Meaning Beyond Words: A Musical Analysis of Afro-Cuban Batá Drumming

Javier Diaz
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MEANING BEYOND WORDS:
A MUSICAL ANALYSIS OF AFRO-CUBAN BATÁ DRUMMING

by

JAVIER DIAZ

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Music in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts, The City University of New York

2019
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Javier Diaz

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Music in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor in Musical Arts.

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
ABSTRACT

Meaning Beyond Words: A Musical Analysis of Afro-Cuban Batá Drumming

by

Javier Diaz

Advisor: Peter Manuel

This dissertation consists of a musical analysis of Afro-Cuban batá drumming. Current scholarship focuses on ethnographic research, descriptive analysis, transcriptions, and studies on the language encoding capabilities of batá. However, this artistically sophisticated tradition demands a more in-depth study of its musical manufacture. Drawing from experience as a ritual batá player and as an oricha priest, I have completed the current study by following three primary analytical modalities: (1) sonic landscape, which encompasses: sound vocabulary, form, individual drum parts, and balance of musical elements; (2) timbral design, how the different batá sounds articulate meaningful and functionally distinguishable structures; (3) the rhythmic construction of batá music. For my research, I have surveyed professional, educational, and field recordings for transcriptions and aural analysis. Besides, I have looked at existing transcriptions and incorporated theoretical models for how this music unfolds through time and space. This paper emphasizes the importance of musical processes as a crucial element in the articulation of meaningful structures in Afro-Cuban batá. Furthermore, it situates its findings within the broader field of theoretical analysis of Sub-Saharan African drum ensemble music.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

While acts of creation often unfold in solitude, we cannot attribute the resulting work to a single person’s labor. In most projects, many individuals are responsible for offering continuous help, encouragement, support, and inspiration along the way in myriad ways. This dissertation is no exception. I am forever grateful to those forces, seen and unseen, that have helped me get across the “finish line.” Maferefin (praised be) Olodumare (God), maferefin egun (ancestral spirits), and maferefin oricha for the opportunities they continue to provide for me. I thank my parents, the late Juan Vicente Diaz (ibbaé bayentonù) and María Raquel Martí, for believing in my musical abilities since I was a child. I am forever grateful to my lovely wife, Toyin Spellman-Diaz; this paper is as much hers as it is mine. Without her support, I could not have finished this study. I am thankful to my padrinos (godparents): Virgilio Figueroa, Mike Orta, Luis Pineda, and Freddy Burgueño for their guidance, support, and patience over the years. I am so very grateful to my batá teachers and mentors Lázaro Galarraga, Román Díaz, and the late Lorenzo Peñalver (ibaé) for their generosity, patience, abundant knowledge, and guidance. I am thankful to my drum brothers: Angel Luís Figueroa, an early mentor and influence, Sebastian Guerrero, Bobby Wilmore, Michael Spiro, Humberto “Nengue” Hernandez, and so many others I have played and interacted with. You have all taught me much. I would like to thank my advisor Professor Peter Manuel, whose encouragement, dedication, and knowledge are ever expanding. Also, I want to thank my dissertation committee: Janette Tilley, David Font-Navarrete, and Benjamin Lapidus for their valuable input and insight. I want to extend a very special thanks to my percussion professor at the Graduate Center Morris Lang for his encouragement during my time at this institution. I am grateful to my good friend Carol Steele for her editorial work. Finally, I would like to thank my editor Carmen Staaf for her precise work.
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INTRODUCTION

The present study consists of a multi-faceted interpretive musical analysis of Afro-Cuban batá drumming. The central motivation of this dissertation is to present new ideas about batá music’s timbral and rhythmic organization. Batá drums are a type of religious hourglass-shaped drum that originated in ancient Yorubaland, modern-day Nigeria, and came to Cuba with the trans-Atlantic slave trade in the early nineteenth century.¹ In Cuba, as in Yorubaland, batá are used in the liturgical music of the *oricha/orisa* religion.² These drums are known for their ability to encode and mimic Yoruba and related dialects. While they are performed in tandem with sacred songs and liturgical dance in public religious ceremonies called *tambores*, the complexity of the drumming itself, and the fact that they are often played by themselves, justify a thorough study of their multiple structural aspects.

Batá music’s elaborate composition has made it stand out as one of the most important Afro-Cuban musical traditions. However, despite its sophistication and significant influence on Cuban music as a whole, batá’s musical design remains relatively understudied. The existing literature on batá music, while providing necessary background information and artistic insight, does not go deep enough into its musical makeup and design. For instance, Schweitzer (2013), and Moore and Sayre (2006) focus on descriptive accounts of formal elements and ethnographic

¹ Ortiz (1994:146) argues that the African-born batá player (and possibly an Osain priest and a *babalawo*) Añabí and Atandá (also a batá player) built the first set of consecrated batá in Cuba in around 1830. Marcuzzi (3005:340-342), however, suggests that the first set of consecrated batá drums in Cuba was probably built closer to the middle of the nineteenth century, around 1866.

² The *orisa/oricha* religion is a complex of spiritual practices consisting of ancestor worship and the worship of the deities known as *orisas/orichas/orixas*. This spiritual practice encompasses a region in Africa that includes Yorubaland and neighboring people, such as the Edo, Ondo, and others (Peel 2003:107-118). It is an ancient practice that continues to evolve today. This tradition came to the New World (Brazil, Cuba, Trinidad, Haiti, and other areas) with the transatlantic slave trade and developed into separate but related practices.
data. Spiro (2006), Amira and Cornelius (1992), and others concentrate on annotated transcriptions of the rhythms. Villepastour (2010) discusses the language encoding capabilities of African batá. As we can see, there is a need for new contributions that look into the construction of this music and how it can establish [musical] meaning beyond speech surrogacy. I use the word “meaning” here referring to how all music, regardless of specific interpretation and cultural decoding (and encoding) systems, conveys intrinsic structural systems that can be apprehended through experiential cognition. This last point is very significant given the decline of spoken African languages (including the Yoruba language known as Anagó or Lucumi) in Cuba since the early twentieth century.³ Batá players from Cuba and secondary diasporas rely heavily (and have done so now for at least three-quarters of a century in Cuba) on musical and religious knowledge to render interpretations of this liturgical music. While the speech surrogacy and the encoding of Yoruba language aspect of batá deserve ample study, I believe it necessary also to understand batá drumming from a musical standpoint.

This study intends to fill the gaps in the current scholarship by answering the following questions: How do the individual drum parts’ perspectives add to the knowledge of batá musical design? What kind of formal structures do we find in the batá repertoire? How is this music timbrally (including “melodic” and “harmonic”⁴ dimensions produced by the different drum

³ Ortiz cites a batá elder in 1954, Miguel Somodevilla saying: “contemporary drummers need to take more into account the relationship between the rhythms and the ritual dancers.” Ortiz suggests that this opinion substantiates the fact that the language encoding aspect of batá in Cuba, at this time, was already becoming a secondary aspect of its performance (1994:100-101).

⁴ I use “melodic” here to describe drum pitches arranged in horizontal schemes that resemble pitch melodies. I use “harmonic” to describe sound structures (such as the lumping of certain sounds across different drums that produce short/repetitive patterns) that exhibit properties similar to the vertical interaction of pitches, specifically arpeggios and harmonic analytical segmentation. Drummers use melody to describe vertical arrangements of drum pitches all the time. Concert music composers have used percussive sounds melodies for a long time now.
sounds) and rhythmically organized (including vertical and horizontal expressions of durations and attacks)? I separate this paper into four main topics, dedicating one chapter to each: (1) preliminary information about batá, Lucumí religion and its historical perspective, scholarship review, an overview of Lucumí religious music, and a brief discussion of batá education processes; (2) the batá sonic landscape: sound vocabulary, form, individual drum parts, and ideas about balance; (3) understanding batá music’s timbral structures, i.e., how different sound sub-groups articulate specific functions and meaning in the music; and (4) the rhythmic makeup of batá music: polyrhythms, tempo, meter, and the use of clave (timelines).

While the focus of my work is batá music’s design, I should emphasize that batá, in the context of Afro-Cuban religious music, is not only a musical instrument, but also a conglomerate of spiritual and sacred technologies, ideas, and agencies that come together as a single object in the form of a drum ensemble. As in many other religious music analyses, my study does not aim at divorcing batá from its religious-functional sphere. However, it is imperative to go past functionality if we are to gain a deeper understanding of batá’s musical dimension. Also, I should point out that while scholarly musical analyses are few, batá drummers are constantly producing musical analyses while playing, teaching, and discussing batá drumming in ritual and secular situations. Their analyses range from introspective performance embodiment of abstract objects, such as polyrhythms, to broad classifications of rhythms by tempo, feel and programmatic performance associations. The present work, considering that I am a ritual batá

(Cage, Bartok, Stockhausen, and others). Ethnomusicologists have used the analogy of melody when studying the different kinds of drum music that exhibit melodic qualities such as “talking” drums, big drum ensemble music, etc. Taking all these precedents into account, I have gone one step further and applied the notion of “melodic” drumming to the dimension of simultaneity and harmonic segmentation. It is clear that we are not describing pitches and pitch relationships as in harmony; instead, we are observing the harmonic treatment of timbres.
drummer, is not only an addition to the ongoing discussion about batá music in academia but also an extension of emic discourse and knowledge.

Before discussing any specific methodology, let us go beyond the field of batá drumming research briefly, and situate the present study within the more substantial existing body of work about Sub-Saharan African drum ensemble music and derived traditions. The questions I attempt to answer in my analysis overlap with several issues previous researchers, such as Koetting (1970), Locke (1982), Ekweme (1975-76), Jones (1959), and others, have encountered when writing about African drum music. Ideas about meter, drum part hierarchies, use of polyrhythmic texture, timbral distribution, tempo/metric manipulation, and the relationship of the drumming to poetry, song, and dance are all areas of intense debate and disagreement within academia. This analysis of Afro-Cuban batá should add new insights to the existing general knowledge of structure, specifically timbral distribution and rhythmic organization, and the establishment of specific musical roles in West and Central African drum ensemble music and secondary diasporas.
Methodology

Havana (Cuba’s capital city) and Matanzas (culturally and artistically important city to the east of Havana) are the cradles of the two main distinct batá performance styles in Cuba. I focus almost entirely on the batá liturgical repertoire from Havana, but there will be mention of the Matanzas style when I discuss the different types of batá sounds. My study draws from my experience as an initiated batá drummer and a priest in the Lucumí (Santería) religion and years of being a student of Afro-Cuban percussion music. I provide multiple transcriptions of batá rhythms and ritual songs. I base the score transcriptions on my own performance experience. Besides, I have also relied on multiple available commercial recordings. That said, the scores presented here are not exact renditions of any one specific performance. Instead, they are composites from recordings and remembrances of my performances and lessons. In addition to transcriptions, there are multiple diagrams, tables and analytical graphs explaining the inner workings of batá music. Finally, I provide extensive commentary on my examples and theorize on how batá music builds patterns according to different criteria (such as rhythm and timbre).

For score examples, I use Western music notation and other forms of graphic rhythmic notation when needed. There are many ways of representing batá drumming meter in Western notation, i.e., 12/8, 6/8, cut-time, 2/4, etc. Primarily, I have chosen two time signatures in score transcriptions: 6/8 for rhythms that make use of ternary subdivisions of the pulse, and 2/2 (cut-time) for rhythms that use binary and quaternary subdivisions of the pulse. Clearly, this notation is an approximation (like every type of notated score) to the real sound of batá. I discuss the micro-timing operations that affect the feel of batá music; however, I have chosen not to notate
any feel variances for the sake of representational clarity. See the music transcriptions notation key below.

I have decided to write Lucumí/Anagó language words using Spanish spelling because that is the primary language used by Cuban batá players. When I write Yoruba words, I use English spelling, again for clarity. The proper names of Lucumí deities, names of languages, and peoples are not in italics. I do italicize all other foreign words.

Music Transcriptions Notation Key
CHAPTER 1: Preliminary Information

Existing Scholarship

Los tambores batá de los Yoruba (1994) by Fernando Ortiz is the stand-alone edition of a chapter by the same author that first appeared in the more extensive work Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana (1954), and it is one of the central works written about the subject. Ortiz, in his peculiar academic style,\(^5\) explains the origin of the batá drums in Cuba, their history, ritual aspects, construction, classification, and musical characteristics. Later researchers and performers have heavily cited the book’s great deal of ethnographic data and ideas about Afro-Cuban batá music. His informants were batá players from Havana and Matanzas active in the 1940’s and 1950’s. This generation of performers was an essential link to the founding African practitioners that reconstructed and established the batá tradition in Cuba. Trinidad Torregosa, Raul Díaz, and Pablo Roche are some of the most important and influential players who served as informants to Ortiz (Ortiz 1994:40-52).

While the ethnographic and historical information that Ortiz delivers is invaluable, his musical descriptions and analyses are more limited given that Ortiz was not a drummer, and that his main esthetic points of reference came from the Western concert music tradition. Also, he was not a trained musician, which affected the accuracy of transcriptions throughout his work. He struggles at times to find analogies that encompass the complex musical nature of batá drumming. With that in mind, we still get a good sense of central ideas that have been cited many times since in the literature of Afro-Cuban drumming. It is also important to mention that

\(^5\) Ortiz, throughout his career, positioned himself as an outsider and as a member of the privileged class (Rodriguez-Mangual 2004:47). For further understanding on Ortiz’s view about race in Cuba, see “Por la integración cubana de blancos y negros” (1943).
the vast scope of Ortiz’s research on Afro-Cuban music as a whole situates him as a towering figure on the subject. *Los tambores batá de los Yoruba* is part of a research continuum that spans decades since his early works dealing with Afro-Cubans and Afro-Cuban culture.

The phrase “*los tres batá hablan lengua*” (“the three batá speak in tongues”), used by Ortiz (1994:49) coincides with remarks many current drummers still make when describing the language encoding aspects of batá. This phrase means, broadly speaking, that the drums (batá) can render in drum language actual Lucumí/Anagó words and phrases. While Ortiz does not provide extended exact text renditions of Lucumí/Anagó words and phrases in the batá repertoire, it is clear to the reader that that is what early batá drummers were doing in Cuba and (back) in Africa: encoding the spoken ritual language into the drumming patterns. Ortiz observes that batá drummers, while knowing the oricha songs and prayers very well, never sing while playing (Ortiz 1994:53). Currently, Yoruba batá players also do not sing while playing (Villepastour 2010:26).

Amanda Villepastour’s *Ancient Text Messages of the Yoruba Bata Drum: Cracking the Code* (2010) is an essential contribution to the scholarship of batá drums. Although her work focuses specifically on African batá, her research is relevant to batá in general because of the thorough study she did on African batá speech encoding. While we only have bits and pieces of the phrases Afro-Cuban batá “speak,” the fact that several rhythms played in Cuba can also be heard in Nigeria probably points towards a common ancient lexical/musical origin. This fact may allow for the use of a similar approach to the study of speech encoding in Afro-Cuban batá.

---

6 Anagó or Lucumi is the name given to a Yoruba language spoken in Cuba during colonial times. See Cabrera’s *Anagó: Vocabulario Lucumí (el Yoruba que se habla en Cuba)* (2007).
Villepastour’s work yields abundant information on how contemporary Nigerian batá speech encoding works. Working primarily with two Nigerian informants: Chief Alhaji Rabiu Ayandokun and ‘Tunde Adegbola, she explores how batá drummers use an invented language called *ena bata* as an intermediary encoding step between drum rhythms and Yoruba speech. Nigerian drummers use *ena* batá language as a didactic/mnemonic secret language that transforms Yoruba into simple syllables that are then used to codify drum sounds (Villepastour 2010:91-93). Cuban drummers today use a few syllables as didactic onomatopoeia when learning simple rhythms, especially those on the *okónkolo* (smallest drum). There may be a connection between these syllables and African *ena* drum language. This area of batá drumming needs a more in-depth study.

In addition to *ena* studies, this volume provides an extensive classification of Yoruba batá repertoire. Of the many instances, both religious and secular, in which batá drums render encoded text in Yoruba land, Villepastour focuses on *oriki* (praise poetry), *owe* (proverbs) and *ilu orisa* (orisa rhythms). *Oriki* and *orisa* rhythms are particularly relevant to my study. The way batá drummers render *oriki* in Yoruba land might be related to the way Cuban players perform *moyuba* (salute-prayer-praise), also called *rezo* (prayer). In Yoruba land, *oriki* is usually played as free speech-like drumming style on the *iyá* (largest drum of the batá ensemble). Similarly, Cuban drummers also play in a rhythmically free fashion when doing *moyubas* on the *iyá*. *Ilu orisa* are most likely the Yoruba equivalent of the Afro-Cuban batá repertoire known as *oro igbodú* (drumming sequence for the “sacred grove”) or *oro seco* (“dry” drumming sequence, meaning there is no singing during this sequence). Both *ilu orisa* and *oro igbodú* rhythms are rhythms played strictly for praising the *orisa/oricha*. Also, both of these categories of repertoire have no vocals. According to Villepasteur, *ilu orisa* consist of simple Yoruba phrases about
orisa, which the drums play (Villepastour 2010:43). The drums play interlocking rhythms on the iya’lu (large drum) and the omele abo (‘female’ middle drum). In Cuba, something similar happens in the oro igbodú sequence. Here the iyá and the itótele engage in rhythmic exchanges and musical phrases that refer to/evoke the orichas. The textual meaning of the rhythms in the oro igbodú has been almost entirely lost, but some rhythms, such as the praise rhythms for the orichas Osain, Elegba, Changó, Ibeji, and others, can still be translated into Anagó/Lucumí. Some drummers refer to these rhythms while teaching to show that the entire oro igbodú consists of actual Anagó speech. However, it is possible (and even probable) that many parts of the repertoire (in Cuba) come from other forms of orisa music that did not use batá or speech encoded drumming, such as many types of bembé drumming.

Villepastour goes on to compare and contrast the speaking capabilities of other drums such as the dundun (squeeze drum) and the omele meta (three small batá drums played by one drummer as a set) to those of the batá ensemble. She concludes that both the omele meta and the dundun are more mimickers than encoders of speech (Villepastour 2010:90). Her study of drum language encoding and mimicking is an excellent (and needed) addition to the literature. There is, however, a gap in her research that I plan to fill in with my musical analysis. Villepastour does not mention in her work how African batá rhythmic organization works. Her central preoccupation is batá textual lexicon; however, there are other structures at play here; especially ways of meaning that go beyond text and speech. My goal here is to expand our understanding of batá by elaborating on the musical notion of meaning that exists in Afro-Cuban batá. As I have mentioned above, in Cuba when words cannot be understood, it is musical gesture, character and collective imaginings (physical and metaphysical) that provide semantic and meta-

7 These toques tend to match the songs’ syllabic structure with the drum accents.
narrative meanings to the batá repertoire. That is not to say that these parameters are not present in the African batá as well; however, in Cuba, they have come to carry most of the meaning system of batá music.

Robin Moore and Elizabeth Sayre’s insightful chapter “An Afro-Cuban Batá Piece for Obatalá, King of the White Cloth” (2010) gives us an excellent introduction to the musical language of Afro-Cuban batá. The authors provide detailed descriptions about the interaction of the three drum parts, the relationship between drumming structure and songs, and the toque structure. Their analysis reveals structural principles about a specific tratado (suite-like collection of rhythms/songs for a particular deity, often pronounced trata’o in Cuban vernacular) and invites further research. Moore and Sayre point out a very significant aspect of the aural experience of batá music. They adequately suggest that the totality of all six heads sounding at once (or within close temporal proximity of one another) is the chief textural aural object of batá music (Moore and Sayre 2010:86). Furthermore, they write about how batá players themselves have techniques of aurally establishing hierarchies of sound that allow them to “experience” batá music in a coherent way. I agree with the authors on this point. However, their mention of clave (a rhythmic pattern that acts as an organizational guide in various forms in Afro-Cuban/Cuban music) as a crucial organizing principle of Afro-Cuban batá music is incomplete and misleading because it subscribes to the general assumption that all Cuban music relies on clave as an essential architectural device. This is not always the case. While it is true that batá players are aware of the rhythmic implications of clave in batá, clave itself as an all-powerful rhythmic blueprint for batá rhythms is not an evenly distributed concept among Cuban (and Cuban-derived batá diasporas) players. As we shall see later in my analysis, there are timbral and rhythmic
forces at play within batá that are as (or more) influential on the organization of the musical texture.

