The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine Campus
Faculty of Humanities and Education
CARIBBEAN STUDIES PROJECT
HUMN 3099

COVER PAGE

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Title of Thesis:
A Comparative Analysis of Afro-Caribbean Identity in the Spiritual Baptist and Santeria Religions in Trinidad and Cuba Respectively

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A Comparative Analysis of Afro-Caribbean Identity in the Spiritual Baptist and Santería Religions in Trinidad and Cuba Respectively

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Caribbean Studies Project HUMN 3099

Dr. Nicole Roberts

April 21, 2017
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Abstract

Identity encompasses a wide range of factors, including race and culture. The Afro-Caribbean identity is wrapped up in the historical denigration of the expressions reminiscent of an African heritage. As a result, Afro-Caribbean religions have often faced institutionalised discrimination, the stigmas to which they were attached often still present in contemporary Caribbean societies. The Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions are two Afro-Caribbean religions indigenous to Trinidad and Cuba respectively. This paper seeks to investigate and compare the roots of the stigmas appended to these faiths to determine whether there is a common ground between the two and to explore to what extent the stigmas persist. Upon finding this answer, the evolutions that took place, both at the structural level of the religions, as well as at the level of the followers, will be examined in order to determine their possible future in contemporary Caribbean society.
Introduction

According to Collins English Dictionary, the term “identity” can be defined as “the state of having unique identifying characteristics held by no other person or thing” (808). For the typical Caribbean person, his/her concept of identity relates to his/her geographical space, race or colour. While the dictionary definition can include these, identity can also encompass culture and social behaviour. This is important to bear in mind because this paper will focus on Afro-Caribbean identity through two African-based religions, Spiritual Baptist in Trinidad and Santería in Cuba. However, the other definitions mentioned will also feature in the discussion throughout the paper.

In the Caribbean, people of African descent have traditionally been regarded and treated as “inferior” to the white race within the region - and the world, at large. This has been the justification used for denigrating Afro-Caribbean people. The stigma runs so deep that, even in modern times, Afro-Caribbean people experience discrimination. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to conduct a comparative analysis of the Afro-Caribbean identity as presented in the Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions to determine the extent to which the misconceptions surrounding the two religions persist in contemporary Trinidad and Cuba.

Based on this theme, the significance of this paper for Caribbean studies is evident. By comparing two different religions cultivated in two different Caribbean societies, it will be possible to ascertain whether a difference in culture and location influenced the Afro-Caribbean identity, or whether cultural and geographical considerations bear no influence in shaping the Afro-Caribbean individual. As a result, the answer to this investigation will be presented under three headings: Chapter One - The Origin of the Stigma Surrounding Afro-Caribbean Religions; Chapter Two - The Evolution of Afro-Caribbean Religions in the Face of the Stigma; Chapter Three - The
Effects of the Evolution of Afro-Caribbean Religions on the Followers and the Implications for the Future.

Chapter One will focus on unearthing the origin of the stigma attached to the Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions. By doing so, a foundation will be established for the rest of the paper. It is necessary to trace the beginnings of the stigma attached to the two religions in order to understand all the repercussions that flowed from it. Once the source of the stigma is identified, then each effect will be described to portray the discrimination. Then, a comparative analysis will follow to reveal the findings of the investigation.

Chapter Two will concentrate on the evolutions of both religions in the face of the stigma. Changes that developed in both religions because of the stigma will be discussed. Mention will also be made of those aspects of the religions that remained unchanged despite the stigma. The evolution will also be presented from the angle of constitutional and social developments that would have affected the religions. Again, a comparative analysis will be conducted and the revelations described in relation to Afro-Caribbean identity.

Chapter Three will cover the final two research questions: one, the effects of these evolutions in the religions on the followers; and two, the implications of the evolutions of the religions for the future. A description will be given of the followers’ responses to the evolutions that took place in their religions. Then, information gathered from research will be presented to demonstrate the followers’ desires for their religions and, possibly, the roles they expect their religions to play in the future. After addressing both questions, comparative analyses will follow.

For this paper, both primary and secondary sources were consulted. For primary research, information was sourced from three expert interviewees: Dr. Hazel-Ann Gibbs De Peza, an Assistant Professor at the University of Trinidad and Tobago and a prominent member of the
Spiritual Baptist community; Dr. Maarit Forde, Senior Lecturer in Cultural Studies at the University of the West Indies; and Mr. Adonis Díaz Fernández, a Cuban Lecturer at the University of the West Indies whose research interests include Afro-Cuban culture and literature. He is also a spiritual leader and President of *Ile Ifa Igba Olorum* in Trinidad and The Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba in Trinidad and Tobago.

As a member of the Spiritual Baptist Faith, Gibbs De Peza was able to provide information from both professional and personal perspectives on the challenges faced by Spiritual Baptist practitioners over the years. Forde gave an academic outlook of the experiences of the followers of both the Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions. Díaz Fernández provided both academic and personal knowledge on Santería. As such, these three individuals were able to contribute perspectives rich in information in order to support the presentation of this study.

Additionally, a variety of literature was consulted on both religions. The texts that addressed the Spiritual Baptists highlighted the complexity in defining the religion as it exists in Trinidadian society because of the difficulty in distinguishing the Spiritual Baptist religion from Trinidad Orisha. However, the texts revealed that the Spiritual Baptist faith contains elements of African expressions and a description of its emergence and the prohibition laws that restricted its practices was given. The history of the practitioners’ persecution was also detailed, showing how they persevered through the persecution to preserve the religion that exists today.

