsored effort in the 1990s on the one hand, and as a coping strategy by Cuban people on the other hand to deal with political and economic instability on the other hand. I build further on religious frameworks such as Turner's theory of *communitas* and Scott's weapons of the weak to explain the religion's function in Cuban life and tourism. I then discuss the broader implications of *Santurismo* in terms of economic and spiritual profit (especially for so-called *jinetero-santeros*), and how the increased commercialized image of these religious practices in Cuba have led to the rise of *diplo-santería* (Palmié, 2013; Ramos, 2010) as a survival or enhancement strategy by *pseudo-santeros*. Ultimately, the third section presents a discussion of the continuing process of commodification that Santería is currently undergoing while I place this tendency in a wider context by relating it to comparable religious and spiritual phenomena in a globalized world.

1. Tourism and Santería in Cuba – A Historical Approach

Santería – or more properly termed *Regla de Ocha* (derived from the Spanish word *reglamentos*), literally 'the rule of the Orisha' or 'way of the saints' – is one of the most popular religions in Cuba known for its African derived rituals and world views[1]. Its religious system combines certain elements of the Western African Yoruba belief system with Roman Catholicism and thus has a dual heritage. The religion was brought from Yorubaland in Africa to Cuba during the African slave trade since the 17th century. These slaves became known as Lucumi from the ancient Western African Yoruba kingdom Ulkumi, which is today known as Nigeria. However, as Ayorinde (2004) noted, the majority of slaves arrived after the Haitian slave revolts in 1791, and during the sugar boom in the 19th century as a greater number of laborers was needed then for sugar production. According to Brandon (1993, p. 53), in the last 30 years of slavery from 1790 to 1820, an approximate number of 240,000 Africans arrived in Cuba. The plantation owners in Cuba were Spanish colonizers who imposed Christianity onto the

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slaves. However, most slaves refused to give up their Yoruba worshipping, so they started to search for parallels between these two belief system. This way, the transatlantic traditions of African religions mixed with the traditions of Europe and so Santería became the cultural product of the religious identification between Yoruba-worshipped gods of the slaves and Catholic saints of their Spanish masters (Ayorinde, 2004; Brandon, 1993; Delgado, 2009; Gonzalez, 2015; Sanchez, 2000; Sandoval, 1979; Tejada, 1999).

In accordance with Scott's magnificent work on *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985), it can indeed be argued that Santería was born as a powerful coping mechanism or strategy of resilience, or as Ayorinde (2004, p. 9) described: "Slaves fashioned their religion to certain extent as a deceptive tool to escape the enforced Catholic religion by white masters or Spanish authorities". Although the slaves were forced by law under Spanish hegemonic rule to convert to Catholicism, most African slaves indeed continued to practice their rituals in a clandestine way. Inventive as they were, the Yoruba people in Cuba started to compare Catholics saints with their deities so that they could not be persecuted for practicing their ancestral religion, and so a syncretic belief system with a parallel cosmology (Santería) came gradually into existence by the end of the 19th century (Behar, 2007; Brandon, 1993; Hagedorn, 2001; Larduet Luaces, 2014). Santería was thus also, what Sanchez (2000, p. 7) calls "a conscious effort at cultural resistance to colonial oppression". A powerful example that is still omnipresent in Cuba's culture today, is the syncretized figure of La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, Cuba's patron saint **(Figure 2)**. This virgin is both a Catholic saint as a Yoruba goddess, namely Ochun[2], as the figure became assimilated of Catholicism into Santería during the 19th century. This enabled the believers in the African-based belief system to practice their religion by worshipping Ochun while pretending to worship a Catholic saint. It is therefore a clear example of the process of *syncretismo* (syncretism) in religious systems in Cuba.

Figure 2: Statue of La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, El Cobre (Cuba)
Source: personal picture by Julie Rausenberger

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Similarly, other saints became 'cubanized' into darker-skinned *santos* (Tejada, 1999). Cuba thus became a unique meeting point of African and Catholic gods in which the church relatively fruitlessly tried to Christianize slaves during the 19th century (Ayorinde, 2004; Behar, 2007; Brandon, 1993; Hagedorn, 2001; Palmié, 2013; Sanchez, 2000; Sandoval, 1979; Tejada, 1999).

Nevertheless, this process of syncretism did not mean that Afro-Cuban religions became more accepted by the Cuban secular authorities over time. All African-derived religions were discriminated and persecuted until 1902, when Cuba gained its independence (Tejada, 1999), but even then African elements were not really integrated into Cuban national culture as they were seen as primitive, animistic, barbaric, backward *brujería* (witchcraft). Because of the long history of Santería concerning persecution, the secret practice of the religion made it seem even more occult. As Cuba did not truly gain political independence in practice after the abolition of slavery in 1880 because it slipped more under power of the United States due to its economic underdevelopment, Santería may have become increasingly commercialized for American tourists. However, in Cuban public life, the religious practice of Santería remained a marginalized taboo until Castro's Revolution. Notwithstanding, Afro-Cuban religions never came even close to disappearance as people continued to practice them within the private sphere. Simultaneously, publicly identifying as a Catholic before 1959 was regarded as prestigious and – in contrast to being *santero/a* – increased one's social rank (Argyriadis, 2008; Brandon, 1993; Delgado, 2009; Gonzalez, 2015; Larduet Luaces, 2014; Tejada, 1999)[3].