*The Artistry of Afro-Cuban Batá Drumming: Aesthetics, Transmission, Bonding, and Creativity* (2013) by Kenneth Schweitzer is one of the most extensive studies done on Afro-Cuban batá drumming in recent years. Schweitzer’s well-researched volume is very ambitious in scope: it is part ethnographic reporting, part musical analysis of the batá repertoire, and part testimonial of his own experience as a student of batá drums. Lastly, it includes his accounts as a ritually initiated *omó Añá* (child of Añá, the patron deity of batá and batá drummers). His insights on batá repertoir are informative and thorough. Schweitzer establishes the question of transcription notation shortcomings, a problem I have encountered as well when using Western music notation. He accurately points out that many rhythms in batá music are performed in an ambiguous meter in between 6/8 and 2/4, giving this music a unique fluidity that resists exact location in the time signature landscape (Schweitzer 2013:68). Percussionist and educator Michael Spiro has coined a term to describe this characteristic, also present in other types of Afro-Cuban music. He calls it “fix”; playing in fix means “to be somewhere between 6/8 and 2/4” (Spiro 2006:38).

Schweitzer’s discussion on form compares the terminologies used by Amira and Cornelius (1992), and Friedman (1982) when describing Afro-Cuban batá musical structures. By doing so, he reveals agencies and motivations in the sole act of choosing specific labels for batá musical products and processes (Schweitzer 2013:70). He establishes a distinction between two main ways of categorizing batá rhythms. One is the conventional way, which groups rhythms (*toques*) by their inclusion in the *oro igbodú* (drum-only praise rhythms for orichas) or a category called *toques especiales* ("special rhythms"). *Toques especiales* can be specific to a
given oricha, or they can be rhythms used for several orichas. What makes them “special” is the fact that they are not included (usually) in the oro seco. Schweitzer proposes a new, alternate view. This view separates toques according to how a toque relates to the orichas; specifically, the number of orichas it encompasses. Is it a rhythm specific to one oricha/one oricha song? Is it specific to several orichas? Or is it used for many orichas (Schweitzer 2013:77)?

While I find Schweitzer’s categories of rhythms thought-provoking, I also see some problems. My main objection comes from the fact that while several batá rhythms can be specific to an oricha, and even to an oricha chant, they also allow for the overlaying of many chants with similar poetic structure. Schweitzer does not address this variety of relationship to songs/chants. For instance, according to Villepastour, in Nigeria, the rhythm for Elegba, latopa, “speaks” the following text: Esu latopa Esu gongo (Villepastour 2010:64). The rhythm by the same name in Cuba exhibits similar rhythmic treatment to the one from Nigeria. We could say that both versions of latopa are certainly “speaking” the same text. In Cuba however, many other chants for Elegba can be sung on top of latopa. This is a case of a rhythm that is specific to an ancient oricha textual meaning (latopa) and at the same time is specific to an oricha (Elegba), but it is not specific to just one chant, it “accepts” other chants for Elegba on top of it as long as they have similar metric structure. Therefore, it is a rhythm for a single oricha, a rhythm with a specific textual meaning, and a rhythm that is generic to many songs for Elegba that follow a similar poetic flow.

Schweitzer’s insight into the musical nature of the ŋongo rhythm is another significant contribution to the literature. He separates ŋongo into two main styles: traditional and contemporary (as played in the Abbilona recording series during the early 2000s from Cuba) (2013:165-166). Schweitzer’s notion of batá repertoire as an evolving, living art form is
paramount when it comes to the analysis of this music. It also underlines how musical factors are the most crucial propeller of evolution and innovation in Afro-Cuban batá. The present study expands on Schweitzer’s musical analysis and reiterates the importance of musical design besides language encoding.

**Oricha Religion: Cultural and Historical Perspectives**

*Regla de Ocha* or *Santería*\(^8\) is a religion that exists as a conglomerate of rituals and religious philosophies that pertain to the worship of supernatural beings/deities called *orichas* (also known as *ochas*) and the honoring of ancestral spirits. *Santería* combines Yoruba\(^9\) traditional beliefs with aspects of Western/Catholic thought and structure (Brown 2003:120), creating ideological spaces that believers interpret in many different ways. This religion originated in Cuba during colonial times with the arrival of enslaved people from Yoruba polities such as Oyó, Egbado, Ijesha, etc. (collectively known in Cuba as *Lucumí*). Over time, it developed unique features that distinguish it today from other similar religious practices such as Brazilian Candomblé and traditional Yoruba religion. *Santería* could be seen today as a spectrum in which on one end we have the “unadulterated” African form of the religion and on the other “pure” Catholicism (Canizares 1993:45). The space between these two opposites is one of syncretic fusions and

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\(^8\) *Regla de Ocha* (the rules of *ochaha*) or (*la*) *ochaha* are the formal names for the religion of the Lucumi and their descendants in Cuba. *Santería*, a more informal, and sometimes derogatory, way of referring to this religious practice, meaning “things about saints”, can convey a certain “spiritually deviant” connotation. That said, most people in the religion use *Santería/santero/santerá* regardless of the potential negative connotation of these terms. Being a *Santería* priest myself, I will use *Santería* and its derived terms as needed.

\(^9\) According to Paul E. Lovejoy in his article “The Yoruba Factor in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade” (2004), the term Yoruba has been used at least since 1613, when Ahmed Baba employed when talking about people from the interior lands of the Bight of Benin that shared a common language. Baba was describing an Oyó ethnicity that had existed for some time according to him.
negotiated spiritual locales. I should also add that the presence of other Cuban religions of African origin, such as Palo (based on central African traditions from the Congo region) and Arará (based on Ewe/Fon traditions), complicates the dual (Yoruba-Catholic) model described above.

It is difficult to identify a specific date for the establishment of the Lucumí religion in Cuba, but we can safely say that it has existed there in some form since at least the eighteenth century. Some records that indicate the presence in Cuba during this early period of enslaved people from early Yoruba states such as Oyó, Egbado, and Ijesha. Initial seeds for a Cuban version of Yoruba traditional religion most likely came during this period. Michele Reid elaborates on the origin of the word Lucumí and some of the earliest records of this ethnicity in Cuba:

In Cuba, and elsewhere in the New World, Yoruba arrivals were known as Lucumí. Historians suggest that the name originated from the northeastern Yoruba kingdom known as Ulkama or Ulkami. Scholars also speculate that the term “Lucumi” derived from the Yoruba common greeting. “oluku mi” (my friend)… data from slave trade licenses issued in Havana from the 1570s through 1699 list Lucumí among more than forty African ethnicities. (Raid 2004:115)

Later, Lucumí religion would continue to evolve by merging surviving local smaller orisa cults with more disseminated cults to form much stronger and more generalized worship models that could withstand the new environment. The formation of cabildos was an important element in the development of re-created African culture and religion in Cuba. David H. Brown defines cabildo as “a colonial-era club, mutual aid association, or religious fraternity of Africans, creoles and other groups…cabildos de nación had African-born slave
membership…and worked to buy their members out of slavery” (Brown 2003:367).\footnote{The word cabildo, in the context of Spanish colonial rule, also means town council.} Often these cabildos would be associated with a Catholic patron saint, and the Catholic Church would support (to a certain extent) their activities. Santería, besides being a spiritual practice and worldview, in the context of colonial society (and given its, at times, clandestine status) also acted as a form of resistance for the African and Afro-Cuban population on the island. It was a way to establish spiritual and psychological locales independently from the dominant society (Reid 2004:120-121).

Some essential tenets at the core of Lucumí religion and theology are:

(1) To align one’s life actions and desires with one’s destiny which has been pre-ordained in ará orun (“heaven”) and chosen by one’s ori (physical and spiritual head) before birth in order to achieve iwa pelé (good character) during life. The honoring of egun (ancestors), the worship of oricha (divine beings), and the consultation of oracles will aid the alignment mentioned above.

(2) To increase one’s aché (spiritual cosmic energy that emanates from God and that permeates the entire universe), and to “work” with it in such a way one remains within iré (divine balance/good fortune/positivity) as much as possible and outside of osogbo (imbalance/bad fortune/negativity).

(3) To live a good life with enough iré so that when we die, we can go back to ará orun (“heaven”) and eventually be able to come back to ayé (Earth) re-incarnated within one’s own family.

Lucumí religion in Cuba consists of three main worship/ritual areas, all interrelated, but with a certain degree of autonomy. In the first place, we have the propitiation and honoring of the ancestors (egun). The second area of worship consists of praising, worshipping and ritually
“working” with oricha, the spiritual beings with human-like characteristics that were created by God and that embody different aspects of God’s energetic manifestations in the Universe. Some of the most worshipped orichas are:

Echu-Elegba: god of crossroads; the path opener. He must be attended to before any other deity because he can communicate directly with Olodumare (God).

Ogún: god of iron, technology, and war.

Ochosi: the divine hunter and provider of goods, while also a swift dispenser of justice.

Babalú Ayé: god of contagious diseases and maladies.

Obatalá: the creator of humankind, an old god, the first oricha to be created by Olodumare.

Changó: the “king” of the religion; god of thunder, drumming, and dance; owner of batá drums.

Oyá: goddess of the wind and change, also associated with the dead.

Yemayá: goddess of the oceans and the mother of all the orichas.

Ochún: the youngest and most beautiful goddess, she rules over rivers, love, and money.

Orunmila: the oricha of divination, central deity in the cult of Ifá.

The third aspect of oricha religion is called Ifá. This area of worship involves rituals and oracular divination associated with a specific deity called Orunmila. According to Lucumi beliefs, Orunmila was witness to the creation of every human soul, and because of this, he knows

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11 Elders have always told me that Changó is the king of our religion. He was indeed an ancient mythical king of Oyó, and it seems his reign over Lucumi religion continues to this day. Santería priest and scholar Miguel “Willie” Ramos (2000) proposes that the fall of the Oyó kingdom and the explosion of the Cuban sugar industry in the early part of the nineteenth century was the reason large numbers of Oyó people were enslaved and sent to Cuba. This historical circumstance created an abundance of ritual adherents to Oyó religious practices, which in turn had a powerful influence on the re-creation of Yoruba religion in Cuba. For more on this subject see Ramos (2000).

12 Ifá is the name given to the divination ritual complex, priesthood, philosophical tenets, and oral religious corpus that deal with the deity known as Orunmila or Orula.

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the present, past and future of every person on Earth. The specialized priests that take care of
Orunmila and provide all the expertise regarding the Ifá oracle (the most sacred form of Lucumí
divination), initiations, and rituals are called babalawos (“fathers of the secret”).

Santería Music

The music of Santería consists of (1) ritual songs (i.e., songs or chants done within specific
ritual contexts, with a particular ritual function, either in private or in public musical
ceremonies), and (2) different kinds of public sacred drumming, which is played in combination
with public ritual songs and dances. The public musical/religious celebrations are known as
güemileres/bembés/toques/tambor.¹³ Let us now turn to the different kinds of ocha music in the
Lucumí tradition.

Songs

Many rituals in ocha religion make use of ritual songs. A critical ceremony, part of many more
extensive ritual complexes, is the “making” of Osain. Osain is the oricha of plants and herbs.
The making of omíero, a liquid herb preparation used in purification baths, is called the making
of Osain. The priests, while preparing the pure liquid of the ochas, sing a series of sacred songs
for this deity in a call-and-response style. The chanting starts with songs for Elegba, the path
opener. About a dozen songs for Osain are “performed” right after the songs/prayers for Elegba.

¹³ According to singer and drummer Lázaro Pedroso, güemilere is a term that is of relatively
recent inception to describe the drumming ritual celebration (publicly available online/Facebook
interview, 2013). Bembé is also the name given to sacred drums other than batá used in Lucumí
religious music. There are many types of bembé drums depending on the region: macagua,
bakosó, ivesá are some notable examples. Toque comes from the Spanish word tocar (“to play an
instrument”). Tambor is the Spanish word for drum.
Priests chant until they finish making the omíero. Again, the language of the songs is Lucumi or Anagó.

**Example 1-1. Osain song**

![Musical notation]

I should point out here that the meaning of the songs is not divulged to those who sing the songs right away; instead, the meaning is revealed as the priests/practitioners progress in the religion. The word-by-word meaning of Santería songs is not the ultimate goal of the people singing them at ceremonies. Instead, it is the feeling they create, and the atmosphere of religious participation they foster, that I think makes us (practitioners/priests) sing and be part of the community. In general, the songs describe the character of the deity, situations in the deity’s mythical life, ritual aspects regarding offerings and sacred foods, etc. That said, besides the literal meaning, Santería songs usually have a meta-meaning for the initiated and those who have enough experience to infer hidden or less apparent meanings in the songs.\(^{14}\)

The ritual through which a practitioner receives the oricha Olokun (owner of the depths of the sea) features several songs for this deity. The kariocha ceremony (priesthood

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\(^{14}\) Singer Lázaro Pedroso explains in an interview done in California, in 2013, publicly available online (Facebook), that the singers of his generation did not know what the words of the songs meant. Their meaning was revealed to them as they learned the ritual contexts in which such words worked. The meaning was deduced; it did not come from translation or explanation from Africans who may have still been alive in Cuba in the 1950s when Pedroso started his training as an akpón (ritual solo singer).
consecration) also features songs for the orichas. The olorichas (priests) sing in the ritual room during the initiation. Virtually every ceremony where two or more priests participate will include some ritual song for the orichas.

At this point, I should mention that the majority of ocha related ceremonies occur in private homes where at least one ocha priest lives. Occasionally rooms are rented for a public celebratory ritual, but in general, worshipping happens in private homes. There may be portions of ceremonies performed outside in the forest, ocean, rivers or other locales, but the bulk of initiatory rites and daily worship happens inside private homes.

For the current study, it is essential to consider that although oricha songs happen alongside batá drums in the public celebrations called tambores, it is reasonable, perhaps even necessary, to study the drumming as a separate musical/artistic strand of such religious performance displays. While I refer to the many instances in which song and dance interact, and maybe even inform batá playing, I justify my analysis of drumming musical structures based on the fact that large seminal portions of the batá repertoire (such as oro ighodú, oro egun or cierre, and kankan de egun) occur without the intervention of dance and/or ritual song. Furthermore, there might be historical precedents that point towards a separate genesis of the Afro-Cuban batá tradition and the oricha songs/ritual dances. For example, there are Brazilian and Trinidadian versions of songs for several orichas that are also well known in Cuba. However, in those places, the songs are done with other drums, not with batá. One can then speculate that the oricha song tradition was strong enough and independent enough from batá for it to exist in other locales without the support of batá rhythms. Something similar occurs with the dances. Ritual choreographies are similar at times and different at other times depending on the diaspora locales. Still, there might be those who say: in Cuba, batá and oricha songs are so intertwined
that they must be studied as two sides of the same artistic expression. While there is no doubt that there are many relationships between the articulation of *oricha* song-dance and batá, even within Cuba, songs are adjusted and changed to fit other drumming styles such as *bembé* and *güiro*. Again, this suggests an independent existence from batá. Finally, batá adaptations of different repertoires such as *iyesá* and *arará* drumming seem to, at the very least, demand a rigorous analysis of the drumming technologies that allow for the creation of new rhythms with similar rhythmic patterning and melodic manufacture, but entirely outside of the influence of strict drum language-spoken language connective processes. Similarly, most rhythms associated with dances can also occur without them. The difference is that when dancers are present, drummers then proceed to try to match existing accenting patterns with specific dance gestures, but even then there is not a level of correspondence that suggests an absolute correlation between the dancer’s movements and drumming gestures.

**Public Drumming and Singing Celebrations**

In addition to ceremony-specific ritual songs described above, there are public celebrations where extensive ritual singing and drumming occurs. There are two main types of such gatherings: *güiros* and *bembés/tamoires/toques/güemilere*es.

*Güiro* ¹⁵ is the name given in Cuba to the ensemble and the religious event at which a group consisting of three *shekeres* (beaded gourds), a hoe blade (*guataca*), and a conga drum

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¹⁵ In Cuba, *güiro* is the word used to describe a dry gourd or calabash. *Shekeres* are made out of *güiros*. There is also a musical instrument, which makes a scraping noise, used in Cuban popular music, called a *güiro*. 
(called caja—“box”) accompany a solo singer (akpón) and a chorus made of practitioners and priests participating in the event. Güiros are done as celebratory musical festivities to honor and thank the orichas on the anniversary of priesthood ceremony (ocha birthday), in gratitude for a specific problem that the orichas may have helped to solve. These celebrations are sacred but are of a lesser formal stature compared to other types of drumming. The percussionists do not need to be initiated sacred drummers (omo añá), or oricha priests, although they usually practice the religion. The akpón (solo singer) is often an initiated priest.

The drumming itself consists of a regular, 6/8-metered, continuous rhythm in which the accents interlace in the shekere parts while the hoe blade keeps a constant rhythmic pattern sometimes referred to as timeline or time-line by ethnomusicologists. The conga drum plays more or less freely, elaborating around a specific rhythmic pattern or basic feel, see example 1-3 below. The repertoire of songs used in a güiro may overlap with those done at tambores; however, the style is different. In general, güiro songs are done at a faster tempo and in a more syllabic form.

**Example 1-2. Güiro timeline played on hoe blade**

![Güiro timeline played on hoe blade](image)

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16 Mason translates this word as “flatterer,” and claims that it also refers to the lead drummer of the ensemble (1992:7). Abimbola (1997:141) refers to Apon, a character in a chant-fable; he is some one able to predict what will happen in the future by using the power of his/her words.

17 While there is a clear “one” (meaning the beginning of the cycle) for timelines used in Cuban music, drummers may start playing 6/8-timelines (arará, bembé, palo, güiro etc.) at different points of the pattern depending on the songs or drumming patterns that go with it.
Example 1-3. Basic conga pattern played at güiro celebrations

The letters written under the music notes indicate which hand plays: l for the left hand and r for the right. Tied notes are to be performed with the indicated hand, with a swiveling motion from the palm to the tip of the fingers. The larger note head is an accented bass sound played on the center of the drum with the palm. The x note head represents a slap stroke.

Tambor, güemilere, and toque are all names for the type of celebration for oricha or egun (ancestral spirits) in which batá drums or bembé drums (such as bakosó and iyesá18) perform. The use of bembé drums is rare outside of Cuba. Their rhythms tend to be simpler compared to batá drumming, and they are usually played by a set of three or four drums of cylindrical shape and different heights. Bembé drumming has been historically more common in the Cuban countryside, and its styles are related to specific regions and places: for example, bembé omó-layé from the Santa Teresa cabildo in the province of Matanzas. Bembé toques are similar to güiro ceremonies in that the rhythms are more generic and less varied than batá repertoire.

While bembé drums do not have fundamento (except for iyesá drums, see footnote below), there are sets of bembé drums in Cuba that are considered sacred, and, in some areas, may rival batá in prominence and use (Brito 2014:53). Besides bembé drums, there were drums reserved for specific oricha cults, such as the olokun drums, a set of four drums of Egbado provenance, that

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18 Some drummers do not consider iyesá drums the same as other bembé drums. The reason for this is that iyesá drums, like batá, contain fundamento (secret consecrating elements) sealed within. Other bembé drums, while considered sacred, do not have fundamento inside. Iyesá drums are associated with the orichas Ogún and Ochún. The best-known set of consecrated iyesá drums that remains in Cuba is at the Iyesá Modó San Juan Bautista cabildo in Matanzas province. For more on the subject see Delgado (2001, and 2008).
still exist in the city of Matanzas. Brito emphasizes the similarities between the olokun drums in Cuba to the Yoruba geledé drums (Brito 2014:148-149).

Batá *toques* or *tambores* (as well as other drum celebrations that do not use batá, for instance, when *bembé* drums play) feature a solo singer called *akpón*, and a chorus made up of the people attending, while batá drums accompany/interplay with the sacred songs. When the batá are a consecrated set, a set of drums ritually made and prepared by ritual drummers and other priests, then the *tambor* is called *tambor de fundamento*. *Fundamento* is probably the most sacred form of drumming in Santería because *fundamento* batá contain within a deity called Añá or Ayan that can communicate songs and prayers directly to Olodumare (God). According to some elders, in (Cuban) *oricha* religion cosmology, Añá is considered to be senior to all other *orichas*. That is one of the reasons all newly initiated priests must be formally presented to a consecrated set of batá drums, a crucial part of the initiatory process.