Similarly, literature on Santería was accessed. These texts focused on the origin of the religion and its treatment in Cuban society. They included an explanation of the name *Santería*: *Santería*, when translated, means “way of the saints,” a feature attributed to the faith because of its practitioners’ apparent worshipping of Catholic saints who, in fact, were merely a veil for the worship of their *orishas*, or deities (Mitchell 60-63). With this explanation, various authors stated
that it is, in fact, a syncretic religion that was formed by an intermingling of the African-derived Yoruba belief system with practices of Roman Catholicism within the context of colonial societal pressures. The texts gave insight into how this syncretised religion was able to withstand the immense challenges it faced to become the religion that it is today and be widespread in contemporary Cuba.

In conclusion, a discourse will now ensue in this paper to show that the local authorities in both Trinidad and Cuba set about to discriminate against the Spiritual Baptists and the Santería practitioners. The discussion will be a comparative analysis of the two religions on the following: the reasons for the stigma; the chain of events the stigma caused; the effects of it on the religions and their followers with a projection of the roles of the religions in the future. At the end of this paper, therefore, it will be clear that the societal reactions to the Afro-Caribbean individual of today are rooted in a colonial past.
Chapter One

The Origin of the Stigma Surrounding Afro-Caribbean Religions

Afro-Caribbean religions were an attempt by the slaves to retain their identities, practising what they knew, but their African expressions were rejected by the local authorities. Both in Trinidad and in Cuba, the local governments suppressed the practices of the Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions respectively through legislation, and the practitioners were persecuted as a result. This chapter, then, will focus on a comparative analysis of the origin of the stigma associated with both religions, beginning with the Spiritual Baptist faith in Trinidad, followed by Santería in Cuba.

From the outset, the stigma appended to the Spiritual Baptist religion had its roots in British prejudice. They regarded Africans as inferior, describing them as “different species of the same genus, equal in intellectual faculties to the orang-outang,” according to a Jamaican planter Edward Long (qtd. in Williams 31). As a consequence, they denigrated the Africans and systematically stripped them of their identities - language and culture. In fact, the British felt that “religion i.e. Christianity, was an icon of civilization” that was “for the masters, not the slaves” (Gibbs De Peza 39). They, therefore, opposed any attempt to offer religion to the Africans, and when the Africans themselves engaged in their religious traditions, the British viewed these practices with suspicion and “vigilantly suppressed” them, according to Leonard Barrett (qtd. in Gibbs De Peza 40). However, after Emancipation, African religions emerged with their African expressions, such as drumming, bell ringing, clapping and rhythmic dancing. The Spiritual Baptist faith was one such religion, formed from among the said Africans that the British considered inferior. Something had to be done to denounce this religion and prevent its growth:
The shame associated with slavery and the so-called uncivilized African heritage of much of the population of Trinidad led to many people at the time to try to ban the religion. In general, the colonial ruling class of the time went to great lengths to suppress the culture and traditional religions of the non-white majority. (Henry 33-34)

It is evident that the emergence of the Spiritual Baptist religion was an affront to the British. The freed Africans demonstrated their humanity by creating a religion to tend to their spiritual needs. This is not the behaviour, or a need, of an “orang-outang.” In fact, according to British thinking, religion is a portrayal of civilisation. They could not allow the Spiritual Baptist religion because it exposed their lie of describing African people as “uncivilised” in order to justify their enslavement of them. Also, the British had tried to erase memories of Africa from the Africans’ minds, but the Africans demonstrated strength of character by forging a new identity for themselves through a religion that incorporated African traditions in their worship. This Afro-Caribbean identity was a severe blow to the existing British thought that Africans were not humans, and they had to find ways to suppress it.

The method of suppression employed against the Spiritual Baptist religion was the introduction of laws that stigmatised it. These laws targeted the African expressions in the religion and named the punishments to be attached to any violation. The 1869 Ordinance in Trinidad illegitimised any African religion and prohibited drum playing at certain times. Later, another bill in 1883 made all drum playing illegal. Violation of these laws was punishable by “imprisonment and flogging” (Henry 34). Then, there was the Shouters Prohibition Ordinance in 1917 which specifically targeted the Spiritual Baptist faith. Frances Henry gave insight into the basis of its implementation:
The stated reason for the ordinance was that the Shouters made too much noise with their loud singing and bell ringing. There were complaints that they disturbed the peace. The worshippers’ expressive and emotional behaviour - which included dancing, shaking, falling to the ground, and shouting and grunting - were no doubt considered highly unseemly by the more traditional groups in colonial Trinidad society...Underlying all of these reasons, however, was the idea that many of these practices derived from an African past. A cultivated Christian society therefore had no room for what were considered to be barbaric rituals. (33)

It is obvious that these laws were really a reinforcement of the entrenched ideology of white superiority over the Africans. The existence and implementation of these prohibition ordinances helped to maintain the social hierarchy that kept the Africans at an inferior position. This social order was important because the British could still exert dominance over the freed slaves and control their development as independent individuals with their own identities. The freed Africans had to know that their freedom was not an indication of British acceptance of them as humans. As a result, a regular day was “Beat and Arrest, Fines and Imprisonment for the Spiritual Baptist” (Gibbs De Peza 59). The colonial authorities had finally succeeded in criminalising the religion and its “barbaric rituals.”