The Cuban anthropologist-ethnomusicologist, Fernando Ortiz (1881–1969) was highly aware of the discriminatory practices surrounding Afro-Cuban faith. He became a political activist for the recognition of Afro-Cuban religions and came to play a considerably important role in the emergence of Afro-Cuban life in Cuba, as he wrote numerous studies about its continuous change and adaptation over the past three centuries, particularly during the transatlantic slave trade (Sandoval, 1979; Tejada, 1999). *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940) is one of Ortiz's most cited works, because he coined the term 'transculturation' in it. With this term, he pointed at the converging of cultures and religions of African and Spanish descent into what was popularly known as *Afro-Cubanism*. He recognized that, within the Afro-Cuban context, the term acculturation was not appropriate, since the slaves never acquired a new culture, but rather created a new hybrid transformed culture, making neither Hispanic nor African culture mutually exclusive, but rather complementary in the influences of both their cultural rituals and practices. He argued that the unique religiosity of both Yoruba worship and Catholic worship kept its integrity in this process (Hagedorn, 2001; Palmié, 2013; Sanchez, 2000; Sandoval, 1979). In the 1920s and 1930s, *Afro-Cubanism* had articulated a reaction to socio-cultural and political challenges faced by the Cuban Republic, but it was also an intellectual and artistic alternative to the stereotypical representation of Santería in popular culture and a response to the European avant-garde at the time by mulatto artists and writers. As a result, Santería received a more artistic reputation which enforced the creation of Afro-Cuban folklore, gradually diminishing the image of Santería as *brujeria* (Argyriadis, 2008; Brandon, 1993).

Nevertheless, from 1959, during the Cuban Revolution, the country gradually evolved

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into a society that was based on a Marxist ideology of atheistic scientificism, in accordance with "the Marxist dogma that religion was the opiate of the people" (Behar, 2007, p. 20)[4]. Although Afro-Cuban religions did not form a threat to the doctrinal revolution and became legally tolerated – meaning that practitioners were no longer persecuted because they helped to eradicate the Catholic hegemony that the government was trying to counter, they remained a suspicious and superstitious anti-Marxist practice well into the 20th century. This contradictory approach went even further by praising Santería as folklore and national historical and cultural heritage. Under Castro's governance, all religious groups encountered themselves paradoxically somewhere between repression and tolerance (Brandon, 1993; Delgado, 2009; Sanchez, 2000; Tejada, 1999).

A successful manifestation of the state-sponsored transformation of Afro-Cuban religions as folklore was the establishment of the *Teatro Nacional* in 1960 and the *Conjunto Folclórico Nacional de Cuba* (CFNC) in 1961. They were cultural governmental organizations that were not intended to promote Afro-Cuban religious practices but rather to desacralize this entire religious complex and transform them into dance, music and theater communities offering folkloric performances to a wider secular public on both national and international levels. The success of this act of 'folklorization' made the CFNC travel abroad to perform *orisha* dances and play their *bata* drums, but also developed one of the most important cultural attractions of the Cuban tourist industry[5]. For the first time in history the religion (the sacred) and the government (the profane) seemed to be on the same level now that the state was actually subsidizing and supporting *santeros* and *santeras* in their struggle to survive. However, this was only the case for its cultural conservation and touristic development (Argyriadis, 2008; Brandon, 1993; Gonzalez, 2009; Hagedorn, 2001; Larduet Luaces, 2014; Sanchez, 2000). Inevitably, Afro-Cuban religions became thus both 'savers' of Cuba's nationalist project as an obscure informal economic strategy and 'threats' to that very same project as they were in conflict with the revolution's ideology.

During the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s, overall religion remained taboo in the public sphere because the Revolution banned the topic by turning to Marxist atheism. Likewise, people who practiced Afro-Cuban religions outside the touristic sphere of folklorization were oppressed and intimated (Behar, 2007; Delgado, 2009; Hagedorn, 2001; Tejada, 1999). It was not until Frei Betto (1985) interviewed Fidel Castro in 1985, that he acknowledged Santería and Spiritism as forming part of the important cultural values in Cuba of African descent. Eventually, the dominant ideology of Marxist atheism was reversed in 1991, when the Cuban Communist Party (CCP) decided to acknowledge religions, including Santería, in the Cuban Constitution (Delgado, 2009; Tejada, 1999; Behar, 2007). In 1992, Cuba became officially a secular – instead of atheist – state in which religious freedom was amended to the Cuban Constitution: people were suddenly allowed to pray and to practice their rituals, and to speak in public about their religiosity (Behar, 2007; Larduet Luaces, 2014; Republic of Cuba, 2002; Tejada, 1999).