*Fundamento* tambores are also a way of honoring and thanking the *orichas*. They are a significant event in which the religious community (initiated or not) comes together, all initiated priests ritually dance for the *orichas* in front of the drums, and some of them may be possessed by their tutelary *oricha*, thus bringing messages for the believers. In addition to the functions stated above, *tambores* work as a kind of communal cleansing for the community. There are also *tambores* in which unconsecrated drums participate. These drumming ceremonies are called

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19 Trance possession (*oricha* and *egun*) is one of two ways Santería practitioners can directly communicate with the spirit world. Possession can take place at any event in the religion. The other way for direct spiritual communication is through divination oracles (*Ifá* and *dilogún*). When *oricha* trance possession occurs (usually during a *tambor*) the *santero* who gets possessed talks to people at the ceremony about issues in their life and/or cleanses them with ritual items such as colorful cloths, etc. The deity dances and interacts with the batá drums; later, he/she is ushered to a room in the house where other priests send the *ocha* off, and the *santero* returns back to being his/her regular self. An *oricha* trance could be thought as having a healing quality for the community. It is the sacred culminating point of any *tambor*.
tambor aberikulá. In this case, everything that happens at a fundamento also occurs at an aberikulá tambor except for the Añá presentation of new priests.

Both güiros and tambores (using batá or bembé drums) follow a specific format that starts with the oro\(^{20}\) (sequence of songs, or rhythms, for all orichas or ancestral spirits) followed by tratados (sequence of songs/rhythms, usually moving from slower to fast tempo) for a single deity. Tambores (only when using batá)\(^{21}\) always start with a series of salutation rhythms for several orichas called oro seco or oro igbodú. The oro cantado, a sequence of sung salutations for the orichas, follows. Then more extensive sequences of songs take place; these songs are for the specific orichas of priests in attendance. At this point in the tambor, santeros come forward and salute the drums by bowing down (bale), on the floor, right in front of the drummers. After that, they dance the sacred dance of that particular oricha. Several priests for a given oricha may do this at a given time. After all the santeros have greeted Añá and danced for their tutelary deity, the akpón starts singing extended sequences of songs for individual orichas in the hopes that some of the priests get possessed by their tutelary deity. These types of possessions take place often at tambores but are not a required element of the celebration. Sometimes, there is a priest who has been asked to dance for his/her ocha. If the tambor were being offered to Changó, for instance, the hired priest dancer would be a priest of this deity. It is expected that this dancer will get possessed (montado) by his head ocha, but again, sometimes the oricha does not come. A tambor for the oricha Changó, for example, would follow the following format:

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\(^{20}\) Ortiz in his *La africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba* defines oro as word or conversation and goes on to suggest that, in the context of Lucumí religion, it may mean “conversation with God” (1993:208).

\(^{21}\) Iyesá drums also play a kind of oro seco before the singing begins at their tambores. This oro is shorter than the batá oro seco (igbodú) and consists of only two types of rhythms played at different tempos for the following orichas: Elegba, Ogún, Yemayá, Ochún, Changó, and Ogún (Delgado 2001:322).
Oro seco or oro igbodú, which would consist of rhythm salutes for the following deities: Elegba, Ogún, Ochosi, Obaloke, Inle, Babalú Ayé 1, Babalú Ayé 2, Osain, Ozun, Obatalá, Dada, Ogue, Aggayú, Orunmila, Oricha Oko, Ibeji, Yegguá, Oyá, Ochún, Yemayá, Obba, Changó, Odudua.

Then, there is a break during which the drummers and singer eat a formal/ritual meal. After the meal, the drumming moves from the ritual room, where the main altar (trono) has been set up, to the living room, larger room, or patio.

The oro cantado would consist of short praise songs and rhythms for the following orichas: Elegba, Ogún, Ochosi, Inle, Babalú Ayé, Osain, Oricha Oko, Obatalá, Dada/Korinkoto/Ogue, Ibeji, Aggayú, Obatalá, Obba, Yegguá, Oyá, Yemayá, Ochún, Orunmila, Changó.

After this oro, comes the tambor abierto or eyá aranlá, wherein the solo singer selects whom to sing for according to which priests are in attendance. The akpón chooses the oricha he/she wants to sing for according to oricha hierarchy (some deities have seniority status over others). For example, he/she may choose to sing for Elegba, Ogún, and Ochosi, then Obatalá, Ochún, Yemayá, and Changó. During this portion, as discussed above, the priests greet Añá by dancing in front of the drums and ritually saluting the drums. Each oricha salutation may take around five to ten minutes, depending on the number of people saluting. The second section of the eyá aranlá features chains of songs for individual orichas; these songs attempt to induce trance possession besides honoring the deities. Each oricha song section may take as long as

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22 Since this example describes a drumming ceremony for Changó, the rhythm for this ocha must be played just before the last one, which is Odudua.
twenty minutes depending on how “hot” the tambor gets. After the completion of several tratados for different deities, the section ends.

The cierre (closing and final part of the tambor) consists of two parts: first, the oro egun, which is a series of drum-alone rhythms that praise the ancestral spirits and orichas related to ikú (death). Right after these rhythms, the singer starts singing for Echú/Elegba, ancestral spirits, and Olokun. The entire cierre takes about fifteen minutes.

While there will be further discussion of batá transcriptions, example 1-4 below may serve to illustrate batá musical texture. In this transcription, x note heads represent slap strokes on the chachá, regular noteheads represent open tones on the enú, regular noteheads with a plus marking represent muted tones on the enú. The top, middle, and bottom parts correspond to the okónkolo, itótele, and iyá respectively.

Example 1-4. Basic version of the latopa rhythm (toque) played for Elegba in the oro seco

Let us briefly discuss the types of ocha songs in a tambor. Songs in the oro cantado consist of praise songs. The salutation songs, when priests honor Añá, consist of rezos (sung prayers for the orichas) or batá-alone rhythms specifically for a given oricha. Tratados may
include a sung prayer and then different sections featuring more syllabic songs that talk about each oricha’s attributes and stories. In addition, they may include cantos de puya (“stinging” songs), which are meant to be offensive to the orichas; they are done to call the deity’s attention, taunting it to come and possess the dancing priests. Once a particular ocha comes to the tambor, the akpón sings individual salutations praises for that deity.

Another category of songs is the cierre (closing) songs. These songs always happen towards the end of a tambor. They are a fixed part of the repertoire consisting of songs that honor the ancestral spirits while “sending” all the divine spiritual energies back to their realm. They also honor Echu-Elegba, the oricha that sits at every crossroad in the universe, and Olokun, the deity that lives in the bottom of the ocean.

Afro-Cuban Batá Drumming: Historical and Spiritual Background

Batá are a family of religious drums that originated at least seven hundred years ago in Oyó, West Africa, where their use was associated with the Oyó state’s imperial war activities (Ayangbekun and Villepastour 2015:59, 71). In Yorubaland, the cults of Sango (traditionally from Oyó), and ancestor spirits (eggunggun) use batá drums extensively (Vaughan and Aldama 2012:6, Ortiz 1994:5, and Euba 1990:35). Abimbola reiterates that “batá was originally of Sango,” and adds Ogun to the list of deities associated with batá. He also explains that, in Africa, batá can be used for many religious and secular occasions (Abimbola 1997:138). Villepastour (2010:14) mentions that batá drums are also used in the cults of Esu (Echu) and Oyá.

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23 In his “A Historical Study of the ascendant role of Bata Drumming in Cuban Orisa Worship” (2005), Marcuzzi also claims that the cults of Oyá and Elegba use batá in Africa.
As mentioned above, both in Africa and in Cuba (and secondary diasporas such as New York City), consecrated batá drums contain inside their physical body secret medicine and ritual/spiritual items that represent the deity Ayan (known in Cuba as Añá). Ritual batá players in Cuba, known as omó Añá, are, in essence, priests of this deity. Ritual owners of batá drums are known as olú batá. New consecrated batá’s construction requires the ritual services and knowledge of several omó Añás, santeros, babalawos, and Osain priests. Through this long and complicated process, the drums receive the medicine and the spirit of Añá, whose secret will now reside within the body of the drums. The new drums are not “born” from an existing set of consecrated batá; however, a set of existing fundamento must “transfer its voice” to the new set of batá. Fundamento drums receive a ritual name, just as do newly initiated oricha priests. The owner of the drums cares for them throughout his life.

Batá-building technology, ritual and performance knowledge came to Cuba with enslaved people from Yoruba states in the early nineteenth century (Ortiz 1994:146). It is hard to establish when batá sounded for the first time in Cuba, but we can say with certainty that the first known consecrated set, which was named Añábí (Añá is born), was built by Lucumí ritual drummers and Ayan priests Atandá and Añabí under the ritual supervision of the famous African-born babalawo Adechina around 1830 in Havana/Regla (Brown 2003:64).24 These Africans were also responsible for the creation of a set of consecrated batá in 1874 at San Cayetano, near the town of Cidra, province of Matanzas. This set was given to renowned drummer Clemente Alfonso Klemodó (Brito 2014:92-93). The Havana origin of Afro-Cuban batá drums is a controversial subject. Havana players claim that the drums originated there with

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24 Marcuzzi (2005:340-342) claims that the first set of consecrated batá in Cuba was built later, around 1866. See footnote 1 on page 1 of this dissertation.
Atandá and Añabí, but some Matanzas drummers, such as Esteban “Chachá” Vega Bacallao (Ochún Ladé), have challenged this claim by saying that the first *fundamento* was built in Matanzas (Brito 2014:94).

There are two main styles of batá playing in Cuba: Havana and Matanzas. While each style has distinctive features, they also share many commonalities, as far as repertoire, meter, tempo, and design. However, there are many rhythms played in Havana that are either used differently or not known in Matanzas, and vice versa. For this research, I focus on the Havana batá style. The Afro-Cuban batá drum ensemble consists of three hourglass-shaped drums, each with two beating sides: the larger low-pitched side or *enú*, and the smaller high-pitched side (*chachá*). The drummers place the drums horizontally across their laps with the lower head to their right (if right-handed). The drums are played with the hands; however, there are areas in Matanzas province where some players use a leather *chancleta* (rustic leather “strap”) to activate the higher side of the *itótele* (middle drum) instead of the hand.

From large to small, the names of the drums are: the *iyá* (-ilú)—the mother drum and leader of the ensemble; the *itótele*—the one that follows (Brown 2003:11); and the *(o)kónkolo*—the one that “speaks in staccato fashion” (Villepastour 2010:17).\(^\text{25}\) The *iyá* has the most rhythmically complex part of the three; it “directs” the group by signaling entrances, stops, and changes in texture and tempo. These signals are followed and answered by the *itótele*, also known as *segundo*, and by the *okónkolo*. Researchers and drummers often say that the

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\(^{25}\) Ortiz suggests that *kónkolo* or *okónkolo* comes from the Yoruba word *kónkoto* (god, toy) (Ortiz 1994:10). However, Villepastour (2010:17) talks of batá drum speech as being *kokolo* (stammer, speaks in staccato manner, detached). Her allusion could suggest another possibility for the origin of the word *okónkolo*. I use her translation of the term *kokolo* for the term *okónkolo*. While both Villepastour and Ortiz’s ideas about what *okónkolo* could mean are plausible, some contemporary batá drummers suggest that *okónkolo* could just be onomatopoeia.
relationship between the iyá and the itótele is conversational because of the call-and-response design of many of their rhythmic and melodic interactions. The okónkolo, the smallest of the three, usually maintains a more straightforward rhythmic pattern and acts as a timekeeping element of the ensemble.

The iyá (large drum) has jingles and small bells around each head. The ones on the enú side are called chawóró, and those on the chachá side are called chaworí. These bells signify that the drums are playing for the orichas. Some elders claim that when batá play for egun (the spirits), the bells are removed. The iyá has a dark sticky paste made from several ritual ingredients attached to the center of the large head. This paste is called idá or fardela, and it is supposed to make the drum sound deeper while at the same time dampening the resonance.

In Cuba (and secondary diasporas), at a tambor, the drummers sit next to each other in a row with some space between them. The iyá sits in the middle, the itótele to its left, and the okónkolo to its right. During the oro seco, the ensemble sets up facing the trono (altar for the orichas). Later during the rest of the tambor, the drummers place their chairs against the wall of the main room where the celebration will take place, and play facing the main room. Ritual dancers and santeros face the drummers when dancing for the orichas. Non-initiated practitioners are not allowed to dance in front of the drums. While it may look like a concert to an outsider, however, this is what happens at a tambor (in general): the drummers, the solo singer (akpóm), and the community of priests (iworo) are engaged in a communal liturgical performance involving drumming, singing and ritual dance in which performers and audience are fluid categories.

Only initiated heterosexual male batá players (known as omó Añá) are allowed to play the consecrated (fundamento) drums. The omó Añá fraternity strictly forbids women and
homosexual men from playing consecrated drums. This restriction has not prevented women from playing unconsecrated batá outside of religious settings in Cuba and secondary diasporas. However, it is not uncommon for women to encounter a certain amount of opposition from drummers when it comes to batá training. The issue continues to be a controversial one within percussion communities. There are several physical and metaphysical/religious reasons that bataleros cite as precluding women from playing consecrated batá. The gender relation implications, and the social ramifications, of this particular aspect of religious batá playing in Cuba, while an important subject, go beyond the scope of the present study.

Batá drums are capable of encoding speech through a diverse ecology of sounds and rhythmic combinations that emerge from their interlocking musical parts. In modern-day Nigeria batá continues to render Yoruba speech patterns. In Cuba, however, speech surrogacy capabilities, while still an aspect of batá playing, are not the primary justification for the use of batá. In Cuba, batá’s ability to convey meaning relies on learned extra-musical narratives such as musical gesture, musical structure, symbolism, and evocative associations. By exploring the non-textual dimension of Afro-Cuban batá drumming, I hope to provide insight into mechanisms that inform batá music well beyond speech surrogacy.

26 The late akpón Amelia Pedroso, niece of the batalero and akpón mentioned above, Lázaro Pedroso, was also an accomplished batá player. For an interview with Pedroso discussing several aspects of her career, including batá playing, see the article by Amanda Vincent (Villepastour) and Joy Woolfe “Rebel: Priestess and Sacred Drums,” which first appeared in 2004 on the Glendora Review, African Quarterly on the Arts. The digitized version of the article can be found at http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/africanjournals/html/itemdetail.cfm?recordID=2272
Batá Drumming Education

There are several ways through which batá apprentices achieve proficiency in the Cuban and Cuban Diaspora tradition. Most drummers I know, myself included, have experienced one or more of the learning scenarios discussed below, all of them contributing to the emergence of knowledge of the batá tradition. However, initiation into the Añá “brotherhood” is the only process that enables drummers to perform in fundamento ceremonies (ceremonies using consecrated drums). The musical aspect of batá drums, however, can become accessible long before any initiation takes place. The following are some of the most common learning scenarios:

- Exposure to batá music during tambores and cultural events such as dance classes, shows, etc.
- Formal/informal apprenticeship with an elder in the form of private instruction
- Study at a university, school or arts institution such as ENA (Escuela Nacional de Arte), other schools in Cuba, and increasingly, many schools outside of the island
- Study of recordings, batá manuals, and batá books
- Initiation into the Añá brotherhood/priesthood, after (or before) which apprenticeship may take place
- Once a member of the Añá brotherhood, “on the job” training, with beginners learning every time they sit down and play at a tambor

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27 When I was “sworn” (initiated) to Añá, there was a moment in the public part of the ceremony when I had to sit down on each drum and play for a brief moment with the other drummers. At that point, I had played very little iyá, and it was intimidating and challenging to have to, on the spot, perform a specific rhythm for Changó I did not know well. That kind of training while playing happens often. The didactic dimension of batá drumming is always at play; however, many elder drummers do not like to show to the general community the fact that some of the
Batá training is not standardized, but the different situations described above are probably familiar to all who embark on the batá journey. Drummers continue to train on their own throughout their lives. Many elders, such as Cuban drummers Carlos Aldama in San Francisco and Lázaro Galarraga (also a renowned akpón) in Los Angeles, probably maintain and sharpen their skills by teaching and mentoring.

Finally, I must add that batá drummers have a lexicon that has spread from Cuba to other places. Words to describe the different drums, rituals and playing techniques tend to be, for the most part, standardized. Bataleros use terms such as *caja, segundo, iyá, itótele, tambor, bembé, (o)kónkolo*, etc. in different situations amongst drummers of different ethnicities and nationalities. The names of the different rhythms are also standardized, with minimal variation. However, there are some differences in the application of similar *toque* names between Havana and Matanzas. Also, the syllables used during the training stages of batá, especially *kilá*, which describes an essential *okónkolo* pattern, are used in a more or less standard way with some regional variation. Batá players, generally speaking, tend to not describe rhythms in Western notation terms; however, many contemporary drummers, especially outside of Cuba, make use of readily available training manuals and transcriptions. Some drummers are more reluctant to write rhythms down; others embrace this practice. Batá drumming continues to be an orally transmitted tradition; written resources, however, continue to gain adepts, especially those that are published by established members of the drumming community.

drummers at a tambor might be beginners. At times, some elder drummers may try to conceal any ensemble weakness in order to continue being hired by the house where the tambor is taking place.
My batá education started in Los Angeles, California, with exposure to existing studio and field recordings several years after I had left Cuba. I probably heard batá on commercial popular music recordings while I was living in Cuba and Venezuela; however, I was not necessarily conscious of them. In 1998, while studying percussion in college, I started studying batá with Los Angeles-based batalero and percussionist Angel Luís Figueroa. In the year 2000, I started taking batá lessons with the late Cuban drummer Lorenzo Peñalver, an elder in the Lucumí and Palo traditions. In 2001, I began a long apprenticeship process under oricha song specialist and batá player Lázaro Galarraga. Along the way, I have performed and interacted with bataleros such as my padrinos (godfathers in oricha and Añá/batá) Virgilio Figueroa and Mike Orta, Román Díaz, Joe Addington, Pedro Martínez, Michael Spiro and others. After becoming an initiated ritual batá drummer (omó Añá) in 2011 and a priest of Obatalá in 2015, I continue to learn the Lucumí religious traditions and religious drumming from my elders and peers.

In the next chapter, I will examine the basic musical elements of batá drumming: individual drum sounds, simple drum patterns, formal structures, and individual drum perspectives. I will also explore how batá design is often symmetrical and well balanced at different levels (individual parts and timbral/rhythmic distribution within the cycle). As we shall see, this music is complex, with distinctive musical syntax. The semantic meaning of the Lucumí/Anagó encoded in the batá drum language is a fundamental feature, regardless of how much of it has been preserved and/or rebuilt in Cuba. However, the study of speech surrogacy alone, what batá drums “say,” does not allow our inquiry to go beyond textual meaning. For that, we need to understand the flow of sound, in its multiple combinations, in the batá ensemble.
CHAPTER 2: The Batá Sonic Landscape: Sound Vocabulary, Form, Individual Perspectives, and Balance

Sounds and Technique

In Afro-Cuban batá, there are many sounds and sound combinations that each drum is capable of making depending on which head(s) is/are sounding at any given moment. These sounds are the basic building blocks that, when combined and distributed across all three drums in an interlocking way, and then experienced as a whole, encompass the sonic texture of batá rhythms. For performance and analysis, it is helpful to understand what sounds each drum can individually make. However, this breaking down of components should always be aimed at the comprehension of the batá ensemble as a whole, because it is in the totality of all the parts where the “true” batá sonic texture exists. Cuban drum maker Juan Bencomó explains in the Cuban documentary Añá la magia del tambor, “batá is not an individual drum, but the entire family of all three” (1994). The following is a list of the basic batá sounds, their particular dynamics (relative loudness), and sound production techniques:

- **Open Tone (**abierto**).** This type of sound is played on the large head (**enú**) of all three drums. On the **iyá**, it is played with the full hand on the head, just above the lower part of the rim, playing off the head to let the sound ring. On the **ítótele**, it is played with all the fingers on the head, letting the sound ring freely as well. Finally, on the **okónkolo**, the open tone is achieved by using the top third of the fingers. Open tones can range from soft to loud; generally speaking, the batá ensemble plays at a relatively loud level. Pitch-wise, open tones are the lowest sound that each drum can produce.
• **Closed or muffled tone** (*cerrado*) on all drums is achieved by applying the same technique as an open tone, except that the hand/fingers must be left on the drum, applying a small amount of pressure, therefore, dampening the sound. This type of sound tends to be slightly accented relative to an open tone. I propose that this characteristic makes this sound “marked” when compared to the open tone. Its intrinsic emphasis calls attention to itself. Closed tones are within the middle pitch range of batá.