The description of “barbaric rituals,” also described as “obeah” or black magic, in the ordinances, was mistakenly associated with the Spiritual Baptist religion, and this resulted in the stigma against it. The Spiritual Baptist religion was frequently linked to the Trinidad Orisha, another African-derived religion. The two religions evolved from a similar history and developed in the same cultural and political context (Gibbs De Peza 25). They both embraced African expressions of loud singing, rhythmic movements and drumming. However, “the ritual of trancing
and manifesting deities...” in the Orisha religion was “...labelled as ‘obeah’ by colonial authorities” (“Among the believers”). As no differentiation was made between the practices of the Spiritual Baptist and the Trinidad Orisha religions, it was believed that they were one and the same. Consequently, the stigma attached to the practices of one was also extended to the traditions of the other, causing the confusion that brought the Spiritual Baptists much persecution.

Gibbs De Peza confirmed the confusion that arose, and still exists, in distinguishing the Spiritual Baptist religion from the Trinidad Orisha, a fact that fed the stigma. In her book *My Faith: Spiritual Baptist Christian*, she said: “as a result of the similarities and of an absence of documentation and teaching of the practices of the two religions, some syncretization took place and a fusion and confusion arose in the minds of members and non members alike” (25). She further explained that there was, in fact, a large following of practitioners who embraced simultaneously the two religions (Personal Interview. 24 Nov. 2016). Therefore, the Spiritual Baptists were thought to be practising “obeah,” or black magic, a practice denounced by the ordinances which trained the Trinidadian minds to regard such practices as “non-Christian” and suspicious.

While no distinction was made between the practices of the Spiritual Baptist faith and those of Trinidad Orisha, the confusion served the colonial authorities well. They were determined to ban the religion using any method available to them, and if the practices of the Spiritual Baptists were also considered to be “obeah,” then that description was a sound ground to have the prohibition ordinances applied to them as well. They were not interested in what the Spiritual Baptists believed, and had they taken the time to find out, they would have realised that they were dealing with a Christian religion with African expressions that were harmless and not, at all, “obeah.” The attitude of the British in this regard mirrors the treatment meted out to Afro-
Caribbean people who are continually subjected to prejudice. In those circumstances, the most flippant excuse is justification for denigrating the Afro-Caribbean identity.

At this point, attention must be drawn to an irony that demonstrates that the stigma was birthed from racial prejudice. In an interview, Gibbs De Peza stated that the practices for which Baptists were persecuted - the singing, clapping and glossolalia (speaking in tongues) - are today visible in different religious circles, “even the Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Pentecostal Church,” traditionally white religions. She continued, “the problem is when we were doing it in the past, it was a black thing and the discrimination is really against blackness and Africanness” (Personal Interview. 24 Nov. 2016). Here, of course, reference was being made to the thinking during colonial times that African people were “uncivilised” and the religion that emerged from them was “non-Christian” and should be rejected. The stigma, therefore, was deliberately developed to suppress Afro-Caribbean identity.

However, Trinidad was not alone in rejecting African-based religions as Santería, an African-derived Cuban religion, originated from stigma. The Spaniards, like the British, believed that whites were superior. However, unlike the British, they sought to convert the slaves to Roman Catholicism, using a system called the cabildos de nación whereby black societies were formed according to ethnic origin as “it would be easier to teach the African slaves...if they were all together” (Kindler 11). This strategy actually provided the Africans with an opportunity to practise their traditional religions, of which the Yoruba religion was one. Eventually, when the Spanish began to view “the preservation of African heritage as a threat” (Kindler 11), the slaves continued practising their Yoruba religion under the guise of worshipping Catholic saints, who represented their orishas, or deities. This gave rise to the syncretised religion of Santería that is practised in contemporary Cuban society (Kindler 11; Mitchell 60-63).
Just as the British, the Spaniards nurtured racial prejudice which led to discrimination against the Santería religion. They, too, embraced white superiority, an ideology that extended from the colonial days into independent Cuba, and “under Cuba’s racial democracy, blackness was frequently denigrated as atavistic and savage” (De la Fuente 52). This was even reflected in liberal Cuban writings in which “blacks were commonly likened to apes” (Moore 30) or labelled as “a race vegetating in childhood,” according to Aline Helg (qtd. in Moore 30). Of course, this attitude had resulted in racial tension in the Cuban society since the colonial era; but these tensions climaxed after the abolition of slavery in 1886 (Moore 219-220). Afro-Cubans became more visible with their cultural and religious practices, and this made the white people feel more threatened, heightening their need to justify the “racially based social hierarchies” (Moore 30). Further, because the Cuban Constitution ostensibly afforded Africans and mulattos the same rights and privileges as white people, the white population was stirred to “find new methods of discrimination that would demonstrate” the African’s “savagery, his incapacity to achieve the status of the rest of the population,” according to Rine Leal (qtd. in Moore 30). This mindset, therefore, led to active discrimination against the practices of Afro-Cuban religions, of which Santería was one. The suppression was spearheaded by Cuban authorities, a point highlighted by Moore:

African-derived religion became a target of officials who pronounced it a “social pathology” brought by the slaves to the Americas, a manifestation of the psychological inferiority of blacks. Prominent figures of the 1910s such as Fernando Ortiz called for the total prohibition of santería worship (Moore 1994, 34-36) in order to purge the nation of “degenerate” cultural practices. (31)
Here, a parallel can be drawn with the Spiritual Baptists. The Spaniards, too, viewed the Africans as animals or subhuman, incapable of demonstrating the intellectual capacity required for a “civilised” society. Their response to Santería with its African expressions was similar to that of the white population in Trinidad on the emergence of the Spiritual Baptist faith: They felt it necessary to find new methods of discrimination to suppress Santería and to maintain the status quo. Evidently, racial prejudice was at the heart of the discrimination against both religions, which reflected a tenacious grip on African expressions, which caused vexation to the Trinidadian and Cuban authorities.