The abolishment of Marxism atheism came almost simultaneously with the fall of the socialist block between 1989–1991 in Eastern Europe. This collapse led to a severe economic crisis on the island as Cuba's trade relations with the Soviet Union were highly important as the island experienced an economic and political embargo by the

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United States since the Revolution. This period of economic hardship was declared as *El Periodo Especial en Tiempos de Paz*, the Special Period in Time of Peace. As an alternative solution, or as 'a necessary evil' in the words of Fidel, Cuba needed to open its gates to international tourism and allowed the circulation of convertible currencies[6]. Tourist and folkloric Afro-Cuban attraction values became important elements in Cuba's new foreign policy, and so Santería became a promoted religion to attract more tourists to the island in order to make them spend money and help Cubans out of severe poverty (Larduet Luaces, 2014; Pantoja Torres, 2016; Sanchez, 2000). During her research, anthropologist Ruth Behar (2007, p. 21) experienced this sudden change as she recounts: "The streets of Havana became filled with Santería initiates, dressed in white from head to toe, as required during the first year after being reborn into the path of the *orishas*, the African deities. With the return of both the U.S. dollar and God to Cuba, the island became safe again for Americans".

Meanwhile, Cubans embraced religion more than ever before, as they looked for spiritual support in times of economic uncertainty and feelings of fear, but also because of its sudden recognition by the state. The Pope saw these economic and political changes as a social opportunity to inforce and fortify Christianity in Cuba. Although his visit was scheduled already 1991, Pope John Paull II finally visited Cuba in 1998. His message was one of hope as he argued that Christianity was able to contribute to Cuba's people social welfare, especially now that socialism (and its Marxian atheism) was collapsing in Eastern Europe. Although he hoped for a continued process of Christianization in Cuba as a result of the message in the significant reference book *El amor todo lo espera* written by Cuban bishops in 1993, Christian faith continued to co-exist and co-emerge with Protestantism and Afro-Cuban religions, such as Santería or *Regla de Ocha*, *Palo Monte* or *Regla Conga*, and *Abakua* religiosity (Tejada, 1999)[7].

2. The Renascence of Santería and Emergence of *Santurismo*

Because of the political and economic changes that occurred during the Special Period in the 1990s, Mahler and Hansing (2005, p. 49) and Tejada (1999, p. 106) have talked about the *Religious Renaissance* or *Renascence of Religiousness* as the 'return to the surface of social life' in Cuba. As I mentioned before, Cuban people longed for spiritual support in their precarious lives and therefore felt the more attracted to religions during this difficult decade in their national history. Typically, as studies have shown, people who suffer from crises and insecurity lean more towards religiosity and the supernatural than those who do not (Mwakabana, 2002). Religion, however, also became a survival strategy in Cuba to cope with economic hardship as it was a way to access hard currency. Therefore, the renascence of Santería was also a repetition of history in according to Scott's *Weapons of the Weak* (1985).

Whereas African slaves used to practice Santería as a syncretized form of Yoruba beliefs and Christianity to resist their Spanish rulers as well as state repression in the past, Cuban people now practiced Santería as a coping strategy to resist Western capitalism when their socialist system came under pressure. (Brandon, 1993; Larduet

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Luaces, 2014; Tejada, 1999). Santería became a great source of sociocultural capital to compensate for the lack of financial capital. Bourdieu's (1984) notion of cultural capital is thus relevant to point at the power of one's religious status in society. When one has sufficient esoteric knowledge about religious rituals, one can indeed use this ability to perform such actions for his own benefit. Delgado (2009) also noticed this trend in his own ethnographic experiences in Cuba, and called the formula "foreigner + local religion = transaction" (p. 52). Through offering Santería initiations (cultural capital) to foreign religious visitors, Cuban *santeros* can indeed gain access to hard currency (financial capital). However, the result of such a transaction is that Santería becomes commoditized as a touristic product through economic innovation. Santería has thus become a relatively efficient and legal way to combat the hardship of Cuba's everyday life as a strategic and lucrative weapon to improve one's situation (Argyriadis, 2008; Hagedorn, 2001).

Whereas Santería once was an effective weapon in the power struggle over cultural identity, it became a profitable 'weapon' for the 'weaker' Cubans to gain economic power in Cuban society for practitioners through its commercialization since the early 1990s (Argyriadis, 2008). Although "constant and circumspect struggle waged by peasants materially and ideologically against their oppressors shows that techniques of evasion and resistance may represent the most significant and effective means of class struggle in the long run" (Scott, 1985), in Cuba it was mostly black slaves and their working class racialized descendants who continued *la lucha* (the struggle) for social and economic control (Gonzalez, 2015). In her inspirational ethnography *Divine Utterances*, ethnomusicologist Hagedorn (2001) argues that the function of Afro-Cuban religions indeed increasingly became one of resolving financial and material problems through the divine utterances and interventions of *orishas*. The *santeros* and *espiritistas* I met in Santiago de Cuba were indeed all very willing to offer her spiritual services (for a fee, of course), and always tried to convince me of their superior contact with *aché* by emphasizing the many international tourists they had initiated from Italy, Spain, the United States, Mexico, and so on[8]. Of course, the consultation fee for a foreigner was remarkably higher than the price that a Cuban paid **(Figure 3 and 4)**.