• **Chachá slaps** are played on the *chachá* head with the full hand, letting the sound ring and achieving as a high a pitch as possible. For a more muffled slap, the drummer can mute the *enú* with the opposite hand. Some players distinguish between loud closed/muffled slaps as being “male,” while less loud unaccented and slightly open sounding slaps as being “female.” Dynamics wise, slaps are generally louder than other batá tones, meaning that *chachá* sounds tend to stand out in the overall texture. However, when necessary, it is possible to play slaps in a less accented fashion.

• The **Bell Tone** (*campana*) is primarily used in the Matanzas batá style. Drummers produce this resonant sound tapping the edge of the *chachá* head with the index finger of the left hand. They use it in combination with regular slaps (on the *chachá*) of both the *iyá* and the *okónkolo*. This type of sound is not common in Havana batá style.

The following staff diagram shows the perceived relative pitch, dynamic level and articulation within the Afro-Cuban batá ensemble from a listener’s perspective. I have notated relative pitch, dynamics, and articulations to show how batá sounds are positioned sonically and timbrally.

28 Some Havana style *bataleros* use this stroke as well, especially on the *iyá*. However, it is not used in a standardized way, as it is done in Matanzas.
relative to one another. The tones and dynamics shown below are not absolute; they pertain only to the corresponding output of each sound element of the batá drum ensemble. Also, the dynamics and articulations shown here are related to timbre, not necessarily to the force or intensity applied to a stroke.

Example 2-1. Batá sounds arranged in ascending order

Looking closely at the “batá scale” above, we can notice a few salient features:

- There are two main categories of sound: enú and chachá sounds.
- Enú sounds can be open or muted (closed).
- Chachá sounds consist of slaps (on all three drums) and bell tones (on the iyá and the okónkolo).
- Bell tones act as an extension of the range of enús; even though they are a chachá sound, their tone quality closer to that of an open tone okónkolo enú.
- The itótele plays the lowest sounding slap, even though it is the middle-pitched drum.

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29 According to singer/drummer Lázaro Galarraga, this is the correct pitch scheme for chachás. Schweitzer (2013:67) situates the itótele slap right above the iyá’s. Amira and Cornelius (1992: 17) emphasize that the itótele’s enú and the iyá’s chachá should be identical in pitch.
We should keep in mind these sonic aspects; they will be useful when it is time to consider the batá ensemble’s sonic field (musical texture) as a whole, its orchestrational hierarchies and instrumental roles.

The two tables below summarize the sounds that each side of each drum can produce individually and some simultaneous combinations.

**Table 2-1. Havana-style sounds**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drums</th>
<th>Hand Strokes/Sounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Iyá</em></td>
<td>Open Enú, Closed Enú, <em>Chachá</em> Slap, Open Enú + <em>Chachá</em> Slap, Flam Stroke L to R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Iiótele</em></td>
<td>Open Enú, Closed Enú, <em>Chachá</em> Slap, Open Enú + <em>Chachá</em> Slap</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Okónkolo</em></td>
<td>Open Enú, <em>Chachá</em> Slap, Open Enú + <em>Chachá</em> Slap, Flam Stroke L to R, Flam Stroke R to L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2.2. Matanzas-style sounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drums</th>
<th>Hand Strokes/Sounds</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Iyá</strong></td>
<td><strong>Enú</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Irótele</strong></td>
<td><strong>Open Enú</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Okónkolo</strong></td>
<td><strong>Open Enú</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On Form and Structure

When considering form, i.e., larger structural units in the batá repertoire, it is useful to talk about musical texture. The main recognizable feature of batá music is its texture, which is created by the rhythmic and timbral treatment of individual drum sounds, interlocking patterning among the six hands of the ensemble, and hierarchical use of different kinds of rhythmic ostinatos (some ostinatos have a supporting role, while others are more thematically important).

<sup>30</sup> Drummers from Matanzas call *chachá slaps chapetas comprimidas* (Summers et al. 2007:vi)
In Western music, discussion of musical form tends to focus on the grouping of musical ideas, and in turn their conglomeration into larger sections: phrases, periods, themes, etc. Underlying notions about musical form in the West consider harmonic treatment, texture, orchestration, and thematic development approaches to separate and mark musical moments, objects, and sections. While the analysis of form in batá music may yield familiar categories, such as sections, etc., it is the aforementioned textural differentiation that determines formal units. In that sense, timbre and rhythm in batá music exist in a “holistic” (as in simultaneous totality) dimension. In other words, the synchronous interaction of all batá sounds, relationships across drum parts, and rhythm distribution across all six drum heads are the main determinants of formal units via the resulting different textures. A similar type of analysis occurs when studying fugue and other contrapuntal textures in Western music; their analysis yields sections, but it is the textural (contrapuntal) treatment, in this case of melodic/harmonic material, that defines formal areas, not the development of motivic ideas.

While I borrow terms from Western musical analysis such as “sections”, “transitions,” etc., and terminology used by other authors (Schweitzer, Amira, Friedman) for my analysis, my main interest is not the labeling of musical areas in batá music. I am more interested in how batá music generates material by the treatment of rhythmic and timbral texture. Later chapters will concentrate on the study of timbre as a generative component of batá music, for both timbral and rhythmic textures are defining features of musical form in batá music. The inclusion of texture when looking at musical form aims at approaching some common ground or, as Agawu calls it, “common practice” (2003:72), in the understanding of musical temporalities across varied traditions.
Batá drumming, generally speaking, consists of the sonic textures created by the three drums (and occasionally the maraca-like instrument called achere, which may play timeline patterns or a reference pulse). These sonic textures exist as entities that occupy a region of time. However, it is not the duration of these textural sections that is crucial, since length is not prescribed a priori but decided by the players in concert with the solo singer. A more important feature here is the identity of a section (its textural makeup). Formal unit identity defines each section as separate. These discrete units of musical texture are what players call toques.

Toque identity depends on the specific textural treatment of rhythms and timbres within the batá ensemble. Throughout this study, I use the term “rhythm” as a musical term (durations-attacks through time), and also I use it interchangeably with toque when describing individual sonic and rhythmic combinations that can be considered formally autonomous. This terminology, however, while corresponding to traditional ways in which bataleros talk about batá music, does start to break down quickly as soon as we understand that, formally speaking, sections within toques could be considered individual toques as well because of their specific textural identity! To avoid confusion, I must, therefore, include in the definition of toque not only musical ideas such as tempo, texture, and musical rhythm but also religious and historical notions.

Toques are the units that make up the batá repertoire. See example 1-4 in chapter one, for a musical transcription of a batá toque for Elegba. Toques can be thought of as individual compositions or pieces because they have a definite beginning, middle, and an ending, but they can also be considered textures because each inhabits a specific sonic/rhythmic space. Alejo Carpentier appropriately describes the basic rhythm of a toque as “having the amplitude of a rhythmic mode” (1988:272). In other words, toques have a range of rhythmic potentialities that
manifest according to specific renditions. However, the basic rhythmic design of the toque remains identifiable, with conversations, variations, and moyubas adding to the complexity of its manufacture. It is common for many toques to be played one after another in longer sequences of rhythms and songs for multiple deities called oro; they can also be played in longer chains of songs for one deity called tratado.

Toques are made up of different sections that players call interchangeably caminos (roads) or partes. Some toques consist of a single tempo; other toques may have many different tempos. Toques can have many sections, or they may have only one. Individual sections are made up of a cyclic repetitive rhythmic pattern/texture distributed and orchestrated across the three drums in an interlocking way; players refer to this simple pattern as the básico (basic/base) or sencillo (simple). The modifications of the regular main pattern that the iyá plays are called variations or conversations. The itótele and okónkolo can also play variations.

When variations on the iyá become very active such that the iyá seems to abandon the básico entirely, they become what some players call moyubas (spoken/recited prayers). We can consider the basic pattern of a section as an unmarked musical object, while modifications of the básico are marked ones.

The iyá plays two types of “signals” (calls) as well. One type is used to signal the change to another section or toque. The other kind of signal is referred to as “conversation” because it

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31 Amira and Cornelius use this term in *The Music of Santeria: Traditional Rhythms of The Bata Drums* (1992). I borrow it here, but terminology to describe batá music is not a unified practice in the batá community or the ethnomusicology field (Schweitzer 2013:70). Ortiz, in *La africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba* (1993:208-209), discusses terms used by Cuban players at length: “Llames, viros, murumacas, conversaciones,” etc. are some of the words mentioned by Ortiz in his research.

32 Many players refer to variations as floreos (flourishes). Conversations, in this context, refer to the general rhythmic activity of the iyá and the itótele individually.
solicits an “answer” from the itótele (and, on occasion, the okônkolo). Conversations may occur once and then be repeated later on. Some conversations can be repeated many times. Most players refer to all signals as llames or llamadas (calls). Variations, moyubas, signals to move on to another section or toque, and conversations can all be triggered by changes in the songs and the formal conventions of individual toques. Variations, conversation, and moyubas can also happen depending on the personal taste and sense of style of the iyá player.

Table 2-3. Terms used in this study to describe Afro-Cuban batá musical form

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Básico</strong></th>
<th>Basic rhythmic pattern that defines a section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Variation</strong></td>
<td>Simple alteration of the básico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moyuba or Rezo</strong></td>
<td>Rhythmically freer variation on the iyá that suggests mimicking of language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conversation</strong></td>
<td>Rhythmic rendering/encoding of language on two or more drums. A brief exchange of rhythmic phrases between the iyá and the itótele in a call-and-response style. Also, it can be used to describe word-speech-like drumming.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Section</strong></td>
<td>A specific rhythmic/textural treatment of drum material within a temporal region (a span of time). The iyá player decides its duration according to ritual and musical criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Signal or Call</strong></td>
<td>A rhythmic figure played by the iyá player. It may solicit and answer from the itótele, if it is a part of a conversation, or it may</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

33 These terms are a combination of words used by players and scholars.
signal a change of section or *toque* altogether.

**Toque**

A self-contained rhythmic/textural formal entity within a temporal region (a span of time). Its duration is not pre-determined but decided by the *iyá* player. It may contain several sections that are connected by religious notions and musical style.

**Toque (cont.)**

**Oro**

Sequence of *toques* or songs

**Tratado**

Sequence of songs and rhythms for one specific deity

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**Oro (or Tratado)**

**Toque 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Sections B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Toque 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section A</th>
<th>Section B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

---

**Figure 2-1. Various Afro-Cuban batá drumming formal structures**

When looking at the above diagram, keep in mind the following: an *oro* may have as many as a two dozen *toques*, *toques* can have as few as one section or as many as six or more sections; these sections always have a *básico*, but may have no variations, conversations or *moyubas*.

Also, the *iyá* player may decide to play only part of a *toque*; he does not necessarily need to play every single component of any given rhythm.
Individual Drums Perspectives

(1) Drum With a View: The Okónkolo Chair

The okónkolo, in general, repeats short rhythmic phrases that are in essence the base of the batá rhythmic flow. Its parts are generally simple; usually, a batá apprentice starts by mastering this drum. The most basic pattern played by the okónkolo is what batá drummers call kilá. Every batá apprentice (yambokí) begins with this pattern. Virtually all bataleros with whom I have interacted, whether as teachers or as players, have referred to kilá as the foundation of “good” batá technique and rhythm because it strengthens the weaker hand by placing the downbeat on the cháchá. Mechanically/gesturally speaking, the left-hand plays the downbeat slaps on the cháchá (lá) while the right-hand plays a ternary anacrusis on the enú as an open tone (ki).

Because of its intrinsic motivic morphology (iambic pattern), we can say that kilá has a direction: from right to left, from low to high and from a weak subdivision of the beat to a strong one. Since kilá appears in many toques, it exists within a wide range of tempos.

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34 Also called kijá.
35 My batá teachers Lázaro Galarraga, Román Díaz and Lorenzo Peñalver all emphasized kilá as the most crucial rhythmic pattern to be learned by a beginner. My studies with Díaz were key to my understanding of the generative aspect of kilá; during our lessons, he would emphasize kilá as an almost omnipresent elemental particle of batá music. My analysis of kilá builds on Díaz’s view by expanding on ways of locating this pattern across the repertoire.
36 While it might be tempting to “read” ki as being the higher sound and lá as the low sound, we should take into account accent patterns used in Yoruba languages and forgo any projection of English/Spanish accenting patterns.
Example 2-2. *Kilá Okónkolo* pattern

When played at a slower tempo, this pattern allows for a dual interpretation/perception of the general meter: simultaneously 6/8 (or 12/8) and 12/16 (or 24/16), wherein 6/8 the main pulse is the dotted quarter-note, and in 12/16 the pulse is the dotted eighth-note. Many *toques* that exist in this ambivalent (6/8-12/16) time/meter: *yakotá*, *latopa*, *iyamasé*, the salute for Osain (first section), and others exhibit this dual feel. Example 2-3 below shows a transcription of *yakotá*, which is a *toque* that can be played for several *orichas* and *egun* (ancestral spirit) as well. Notice how *kilá* in the *okónkolo* can be heard in at least two ways depending on where we direct our attention. If we think of the dotted eighth-notes in the *itótele* part as the main pulse, the *kilá okónkolo* figure would sound like a rhythm slower than the main pulse because it occupies the space of two dotted eighth-notes. However, if we hear the *iyá* eighth-notes as the main subdivision of the pulse, and the dotted quarter-note as the pulse, then the *kilá* rhythm would sound like a rhythm that operates at the same speed as the main pulse. In other words, the reference pulse that the drummer (or listener) chooses to focus on changes the perception of the pattern in question.
Example 2-3. *Yakotá* (for several *orichas*)

The word *kilá* acts as a mnemonic/didactic/onomatopoeic phrase. It is part of a larger simple system of syllables/onomatopoeic phrases used by most *bataleros* from Cuba and secondary diasporas when teaching simple rhythmic patterns, especially those on the *okónkolo*. This system, while known to most batá players, is not entirely standardized. Later in this chapter I will discuss the different syllable combinations used in batá. *Bataleros* use this syllabic system in a similar way to the way Nigerians use *ena* (encoded drum language) language, as researched by Villepastour. As explained in the previous chapter, *ena* is a language invented by batá players in Yoruba land that encodes Yoruba into drum-like vocal sonorities and syllables. These vocalizations are only comprehensible to the drummers. In Nigeria, *ena* is used to help in the memorization and learning of drum patterns (Villepastour 2010: 91-93). While it would be hard to prove that *kilá* and other similar phrases are actual remnants of some *ena*-type drum-like code language in Cuba, we should notice a correlation in usage. Still, the syllables used in Cuba, such as those used to describe *kilá*, are not used as rigorously as it happens in other drum vocalizations systems, e.g., South Indian music, etc.

*Kilá* appears (on the *okónkolo*) in many *toques*. In the *oro ighodú* alone we find *kilá* in the following *toques*: Babalú Ayé (second section), Ozun, Obatalá (third section), Dadá, Ogue, Oricha Oko, Ibeji, Yegguá, Oyá, Yemayá, and Obba. In the *toques especiales* (*toques* dedicated
to a specific song or deity) and other parts of the repertoire, kilá is ubiquitous as an okókonlo rhythm as well.

I will now briefly discuss the syllabic/vocal/mnemonic system used to learn the okónkolo as I experienced it as a student. I began studying batá in the year 2000. I studied mainly with two teachers: Lázaro Galarraga (born in the late 1930’s), Cuban oricha singer/drummer/dancer and founding member of the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional de Cuba; and the late Lorenzo Peñalver, Cuban batá elder living in Los Angeles, CA in the 2000’s. The first drum I started playing was the okónkolo, and, as is commonly done, the first rhythmic pattern I learned was kilá. Both Galarraga and Peñalver would rhythmically sing the pattern (using drum syllables) while showing me how to play the part. At the same time, they would play their drum part.

The following tables show the specific uses of this syllabic rhythmic system according to my batá mentors. Notice the relationship between beat subdivisions and syllable use. See musical examples 2-4, 2-5, 2-6, 2-7, and 2-8 for clarification on how to use these syllables in okónkolo patterns.

Table 2-4. Syllables used in okónkolo sonic vocalizations, binary beat subdivision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beat Subdivision</th>
<th>Open Enú</th>
<th>Chachá Slap</th>
<th>L to R Flam</th>
<th>R to L Flam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downbeat</td>
<td>kim/ki/kin</td>
<td>là/já</td>
<td>klin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Binary Subdivision</td>
<td>ki</td>
<td>la</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binary Upbeat</td>
<td>ki/kin</td>
<td>pa/la/ki</td>
<td></td>
<td>klian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Binary Subdivision</td>
<td>ki</td>
<td>la</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2-4A. Syllables used in *okónkolo* sonic vocalizations, ternary beat subdivision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beat Subdivision</th>
<th>Open Enú</th>
<th>Chachá Slap</th>
<th>L to R Flam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downbeat</td>
<td>kin/kim/ki</td>
<td>là</td>
<td>klin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Ternary Subdivision</td>
<td>kin/ki</td>
<td>pa/la</td>
<td>klin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Ternary Subdivision</td>
<td>ki</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although the system has limitations and some inconsistencies, it is so intuitive/easy to remember that beginner drummers can render all *okónkolo* parts of the *oro seco* (drums-alone sequence of *oricha* salutes) with it. Its inventiveness makes it very useful as a pedagogical system.

The examples below show the *okónkolo* patterns used in the rhythm called *latopa* for the *oricha* Elegba. Keep in mind that each section plays for as long as the iyá player determines.

**Example 2-4. Latopa okónkolo entrance and sections 1, 2 and 3 (within the repeat signs)**

![Diagram showing the okónkolo rhythm with notation and syllableski, lá, ki, klin, pa/la.](diagram)

Drummers usually start on *ki*.

**Example 2-5. Latopa okónkolo section 4**

![Diagram showing the okónkolo rhythm with notation and syllables lá, ki, lá, la, kin, klin.](diagram)
**Example 2-6. Latopa okónkolo section 5**

The following is a mnemonic guide I made while I was learning the *oro ighodú okónkolo* parts-Havana style, using the batá syllabic vocalizations. *Kilá* occurrences are written in bold:

- **Elegba**  
  kilá—lá kilá lá kin klin—kilá

- **Ogún**  
  kin kilá kinkilá

- **Ochosi**  
  kinklian kimpa—kila-i—kinklian kimpa—kimpa—kinklian
  kimpa

- **Obaloke**  
  lá lákinlá—lá lákinlá lákikilá

- **Inle**  
  kilakanlá kinkilá

- **Babalú Ayé**  
  kimpa kimpa kimpa—pa—kilá

- **Osain**  
  kila-la—kinklian-la—kila-i—kilakenlá kinkilá

- **Ozun**  
  kilá—kilá

- **Obatalá**  
  lákiki—lá kiláki—kilá—kin ki-lá la-ki-lá kin-lákilákilákilá

- **Dadá**  
  kilá

- **Ogue**  
  kilá

- **Aggayú**  
  klin klinklin klin

- **Orula**  
  lá ki kilá ki—kin kilá kinkilá—lá ki kilá ki

- **Oricha Oko**  
  kilá/kilá

- **Ibeji**  
  kilá
I should clarify what I mean by “an occurrence of kilá.” Every time the right-hand plays the *enú* and the left-hand follows with a slap on the *chachá*, kilá has happened. The same reasoning applies even if the *kilá* gesture is a small component of a larger pattern. You may say, —“well, all drumming consists of a succession of right and left-hand/left and right-hand strokes; at some point, there will be a right-to-left motion. How does this constitute a *kilá*?” To which I would answer: the *batalero* starts playing the drum by consciously and purposefully trying to master the physical motion of a right-to-left hand stroke, and the musical phrase “right-*enú*-stroke- (low pitch)-to-left-*chachá*-stroke- (high pitch).” The motion and the musical phrase *kilá* become the same in the mind of the drummer: motion, rhythm, and melodic shape ideas meld into each other. The batá drummer embodies this notion repeatedly by using the word *kilá* as a mental object that describes and represents this physical motion/gesture and the corresponding musical gesture. *Kilá*, as a sonic-melodic combination and as a physical motion with a specific direction, becomes a *gestalt*. Moreover, as already explained, this “entity” becomes a basic “generator” of all *okônkolo* parts because there are so many instances in which *kilá* is a segment
of other patterns. It is significant that most \textit{okónkolo} parts “start” with a right-to-left motion, or \textit{enú} to \textit{chachá}.\footnote{In my experience as a batá player, most elders encourage starting \textit{okónkolo} parts with the right hand. However, some parts do not adhere to this starting scheme; for instance, the \textit{oro seco} salute of \textit{Oyá (Oyá por derecho)} can start with either the left-hand note on “one”, or with a flam note on “two”. Also, as more players with prior Western musical training and lack of “traditional” training learn to play batá, many of them tend to start on the first note (downbeat) of the cycle regardless of the corresponding hand/sound.}

\textbf{Example 2-7. Kilá as a component of the larger rhythmic pattern for an Aggayú rhythm}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example2-7.png}
\caption{Kilá as a component of the larger rhythmic pattern for an Aggayú rhythm.}
\end{figure}

Drummers vocalize the above part (example 2-7) in the following way: \textit{kilákikiláki-klinkilá}. All “lá” syllables plus the “klin” one are downbeats.