Again, as happened to the Spiritual Baptist faith, the stigma against Santería resulted in institutionalised discrimination. Santería practitioners, or santeros, had always experienced persecution in the Cuban society, but conditions worsened when the United States occupied Cuba during 1898 to 1902. The North Americans displayed an intolerance for the religion describing it as “a ‘mass of foolishness’ in which Catholicism and ‘African demon-worship’ had become ‘grotesquely mixed.’” They prohibited all processions and public demonstrations by Afro-Cuban religious societies (De la Fuente 50). Thereafter, the Cuban authorities in the new republic mirrored the Americans’ example of illegitimising the religion.

The basis upon which the practices of Santería were prohibited lay in its description as brujería, or witchcraft, accusation of which carried severe penalties. It was observed that the Palo Monte practitioners incorporated human bones into their rituals (Moore 31), a practice which was regarded as witchcraft in the Cuban society, evoking “images of ancestral, primitive rites mixed with human sacrifices and even acts of cannibalism” (De la Fuente 50). No differentiation was made between Palo Monte and Santería, and so the practices of one were deemed to be the practices of the other. Consequently, “in the 19th century and early 20th century, there was a sort
of moral outrage, a moral panic” in the Cuban society, and many of the Santería practitioners were mistakenly deemed brujos, or witches, for allegedly killing white Cuban children for ritual purposes (Forde. Personal Interview. 7 Dec. 2016). This misconception meant that the santeros were often punished by imprisonment and/or death for breaching the law. Later, however, it was learnt that white people were the culprits who had “mutilated the bodies in various ways to implicate black suspects” (Moore 31) to justify their claim of brujería.

Further, Santería practitioners were persecuted for practising harmless religious ceremonies and for being in possession of objects necessary for their rituals. For example, toques de santo are a Santería ritual where santeros perform dances to various orishas, accompanied by the music of the batá drums (Hagedorn 99; González-Wippler 190; Moore 286). The musicians at these “toques de santo were forced as a result of public hysteria to wrap or otherwise conceal their instruments, as the mere possession of such ‘artifacts of witchcraft’ could mean incarceration,” as noted by Rogelio Martinez Furé (qtd. in Moore 31).

Then a 1922 resolution struck at the core of all Afro-Cuban religions, including Santería, further restricting their African expressions. It read in part as follows:

...the secretary of the interior banned all Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies and dances on the grounds that they were offensive, that they were opposed to culture and civilization, and that ‘experience showed’ that they frequently “led to robberies, kidnappings, or killings of children of the white race.” (De la Fuente 51)

It is amazing how the origin of the stigma against both the Spiritual Baptist and Santeria religions are so strikingly similar. The stigma originated from racial prejudice in both cases, and the white people sought ways to suppress the African expressions in the religions. What stands out, as well, is the fact that these occurrences were happening under two different governing
systems in two different Caribbean islands, yet the thinking and treatment of African people were the same. Their resentment ran deep, and the religions represented a cleaving to Africa that the white people did not want. The Afro-Caribbean identity, therefore, was to be rejected.

Furthermore, a period in Cuban history highlighted the prejudice against Santería. The *afrocubanismo* movement emerged in the early 1920s where “a qualified acceptance of black expression was the only recourse of intellectuals and performers desirous of creating ideological unity in a country so heavily influenced by Africa.” Its aim was to acknowledge Afro-Cuban culture. As such, it was common to have performances by these elite artistes, mockingly imitating *santeros* by “invoking” *orishas*. Society grew to accept that depiction. However, when *santeros* themselves began to participate in popular culture at the time and “infused their compositions with influences from...*toques de santo,*” the Cuban society scorned them (Moore 220). This situation reflects Gibbs De Peza’s words where she said that elements of the Afro-Caribbean identity were only socially accepted when performed by other people. She spoke with reference to the Spiritual Baptist reality, but it is clear that her observation transcends cultural boundaries.

The research reveals that the rejection of both the Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions was rooted in their African flavour. Both societies referred to the religious practices as witchcraft, and they both made prohibition laws to suppress key features of the religions that represented their Afro-Caribbean identities. The violation of these laws brought severe punishment, but the practitioners endured the persecution and emerged with religions indigenous to their territories. These religions exist today and are testimony to their resilience and ingenuity of Afro-Caribbean people. With this understanding of the origin of the stigma, it will now be easy to trace the evolutions it caused in the religions, which is the theme of the next chapter.
Chapter Two

The Evolution of Afro-Caribbean Religions in the Face of the Stigma

Because of the effects of the stigma on the Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions, the two religions underwent evolutions in different ways in order to ensure their survival. For the Spiritual Baptists, these changes occurred within the practices of the religion and at a constitutional level, while for Santería, the changes were taken from constitutional and economic standpoints. In either case, the religions moved from positions of degradation to those of national recognition. This chapter, therefore, will compare these evolutionary paths in both religions, showing how these changes eventually led to the repeal of laws and acceptance of these Afro-Caribbean religions in Trinidad and in Cuba. In the end, it will be obvious that Afro-Caribbean people are creative, tenacious and resilient.