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Figure 3: Consultation available for 10 CUC at *Casa del Caribe*, Santiago de Cuba (Cuba)
Source: personal picture by Julie Rausenberger

Figure 4: Consultation area at *Casa del Caribe*, Santiago de Cuba (Cuba)
Source: personal picture by Julie Rausenberger

Together with the increased commodification that practitioners of Santería implemented, the Cuban government continued to commercialize Afro-Cuban religions (Gonzalez, 2015). The government started to employ so-called 'expert practitioners'

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(Delgado, 2009), such as the *espiritista* Rosaida Zamora Planas, who I met in *Casa del Caribe* in Santiago de Cuba. In this way, practitioners of African-derived religions like her can become professionals of Afro-Cuban folklore while having the financial security of an income provided by the state. Folkloric expressions and religious consultations became thus increasingly valued as their currency-gaining commodities for tourism purposes, by both the state and the practitioners themselves (Delgado, 2009; Hagedorn, 2001).

During the next decade, two types of touristic practices embraced Santería. On the one hand, government-sponsored tours – called *Ochaturs* – brought into existence a new phenomenon of *Santurismo* (a term coined from Santería and tourism) in Cuba[9]. These all-inclusive package holidays had a cost of $6,000 to $8,000 in the early 2000s and were thereby the most visible but strictly selective implementation of Santería's further capitalization in Cuba[10]. The deal included an initiation, accommodation, meals, transportation, classes, visits to cultural sites and music/dance performances. This allowed the state also to control most economic transactions and keep most of them within Cuba's hands. On the other hand, independent *santeros* also offer initiation-only options starting from $500 for a Cuban and at least $2,000 for a foreign tourist, depending on the conditions and agreements. Knowing that the average monthly salary of a Cuban working for the socialist government is only approximately US$30, this is a huge amount of money for Cuban *santeros*, whether they had been hired by the state or worked on the informal black market (Argyriadis, 2008; Delgado, 2009; Hagedorn, 2001).

But what made *Santurismo* so attractive to tourists, and why were they willing to pay this considerable amount of money for a Santería initiation in Cuba? Well, first of all, Cuba is known to be the birthplace of Santería, and therefore the *aché* (sacred power/energy) of the *orisha* deities is considered to be stronger and purer on the island than anywhere else in the world. Therefore an initiation in Cuba has a greater spiritual value and higher quality for the religious practitioner (Argyriadis, 2008; Delgado, 2009; Mahler and Hansing, 2005). Secondly, initiations are remarkably cheaper in Cuba than in other locations, such as the United States, for example (Mahler and Hansing, 2005). This created what Palmié (2013, p. 213) called "an emerging transnational ritual economy". A third explanation might be that Cuba is perceived as a purer place as it is isolated from capitalism (and commodification?!) and therefore became more like a pilgrimage site for Santería practitioners (Delgado, 2009). Indeed, Hagedorn (2001, p. 224) argued: "Many of the foreigners who come to Cuba to become initiated into Santería are in fact religious pilgrims who are also tourists".

3. The Implications of *Santurismo* – *Santero* or *Jinetero*?

One of the risks of *Santurismo* and the commodification of Santería, is that its economic importance can succeed the spiritual importance. In this section, I will discuss the implications of this tendency towards touristification of Santería, which I call *Santurismo*.

By now, the Special Period is officially already twenty years ago. Nevertheless, many

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Cubans say that the Special Period is still continuing. While some *santeros* are still looking actively for potential Santería initiation and consultation customers, others have managed to establish long-lasting informal networks. During the conversations I had with Diego, a *santero* who has a *casa templo* (private house temple) in Santiago's *Micro Ocho* district, he told me that many of his foreign acquaintances from Europe came to visit him every year **(Figure 5)**. When I asked him how he got in touch in the first place with these people, he explained me that he had Cuban family members living in Italy. While they practiced Santería in Europe, they recommended Diego's services to the Italians planning a trip to Cuba. This is just one example to illustrate how Cubans establish informal networks that provide them with tourist revenues through religious practices, and to provide one's economic situation (financial capital) and spiritual status (cultural capital). Delgado (2009) expands on these networks within Santería by explaining how Cuban *santeros* increasingly value foreign *ahijados* (godchildren) and become *padrinos* / *madrinas* (godfathers / godmothers) by offering their services to foreigners. Therefore they do not only gain financial but also social capital as their prestige and reputation increases.

Figure 5: *Casa Templo* in the *Micro Ocho* district, Santiago de Cuba (Cuba)
Source: personal picture by Julie Rausenberger

Such bonding on a spiritual level created social bonding between *ahijados* and their godparents, something that Turner (1974) called *communitas*. The initiation ritual can indeed be compared to Van Gennep's (1909) notion of *rite de passage* and Turner's notion of *anti-structure*, as it was marked by a period of liminality in which the initiated changed religious status. Through rituals, the Cuban and foreign Santería practitioners felt like an extended family of religious members because of their common spiritual experiences. The fact that they mutually benefited from this situation (the foreigner by

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being initiated and the *santero* by gaining money and being able to survive economic hardship), the sense of connection and feelings of friendship grew even stronger. Holbraad (2004), however, noticed that it also led to an increased stratification and rivalry between *tourist santeros* and *local santeros*. Palmié (2013) also commented how these transnational networks led to benefits for Cubans who were not able to afford initiations without the help of foreign tourists: he called it speculation "generating mundane relations of dependence among less-favored relatives, acquaintances, and fellow priests" (p. 213). Such religious necessity drove people towards each other and counted on acts of solidarity amongst *santeros* while it strengthened the sense of *communitas* under those Santería practitioners who faced the same spiritual challenges. Networking became an essential strategy for Cubans to cope with *la lucha* (the struggle) of daily life under Cuba's post-Soviet era (Ramos, 2010).