\textit{Kilá} also appears in rhythms with a different implied metric! In this case, the melodic shape and direction of \textit{kilá} are “transferred” to the different rhythmic pattern.

\textbf{Example 2-8. Kilá with a duple feel: \textit{kimpa}}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{example2-8.png}
\caption{Kilá with a duple feel: \textit{kimpa}.}
\end{figure}

The key idea here is that, to drummers, \textit{kilá}, in its ternary meter (6/8) form, is a pattern that incorporates the following parameters into a single perceived sonic unit: right-to-left spatial-motor direction, low-to-high melodic profile, anarusis-crusis accent pattern, and short-long
rhythmic profile. When the drummer encounters other short patterns, or sub-sections of longer patterns, and because kilá is one of the first patterns to be mastered, it is possible to project some of these parameters onto the new pattern. In the case of kimpa, the right-to-left spacial-motor direction and low-to-high melodic profile are the same as kilá. These two common parameters, and the fact that both patterns consist of two notes, make it possible for the drummer to transfer kilá ideas onto kimpa. Such transfer allows the drummer to hear and experience both patterns as very closely related patterns, almost as if they were two ways of uttering a single gesture, regardless of the different accent scheme and rhythm.

(2) The Itótele Perspective: In Batá, Second Parts Are Best

The itótele, the mid-sized drum of the ensemble, has at least two musical functions. The first one is that of a timekeeper: its chachá usually interlocks with the okónkolo part to form a composite musical structure that acts as a primary rhythmic ostinato within the full batá texture. The second function of the itótele consists of interactions between its enú (lower head) and that of the iyá. These interactions are melodic; they form part of the speech-encoding element of batá drums.

The patterns played on the itótele use the following sounds and sound combinations: chachá slap (always with the left hand), open enú and muted enú (both with the right hand), and simultaneous open enú and chachá slap. The following syllables, though not as standardized as those for the okónkolo, are commonly used by drummers to describe, memorize and teach these sound combinations. See examples 2-9, 2-10, and 2-11 for clarification on how these syllables apply to itótele parts.
Table 2-5. Syllables used in itótele sonic vocalizations (Havana), binary subdivision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beat Subdivision</th>
<th>Open Enú</th>
<th>Closed Enú</th>
<th>Chachá Slap</th>
<th>Simultaneous Open Enú and Chachá Slap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downbeat</td>
<td>kin</td>
<td>bip/hip</td>
<td>pa/ta</td>
<td>hin/kin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binary Second subdivision</td>
<td>ki</td>
<td></td>
<td>pa/ta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binary Upbeat</td>
<td>kin/ki</td>
<td>bip/hip</td>
<td>pa/ta</td>
<td>kin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binary Fourth subdivision</td>
<td>ki</td>
<td>bip/hip</td>
<td>pa/ta</td>
<td>hin/kin</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-5A. Syllables used in itótele sonic vocalizations (Havana), ternary subdivision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beat Subdivision</th>
<th>Open Enú</th>
<th>Closed Enú</th>
<th>Chachá Slap</th>
<th>Simultaneous Open Enú and Chachá Slap</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downbeat</td>
<td>kin</td>
<td>bip/hip</td>
<td>pa/ta</td>
<td>hin/kin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ternary Second subdivision</td>
<td>kin/ki</td>
<td>bip/hip</td>
<td>pa/ta</td>
<td>kin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ternary Third subdivision</td>
<td>ki/ko</td>
<td>bip</td>
<td>pa/ta</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Itótele** parts tend to be longer and more complex than those of the *okónkolo*. However, many of the *itótele* parts’ components correlate to the “smaller” *kilá* gestures in the *okónkolo*. As already stated, after my studies with Lázaro Galarraga and Román Díaz, and inspired by their views about *kilá* as a basic seminal pattern in batá music, I was encouraged to look at every drum part I had learned to find “hidden” *kilá*-like statements. A simple *itótele* part such as that of *yakotá* illustrates this point. The *yakotá* *itótele* part consists of four dotted eighth-notes arranged in the following sequence: right hand (open *enù*) - left hand (*chachá* slap) - right hand (closed *enù*) - left hand (*chachá* slap).

**Example 2-9. Yakotá itótele part**

![Example 2-9](image)

As we can see above (example 2-9), this *itótele* part is rhythmically similar to any *kimpa*-like (binary subdivision version of *kilá*) part on the *okónkolo*; for example *chachalokefún*, or Ochosi’s salute in the *oro igbodù*’s first and third sections. Furthermore, *kilá*-like gestures also exist within the rhythmic structures of the *itótele* in fragmented versions, as shown in the example below.

**Example 2-10. Iyamasé rhythm, for Changó**

![Example 2-10](image)
The hand allocation pattern ("sticking") for this rhythm (example 2-10) is L - LRRL - LRR.

The similarity to kilá okónkolo parts is self-evident. I must clarify here that even though many drummers are acutely aware of kilá gestures within itótele and iyá drum patterns, others are not as vocal about the generative quality of this rhythm/physical pattern. Regardless, we can observe that kilá is indeed embedded in the "fabric" of batá drumming in a prevalent way. Besides, because batá drums rest across the player’s lap, the sense of directionality of this rhythm—from right to left—is especially emphasized by its movement. Later on, when we look at iyá drum parts, we will be able to see how the iyá player exploits the inherent directionality of kilá in ways that shift our expectations and sense of rhythmic weight.

The example below shows a rhythm that features two iterations of kilá. Here, kilá is rhythmically displaced. When batá players play this particular pattern, they do not call it kilá; still, the gesture is present regardless of the syllables used by drummers to describe the rhythm. This pattern is part of the rhythm called chachalokefún; itótele players may voice this part as kopá-kipa.

**Example 2-11. Chachalokefún itótele part**

Notice (example 2-11) that the connection with kilá is self-evident when looking at the analytical bracketing of the itótele pattern. I have done this bracketing according to the way drummers learn the part and internalize the physical/melodic/rhythmic gesture.
In addition to the right-hand-to-left hand linear relationships (such as kilà fragments), the itótele player also develops, more than the other two drummers of the ensemble, a very solid sense of what I call “parallel coordination.” This term refers to the mechanical/rhythmic coordination that allows the drummer to perceive the compound sonic image of two independent rhythmic lines. In the case of the itótele, the chachá acts as an accompanying pulse to the more elaborate rhythmic design of the enú. There are many instances in which this kind of coordination takes place. The example below illustrates this feature of itótele patterns. The placement of chachá notes on the second subdivision of a triple pulse is very characteristic of itótele parts in 6/8.

Example 2-12. Latopa (for Elegba) itótele part

Latopa requires quite a bit of coordination, and it can be challenging for the novice. Other rhythms have much longer cycles. In those rhythms, it feels as if the left hand is genuinely “independent” from the right. The next example (2-13) is from a rhythm for the oricha Aggayú (oricha of volcanoes), called elekotó. This section starts with a call played on the iyá (not shown here), then the itótele responds with the phrase below.

---

38 This word could be translated as “the one that has strength” (Brito 2014:154).
Example 2-13. *Elektó* (for Aggayú) *ítótele* part

(3) *Iyá*: “Mom” Calls The Shots

The *iyá* (mother), also referred to as *caja* (box), is the most demanding drum of the batá ensemble. Generally speaking, *iyá* parts exhibit the most elaborate design and take the longest to master. Traditionally, drummers begin their training on the *okόnkolo*, then, move to the *ítótele*. Eventually, after some years, they start learning the *iyá*. This type of staggered training allows the drummer to become familiar with most of the songs and rhythms before trying to tackle *iyá* parts. Of course, there are many instances in which a drummer may learn the drums out of sequence and end up playing *iyá* before he masters the other two drums. Other times many players, once they start playing *iyá*, might lose their skill at the other two drums. Ortiz says about the *iyá* player the following:
The iyá drum must be played by the most skilled of the three [drummers] of the batá orchestra. His hands are dedicated to the prodigious virtuosity of the drum’s rhythms and tones. While his right hand, on the low head, makes a capricious background of rhythmic arabesques, with his left hand, on the higher head, he draws a magical language that causes Dionysian euphoria, mystical trance, and the illusion of contact with the gods.

(Ortiz 1994:57)

_Iyá_ players, besides mastering the drum repertoire, also need to know how rhythms fit with _oricha_ songs, how to interpret the solo singer’s (_akpón_) song entrances for tempo and character, and how to move from section to section and from _toque_ to _toque_ as smoothly as possible. Also, they must be familiar with the ritual aspects and protocols of drumming public ceremonies. All of these factors make _iyá_ playing a very complicated art.

From a technical standpoint, this drum is the “director” of the ensemble as it cues all the entrances, transitions and endings while effectively communicating notions of tempo and character.\(^\text{39}\) Also, the _iyá_ drummer must understand how _oricha_ possessions may “trigger” changes in the drumming due to a deity “asking” for a specific rhythm in his/her honor. A great _cajero_ (_iyá_ drummer) must indicate the dynamics and the “story” of each rhythm in such a way that the drum ensemble momentarily embodies the characteristics of the different metaphysical entities being represented and addressed while allowing dynamic space for the _akpón_ to sing. In addition, the _cajero_, while playing, may simultaneously coach or teach his fellow less-advanced drummers, engaging in the educational aspect of batá music. Finally, the most experienced _iyá_ players can play in such a way that seems to “accompany” the singing while graciously marking

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\(^\text{39}\) It is not rare to hear an _iyá_ player say to his _okónkolo_ or _itótele_ players: “pica! pica!”, which in this context means to play “ahead of the beat”, do not let the tempo and the intensity fall back.
the steps of the ritual dancers, all of this without losing his important role in the “conversation” with the orichas.\textsuperscript{40}

Let us turn now to the multiple musical functions that the iyá drum performs within the Cuban batá ensemble:

a) Playing calls or llames: As already discussed in the section about musical form, the iyá plays musical phrases that signal entrances, endings, changes of sections and conversations. The term used by drummers is llamada or llame —literally, a call. Calls for conversations and for signaling a move to a different section must be played at a specific point in the cycle and oriented correctly with the timeline (clave).

b) Playing variations or floreos: These are slightly different renditions of a standard part. They may occur on the chachá, the enú or both. They may add a few more notes or take away some notes from the básico (standard basic) pattern. In toques that feature many variations, the iyá part becomes almost improvisatory. The player may perform variations based on timeline patterns, or riffing off of accompaniment patterns played by the okónkolo and the itótele. Some variations are standard, while others are less set leaving room for a certain amount of creativity from the drummer.

c) Playing moyubas: These are a type of rhythmic variation on the iyá that can be played in strict time or slightly behind (“ritardando”\textsuperscript{41} style) or ahead of the beat in such a way that

\textsuperscript{40} For bataleros, the entire dimension of batá music is a conversation: a conversation among the drums, between singing and drumming, between drumming and dance, between humans and spirits and orichas, between this world and the divine. Batá players believe that this communicating dimension is the manifestation of Añá’s (the drum deity) purpose, perhaps even Añá him/her self. This is what Akiwowo and Font-Navarrete describe as “the intersection of speech, drumming, and the notion of ‘talking drums’—musical instruments that convey spoken language through surrogate speech” (2015:38).
mimics human speech. They act as drummed prayers; within this modality, *bataleros* develop individual styles of *moyuba* rendering. Some of them are standard rhythmic phrases, and others are improvisations based on stylistic musical proficiency and religious symbolic knowledge related to the character of the *oricha*, song or dance. At times, a quotation from another rhythm or the repertoire for a different deity (or the same deity, just another rhythm) can be considered a *moyuba* if done following a religious logic. *Toques* that feature the most *moyubas* tend to be the most virtuosic and extensive, for example, *aluya* (for Changó), *aro* (for Yemayá), and *tui-tui* (for Changó and Oyá). That said, according to the drummer’s expertise, *moyubas* could be played within any repertoire, especially rhythmic salutes for the *orichas*. If the drummer knows of specific Lucumí prayers, he might try to mimic such prayers with the drum.

d) Marking dance steps by correlating and synchronizing dance moves with drum flourishes and accent patterns. This practice does not occur in every *toque*. It only happens in *toques* where the dance choreography has a strong structural relationship to the drum patterns. Some examples of this technique can be seen and heard in *bayuba* (for Changó), *aro* (for Yemayá) and *aluya* (also for Changó).

e) Indicating tempo changes and establishing a correlation between the *akpón*’s tempo and the *batá* ensemble’s tempo. Tempo choices and adjustments are fascinating aspects of *batá* drumming because they are embodied qualities of the entire group. The *iyá* communicates tempo tendencies, almost imperceptibly, by physically emphasizing rhythmic articulation, and intensity in a way that the other drummers can understand, but

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41 This term, while used by the drummers, clearly indicates a degree of exposure to Western musical vocabulary.
42 Older players complain about tempos being too fast nowadays.
that might not be obvious to others in the room. As mentioned before, cajeros can also achieve tempo direction in less inconspicuous ways, such as shouting certain command-like and qualifying words: *pica* (move forward), *vamos* (let’s go), *camina* (walk ahead), *tranquilo* (relax), *ahí na’má* (that’s it), *no te duerma’* (don’t fall asleep).

While the iyá’s role is predominant in the batá ensemble, it never quite achieves the lead “solo” drum status that cajas (lowest sounding lead drums) achieve in other Afro-Cuban musical styles such as *palo*, *makuta* and even *bembé*.43 Iyá patterns are part of a concrete structure that obeys musical rules and extensive compositional and stylistic restrictions. In the styles mentioned above, cajas play improvised phrases based on pre-determined drum vocabulary specific to a given style. These phrases are triggered, enhanced, and informed by interactions with the solo singer and dance choreographies. Caja rhythmic phrases in *palo*, *makuta*, and *bembé*, however, never require an “answer” from the other drums. The secondary drums are always supporting, but never do they interact with the solo. In batá, many of the iyá phrases solicit a musical response from the itótele and sometimes also from the okónkolo. Also, while the iyá phrases are also part of a rhythmic lingo, they are much more extensive and complex when compared to most caja parts. The dynamic of the call-and-response structure of many batá rhythmic phrases gives batá conversations a sense of expectation and fulfillment which skilled players know how to use well. Finally, as we shall see later, the iyá drum is a hybrid instrument whose parts can behave at any given time like a time-keeper, a “solo” talking drum, a dance movement accenting device, or several of these modalities at the same time!

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43 In Cuban arará music, a type of religious song/drum tradition which evolved from Dahomean (Ewe/Fon) models, there is a low lead drum, the yonofó, that does interact with the accompaniment drums of the ensemble in a conversation-like fashion in specific rhythms. This interaction, however, is not as elaborate as the one that the iyá and the itótele exhibit.
While the majority of African-derived lead “solo” drums (*cajas*) in Cuba do not engage in drum conversations with other instruments of their ensemble as it happens in batá, drum “conversations” are not unique to *batá* drumming. Within the broader context of other African and African Diaspora traditions, the West African Ewe drum-dance-song complex *Agbadza* features a similar approach. Here the lead-drum/supporting-drum/singer/dancer structure operates in an analogous way to the *iyá-itótele* structural unit. David Locke tells us more about this dance music:

The low-pitched *sogo* drum is the leader of the drum ensemble. Its main musical functions are (1) to state drum language compositions, (2) to improvise melodic-rhythmic lines that connect with the medium-pitched *kidi* response drum and make exciting interaction with the other instrumental parts in the ensemble, and (3) to provide a musical line that moves in tandem with the song melody. In full performance with dance, the *sogo* drummer keeps a close eye on the dance space, using rolling figures to cue dancers to begin the *Agbadza* step and controlling his musical energy to maintain the overall momentum of the entire event.

(Locke 2012:62)

As with the *okônkolo* and the *itótele*, *iyá* parts can be understood in multiple sonic/rhythmic levels depending on the role that each head (*enú/chachá*) plays within the tapestry of any given rhythm. Based on this analytical approach, *iyá* parts can be aurally comprehended in (at least) the following ways:

- *Chachá-enú* relationship; right-to-left/left-to-right motions (*iyá* only)
- *Chachá* alone/*enú* alone; moments in the repertoire when the *iyá* emphasizes just one of the two heads.
• *Iyá chachá* as it relates to the other two drums *chachás*.

• *Iyá enú* as it relates to the other two drums *enús*.

• *Iyá’s chachá-okónkolo’s enú* doubling; when the hits on the *iyá chachá* mirror those on the *okónkolo’s enú*.

• *Iyá’s chachá-itótele’s enú* doubling; when the strokes on the *iyá chachá* mirror those on the *itótele’s enú*.

The sonic combinations mentioned above act as timbral reference points for the *cajero*. This notion of how different sonic elements of the total sonority of the batá ensemble interact in the physical space and come together in sonic subgroups is, as we shall see later in this study, essential for having a grasp on the totality of batá texture. Schweitzer emphasizes how the physical setup of the ensemble potentially affects the total hearing and strategic listening of batá music from the standpoint of the players: “batá drummers arrange themselves in a manner that profoundly affects the way they perceive the music and interact with one another” (2013:111).

The hearing of the different sonic relationships described above is paramount for timbral analysis and performance. There will be more on different batá timbral combinations in the next chapter.

Let us now look at the syllables used in the description of *iyá* patterns. The table below shows the syllabic combinations used in Cuba and secondary diasporas. These syllabic onomatopoeia, as for the *itótele*, are not as standardized as those used when describing *okónkolo* sounds.
Table 2-6. Syllables used in iyá sonic vocalizations (Havana), binary subdivision

| Beat Subdivision | Open Enú  | Closed Enú | Chachá Slap | Simultaneous
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downbeat</td>
<td>kon/ko</td>
<td>bip/hip</td>
<td>pa</td>
<td>kon/kan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binary Second Subdivision</td>
<td>ko</td>
<td>bip/hip</td>
<td>pa</td>
<td>kon/kan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binary Upbeat</td>
<td>ko</td>
<td>bip/hip</td>
<td>pa</td>
<td>kon/kan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Binary Fourth Subdivision</td>
<td>ki</td>
<td>bip/hip</td>
<td>pa</td>
<td>kon/kan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2-6A. Syllables used in iyá sonic vocalizations (Havana), ternary subdivision

| Beat Subdivision | Open Enú   | Closed Enú | Chachá Slap | Simultaneous
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Downbeat</td>
<td>kon/ko</td>
<td>bip/hip</td>
<td>pa</td>
<td>kon/kan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ternary Second Subdivision</td>
<td>ko/kon/kan</td>
<td>bip</td>
<td>pa</td>
<td>kon/kan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ternary Third Subdivision</td>
<td>ko/ka</td>
<td>bip</td>
<td>pa</td>
<td>ko/ka</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following example (2-14) shows an iyá part and the syllable vocalizations that describe the pattern. I use brackets to indicate rhythmic segments that I interpret as iterations of kilá-like gestures.

Example 2-14. Latopa (for Elegba) iyá part, first section

This toque for Elegba, the first one in the oro igbodú, is likely to be one of the first rhythms bataleros learn on the iyá. I make the kilá connection here to highlight the fact that by the time a batá player learns this iyá part, he would have been thoroughly familiar with kilá and its presence in “hidden” places in okónkolo and itótele patterns. It is essential to understand that by playing this rhythm on the iyá, the drummer would see, hear and feel the connection with the kilá pattern the okónkolo plays during this rhythm. In other words, there is an embodied connection to okónkolo and itótele gestures. The correlated gesturing across different parts emphasizes such a relationship. We could think of a batá gesture such as kilá as an entity that becomes more and more abstract as the player moves from the okónkolo to the itótele and, as we see here, to the iyá, but that at the same time it is underlined or echoed by any alignments with similar gestures that happen in the okónkolo.

The latopa iyá pattern feels very “melodic” to the player because the sequence of hand strokes outlines a contour of drum pitches. In essence, this iyá rhythm can be conceived of as a linear rhythm because of the hand-to-hand design, because it does not have simultaneities. The iyá melody here consists of three pitches: open tone (low), muted tone (medium-low), and
chachá (high). The hits that occur on the main downbeats (1, 2, 3, 4) of the cycle alternate between low and high (enú and chachá) sounds. See the below diagram.