With respect to the Spiritual Baptist faith, the stigma gradually caused the development of a continuum. As the Bible is the Spiritual Baptists’ authority, the fundamental doctrines remained intact (Gibbs De Peza. Personal Interview. 24 Nov. 2016), but differences arose in their practices. The adherents’ first response to the Prohibition Ordinance was to practise their religion in secrecy and in small groups. With unrelenting persecution, however, some leaders made adjustments to the religion, thereby introducing variations in the faith (Gibbs De Peza 45). There exists, therefore, at the centre of the continuum, the traditional Spiritual Baptist. Their practices remain unchanged. As Gibbs De Peza said, “There are several things that are unique to the Spiritual Baptist Faith, like the ringing of the bell...the beating of drums, the clapping and singing and shouting, the way we dress – all of those are things that are, more or less, the same over the years” (Personal Interview. 24 Nov. 2016). Forde, too, stated that the very things listed as illegal in the Shouter Prohibition
Ordinance of 1917 are the same practices that can be found in Baptist churches today (Personal Interview. 7 Dec. 2016). This reality was, therefore, demonstrative of the Spiritual Baptists’ tenacity in maintaining their belief system in a hostile environment that drove them to practise their religion underground.

The continuum continued with deviations from the indigenous Spiritual Baptist faith. On one hand, there were “churches with retentions from the Baptist tradition syncretized with European/American religious practices” while, on the other hand, others chose “to disassociate themselves from the NAME Spiritual Baptist and use other names...and/or discontinue the use of the vessels and bell and/or stop the practice of mourning in an attempt to become more like the established Christian churches...in administration and appearance” (Gibbs De Peza 45-46). Clearly, Spiritual Baptists made whatever adjustments they felt necessary in order to preserve their religion and to minimise the persecution against them. They viewed themselves as Afro-Caribbean people, products of two cultural experiences, which their religion reflected. However, society continually pressured them to relinquish their African heritage, but they were determined to keep their identity.

Another development that the stigma caused for the Spiritual Baptists was the change of status for their religion made at the constitutional level. The Spiritual Baptists had continually made efforts, over the years, to have the Ordinance repealed, to no avail (Gibbs De Peza 59). They eventually saw wisdom in establishing the West Indian United Spiritual Baptist Sacred Order Inc., or WIUSBSO, in 1942 to work towards having them removed from under the stigma. The organisation gained legal status by an Act of Parliament in 1949 (Gibbs De Peza 59). Its main aims were as follows: one, to disassociate the religion from the derogatory term “Shouters,” a term which also formed part of the title of the Ordinance; and two, to have the religion recognised as a
legitimate Christian faith, even with its African flair (“History”; Gibbs De Peza 59). After persistent attempts on behalf of the practitioners, the WIUSBSO finally succeeded in having The Shouters Prohibition Ordinance repealed on March 30, 1951, marking the end of a 34-year ban on a religion solely because of its African expression.

Following this achievement, the Spiritual Baptists sought to have themselves fully integrated into society by lobbying for a national holiday as enjoyed by other accepted religions in the country. Their efforts were finally fruitful in 1996 when the United National Congress Government acceded to their request and made March 30 “Spiritual Baptist/Shouter Liberation Day” in commemoration of the repeal of the 1917 Shouters Prohibition Ordinance (Gibbs De Peza 62).

The stigma caused the Spiritual Baptists much grief, but its existence eventually resulted in great achievements for them. Having the Ordinance repealed and acquiring a national holiday were not small feats. Legislative adjustments had to be made and agreed to by both the Government and the Opposition. The fact that these accomplishments are realities today are evidence of the recognition afforded them as citizens of Trinidad who were also entitled to practise their religion as ever other Trinidadian. Theirs was an arduous journey that spanned from days when they had to run and hide to practise their faith to a time when some recognition was finally afforded the faith so that they could worship freely. It can be said, therefore that the repeal of the Ordinance and the granting of the national holiday validated their Afro-Caribbean identity.

In Cuba, on the other hand, the effects of the stigma on Santería were somewhat different and did not lead to a continuum. Neither the fundamental doctrines of Santería nor its practices, birthed at its inception, have changed despite persecution. This fact has been attested to by these words: “The traditions, beliefs, ceremonies and practices remained the same…” (Kindler 20). Díaz
Fernández also supported this position when he indicated that practitioners continued to worship the same orishas that were adopted from the Yoruba religion and that each orisha still retained his/her original role (Personal Interview. 16 Nov. 2016). However, persecution caused the santeros to practise their religion in secrecy to preserve it (Kindler 20). The Spiritual Baptists also responded in this way under persecution. With the exception of operating in secrecy as the Spiritual Baptists did, the Santería practitioners did not allow the stigma to erode their Afro-Caribbean identity as depicted in their religion.

However, Santería was gradually embraced during the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro. He initially maintained the negative stance against the religion, but because of his ideology to promote a Cuban identity through the nation’s African heritage, Afro-Cuban religions were accepted, dismissing their religious contexts (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 74). Santería did not have an institutionalised structure. Its traditions were oral, and many of its practices were unknown because of the secrecy under which the practitioners operated (Kindler 20) and “in the eyes of the elites and those of the black middle class, brujería symbolized Africanness, the very antithesis of progress and modernity” (De la Fuente 50). Santería was not a religion that had an influential role in society as did the Catholic Church. As well, the traditions of Afro-Cuban religions, including Santería, encapsulated Castro’s ideology of a Cuban identity. In addition, the religions satisfied the two definitions of “Afro-Cuban religion” at the time: one, a religion that is associated with black Cubans; and two, a religion born in Cuba whose cultural elements have African origins (Wirtz 27). For all these reasons, therefore, Castro did not see Santería as a threat to his regime and promoted it for its cultural value (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 73; Goldenziel 190).
From that moment onwards, the discrimination against Santería began to subside at a constitutional level. The traditions of the religion were slowly esteemed until, in the late 1980s, the law that prohibited its practice was repealed. Moreover, Castro eventually relaxed his stance on religious matters, and declared Cuba a secular state in 1992. This meant that Santería practitioners were now free to practise their religion openly, to the extent that the Fourth International Congress of Orisha Tradition and Culture was hosted in Cuba in 1992 (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 74). This religious freedom also enabled them to receive benefits from the State as did other religions, such as the aid of Caritas, “Religious social service organizations...opened in Cuba, providing crucial social services to Cubans of all religious faiths” (Goldenziel 179). Santería, like the Spiritual Baptist faith, finally had legal recognition and acceptance of its Afro-Caribbean identity.