As I approached this research topic from the 'outside-in' perspective, I consulted various *santeros* in Cuba as a tourist myself. A remarkable finding that confused me was that I at least 'received' three different *santos* during the same week: "*Eres hija de Yemayá sin duda*" (you are a daughter of Yemayá), "*Veo en las cartas que Ogún es tu guerrero*" (I read in the cards that Ogún is your protector), and *"¿Naciste el quince de octubre? ¡Entonces, eres hija de Orula!*" (Are you born on October 15th? Well, then you are the daughter of Orula). However, this should not have been a surprise, since it is easy to get lost in a mostly oral religious tradition with no sacred book (Brandon, 1993). Each *santero* has the freedom to interpret the belief system and its mythology in his own way and can thus convince his followers of his own subjective interpretations (Sandoval, 1979). As with all unwritten testimonies, they risk being misinterpreted, but also misused and misplaced.

First of all, this may lead to *diplo-santeros*[11]. This category of *santero* emerged during the Special Period when the so-called *diplo-tiendas* came into existence. These were shops filled with luxury goods such as clothes, soaps, shoes, and perfumes which could only be paid in foreign currency or *pesos convertibles*, which were at the time only accessible by tourists or diplomats. *Santeros* who wanted access to hard currency thus became known as *diplo-santeros*. Ramos (2010) describes them as "a particular group of unscrupulous and deceitful *diplo-santeros* that caters to the *extranjeros* (foreigners) who visit the island seeking an alleged and idealized religious Mecca". Such naïve foreign tourists who believe that Cuba is the ultimate place for Santería pilgrimages, are willing to pay for a unique experience but might get trapped into the tricks of a *diplo-santero* who is making the tourist pay high and corrupt prices for a religious scam. The *diplo-santero* will offer unique Afro-Cuban knowledge about his tradition, while, in fact, none of it is true. This leads us to the second implication, which is the sudden creation of *diplo-orishas* in the 1990s and onwards (Ramos, 2010). These are invented *pseudo-orishas* that sell better to foreigners, but that do not exist in Santería cosmology and cannot be traced back to Lucumi origins.

Ultimately, Ramos (2010) also pointed out that it was not only *diplo-santeros* who created such a threat to the authenticity and credibility of Santería. There were also tourists who required adaptations in the religion's ritual requirements according to their needs and preferences in terms of duration (those who do not have sufficient time for a 7-day initiation), vegetarianism (those who like to be initiated without

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offering animals), comfort (those who desired living and sleeping conditions according to Western standards during the initiation process) and dress (those who did not want or who could not dress in white as an *iyawó* for one year after getting initiated)[12]. Moreover, foreigners ask for constant assistance during such rituals (Delgado, 2009; Hagedorn, 2001). This resulted in the implementation of so-called *diplo-rituals* (Ramos, 2010 as cited in Palmié, 2013) for a particular type of tourist which Ramos (2010) categorized as 'the sinister foreigner'. He describes them as one with a 'very bad destiny' who "visits the island to exploit the present circumstances and necessity of some Cuban *orishas* and extract from them whatever knowledge they may want to share, or sell, even if this knowledge is questionable or invented". With the inauspicious characterization of this foreigner, Ramos (2010) thus seems to suggest that not only *diplo-santeros* should be blamed for exploiting Santería, but so might do the tourist himself as he also only cares about power and personal advancement on his own terms. Although I agree with this opinion, I also believe that this should not erase the culpabilities of those *santeros* who exploit tourists by charging them far more than Cubans pay for their initiations, so that they can become rich as 'religious prostitutes'. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged as well that foreigners should not be merely victimized in such situations. As (Delgado 2009, p. 58) argued: "Foreigners are aware that they pay higher costs than Cubans for Santería objects and rituals. Conscious of costs back home, they often feel they are getting a bargain on an initiation". Moreover, foreign tourists are often willing to pay too much according to Cuban standards as they think it is only morally correct that they would pay more than a Cuban due to their relatively higher economic situation.

As mentioned earlier in this paper, Santería initiations can be expensive, both for Cubans as for foreigners, both in Cuba as in the United States and elsewhere in the world. I already explained why tourists are willing to be such a high price for an initiation ceremony, but that does not fully explain why Santería rituals are so expensive in the first place. As Brandon (1993) explained in his work, it is an important supposition in Santería's cosmology that the larger the sacrifices and ceremonial gifts one offers, the higher the chances are that one can improve his future in terms of health, wealth and prosperity. "The entire procedure of sacrifice is embedded within a metaphor of gift giving, or gift exchange as an expression of reciprocity between the human and spiritual worlds rather than as material exchange or as self-denial", Brandon (1993, p. 148) explains. That is why an initiation ceremony can easily cost the equivalent of a Cuban's annual salary in Cuba ($500–$2,000) and an American's salary in the United States ($5,000–$20,000). When a foreigner gets initiated in Cuba, however, this comparable cost ratio changes: "A foreigner may pay the equivalent of US$4,000 to become initiated into Santería in Cuba, including round-trip airfare, payment to all participants, animals, food, and so forth – a price much cheaper than a similar initiation in Spain, the United States, Canada, or even Mexico" (Hagedorn 2001, p. 221). Likewise, a *santero* earns more by initiating a foreigner than by initiating a Cuban. This explains why many *santeros*, such as Diego (the *santero* whom the researcher met in *Micro Ocho*), were so enthusiastic about my visit to his *casa templo*.