![Diagram](Figure 2-2. Alternation between enú and chachá sounds in latopa (first section) iyá part)

This feature (low-high sound alternation) gives latopa first section iyá part a low-high-low-high feel that emphasizes a sense of oscillation (perhaps even a reciprocal relationship between both hands) and also a sense of balance; the frequencies of the part are “elegantly” distributed throughout the cycle in such a way that no single sound sticks out. Not all iyá parts are the same, but latopa (first section) iyá part is an excellent example of a feature that often shows in batá music: the idea of balance and reciprocity.

**Sonic Balance (Symmetry) Within Individual Drum Parts**

When one first hears batá drumming, several sonic qualities become apparent. For instance, one observes the call-and-response relationship between many of the musical phrases played by the iyá and the itótele. One can also see the prevalence of hierarchic polyrhythmic textures. These textures emphasize 3:2, 4:3, 3:8, and other rhythmic ratios distributed across the three drum parts. One notices the cyclic design of individual drum parts (and general musical form), the correlation between many sung phrases and specific rhythmic patterns, and lastly, the
relationship between musical accents and ritual dance gestures. There is, however, one more
characteristic that may go unnoticed: batá music points towards a well-balanced distribution of
sonic elements in its design, both within individual parts and between different drum parts
timbres and formal structures. This feature allows for batá music’s total sonic density to be
similar across the repertoire. In the context of a single drum part, one can observe balance and
reciprocity in the flow of single-hand attacks (as introduced in the previous analysis of the latopa iyá part). The number of left-hand sounds and right-hand sounds, for the most part, tends to be
well balanced, meaning there are never too many left hands in a row without the right coming
back into the picture. Hands (left-right) and sounds (chachá-enú) balance each other out in a
reciprocal way. This feature within individual parts appears to be generalized across the entire
repertoire. The example below illustrates my point.

Example 2-15. Excerpt from aro (for Yemayá) in the oro igbodú

As we can see above, each drum part exhibits even sound distribution. Sounds played by the left
hand are followed by right-hand sounds in such a way that not too many sounds on either the
chachá or the enú go on for too long without its counterpart hand intervening. It is tempting to
say—well, most drums require being played by both hands, so the fact that one hand may follow

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44 There are a few exceptions in certain iyá parts in which the right hand or the left hand might briefly emphasize a specific sound, for instance, the offbeat figure called contratiempo. Also in a category of toques called cerrado, the itótele may play only chachá pulses for some time.
the other at close time intervals is not a salient point. This logic applies to many drums, such as the snare drum, jembe, congas, bongos, etc., in which alternation of hands is a common practice. However, in the case of batá, because each hand is limited to one of the heads, and because the hands/heads are spatially separated, the possibility of, for instance, the right hand taking a “solo” as an individual part while the other hand remains inactive, or both hands playing on one of the heads, could be conceived of, but it (almost) never happens. In a very concrete example of this feature, we observe that there are no drum rolls of any kind in Afro-Cuban batá drumming! The sonic/hand interaction balanced reciprocity that individual batá drum parts exhibit also exists at the macro level, i.e., sonic relationships between the drum “voices” and other structures within the drum trio.

**Balance and Reciprocity in the Ensemble as a Whole**

The scheme of all three chachás and all three enús within a single rhythmic cycle also shows a certain amount of even distribution of different sounds (chachá and enú). What I mean here by “even distribution”, i.e., sonic reciprocity, is that if a given sonic element is activated in one drum, another similar component (sound belonging to the same category, i.e., chachá or enú) will get activated later in the cycle balancing and reciprocating the initial activation. Kühn, in his analysis of musical forms, has explained:

> The formal idea of balance suggests the establishment of compensated situations, at small and large scales. The different [thematic] fragments and phrases relate to and

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45 Some Matanzas iyá players may (rarely) play a series of soloistic musical phrases on the chachá using both hands during the aro toque for Yemayá.

46 Occasionally, some iyá players shake their drum so that the bells (chaworó) move in a roll-like effect. While this sound does produce the type of sustain that drum rolls can achieve, it does not constitute a true roll because the drum heads do not produce it. Modern batá players in Nigeria do play rolls with flexible sticks on the smaller drums such as omele ako and omele meta.
balance each other through re-statements, correlations and complementary contrasts.

(Kühn 1992:58)

Batá music depends on this type of reciprocal balance treatment to create logical formal structures. The most salient example of this type of sonic balancing is the relationship between iyá enús and itótele enús; that’s what happens in a drum conversation. One can also observe this kind of design in shorter cycles, such as those that last a single main pulse (beat). Many of these shorter cycles consist of one timbral category distributed across all subdivisions and drums. An instance where this happens is in short chachá cycles in which each drum plays a subdivision of the main pulse. It is essential to keep in mind, as I will explain later, that in batá music there might be several cycles of different lengths happening at the same time with each cycle having specific timbral manufacture. The diagram below (figure 2-3) illustrates both instances.

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**Figure 2-3. Balance and reciprocity in enú and chachá cycles**
The above diagram (figure 2-3) shows a long cycle involving enú sounds (diamonds ♦) on two drums and, at the same time, a shorter one consisting of three chachá sounds (triangles △) on three different drums. Each one of these cycles is, timbrally/rhythmically speaking, balanced because of the even and reciprocal distribution of similar sounds throughout the ensemble and across time within the cycles. The enú cycle consists of three enú attacks on one drum followed by three enú attacks on another drum. The entire enú cycle is divided into two reciprocal sides. Conversely, the chachá cycle only lasts one ternary pulse, and it repeats four times. The chachá cycle here is four times shorter when compared to the enú’s. The chachá cycle in the diagram consists of three evenly spaced sounds distributed across the three chachás of the ensemble. This is one of several types of rhythmic/timbral formations commonly used in batá music.

Let us look at some examples from the repertoire. The Obaloke salute in the oro igsodú consists, globally, of a four ternary-pulse cycle (two 6/8 measures), in which the first part of the cycle emphasizes a strong first downbeat on the low head of the iyá. The second part of the cycle features the low head of the itótele balancing out the sonic “equation.” All four beats of the cycle are “accompanied” by the familiar one-and-uh triplet-like feel shorter cycle repeated four times and distributed across the three chachás of the ensemble. Both structures, enúes and chachás, operate in a specific range of frequencies, which allows for the ear to experience them as two separate sonic entities that are interconnected.

The example below (2-16) uses the Time Unit Box System (TUBS) championed by Koetting in his Analysis and Notation of West African Drum Ensemble Music (1970). In my box score, each row represents a hand/sonic element of the ensemble. The top two rows show okónkolo sounds, with the left hand above and the right hand below. The middle two rows show itótele sounds, while the iyá occupies the bottom two rows. X’s represent chachá slaps and O’s
stand for *enú* sounds. The numbers above represent the smallest subdivision (sixteenth-note in this case) at which the musical tapestry of this rhythm operates. This is what some musicologists call “elementary pulsation” (Kubik 2010:31) and “rhythmic background” (Burns 2010).

Example 2-16. Obaloke salute basic cycle in TUBS (box) notation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beat Subdivision</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Okónkolo Chachá</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Okónkolo Enú</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Itótele Chachá</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Itótele Enú</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Iyá Chachá</em></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Iyá Enú</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
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Notice above (example 2-16) the four repeated short cycles of *chachá* triplets (X’s). In contrast, the *enú* cycle (O’s) is four times as long.

Example 2-17. Obaloke salute primary cycle *enú* (right-hand open tone) sounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beat Subdivision</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Okónkolo Enú</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Itótele Enú</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Iyá Enú</em></td>
<td>O</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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Also, notice (example 2-17) how the iyá low note encompasses the first two beats almost entirely while the enús of the other two drums are more active towards the second half of the cycle.

Example 2-18. Obaloke salute basic cycle chachá (left hand) sounds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beat Subdivision</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Okónkolo Chachá</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itótele Chachá</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iyá Chachá</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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In example 2-18 we can see how the chachá sounds act as a support to the more extended melody of the enús. Because of the chachá’s close rhythmic proximity and timbral similitude, it is possible to group them into a singular timbral entity. They become an immediately recognizable sonic feature of the musical texture. Schweitzer describes a similar rhythmic/timbral object in his analysis of the ñongo rhythm (2013:149). Later we will see how this “arpeggio-like” succession creates almost a kind of “harmonic” stasis that defines toques that use this pattern.

My interest is not to show every possible combination/segmentation of how one can hear the sonic elements of Afro-Cuban batá, but only those that are salient within the context of possible sonic experiences of the drummers and listeners.47 In chapter three, I will explore timbre organization; my analysis will look at how sonic segmentations (which

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47 I must also clarify that for the drummer, the most essential experiential point of view is his drum part first and foremost, and how it fits with the other two drums, the song, and the timeline. Only after spending time becoming familiar with different batá textures does the drummer start to see/hear more abstract sonic combinations that are buried or obscured by the structure of individual parts. As listeners, however, we are free to make whatever connections we want to make depending on our cultural conditioning.
I call *timbral zones*) interact to create diverse musical content. I must mention that the most experienced drummers can hear more sonic segmentations simultaneously than beginners; this allows them to experience the multi-layered aspect of batá music in a more profound (and efficient) way. In fact, this ability enables experienced drummers to direct their attention to different rhythmic beacons within a given *toque* and play off of these guiding posts without losing track of more apparent readings of the sonic landscape such as those expressed in the above diagrams.

The next example (2-19), the salute for Obatalá in the *oro igbodú*, is more complicated. It features two simultaneous subdivisions of the beat: one at regular speed (represented here by the eighth-note) and another one twice as fast (represented by the sixteenth-note). We could think of this *toque* as using both 6/8 and 12/16 as time signatures simultaneously because of the two simultaneous background beat subdivisions.

I should clarify that even though there are two time signatures in my interpretation, I do not necessarily adhere to multi-meter notions of batá music. There are, as I will show later, different rhythmic ratios operating at once, but there is a single interpretation of the beat: the one that can accommodate the pulse of the songs, the pulse of the dance steps and the timeline that goes with the song. Going by those criteria, the only time signature I should use in the example is 6/8 (or 12/8). However, because there is a speed twice as fast that the polyrhythmic texture implies, I choose to show it by implying the time signature 12/16 as well. My view on polyrhythm in batá is that two rhythmic frequencies interact with each other much like two notes in a harmonic interval. The interval is what matters most, not the single components. In that sense polyrhythms, to echo Efrain Toro, are indeed “harmonic” [and harmonious] (Toro 2014:1).
consonant. That is why I try to avoid the pervasive term “cross-rhythm.” This term seems to highlight conflict (Burns 2010), and it does not say much about the capacity of polyrhythms for generating robust and stable rhythmic textures of the kind we find in batá music.

Example 2-19. Basic rhythm for the Obatalá salute in the oro ighodú

The way the two rhythmic feels, 6/8 and 12/16, interact is quite evident after looking at the individual parts. The okónkolo part consists of a simple 6/8 rhythm. Under this simple pattern, the itótele and iyá establish a rhythm that can be better understood/heard as 12/16 time. This type of simultaneous “speeds” is characteristic to a category of toques that function within a more or less specific tempo range (slow to medium slow, roughly around dotted quarter-note at forty beats per minute to sixty-eight BPM) and compound meter. This family of rhythms (unified by tempo) includes many toques such as yakotá, Obatalá’s salute, telemina and others.

As far as the balance of sonic elements in the Obatalá salute, we can observe that the enús of both the itótele and iyá are in perfect succession, when the iyá plays, the itótele follows complementing the musical phrase. Notice here how the iyá’s chachá hits coincide with the itótele’s enú, this doubling is frequent in the batá repertoire. The TUBS notation diagram below
shows the “melody” between the iyá and the itótele, as well as other elements of the toque. The numbers represent eighth-notes (I have omitted the entrance to the rhythm and grace notes for clarity).

**Example 2-20. Obatalá’s salute**

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Let us look at the different components of the *toque* separately.

**Example 2-21. Obatalá’s salute *chachás***

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The *chachás* are distributed across the *toque* so that they produce an even binary pulse effect. If we listen to this layer by itself, we would feel a 2/4, cut time, etc. type of time flow (meter). Of course, other drum parts complicate this by foregrounding a triple subdivision of the pulse. The use of 16\textsuperscript{th} notes on the *iyá* part, the 3:2 ratio effect created by the composite *chachás* of the three drums and the *okónkolo* part, create a faster triple subdivision effect (12/16 time signature I have already suggested). The diagram below shows a composite pattern formed by the *okónkolo* and *itótele chachás* and the *okónkolo enú*. It is common for this sound (*okónkolo enú*) to be grouped with more static parts, such as the *chachás* because many of its occurrences are themselves static and straightforward.
Example 2-22. *Okónkolo* and *itótele chachá* rhythmic/timbral composite pattern in Obatalá’s salute

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This rhythmic pattern (example 2-22), because of its ambiguous nature—could be heard as 12/8 or 12/16 time signature, and simple repetition (it repeats eight times in the cycle), acts as a critical rhythmic and timbral marker of the *toque*.

The melody of the *iyá* and *itótele’s enús* shows balance in the distribution of elements across the length of the cycle. Again, we get the sense of reciprocal distribution; the two similar sounds appear in different but corresponding and complementing regions of the grid. These regions form a symmetric structure, the first half of the cycle features more *itótele* sounds, while the second features *iyá* sounds.
Example 2-23. Obatalá’s salute *iyá-itótele enú* composite

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In this chapter I have explored some of the key elements and concepts that make up batá music: different drum sounds, individual drum parts, form and structure, and the existence of balanced (reciprocal) design in individual drum parts and the sonic distribution within rhythmic cycles. These components are part of batá’s musical “syntax.” They are the essential building blocks through which batá music can generate coherent and meaningful musical content. As I have shown, batá music’s complexity stems from the multi-dimensional experiential possibilities available to listeners and drummers when all of the above elements interact with each other according to prescribed stylistic parameters to produce a vast array of timbral and rhythmic combinations. In the next two chapters I will take a look into emergent timbral structures across the different sonic elements of the ensemble and how batá rhythmic design can articulate musical ideas.
CHAPTER 3: Understanding Batá Music’s Timbral Structures

In the previous chapter, I dealt with the idea of timbral and rhythmic balance in batá toques. I proposed that most batá drumming exhibits a more or less even and reciprocal (antiphonal) distribution of sonic elements across different drum parts. In my analysis, I have segmented the music in specific salient ways in which drummers and listeners may experience the music. Next, I will show the organization of batá toques according to possible timbre combinations. As a result of this analysis, I will demonstrate how a few rhythmic and polyrhythmic patterning principles, through timbral re-combinations, can generate a great abundance of rhythms and textures. Cuban musicologist and composer Argeliers León (1984:46) mentions the importance of timbre in Afro-Cuban batá: “the timbral variety that the drummers can get through the different percussive techniques makes of batá accompaniment a melodic structure that sings right next to the voices.”

To understand how the Afro-Cuban batá system is put together from a timbral standpoint, I separate all the different timbral components by what I call sonic zones (or timbral zones): a distinguishable timbre combination with a specific function, and within a given rhythmic texture. I also distinguish between “harmonic” zones and “melodic” zones. I use harmonic here as in simultaneous, nearly simultaneous and more static timbral/rhythmic combination; for example, a pattern of three chachá eighth-notes where a different drum plays each note. The resulting composite is a repeated “one-and-ah”/ “ti-ta-teh” sonority, which is static because it sounds almost as an arpeggio-like ostinato. By melodic I mean timbral/rhythmic patterns that extend across time “horizontally” exhibiting some amount of rhythmic variation and melodic treatment of drum frequencies, for example, the patterns formed by interlocking enús. Melodic zones define the melodic contour of batá patterns, the enús (generally speaking), which play longer
phrases. Conversely, batá “harmony;” the feel of batá, the skeleton of the rhythm, is defined by interlocking *chachá* playing shorter cycles that interact with those of the *enú*.

The following are the most important sonic zones (timbral zones) in batá. Let us keep in mind that the zones below are the sonic medium through which different patterns unfold as either harmonic (static) or melodic (more fluid) constructs in all *toques*:

- The three *chachá* zone, usually a “harmonic” zone, but not always
- The *okónkolo enú*, *okónkolo chachá*, and *itótele chachá* zone, a “harmonic” zone
- The *iyá enú* and *itótele enú*, a “melodic” zone

To visualize the interaction of melodic and harmonic zones, I have represented the *latopa* rhythm for Elegba in music notation (example 3-1) and a basic graph (figure 3-1). In the graphic representation of the *toque* the dark circles represent *enú* tones played by the *iyá* (lower) and the *itótele* (right on the horizontal line). The two gray triangles represent the *chachá* of the *okónkolo* (high drum) and the *itótele* (medium drum), while the gray circle stands for the *okónkolo enú*. I have grouped the *okónkolo enú* with the *chachá* because of how it interlocks with them forming a short cycle triplet rhythm, which acts as a supporting structure to the melody of the *iyá* and *itótele’s enús*. I have not included the *iyá chachá* because in this *toque* this sound mostly doubles other existing sonorities. The horizontal line represents time, and the vertical line represents the range of frequencies or melodic elements within the cycle. This line also divides the cycle precisely in half, which allows us to see where melodic attacks occur.
Example 3-1. *Latopa* (for Elegba)

Notice above (figure 3-1) how the *enú* melodic zone cycle encompasses the entire time cycle while the *chacháso-kónkolo enú* harmonic zone is a shorter cycle. As I have said above, generally speaking, harmonic zones consist of much shorter cycles compared to melodic zones. Again, I use harmony here as an analogy for vertical, static, repetitive and supportive structures.
The Three-Chachá Zone

As already discussed, batá music features interlocking drum parts that lace together individual hand patterns, rhythms, and timbral combinations. Such interlocking patterning produces composite structures that can then be separated by functional timbral categories. One of the most salient of such composite structures is the three chachás as an individual composite entity, which with its slap ricochets, appears (in many toques) to be organized in shorter cycles when compared to those of the enús. The sonic effect of the three-chachá zone rhythms is repetitive; in a textural treatment that can be considered analogous classical music harmonic figuration accompaniments such as Alberti bass and other patterns. That said, the iyá’s chachá complicates the “neat” grouping of all three chachás as a functional textural unit. The reason being that the iyá’s chachá can operate as part of the chachá ensemble (three-chachá-zone) and also, combined with the enú, as part of declamatory/speech-like rhythmic utterances (moyubas). At that point, the iyá’s chachá becomes an independent element within the batá texture.

The following section shows examples of how the three-chachá zone operates. I have included score transcriptions, with the okónkolo at the top, itótele in the middle and the iyá in the bottom two lines. Each music transcription is followed by a graphic box-notation representation of the three chachás, in descending order: okónkolo, itótele, iyá. In addition, I have separated the examples into three categories: (1) accompanying chachás, in which the three-chachás composite pattern is quite simple, repetitive and semi-independent from the enús; (2) chachás that “double” important elements of the enú’s rhythmic melody; and (3) chachás as a coloring element of a global composite melody.
(1) Three-Chachá Zone: Accompanying Chachá

Example 3-2. Latopa (for Elegba)

Example 3-2A. Latopa (for Elegba) chachás

Example 3-3. Fourth section of Obba’s salute
Example 3-3A. Fourth section of Obba’s salute chachás

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Example 3-4. Omolode (for Yemayá)

Example 3-4A. Omolode (for Yemayá) chachás

Example 3-5. Ñongo (played for several orichas)
Example 3-5A. Ñongo chachás

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By looking at the transcriptions and graphs above, we can make the following observations about the three-chachá zone as accompaniment:

- Batá chachás form a sonic structure that is often separate and complementary to the “melodies” of the lower heads (enús)
- The chachá structures, generally speaking, act as a supporting element to those formed by the enús because of their repetitive rhythmic design and short duration
- The iyá chachá is different in each one of these toques. Again, this observation supports the idea of this sound as a semi-independent component from the other two chachás composite. Schweitzer notes this idea in his analysis on ñongo (2013:150)
- Finally, there seems to be an abundance of examples in which the okónkolo chachá plays downbeats, while the itótele chachá plays in the second subdivision of the beat

(2) Chachás as a Doubling (or Accenting) Element of the Enús

In the example (3-6) below, both structures are part of a single rhythmic statement. Here the chachás are acting like an orchestration device in that they double some of the enús.
As we can see above, even though there are a few more hits played by the *enú* composite melody, the *chachá* composite pattern holds its own, both rhythmically and melodically. However, as I have already discussed, the *chachá* composite does not act as an independent...
voice. It is clear that both, enús and chachás, show an almost identical rhythmic profile; the chachás are indeed doubling the hits of the enús.