Further, Santería was embraced for its cultural and economic value through the emergence of a religious/folklore tourism. This phenomenon was described by Moore: “Capitalizing on the appeal of Afrocuban culture abroad, the Castro government has recently developed ‘folklore tourism’ packages for those interested in learning songs and dances of Afrocuban origin” (226). Facing the U.S. embargo, the Cuban government saw Afro-Cuban religions as a major source of income, thereby promoting their visibility in Cuban society (Hansing 13; Goldenziel 203). Also, literature on Afro-Cuban religions, including Santería, became more visible (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 74). These types of promotions encouraged an influx of tourists to the country, thereby stimulating its economy.

However, this economic status of Santería did not come without a price, again highlighting the treatment of Afro-Caribbean identity. This was noted by Goldenziel:
Afro-Cuban societies receive little to no legal remuneration from the marketing of their goods and services. In addition to material remuneration, the Cuban government also receives political goods from deregulating Afro-Cuban religions. The increased visibility of these faiths allows the Cuban government to reinforce the appearance of religious liberty while also promoting beliefs that undermine the hold of Catholicism. (203)

Evidently, the evolutions of the religions brought some benefits to the Spiritual Baptist faith and the Santería religion, though these changes did not necessarily indicate a complete erosion of the stigma. The Spiritual Baptists have acquired a national holiday, proof of their constitutional status; but the religion has not been promoted as a religion indigenous to Trinidad and worthy of national veneration. This is a significant fact that has been overlooked, and it reeks of subtle disregard of the religion. Santería, on the other hand, is projected by the Cuban government as a source of national pride because of its origin on Cuban soil. Admittedly, the Cuban government exploits the religion for economic reasons, demonstrating a lack of genuine interest in Santería as a religion, which hints, too, at the underlying stigma. So, in both cases, it is obvious that the religions are not regarded with respectability.

The Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions, on account of the stigma, underwent certain changes that secured their survival and brought them some benefits. These changes occurred in different ways and for different reasons for the two religions. For the Spiritual Baptist faith, a continuum developed; the Prohibition Ordinance was repealed; and a national holiday was granted. Santería gained constitutional recognition gradually under the Castro government, and the Cuban government highlighted its cultural value for economic gain. This study clearly reveals that Caribbean authorities disadvantage their citizens at a moment’s notice; but correcting the error is
not so easy. In any event, these changes have, of course, affected the followers and even have implications for the future of these religions.
Chapter Three

The Effect of the Evolution of Afro-Caribbean Religions on Their Followers and the Implications for Their Future

Both the Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions experienced changes in response to the hostile environments in which they existed, and these changes affected the practitioners in specific ways. In the case of the Spiritual Baptists, the continuum caused division among them; their legal status afforded them opportunities to provide social institutions for their members; some members have risen to prominence while openly identifying themselves as Spiritual Baptists. Unfortunately, they still feel marginalised. With respect to the santeros, despite their legal status, many continue to operate in secrecy; their traditions play an important role in the economy and culture of Cuba. Like the Spiritual Baptists, they, too, do not feel fully accepted. This chapter, therefore, will compare these effects on the adherents of both religions, showing that there is still underlying prejudice that bedevils them. As well, the discussion will project future implications for the two religions.

The continuum that developed because of the stigma caused division in the Spiritual Baptist community. Now that the religion has been decriminalised and they are free to worship, Spiritual Baptists remain in the divisions to which they were driven during the days of persecution. This point was highlighted by Gibbs De Peza in her interview with Clevon Raphael of The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper when she said that while there could be unity as a community, spiritual unity was a challenge on account of these variations in beliefs (“Rev de Peza: Baptists on shaky ground”). The stigma ran deep, and the damage it caused in this regard is difficult to repair.
Next, the legal status achieved for the religion empowered Spiritual Baptists to seek their development for their community, and it has emboldened some of them to achieve personal goals while identifying themselves as Spiritual Baptists. For example, Archbishop Barbara Gray-Burke served as a senator in Parliament under the United National Congress (UNC) political party, dressed always with her head wrap. Another example is Gibbs De Peza, who has been mentioned repeatedly throughout this paper. She is currently an Assistant Professor at a university and dresses as well with her head tie. Furthermore, under the UNC Government, the Spiritual Baptists were given 25 acres of land on which the St. Barbara Shouter Baptist Primary School in Maloney was constructed in 2012 (Moe; “Spiritual Baptists show unity”). Then in 2014 they opened The Spiritual Baptist Early Childhood Care and Education Centre, as noted by Doughty (“Spiritual Baptist to open ECCE Centre”).