Moreover, I was informed that other Cubans also benefit from this foreign initiation in the *casa templo*. When a foreigner pays his *derecho* (ritual fee) for an initiation ritual (which includes animals for the offerings and food for all the visitors of the *casa*

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templo), those Cubans who cannot afford initiation rites can get initiated simultaneously with the foreigner as the ritual supplies are available and the ritual labor already paid. It is also here that the importance of a local informal Santería network comes into play. Cubans who have closer connections with a *tourist santero* have increased chances of being initiated. This also explains why these *Ifas de dinero* have a paradoxical status in Cuban society: they are praised for their power, capital and solidarity, but they are simultaneously accused of acting as *jineteros*, putting the authenticity of Santería at risk for financial gains. In her discussion of Santería's increased commercialization, Wirtz (2004) refers to this ambiguity as 'a double moral': "the practice of publicly professing one set of values while behaving a contrary way due to necessity" (as cited in Delgado 2009, p. 66). Nevertheless, I believe it is important to nuance such accusations as money has proved to be inherently present in the Santería cosmology as a tool to negotiate services with the *orishas*, and therefore one cannot simply accuse *santeros* of being money-minded. Money symbolizes prosperity and is the ultimate activator of *aché*. The financial concerns that *santeros* may have are not necessarily out of self-interest as they fit into the larger cosmological framework of Santería. Everything in Santería needs to be situated within the 'economies of scale' as everything in this Afro-Cuban religion costs money for the reasons mentioned above (Argyriadis, 2008; Hagedorn, 2001; Holbraad, 2002).

During my research about Santería in Havana and Santiago de Cuba, I often caught myself comparing *santeros* to *jineteros* (and *santeras* to *jineteras*). Although I am aware that it is partially completely misplaced and inappropriate to associate highly sexualized and more racialized stigmatized creatures in Cuban society to religious practitioners of Santería, I cannot abstain from engaging in this ongoing discussion about *Santurismo* as a facet of *jineterismo* because there are unmistakable similarities to be recognized. As Hagedorn (2001) remarked earlier, both phenomena were born out of a turbulent past in Cuban history but remarkably emerged during the Special Period. Moreover, as Argyriadis (2008, p. 256) states, "the *jinetero* or *jinetera* are not seen as objects of consumption, but rather as resourceful people (*luchadores*) who make good use of their charms to profit from ingenuous tourists". In line with Delgado's (2009) argument that Afro-Cuban religions do engender certain *jinetero* activities, I argue that the same applies to *diplo-santeros* or *Ifás de dinero* who also obtain benefits from their interactions with tourists[13].

I would go even further by arguing that *Santurismo* is comparable – up to a certain extent – to *jineterismo* on a social, economic and political level. In terms of sociality, both phenomena have in common that tourists are the foremost social actors in their practices. At the economic level, both the *diplo-santero* and the *jinetero* engage in their activities to gain money (more particularly foreign hard currency) and improve their economic situations by trading in Cuba's black market. Some *santeros* also engage in transnational religious networks in order to travel themselves one day – within and/or outside Cuba – or to obtain a visa one day to leave the island permanently and escape the hardship of everyday life (Delgado, 2009; Hagedorn, 2001; Larduet Luaces, 2014; Mahler and Hansing, 2005; Ramos, 2010). In her study on folkloric dance, Hagedorn (2001) noticed that many of the dancers in the *Conjunto Folclórico* saw their profession as an opportunity to travel. She describes how "traveling became like a cancer in the *Conjunto Folclórico*. People no longer wanted to join the troupe to perform, but rather

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to travel. Because, of course, travel means *divisa* (hard currency)" (p. 227). This is why I believe it is important to recognize these key elements and characterizations that overlap in the identities of both *jineteros* as *santeros* in Cuba, and to acknowledge that the commodification of religions in Cuba brought into existence of what Argyriadis (2008) called a 'religious *jinetero'*. However, I also believe that is becomes too popular to categorize people into the box of *jineterismo*, and it becomes too easy to make such – sometimes misplaced – accusations.