(3) **Chachás as a Coloring Element of a Global Composite Rhythm**

I would like to conclude this discussion of the chachá zone with a brief mention of the toque known as chachalokefún. Specifically, I will talk about a section or mode of the toque in which the okónkolo part goes from straight quarter-notes (one-and-two-and, etc.) to a more elaborate pattern. What I am showing here is a straightforward rendition of this specific modality of the toque. There are even more complex patterns that the okónkolo can play (in a somewhat semi-improvisatory fashion) during this section of the toque, and also, the iyá enú and the itótele enú can engage in extensive conversational call and response type of rhythmic playing. For our discussion, however, the basic version of this chachalokefún mode will suffice. Chachalokefún can be played for many orichas, and, because it has been adapted to many other types of music, it is one of the most recognizable rhythms (toques) of the Afro-Cuban batá repertoire. It probably evolved from a Changó toque called didilaro (played for Changó in the oro igbodú). Chachalokefún features an interlocking rhythmic style that reminds us of a timbral melodic figuration. The rhythm consists of a series of interlocking drum parts but, because there are very few sonorities that happen simultaneously, it is perceived almost as a sound-color rhythmic melody in which the “melody” passes around the different drum sounds. The effect is

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49 Drummers also refer to this toque as chachalokuafún, chachalakbafún, chachalodefún.
50 Elders disagree on this point. Some emphasize a connection with didilaro, while others consider it an independent rhythm.
51 It reminds us of klangfarbenmelodie (sound-color melody); the expressionist orchestration technique consisting of the use of different instruments for different segments of a melodic line. Arnold Schoenberg coined the term in his Harmonielehre (1966:503).
a unique rhythmic statement with many sound shades that quickly “shimmer” through the rhythm. Let us look at the transcription below.

**Example 3-7. Chachalokefún section in which the okónkolo is a bit more syncopated**

**Example 3-7A. Chachalokefún chachás measures 1-2 and 3-4**

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**Example 3-7B. Chachalokefún enús measures 1-2 and 3-4**

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Example 3-7C. Global composite rhythmic pattern of *chachalokefún*’s section in which the *okónkolo* plays a more syncopated rhythm

All batá rhythms produce a global composite structure that can be rendered in a single line if we do not include any doublings. That said, *chachalokefún* stands out for the complexity effect that the quickly changing melody, timbrally speaking, causes on listeners and players alike, all while rendering a very simple, repetitive, almost uninteresting rhythmic composite. The three-*chachá* zone in this *toque* functions as a high-register coloring device. The *enús* in turn, also work as a coloring element of the global composite. We could mistakenly look at the *chachás* as an accompaniment pattern to the *enús*, but because *chachalokefún* is such a linear rhythm, the cumulative sonic effect is more of a sound-color melody than a multi-pattern juxtaposition. Only from the player’s point of view do the drum parts sound like separate structures, not as separate *chachá* and *enú* constructs, instead, as distinct drum patterns. Perhaps, when the listener directs his/her attention to *enú* “conversations” as they happen within this basic pattern, only then do *chachás* “feel” as an accompaniment element. However, even then, the ricocheting of the *chachás* and *enús* is such that listeners would perceive *chachá* sounds as a timbral treatment of the overall “melody.”
The Okónkolo Chachá, Itótele Chachá, and Okónkolo Enú Zone

When the okónkolo enú is repetitive and simple enough so that its cycle lasts for one or two main beats (pulses), it is possible for the ear to group this sonority with other simple elements of the ensemble that perform a similar function. I have called this timbral zone the okónkolo chachá itótele chachá and okónkolo enú zone. I consider this composite sonority a “harmonic” one (just as the three-chachá zone) because of the simplicity of its parts and repetitiveness. There are numerous examples of this type of structure in the batá repertoire. We can observe this timbral zone virtually in all toques that feature kilá and other simple okónkolo patterns. Let us look at a few examples keeping in mind that in the standard music notation transcriptions the order, from top to bottom, is okónkolo, itótele, iyá and in the graphic notation the two triangles represent the okónkolo and itótele’s chachás while the circle represents the okónkolo’s enú.

Example 3-8. Latopa (for Elegba)
Figure 3-2. Latopa okónkolo chachá, itótele chachá and okónkolo enú zone

Example 3-9. Yakotá (for several orichas)

Figure 3-3. Yakotá okónkolo chachá, itótele chachá and okónkolo enú zone

52 The fourth iteration of the cycle exhibits a slight variation in the itótele chachá rhythm.
Example 3-10. Ñongo (for several orichas)

Example 3-11. Omolode (for Yemayá and Ochosi)

Example 3-12. Section from aro (for Yemayá)
The previous three musical transcriptions feature the same pattern in the *okónkolo chachá*, *itótele chachá*, and *okónkolo enú* zone, see figure 3-4 below.

Figure 3-4. Common *okónkolo chachá*, *itótele chachá* and *okónkolo enú* zone pattern

The sonic and rhythmic signature of this pattern makes for a significant portion of the characteristic “feel” of Afro-Cuban batá music; that “pla-ki-ti-pla-ki-ti” so familiar to all who have listened to batá drumming.

*The Iyá Enú and Itótele Enú: A “Melodic” Zone*

One of the most interesting features of batá music is the rhythmic and melodic play between the iyá’s *enú* and the itótele’s *enú*. As I explained before, the iyá *drum* is the “lead” drum of the batá ensemble. Through rhythmic/melodic signals, it can solicit a response from the itótele (and sometimes the okónkolo as well), forming what players and authors have called “conversations.” These signals can steer the ensemble into a different rhythm or a separate section of the music or make the ensemble stop playing altogether. Most of the exchanges between the iyá and the itótele happen between the *enú*s of these two drums. The primary focus of this section will be the relationship between the *enú*s of the iyá and the itótele (the iyá *enú* and itótele *enú* zone), not only in the contexts of conversations but also in the context of regular rhythmic patterns, such as the *básico* of a section.
For the study of the iyá enú and itótele enú timbral zone, I have created several analytical parameters, which I discuss below: sound distribution within the cycle, directionality (and the “leading tone” effect), and drum conversations.

(1) Sound Distribution Within The Cycle

As discussed earlier, iyá enú and itótele enú sounds are arranged within a rhythmic cycle more or less evenly. In general, the distribution of these sounds follows the main pulses (1,2,3,4), timeline accents, and longer temporal areas (encompassing two or more main pulses within the cycle). In all cases, the sonic distribution observes (usually) symmetric proportions and sonic reciprocity. For instance, in latopa, the iyá enú open tones mark main pulses one and three of the cycle, while the itótele enú activity occurs around the main pulses two and four.

In longer cycles, such as that of tuitui, the enú of the iyá and the itótele can be concentrated within a few main pulses leaving a lot of space in the cycle for other sonic elements to come to the foreground, i.e., okónkolo enú, etc. In the case of tuitui, the iyá and itótele enús are activated only on main pulses seven, eight and one (except, of course, for when there are conversations). In contrast, the salute for Obaloke exhibits different enú scheme. This toque activates the enús within larger time units: the iyá enú occupies the area of pulses one and two, while the itótele enú occupies three and four. Schweitzer notes a similar distribution of enú sonic elements, emphasizing what I have called sonic reciprocity and balance in his study of ŋongo:

53 Occasionally, the itótele enú plays on main pulse two when a conversation response occurs.
Within ñongo, the roles of the itótele and the iyá are clearly demarcated, each having a designated space within which it is allowed to “speak” with their respective enús. The iyá dominates the three-side of the clave and the itótele dominates the two-side. As a result, the drums embody musical characteristics inherent to their respective sides of clave: tension for the iyá and resolution for the itótele. (Schweitzer 2013:150)

I should point out that while my primary focus is the musical patterning that controls the iyá and the itótele enús, there were language-encoding elements behind the organization of the drum structures I have described above. We know this because of the many toques that correspond to specific Anagó/Lucumí songs. The majority of the toques especiales (rhythms specific to an oricha, with specific song lyric correlation), and many of the toques in the oro igbodú are based on songs, for example: tani-tani-chobi, ijeijekua, alubanché, bamilé ochún, etc. That said, knowing the song lyrics and how the drums render/coincide with them does not necessarily tell us how batá drums produce meaningful musical content because the metric of the lyrics has been arranged according to musical criteria. Therefore, it is crucial to study the structure of batá drumming in musical terms. The musical syntax alone is sophisticated enough to devote the present study to its deciphering, without forgetting the many seminal layers of meaning within batá drumming: musical structure of the drum patterns, musical structure of the oricha songs performed in tandem with the rhythms, ritual dance choreography, and speech surrogacy.
Let us look at some examples. The sounds notated here are the iyá’s enú open and closed tones, and the itótele’s open and closed tones. In example 3-13 below, notice how the ternary downbeats alternate between the iyá (1,3), and the itótele (2,4). The plus sign indicates a muffled enú sound.

Example 3-13. Latopa iyá/itótele enú distribution within the cycle

In the toque tuitui (example 3-14), the only main pulses activated by the iyá and the itótele enús are seven, eight, and one (this rhythm always starts on main pulse seven). In contrast with the previous example (latopa), tuitui feels like a long anacrusis beginning on the fourth measure of the phrase, then, it quickly “propels” itself forward towards the first downbeat of the cycle.

Example 3-14. Tuitui iyá/itótele enú distribution within the cycle
In example 3-15 below (Obaloke’s salute), each bar features a specific enú.

Example 3-15. Obaloke salute iyá and itótele enú open tone distribution

![Diagram of drumming patterns]

1  2  3  4

(2) Directionality: “Leading Tone” Effect

One of the most interesting aspects of batá drumming is that there is a clear musical/language-like intent that seems to “travel” around the different enús and chachás. This aural and gestural patterning makes musical ideas manifest as collections of drum pitch areas that “light up” as drummers articulate patterns through time, a kind of drum “melody”. Because Cuban batá has almost completely forgotten the literal meaning in Lucumí-Yoruba languages, it is the succession of enú pitches (and chachás) that creates musical meaning by strategically positioning drum pitches at different points of the cycle. This positioning follows the tendencies of the cycle, timeline patterns (such as clave), and accents that coincide with dance gestures. All of these correlations create a sense of expectation that can be exploited by drummers and singers to articulate formal structures. It is the rhythmic expectations what creates a sense of melodic/rhythmic direction. What Afro-Cuban batá generates then, is a melodic/rhythmic system that exhibits tendencies that have direction, and a “leading tone” effect or quality. In other words, some tones in batá music are “expected” to be followed by other tones when presented within a certain rhythmic scheme. This directionality can be observed even in individual parts patterns such as kilá. Just as kilá behaves in a certain melodic/rhythmic “expected” way in okónkolo parts, a similar tendency
can be observed in *enú* tones across the *iyá* and the *itótele* parts; tendencies that can be met or avoided (as in solved and unresolved phrases). To illustrate this point, I explain below how the *toque tuitui* exhibits both directionality and the “leading tone” quality present in much of batá music.

**Example 3-16. Tuitui *enú* basic melody**

![Example 3-16. Tuitui *enú* basic melody](image1)

The first example (3-16) establishes the rhythm of the *toque* and its melodic profile. “One” is the main resolution; the gesture, starting on seven and eight, is resolved onto beat one. Notice that the “one” of the cycle is on the first measure of example 3-16 and the second measure of example 3-17. When drummers articulate a variation (example 3-17), they further emphasize the rhythmic/melodic profile. Here the second melodic cell also creates a sense of direction/leading tone: the low *enú*, situated on a pick-up subdivision of the pulse, seems to always “resolve” to the higher *enú* downbeat. These are re-iterations of the primary melodic resolution (example 3-16).
The next example, *alubanché* (3-18), illustrates several features. In the first place, we can see how what I have labeled 1\textsuperscript{st} Melodic Cell always comes back on the fourth measure of the cycle in its original form. Keep in mind that the example starts on the fourth measure of the phrase because *alubanché*, like *tuitui*, begins with an entire pick-up measure. Besides, the example shows that by playing variations of this first melodic phrase during bars one, two and three of the cycle, the *iyá* player establishes the governing principle of this *toque*: original phrase followed by varied repetitions of the initial gesture for three measures. Furthermore, the *iyá* player may choose not to play the variations and keep time instead. The presence (or absence) of changes within the cycle becomes itself a tool that can be used to play with the expectations of the audience. The listeners come to expect the variations and the unchanged phrase to be played at the correct place each time the cycle returns, but the listeners do not know which variation will be played at every return, or if the variations will happen at all. This unpredictability factor keeps listeners, dancers, and drummers guessing the form scheme while admiring the creative qualities of the *iyá* player. Someone like Lázaro Galarraga would embellish the variations and indeed invent rhythmic combinations that worked with the melodic positioning of the *itótele*.\textsuperscript{54} Other players may choose to adhere to a couple of standard variations, such as the ones I transcribe here.

\textsuperscript{54} See Galarraga and Summer’s 1996 recording *Ilu Orisha: Songs, Chants and Rhythms of The Batá, Sacred Drum of The Yoruba.*
Example 3-18. *Iyá variations in alubanché (for Elegba)*

This example (3-18) showcases how the iyá player can play with an “educated” audience’s expectations to create musical meaning. Finally, I should mention that because of the static rhythmic placement of the itótele in this *toque*, whatever comes before it, on the iyá, is always heard as “leading” to it. In turn, the itótele leads towards the iyá downbeat, which feels like the main resolution every time the cycle starts. It might be tempting to strictly focus on the rhythmic relationships between the itótele and the iyá, such as an anacrusis-crusis type of analysis. Throughout this section, I have chosen to emphasize the melodic relationship high-low and low-high instead. This approach clearly establishes the existence of a drum “pitch” scheme and rhythmic melodic contour that goes beyond a simpler purely rhythmic approach (downbeats-upbeats, etc.). A possible alternate description of the melodic relationships between the melodic phrases of the itótele and the iyá could employ terms such as antecedent and consequent.
(3) Drum Conversations

The iyá enú-and-itótele enú zone features the emblematic rhythmic/melodic exchanges between the iyá and the itótele that drummers and authors call conversations. The use of this term suggests both that there is an open exchange of material back and forth between two parts, and also prescribed call-and-response models. Conversations start with signals (llames) generated by the iyá enú or chachá, which in turn, the itótele completes with pre-determined responses. It is important not to confuse signals (llames) played before conversations with those the cajero plays before a section (viros) or before a toque (llames iniciales). Those llames are not part of conversations. Also, the term “llames iniciales” describes calls cajeros would play in quick succession before a drumming ceremony, and before the oro igbodú. Finally, it is important not to confuse llames (calls) with word-like phrases (moyubas) that iyá players perform within a toque, or by themselves. Drummers refer to those “utterances” also as conversations! (“la conversaciôn”). They are more like a monologue for the orichas. The diagram below should clarify the “conversation” terminology usage.

1. **Conversation** (within a section of a toque)

   Call (Llame), played by the iyá  ➔ Response, played by the itótele

2. Section—Call (Llame), played by the iyá; it signals a switch to another section

3. Call (Llame)—Section (Initial Call before a toque)

4. “Conversation” or **Moyuba** (within the basic pattern of a section), played by iyá only
As we can see, the use of conversation and call (*llame*) is a multi-leveled and nuanced practice.

Conversations always happen at a specific position in the cycle. They are not only rhetorical interjections (interruptions), but also brief rhythmically orienting moments. Conversations reaffirm the relationship of the underlying rhythm of the *toque* to the timeline and pulse. They also can offer a different rhythmic/musical point of view. There are two kinds of conversations: (1) those that are brief, but that can occur several times within a section, and (2) the ones that keep repeating themselves, almost becoming a separate section. For example, the conversation in the first section of *latopa* can happen several times, but it is not usually immediately repeated after a single occurrence. In contrast, the conversation played in the Ogún salute during the *oro igbodú* (in the Havana style) is generally repeated several times; therefore, momentarily changing the feel of the *toque*.

**Example 3-19. Latopa conversation**

![Diagram of Latopa conversation]

**Example 3-20. Ogún’s salute conversation**

![Diagram of Ogún’s salute conversation]
Conversations exist within the body of a *toque*. Because they happen within this ongoing musical texture, they represent a momentary change of the general rhythmic pattern. They do not represent, however, a total departure from the rhythm of the section in which they happen because the *okónkolo* part does not change in such moments. The permanence of the same *okónkolo* pattern usually tells us that the ensemble is still within a specific section.

Conversations also have the function of adding musical variation in addition to responding to a priori established liturgical justifications for their existence. In other words, conversations occur to meet basic religious conventions (sometimes evident in the actual text encoded in them), and also to fulfill musical and esthetic needs that vary from one ensemble to another. The “interruptive” nature of conversations makes them a “marked” enough event, which makes them susceptible to be quoted in a different environment and still retain musical and religious meaning across *toques*. It is not uncommon for drummers to play conversations that belong to a specific rhythm in different *toques* to emphasize musical or religious kinship. Conversations exist because of a specific *toque* that “birthed” them, and also beyond such *toque* as an independent and recognizable thematic unit. For example, a conversation from the Oyá salute can happen as a quotation during the salute for Yemayá (first section). Some players justify this by the spiritual connotation of the *oricha* Oyá as the “owner” of the wind. They say that the wind blows onto the ocean (Yemayá), making the ocean agitated. Interestingly enough, because the Oyá conversation is rhythmically more active than the Yemayá rhythm at that point, the musical feel of the *toque* also becomes “agitated” (rhythmically more elaborate). This conversation functions as a musical programmatic description that links the physical manifestations of these two deities, and it also works as a musical device that propels the rhythm and tempo forward. When
conversations occur outside of their original context, the rhythmic orientation rules that normally apply to its original toque can change in the new environment. In other words, it is possible for conversations to retain their original identity while following the meter rules of a new rhythmic background.

*Sonic Meanings*

In the iyá-enú-and-itótele-enú zone there can be intrinsic functionality and meaning for specific sounds within the zone, i.e., open tones, closed tones, double stops (chachá and enú together, specifically on the iyá). Muffled tones on both drums produce a drier/higher (in pitch) and slightly accented sound. On the iyá, muted tones can have punctuation or accent connotation when they occur in syncopated or rubato fashion, either inside a section or at the end. A salient example is the combination open-tone shortly followed by a muffled-tone, which can signify the Lucumí word “didé” (to lift, to stop). When priests do moforibale (reverence through prostration) in front of the iyá while saluting Añá (drum deity), the iyá plays a series of open and muffled tones to indicate to the priest that it is appropriate for him/her to rise right after they have saluted. It is a reciprocal show of respect between the priest and Añá. Perhaps, in this context, it might be tempting to consider these didé gestures as extra-musical sonorities because of their direct correlation with a ritual action, as supposed to a rendition of song/prayer texts, or a purely musical phrase. However, that would be an oversimplification. A closer look at how didé operates (for the most part) reveals that it may happen with similar rhythmic inflection to its

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55 I have included this tone as an enú sound (technically the chachá is at play here too) because of the importance of this compound tone when it comes to establishing intrinsic musical and extra-musical meaning (it usually creates a specific accent that draws attention to itself as a salient point within the texture), and also because it is a staple sonority of the iyá.

56 It can also signify: agó, cuelé, and other words that follow a similar rhythmic/melodic profile.
immediate musical surroundings regardless of whether it occurs within the context of a rhythm, or right outside of it at the end. Some drummers might even musically disguise it in such a way that the “untrained” ear does not notice this “stop” signal. When *didé* happens within a rhythm, the *iyá* player plays it in a syncopated style but still within the rhythmic limits of the groove.

Of course, the closed *iyá* tone is also part of many patterns played throughout the *batá* repertoire, representing and mimicking the melodic contour of Yoruba and related languages. When this sound occurs as part of a rhythmic pattern, it can happen on any beat or subdivision, usually in some sequence involving open tones and the *chachá*. In this case, it acts as a tonal (pitch variation) device, and it almost never happens by itself in isolation. That said, the actual physical technique needed to execute a muffled tone properly, both on the *iyá* or *ítulo*, makes it slightly accented by default. Regardless of what drum plays it or how it is used, closed strokes, tonally speaking, “close” the rhythm of the *toque*. In this context, closed tones are agents of areas of the *toque* that are less likely to communicate or “talk.” For example, in *ñongo* when the *iyá* plays a lot of muffled tones, it is signaling to the *ительно* to stop “speaking” with the open sound; “close your mouth.” In turn, the *údo* answers with more syncopated phrases that feature the muffled tone.