Despite their many achievements, the Spiritual Baptists still feel marginalised in contemporary Trinidad. In addition to goals attained that were mentioned previously, the Spiritual Baptists also acquired a national holiday for themselves to commemorate the repeal of the Prohibition Ordinance of 1917. This was a remarkable achievement. However, “some of the Baptists feel that that is just, you know, once a year…that they’re not really on par with, say, the Anglican or the Catholic or the Orthodox Hindu like Maha Sabha organisations, which are considered the more respectable religious groups in the country” (Forde. Personal Interview. 7 Dec. 2016). They feel that recognition of their religion is in the laws only, and it has not trickled down to society. For them, the struggle is not over.

Pockets of society still hold steadfast to the misconceptions surrounding the faith, causing the Spiritual Baptists to respond in certain ways. The Afro-Caribbean identity has been demonised for so long that even after legal accommodations have been made to recognise the Spiritual Baptist
faith, an Afro-Caribbean religion, society still has reservations about it. It is this lingering prejudice that makes Spiritual Baptists know that they are not fully accepted. As a result, some practitioners avoid discussing their beliefs in public and refrain from wearing their religious garb, such as the head ties, to avoid discrimination. Others, though, like Gibbs De Peza, refuse to hide her identity:

> So, there are people who, if they’re in my position as a lecturer, as Assistant Professor in a university, wouldn’t let people know that they’re Baptists. They wouldn’t wear their head-tie because they know the kind of discrimination they will face. And I have faced discrimination because of it, but because I am convinced that I know who I am, it doesn’t matter to me. (Personal Interview. 24 Nov. 2016)

Obviously, the law has limitations, and it was not able to obliterate the psychological impact of the stigma on society. “Obeah,” or witchcraft, is viewed with fear in the Trinidadian society, and anyone who practises this is considered evil. By describing the practices of the Spiritual Baptists as “barbaric rituals” and “obeah” all those years ago, the colonial authorities were able to engrave this misconception into the fabric of the society, making it difficult for citizens to relinquish it. This is the Spiritual Baptists’ experience which, for some, causes them to hide their Afro-Caribbean identity for fear of persecution, just as they did in the past.

In a similar manner, the santeros still find it necessary to operate in secrecy, despite having constitutional recognition. In contemporary Cuba, every citizen has the right to practise his/her religion (Forde. Personal Interview. 7 Dec. 2016). As a result, santeros have become more visible, and their religion has become a source of national pride for many. However, the practitioners still keep some of their rituals secret, a fact attested to by Díaz Fernández. This is so for two reasons: one, the desire to reserve these practices for members of the faith; and two, the distrust by practitioners who still fear possible discrimination (Personal Interview. 16 Nov. 2016). This
attitude bears resemblance to their response at the end of the Revolution when Castro began to grant Santería greater freedom, but the santeros chose to continue operating in secrecy, not wishing to invite any instance of discrimination (Goldenziel 190).

Though inroads had been made in the Cuban society for the acceptance of the Santería faith, the santeros still feel uneasy. They know that they can practise their religion openly, but they worry that the wrong interpretation of their religion by authorities could affect them negatively if they should find themselves in trouble. Their attitude is similar to the response by some Spiritual Baptists for whom the years of persecution are a bitter memory, causing them to avoid taking risks that can invite discrimination. So, they continue as before – in secrecy. The stigma not only drove the religions underground, but also affected the followers psychologically. This is the usual outcome of discrimination on the Afro-Caribbean individual.

Further, santeros make economic contributions to the Cuban society that do not fully benefit them. On one hand, the religion has been integrated into society to such an extent that santeros participate in the religious/folklore tourism. Foreigners often visit the island specifically to become initiated into the faith, thereby supplying foreign currency to the Cuban economy. However, as Goldenziel noted, “Afro-Cuban societies receive little to no legal remuneration from the marketing of their goods and services” (203). This reality highlights an interesting point: the traditions of the religion are “embraced” only for its economic value, which implies that there is no genuine interest in the religion itself.

On the other hand, linguistic aspects of Santería have become part of the Cuban “way of life. Because Santería has become more visible, Cubans have become aware of some of their words, which they have incorporated into everyday use. Díaz Fernández explained this reality. Because of the Yoruba background of Santería, the santeros use the word “osogbo,” for “bad
luck,” but the Cubans pronounce it as “osorbo” to describe a day in which they may have suffered a series of mishaps/unfortunate events (Personal Interview. 16 Nov. 2016). This demonstrates the African influence in Cuba, seeping out through the Santería religion.

Santería is part of the Cuban identity, whether they are willing to accept it or not. Its traditions are marketed as Cuban culture, though foreigners also visit the island for its religious aspect. Whatever the reason, the tourists provide foreign currency to the Cuban economy. Further, Yoruba linguistics has made its way into the Cuban population. This whole experience for the Santería practitioners is better than in the past, though they are not really respected. Both the Spiritual Baptists and santeros have some acceptance by their societies, in different ways and for different reasons, there is no denying that the changes that the stigma caused has affected their daily existence.

Starting from the present realities of the Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions in their societies, some implications can be drawn for the future. Both practitioners desire genuine acceptance by their societies. With reference to the article written by Clevon Raphael, when asked about her greatest desire for the Spiritual Baptist community, Gibbs De Peza answered, “that our society will give us an equal place as the anthem says....If I am not free to wear my head tie to work or school I do not have an equal place. Other people can wear theirs but if I wear mine it is a problem” ( “Rev de Peza: Baptists on shaky ground”). The Baptists know that they are still trailed by the stigma and so, they make every effort to make themselves visible by publishing books and hosting seminars on their faith. As Gibbs De Peza indicated, “a lot of the change is on us being more willing to identify ourselves in the faith...that would have the effect of people understanding the faith more because they see us more...we’re more obvious.” (Personal Interview. 24 Nov. 2016).
The Santería practitioners themselves also desire full acceptance in Cuba. They are still sceptical about exposing all aspects of their faith. They already participate in the religious tourism, but they can perhaps make representations for themselves to benefit more from it economically. Additionally, this could be a good avenue that they can explore to determine the best approach to raise awareness of their belief system. People tend to be more accepting of things they can understand. The Santería adherents have already make some progress and they can capitalise on those milestones to pursue full acceptance of their Afro-Caribbean identity.