From the arguments mentioned in this paper, it may have become clear already that Santería is degenerating its religious value because of the commercialization of its traditional practices as folklore. Such a new contextualization in terms of marketing made practitioners feel disempowered in first instance. Nevertheless, Santería followers resisted this growing exploitation by the international market by deploying the religion in their own terms to gain hard currency (Delgado, 2009). While I agree that this commodification of Santería by both state and private actors is harmful to the religion, I cannot argue that it threatens the further existence, authenticity and credibility to the fullest. Santería has always been changing over time, and its adaptive syncretized character is inherent to its genealogy. Moreover, I can only witness that Santería has grown both as a religion and as a touristic product since the Special Period in the 1990s. As there seem to be more Santería practitioners in Cuba and elsewhere than ever before, I believe it is only right to conclude that the touristification, folkloricization, commodification and commercialization did not damage the religion as such. As Santería is known to be not mutually exclusive of other religions, it is also not mutually exclusive of other adaptations. Lastly, I also wonder what Delgado (2009) meant when he said that "commodification does not significantly erode authenticity" (p. 63) because what does it actually involve to speak about authenticity in Santería? As a religion without a spiritual leader or a sacred book, without fixed origins and a turbulent history or syncretism and resistance, one can barely define authenticity. As opposed to Argyriadis (2005, 2008), I would argue that, as long as Santería keeps being practiced by practitioners with sincere spiritual motivations, the religion cannot become a merely artificial touristic product or consumer good.

Conclusion – Cuba as a Spiritual Supermarket

In his Marxist analysis of the commodification of religion, Ward (2003) predicted that religious resources – such as beliefs, artifacts, symbols and cosmologies – would only continue to develop further towards pseudo-religious products. And he was right: Afro-Cuban religions are becoming increasingly popular, in Cuba and beyond. Simultaneously, it becomes a trend for people to search for better and higher lifestyles in their capitalistic existence. This explains the popularity of New Ageism and its related activities such as Santería initiations for religious tourists (Redden, 2016). Although Cuba officially remains a socialist state, Bourdieu's (1984) theory on 'fee-for-service commodification (as cited in Redden 2016, p. 241) is responsible for this capitalistic structure and the emergence of *Santurismo* in Cuba. Such processes of reification and commodification are exactly what we see happening today in public spaces where

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tourism and religion converge, such as in *Callejón de Hamel* in Havana, where the Cuban state sought to implement government-sponsored touristic infrastructure and Rumba sessions are offered weekly on Sundays. This cultural spot attracts tourists and their dollars while it promotes Afro-Cuban religiosity as a folkloric product. Its surroundings are packed with Cubans and foreigners, *santeros*, *jineteros* and *santero jineteros*. It is in places like this that a sense of communitas thrives.

I would like to conclude this paper by arguing that it is not useful to accuse nor the Cuban state, nor the practitioners of Santería, nor the spiritual tourists themselves for the continuing commodification of Afro-Cuban religions. However, it cannot be denied or ignored that the state sponsored the 'folklorization' of Afro-Cuban religions; that some *santeros* are mainly offering initiations to foreigners out of economic or spiritual self-interest; and that tourists are increasingly buying these commoditized services as customers for a number of reasons. We must not only recognize the social, cultural and religious motives that thrive people to Santería, but we must also acknowledge that the political situation in Cuba, especially since the Special Period in the 1990s, has led to economic hardship. Exactly these tendencies have led to the emergence of *Santurismo* and its increased commodification. All these parties are all in their own unique way – some somewhat more than others – involved in this process are somewhat culpable of commodifying Santería. I argue that it is crucial to apply a phenomenological perspective rather than a cultural relativist perspective regarding *santeros* jineteros and *Santurismo* more generally, as it may lead to a deepened comprehension of the current changes that Santería is going through in Cuba.

Moreover, as Redden (2016) has argued in his recent work, there is a worldwide tendency towards religious consumerism as a broader social trend for people seeking increased well-being. Coincidentally or not coinciding with Cuba's Special Period in Peacetime, "market metaphors have been increasingly applied to religion since the 1990s" (p. 231). Popular world-views such as New Age become matters of choice as they are increasingly bricolages that fit into people's lifestyle through certain consumer activities, and are therefore depicted as 'spiritual supermarkets' (Bowman, 1999) in which people 'pick and mix' their religions. This syncretism is at the core of Afro-Cuban religions – as they were born out the convergence of African and Catholic beliefs. However, the current fusion of multiple cultural values and practices as commodities is not necessarily proof of the *multireliogisidad* (multireligiosity) as Ayorinde (2004) predicted, but rather proof and reconfirmation of Bourdieu's (1984) theory on consumption as identity and social power in which the social action of consuming religions in a globalized religious marketplace where knowledge and objects can circulate as long as one's affluence permits it, whereas previously this was considered the esoteric domain of the Afro-Cuban community. This reduction in the gap between the sacred and the profane is therefore the greatest challenge for practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions in the 21st century as Santería and tourism are increasingly converging together, and as questions of authenticity and sincerity are raised.

When I had my first experience with Santería in Cuba, for example, I experienced both repugnance and curiosity towards this religion. What was at stake, without me realizing it at first, was that I was precisely caught in the web of New Ageism and deciding whether or not *cartomancia* (fortune-telling) would, ideologically at least, be a beneficial added value to my current lifestyle. Throughout my both scientific and

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spiritual journey in Cuba as an anthropologist, I encountered myself – without being aware of it – in the 'religious supermarket' described Bowman (1999) and Redden (2016). Walking through the streets in Havana, watching a folkloric show in Havana Café or listening to salsa music in *Casa del Son*, visiting various *santeros* (who all attributed a different personal *santo* to me), attending rumba sessions in *Callejón de Hamel*, and looking for literature in the book shops of Santiago de Cuba, I learned that Santería is an intrinsic value of Cuban life and has become part of Cuba's national pride.