Finally, despite the challenges they have faced, both religions continue to expand. Historically, both religions were comprised of working-class black people, but today the membership has grown to include people of different races and social standings. With respect to the Spiritual Baptists, this is what Gibbs De Peza had to say:

In terms of our membership, we have a lot of members who are professionals, who are in high positions whether in government, in business, in education, so we definitely are growing and will continue to grow. And we will grow even more coming out of this hundredth anniversary of the Prohibition Ordinance because whereas people talk about the fact that we have so many groups and we’re not united and – this is a demonstration of how united we are because most of the groups are involved in this hundredth year anniversary. And that will give us greater growth when everyone comes together as one. (Personal Interview. 24 Nov. 2016)

For Santería, the growth in membership began after the Cuban Revolution. In the years leading up to the Revolution, Santería “enjoyed a significant, but limited, following” and “was totally unknown” in several parts of the island and “had a reputation for being a religion of ‘lower’ class, primarily black, mulatto, and white uneducated people.” However, after the Revolution,
Santería “gained a greater following and visibility among Cubans on the island regardless of their ethnic, social, and economic background” (Olupona and Rey 356), a point reiterated by Díaz Fernández. He said that people in prominent positions, such as politicians and police, also joined the faith (Personal Interview. 16 Nov. 2016). Then, of course, with the emergence of the “folklore tourism” the religion grew more and continues to grow. Forde said this:

People who seek alternatives and who explore their identities, who may want to think of the different ways of understanding who we are, where we come from...they will continue to seek out Santería and other African-oriented rituals and communities in Cuba and elsewhere. And I don’t see that search ending anytime soon. I think people are interested in these questions in Cuba so that they are gravitating towards these faiths because of that.

(Personal Interview. 7 Dec. 2016)

In conclusion, this chapter focused on a comparative analysis of the effects of the evolutions of two Afro-Caribbean religions on their followers. In the case of the Spiritual Baptists, the effects of the stigma caused discord among them which they are struggling to repair. They, however, made strides in acquiring land and building schools for their community. However, they still feel marginalised. Santería, on the other hand, is far more visible in the Cuban society than in the past. Their traditions are showcased for their cultural and economic value, though some foreigners show interest in the religious aspect as well. Sadly, they do not benefit much, if at all, from the revenue made through their contributions. They, too, do not feel fully recognised and still operate, to some extent, in secrecy. The common thread between the two religions is the lack of genuine acceptance, and it was revealed in this chapter that the stigma towards the religions lingers. Because the stigma is still a force to be reckoned with, both adherents will need to focus their attention on eradicating the prejudice once and for all.
Conclusion

The Afro-Caribbean identity, represented by the Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions, came from the abyss of rejection to enjoy certain benefits that are reflected in the contemporary environments and have implications for the future. The theme of this study was addressed in three chapters: The first chapter focused on the origin of the stigma appended to the Spiritual Baptist and Santería faiths; the second chapter revealed the evolutions that took place in the religions in the face of the stigma; and the third chapter was centred on the effects that these evolutions had on the practitioners and the possible routes of the religions in the future. A comparative analysis was conducted on both religions in order to determine what similarities or differences existed in the responses towards Afro-Caribbean identity by the local authorities in two different Caribbean territories.

Chapter One explored the origin of the stigma against the two religions. The thinking that African people were “uncivilised” was an ideology passed down from the colonial era in both Caribbean islands. The comparative analysis revealed that ingrained prejudice in the societies led to the enactment of prohibition ordinances in both Caribbean islands. These, in turn, commenced prosecution and persecution as a way of life for the Spiritual Baptist and Santería practitioners.

Chapter Two mapped the evolutions that occurred in both religions as a result of the stigma. In comparing the Trinidadian experience with its Cuban counterpart, it was apparent that the two religions made immense strides but in different ways. Both religions underwent constitutional changes to improve their statuses. However, for the Spiritual Baptist faith, there was also the formation of a continuum and the acquisition of a national holiday. For Santería, on the other hand, while the stigma did not affect its beliefs, the evolutions of the religion were seen on economic and cultural levels through folklore tourism. The comparison done in this chapter, therefore,
revealed that, while progress was made on a number of levels for both religions, the underlying prejudice towards African expressions remained.

Finally, Chapter Three was divided into two themes: one, the effects of the evolutions of these Afro-Caribbean religions on the adherents; and two, the implications for the future of these religions. The common ground between the two practitioners was the shared sentiment that they were not genuinely accepted. This served as the basis for projections for the future of the religions. By using the evolutions in their religions to their advantages, Spiritual Baptists and *santeros* would have promising outlooks of dispelling the stigma over time by raising public awareness of the true practices and beliefs that comprise the religions.

Given the progression of the discussion throughout the paper, it is clear that the misconceptions surrounding the Spiritual Baptist and Santería religions, representative of Afro-Caribbean identity, continue to pervade the fabric of the Trinidadian and Cuban societies respectively. Indeed, milestones have been achieved in reducing the persecution in contemporary society, but the practitioners of both religions still have a long way to go before their Afro-Caribbean identity can be fully integrated.
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