During the Global Orisha Congress of 2003 held in *Palacio de las Convenciones* in Havana, the Cuban Minister of Culture, Abel Prieto, pronounced Afro-Cuban religions as "one of Cuba's most unique and powerful weapons in the international struggle against capitalist cultural hegemony and an enduring contribution to global culture" (Palmié, 2013). This serves as evidence to proof that Afro-Cuban religions have worked their way up from a stigmatized and persecuted religious system to a widely valorized religion in the spiritual and touristic sphere. One thing that did not change is the inherent character of Santería as a weapon: to resist Spanish colonial hegemony, to fight for its position amongst other religions in Cuba, to serve as a representation of Afro-Cuban identity, to present the beauty of Afro-Cuban culture on the island and beyond, to survive economic hardship during the Special Period, and finally to gain privilege and social capital as a renowned reputation in Cuban society. To argue that Santería is a *Weapon of the Weak* in Scott's terms would be an underestimation, and to argue that Santería is in danger due to its current commodification is an exaggeration. Just like its *orisha* Ogún, Santería is a warrior with many weapons, which always continues to fight and stand up for its survival.

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[1] According to Delgado (2005) and Sanchez (2000), Ocha refers to the Lucumi word *orisha*, which means 'a deified spiritual being' from Yoruban origin. *Ifa* stands for 'a system of divination'; and a *santero/santera* is a person who is a *orisha* initiate. A *santero/a* should, however, not be confused with a *santo*, or *orisha*. This is "the divinity born of the syncretism between a Yoruba god or oricha and a Catholic saint" (Sandoval 1979, p. 138).

[2] Ochun is the Yoruba goddess of rivers and romantic love. The story goes that she rescued three fishermen (known as the three Juans) who were drowning in a storm near Cuba's eastern coast. When they saw "a mystical vision of La Caridad", she saved them from drowning (Hagedorn 2001, p. 203).

[3] Still in the 1980s, when Fidel Castro was interview by Frei Betto (1985, p. 103), he declared the inferiority of Afro-Cuban religions and Spiritisms although he also recognized that he had encouraged discrimination he had encouraged by imposing restrictions on religions in Cuba.

[4] Cuba was officially declared as an atheist state by Fidel Castro's government in 1961, forbidding any practitioner of a religious belief to join the Cuban Communist Party as they were not 'politically integrated' (CCP) (Hagedorn, 2001, p. 198; Mahler and Hansing, 2005; Tejada, 1999). However, religions became mostly practiced clandestinely.

[5] I borrow the term 'folklorization' as used by Hagedorn (2001, p. 12) who approached it as "a process of making of folk tradition folkloric".

[6] Since 1993, Cuba uses two currencies: the Cuban *peso* (CUP, the local currency) and the *convertible peso* (CUC, mainly for tourists or international products and services) which equals the US dollar (USD). In 2003, the US dollar was abolished in Cuba, making the CUP and CUC the two official currencies circulating in Cuba.

[7] It should be noted that Afro-Cuban religions are not mutually exclusive. A person can be a *palero*, *abakua* and *santero* at the same time as while being Christian. Membership to other religions is not excluded in Cuba (Tejada, 1999). This explains Ayorinde's (2004) theory about *multireligiosidad* (multireligiosity).

[8] Hagedorn (2001, p. 118) defines *aché* as "a central concept in Yoruba cosmology that has been transferred intact to the Cuban practice of Santería. It refers to both the realized and inherent divine potential in all aspects of life, even in apparently inert objects. Although all beings possess *aché*, people who are initiated into Santería generally gain more *aché*".

[9] *Ochatur* stands for *Orisha turismo* (Orisha tourism). Although Hagedorn (2001) elaborates on this government-sponsored type of cultural tourism, I was unable to track current organization of such tours in November 2016 by doing online research. Hagedorn (2001) and Argyriadis (2008) also note that it was Rogelio Martinez Furé, a Cuban folklorist – who was one of the founders of Cuba's National Folklore Ensemble – who first coined the term *Santurismo* (*Santería + Turismo*) in an interview. He even described it as 'pseudo-folklorism'.

[10] In the United States, were Santería also became increasingly popular due to Cuban exiles who fled the island after Castro's Revolution, a similar Santería initiation ceremony could cost $5,000 up to $20,000. Therefore, many American Santería practitioners chose to travel to Cuba for religious purposes and got initiated there as a financial decision (Delgado, 2009; Hagedorn, 2001).

[11] The prefix *diplo-* was first used in this context during the Soviet era in Cuba when so-called *diplo-tienda* markets opened (Delgado, 2009).

[12] *Iyawó* is the Lucumi name for somebody who is recently initiated in Santería. An *iyawó* is supposed to dress one year in white, starting from the day of his/her initiation (Palmié 2013).

[13] In his interview, Furé, the co-founder of the *Conjunto Folclórico*, also mentioned 'pseudo-religious jinetero' and 'santero jinetero', which is clear evidence that he recognized the existence of a religious *jineterismo* (Argyriadis, 2008; Delgado, 2009).

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