In conclusion, muffled tones have specific functions in *batá* music. They attract attention on to themselves because of their accentuation; this is a byproduct of the technique drummers use to produce them. Also, they serve as tonal and melodic variation devices in both the *itulo* and *iyá*. Finally, specifically in *iyá* parts, they are associated with “closing” the mouth of the drum because they are an integral part of the drum word *didé*, which can be translated as to lift/stop. Often, when *didé* happens inside a rhythm, it signals a change in the texture of the
whole toque. Open tone sequences on the itótele are temporarily suspended in favor of more muffled tone variations as already explained.

In general, open tones are not, dynamically speaking, too loud when compared to the chachá. The drummer must cultivate clarity and proper sound production technique (what some drummers call good “diction”) so that open sounds are distinguishable from muffled ones, but volume is not the main priority. Enú open tones, especially those on the iyá and the itótele, form a structural shape that can be easily heard and comprehended by listeners and drummers alike. This sound combination may be one of the first features in batá music that beginners can understand. I believe that open tones are “unmarked” while muffled tones (because of the strong emphasis connotation) are most definitely “marked” sonic events within the iyá enú and itótele enú. In other words, musically speaking, muffled tones are an “alteration” of open tones. Open tones are a full resonance; the fundamental tone of the drum is activated. In contrast, muffled tones require an extra step: the stopping of the freely resonating skin. While sonically speaking muffled tones are marked, that does not necessarily mean that their use is rare; they can occur as part of rhythmic-melodic patterns—which can have a speech encoding origin (or not) and in accenting and rhetorical gestures such as didé.

Double stops, especially those played on the iyá, are almost always an accented sound. In iyá drum parts, these hybrid tones, in addition to being de-facto accents in the rhythm, have the “assigned” meaning of a “closing” gesture. Drummers talk about “closing the drum” (making a certain “verbose” rhythmic activity stop) when double stops occur on the “one” at the beginning of a cycle. Because of this, several toques can be considered to be operating in a “closed” modality. For example the toques omolode, the first sections of the salutes for Ozun,
Obba and Oricha Okó exhibit this type of modality. In this kind of *toque*, the *itótele enú* is not as active, or it is entirely silent.

**Example 3-21. Omolode (for Yemayá and Ochosi)**

![Example 3-21. Omolode (for Yemayá and Ochosi)](image)

**Example 3-22. Ozun’s salute, first section**

![Example 3-22. Ozun’s salute, first section](image)

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57 This *toque* modality is also called *hueso* (bone), or *cerrado* (closed).
In all of the above *toques* (examples 3-21, 3-21, 3-23, 3-24), the *iyá* part has a “double stop” (simultaneous double attack) on the first beat of the cycle preceded by an open tone anacrusis. This accented downbeat double-stop is the specific feature that makes the rhythm closed (*cerrado*). However, the open tone pick-up should be considered as part of this closing gesture as well. The open tone pick-up followed by a double stop downbeat, gesturally and timbrally, is analogous to the sequence open tone-muffled tone characteristic to the “drum word” *didé* (to lift/stop), as already described.

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58 *Batales* describe each one of these rhythms as belonging to the *cerrado* category or modality. Many drummers, however, emphasize that each one of these rhythms is supposed to be played slightly different despite similarities. Ways of differentiating these *toques* vary from drummer to drummer depending on their lineage.

59 This term is of common use among drummers.
In this chapter, I have described the timbral features and structures of Afro-Cuban batá drumming. As I have explained, the different sounds and sonic combinations of batá music serve musical purposes that, while related to speech surrogacy and religious functionality, also have rich esthetic and artistic dimensions of their own. Next, I will analyze the rhythmic architecture of Afro-Cuban batá and how rhythmic combinations, together with timbral distribution, generate variety in this music.
CHAPTER 4: An Approach to Rhythmic Organization

Orchestrating Polyrhythm

Batá can “speak” Yoruba in Nigeria; batá can “speak” Anagó/Lucumí in Cuba. Through the metaphysical and spiritual force that Ayan/Añá gives these drums, batá can communicate with the divine and with the ancestors. Akiwowo and Font-Navarrete beautifully and accurately summarize batá’s, Ayan’s/Añá’s, and the batá drummer’s role in the community:

The common occupational objective of Ayan drummers is *imuluudun*, making the community “sweet” to live in. Both drumming and songs are provided to serve that main objective. Through sound, Ayan connects living humans to ancestors and orisa, thus providing a stimulating energy that bridges visible and invisible. (Akiwowo and Font-Navarrete 2015:48)

The key word in the previous quote is *sound*, which encompasses the drumming and the singing. The authors emphasize the communicational aspect of batá through sound, as supposed to text or words. I believe this to be true especially when aspects of the language being encoded in the drums, or used in songs, have been partially lost, as it has occurred in Cuba. As I have argued before, speech surrogacy is a primary feature of batá music. However, I must emphasize that batá drums inhabit the world of spoken sound (for instance when mimicking speech patterns) and the world of musical sound (when speech is encoded according to esthetic and artistic criteria). I in this chapter I study one of the key element of batá’s musical dimension: rhythm.

Batá drumming, like many other African and African Diaspora drumming styles, makes heavy use of polyrhythmic texture; the musical design in which different pulse subdivisions and subdivision groupings interact with one another producing complex simultaneities.
polyrhythms are produced by the interaction of two or more simultaneous pulses, each at a different rate or speed, it is possible to think of such pulses as different rhythmic frequencies. This line of thinking, echoing Toro (2014), makes polyrhythms comparable to harmonic intervals. For instance, a 3:2 polyrhythmic ratio is analogous to a 3:2 (perfect fifth) harmonic interval; a 2:1 ratio is analogous to a perfect octave, and so forth. It is crucial to understand polyrhythm as a simultaneity that becomes a sonic entity and a physical “tactile feel” (Burns 2010). In other words, while it is true that there are two pulses at different speeds interacting with each other, it is the totality of the sonic entanglement, based on specific reference points, which we should take into consideration (Agawu 2003:92). Individually, however, drummers may have different ways of “feeling” how their part fits in the polyrhythm. That said, in my experience, regardless of how any drummer might understand his drum part, he remains aware of the main pulse (1,2,3,4 —binary, ternary, or quaternary), the timeline (if active), and the “feel” of the background subdivision. Practically speaking: as a drummer, I must be able to switch back and forth reference rhythmic points to accurately comprehend and orient my drum part (how it fits the whole).

Several authors, such as Agawu (2003), Kubik (2010), Burns (2010), Nketia (1974), Locke (1982), and others, propose different ways understanding the rhythmic textures created by Sub-Saharan African and African Diaspora kinds of music that range from polyrhythmic and multi-metric to rhythmically holistic and texturally saturated. While we could favor any one of these author’s viewpoints as part of our analytical undertaking of batá, the drummers need to “understand”, in performance terms, the following criteria: (1) how their parts relate to the main pulse, (2) how individual drum patterns relate to the binary subdivision of the main pulse, (3) how drum parts relate to the ternary subdivision of the pulse, (4) how drum parts relate to the
song’s primary background subdivision, and finally, (5) how their patterns might relate to potential secondary background subdivision (slower or faster than the primary background subdivision). Players, especially non-beginners, aren’t aware of musical structures in one-dimensional ways. More experienced players can to negotiate different rhythmic standpoints regarding drum parts, songs, and the entire texture of a *toque*. The example below, from the *toque* called *yakotá*, illustrates this multiple-referential-points idea.

**Example 4-1. Yakotá (for several orichas)**

In the above example, we can see that the *okónkolo*, playing a ternary pattern, can be heard in at least three ways, depending on where the focus is: (1) a ternary pattern based on the eighth-note pulse—the primary background subdivision is in 6/8, (2) a ternary pattern based on the main pulse (the dotted quarter-note), and (3) a ternary pattern that plays off of the dotted eighth-notes played by the *itótele*, giving it a 12/16 feel. All reference points/interpretations are valid for the performer. At the same time, the *itótele* plays a duple subdivision of the main pulse (the dotted eighth); if the tempo is slow enough, those dotted eighth-notes could be felt like a secondary a pulse (a faster 1,2,3,4). The *iyá* plays a ternary subdivision of the main pulse as well, but because the *itótele enús* occur on the downbeats of the cycle, while the *chachás* fall on the binary
upbeats, the *toque* feels perfectly balanced, and ambiguous (1 and uh 2 and uh, or 1 and 2 and). Which of the two subdivisions is more salient, the *iyá*’s eighths or the *itótele*’s dotted eighths? While more drums are playing ternary rhythms, the *itótele*’s unmistakable binary feel counterbalances the other two drums. The following table shows which rhythmic subdivision (rhythmic frequency) each voice plays in *yakotá*. Let us consider the dotted quarter as the main pulse, i.e., rhythmic frequency 1.

**Table 4-1. Sonic distribution of rhythmic ratios in *yakotá***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice</th>
<th>Rhythmic Ratio (Frequency)</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Okónkolo</em> Part</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eighth-Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Okónkolo</em> Chachá</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dotted Quarter-Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Itótele</em> Part</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Dotted Eighth-Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Itótele</em> Enú</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dotted Quarter-Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Itótele</em> Chachá</td>
<td>Binary Upbeat</td>
<td>Dotted Quarter-Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Iyá</em> Part</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Eighth-Note</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Afro-Cuban batá music, there are several polyrhythmic ratios, of which 3:2, 4:3 and 8:3 are the most prominent. The way polyrhythms work in batá music is by assigning each drum part a given pulse rate. At the same time, different sonic groups, i.e.,

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60 For this analysis, I do not distinguish between 3:2 and 2:3. In a strict sense of polyrhythmic labeling, 3:2 represents three pulses played over two pulses. This definition implies that “2” is the primary reference pulse while “3” is the irregular rhythm. Consequently, 2:3 means that three is the main pulse while two is the “irregular” subdivision.
chachás/enús, form interlocking distinguishable structures that also function within specific pulse rates (sonic or timbral zones). For example, a toque might use a given subdivision in the okónkolo part, while the itótele part features a different value subdivision creating a polyrhythmic ratio between those two parts. Also, the composite of the chachás might render a specific structural pattern based on similar subdivisions. Meanwhile, the composite of the enús could make yet a different structure based on another polyrhythmic ratio. Furthermore, the iyá by itself might emphasize an accenting pattern that implies another polyrhythmic relationship with another element of the ensemble. This vertical layering of polyrhythmic ratios creates a multidimensional “orchestration” of patterns that can be experienced in many different ways depending on the listener’s (or performer’s) point of view (or experience). The following transcription of the first section of the salute rhythm for Changó (Havana style) illustrates the polyrhythmic dimensionality characteristic of many batá toques.

Example 4-2. First section of Changó’s salute
Example 4-2A. A polyrhythmic ratio of 3 eighth-notes to 2 dotted eighth-notes between the

*okónkolo* and the *itótele* parts

Example 4-2B. A polyrhythmic ratio of 3 quarter-notes to 2 dotted quarter-notes between the *okónkolo* and the *itótele enús*

Example 4-2C. The composite melody of the *iýá* and *itótele enús*, based on the sixteenth-note pulse, but emphasizing mainly the eighth-notes

The *itótele* portion of the above melody (example 4-2C) exhibits an interesting rhythmic device in which a triple rhythm is re-grouped into a duple melodic accent scheme. I will explain this device further in the next section.
Example 4-2D. The composite melody of the *chachás* and the *okónkolo enú*, based on the sixteenth-note pulse

![Diagram of rhythms](image)

Notice (example 4-2D) the 3:2 polyrhythmic ratio between the *okónkolo* part (*enú* and *chachá*) and the other two *chachás*. Also, notice the grouping by 2’s of the triplet composite pattern of the *iyá* and *ítótele chachás*.

Let us look at a different example.

Example 4-3. Conversation quoting an Oyá rhythm in Yemayá’s salute (*aro*)

![Diagram of rhythms](image)

In this example (4-3), the *okónkolo* emphasizes the ternary subdivision of the main pulse (*kilá*) and the *ítótele* is playing a duple subdivision of the main pulse; therefore, there is a 6:4 or 3:2 polyrhythmic ration between these two parts. Players would be aware of this relationship while
playing their respective part. The three *chachás* composite emphasizes a double-time triple subdivision suggesting a 12/16-meter-feel on top of the slower main 6/8-meter of the *toque*. The composite of the three *enú* operates within the ternary subdivision of the main beat creating a distinct melodic profile.

**Example 4-4. Polyphonic representation of Oyá quotation in Yemayá toque,**

*The x note heads represent the *chachás* (from top to bottom: okónkolo, itótele, and iyá) and the regular noteheads the *enú* (from top to bottom: okónkolo, itótele, and iyá)*

As already I have explained above, the *chachás* composite melody consists of a 12/16 rhythm, while the *enú* composite consists of a 6/8 pattern. This metric simultaneity is the result of the over-imposition of the polyrhythm 3:2. The “3” (three eighth-notes per pulse) represents the *enú*, and the “2” (two dotted eighth-notes per pulse) represents the *chachás*. Finally, each of these dotted eighth-notes sub-beats is further sub-divided into three sixteenth-notes. While there are multiple subdivisions of the main beats at play, the drummers would probably consider the eighth-note the main background subdivision and the dotted quarter the primary pulse because of the clear 6/8 feel of kilá on the *okónkolo*.

This kind of polyrhythmic orchestration is one essential feature of batá drumming. The components of such polyrhythmic structures can be re-arranged at different tempos and rotated around (orchestrated) the various sonic elements of the ensemble. In other words, the
polyrhythm discussed above, metric separation of the drum parts, and the metric/timbral separation between the chachá composite and the enú composite are the main parameters that, when re-arranged across the ensemble, generate rhythmic textures in batá music. All of these musical elements are, of course, also intertwined with the rendering and mimicking of Yoruba languages (such as Anagó-Lucumí) within the batá ensemble, extra-musical ideas (religious symbolism), and with how we orient them musical ideas along rhythmic cycles and timelines.

Polyrhythmic relationships can also manifest linearly through the re-grouping of different subdivisions within a specific drum part or across several parts. In other words, polyrhythmic ratios can be expressed melodically and horizontally by changing the accent scheme that a pattern exhibits within the parameters of a metric dimension. What I call 3’s by 2’s (or 4’s) and 2’s (or 4’s) by 3’s, for example, falls within this category of polyrhythmic linear usage and it is a device often used in the patterning of batá drum parts. This technique has been studied amply in other contexts, such as rhythmic improvisation in Afro-Latin music and African and African Diaspora drumming in general, by several authors.61 The idea is simple; if a specific subdivision typically occurs in groups of threes, as prescribed by meter, then, if we change the grouping to a binary one (either by twos or fours), the cycle of accents and phrases will change in such a way that the perception of meter and main pulses can also vary. The same occurs if a subdivision, usually occurring in groups of twos (or fours), comes in groups of threes; a potential temporary shift in the perception of the pulse scheme may occur. Examples 4-5 and 4-6 below show this device at work.

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Example 4-5. Fragment from the “long” conversation in *chachalokefún*

These two examples (4-5 and 4-6) feature groupings by twos (or fours) of eighth-notes that would “normally” be grouped by threes because they are the ternary subdivision of the main pulse. In both cases, there is a temporary “confusion” of what the main pulse is. In the *chachalokefún* excerpt, featuring the re-grouping by fours in the *iyá* and the *itótele*, the new inferred pulse is the half-note. The suggested half-note pulse is in a 3:4 polyrhythmic relationship with the primary dotted quarter-note pulse. In the second example (*ewimpamí*), the inferred quarter-note pulse (because of the re-grouping that occurs in the *itótele* part) is in a 3:2 polyrhythmic relationship with the dotted quarter-note main pulse.
Example 4-7. Entrance to the third section of Ochosi’s salute

The example above shows a typical use of re-grouping of musical subdivisions in Afro-Cuban music (and other Sub-Saharan African and Diaspora traditions): ternary re-grouping of binary subdivisions. In this specific case, the inferred pulse in the iyá is the dotted quarter-note. This “new” pulse is in a 4:3 polyrhythmic relationship with the main half-note pulse. This subdivision re-grouping is characteristic of all music with binary background subdivisions that makes use of timelines such as clave. Therefore, all music “in clave” features ternary re-grouping of binary subdivisions to some degree.

*Feel*

Afro-Cuban batá music, especially at comfortable medium tempos, has a particular rhythmic “flavor” that makes it sound as if it was “limping.” If the metaphors that I have used in the previous sentence sound confusing, that is because it is hard to describe the specific feel of Afro-Cuban batá. All musical styles have characteristic “feels.” Feel could be defined as the rhythmic/timbral/melodic totality of music. Feel includes how melody, simultaneities (harmony) 62

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62 The well-documented *cinquillo* pattern (eighth-note + sixteenth-note + eighth-note + sixteenth-note + eighth-note, “tan-tatan-tatan”), so common in *makuta, contradanza, danzón*, and many other styles, falls under this re-grouping category; it consists of two iterations of a trochaic long-short rhythm that for a moment emphasizes the dotted eighth-note, while outlining the *tresillo* (dotted-eighth + dotted-eighth + eighth, “tan- tan-ta”) as well.
and musical rhythm operate (as far as phrasing, intensities, articulation, ornamentation, and rhythmic interpretation) according to cultural notions of music. Some bataleros refer to rhythmic feel, in particular, as cadencia.

Many drumming styles exhibit a specific feel that makes the succession of regular subdivisions slightly uneven, but predictable according to stylistic notions, for instance: Brazilian samba, Afro-Cuban rumba, batá drumming, Punjabi drumming, West African jembe drumming, American jazz, and many others. Polak writes the following on the subject of rhythmic feel:

Non-isochronous beat subdivision is polymorphic and widespread in various musical traditions of the world. An SLL feel pattern (short-long-long) shapes the timing of insiraf, a rhythmic mode of classical Arab music from Algeria (Elsner 1990). An MSML pattern (medium, short, medium, long) underlies and identifies the subdivision of samba music from Bahia in northeastern Brazil. From the musician’s view, this pattern serves as marker of their rhythmic dialect, which they address as suinge baiano (Bahian swing) and distinguish from the feels of other regional styles of samba (Gerischer 2003; 2006). Of course, the LS pattern is typical not only of Swedish polska. It marks the swing feel of jazz, the notes inégales of French Baroque music, and is also found in jembe music, a popular form of drum ensemble music from West Africa. (Polak 2010)

The understanding of feel overlaps with the study of style. In the case of batá music, [theoretically even] background rhythmic subdivisions (represented in this study by eighth-notes in groups of either three or four) are not evenly spaced in performance situations. They are non-isochronous. The Western notation mechanisms are inexact when it comes to showing the rhythmic feel of this music, and micro-timing adjustments are mostly rounded off and not shown
in transcriptions. For clarity, I present my transcriptions in either 6/8 or 2/2 meter, but we should not overlook that drummers play some rhythms ambiguously in the “real” world. For example, *bataleros* play the composite three-eighth-note rhythm of many medium-tempo batá composite patterns with a rhythmic affectation that reminds us of the binary pattern quarter-note followed by two eighth-notes. This interpretation emphasizes the fact that the rhythms “one-and-ah” and “one—and-ah” are difficult to distinguish from one another. All we need to do to notice this ambiguity is listen to recordings (or live performances) of *toques* that feature *kilá* on the *okónkolo*.

Example 4-8. Two composite rhythmic patterns that tend to get confused with one another due to the unevenness of background subdivisions characteristic to batá drumming

While it is possible to continue to use 6/8 and 2/2 (or equivalents) for representing batá rhythms, it will be useful to remember that the rhythmic treatment of this music, especially at medium tempos, allows for a more fluid categorization of meter and subdivision. That said, attempting to write down exact rhythmic attacks and durations, in my opinion, would not necessarily clear what kind of metric and subdivision operations occur in this music. At its core, batá rhythm is still either binary or ternary, but players interpret these subdivisions according to
notions of style giving the music a distinctive lilt. The idea of rhythmic feel in batá music should not be a foreign notion to us since there are many examples of stylistic treatment of rhythm yielding specific feels in Western music. It is sufficient to listen to three waltzes: a 19th-century Russian waltz, a Viennese waltz, and a Venezuelan waltz to realize that, while all of these waltzes are in 3/4 meter, each tradition spaces pulses and subdivisions differently.

*Tempo Regions as a Rhythmic Formal Device*

Batá players perform *toques* at more or less specific tempos. For instance, *latopa* is always played at a slow to moderate pace; in contrast, *yesá* is played at a moderate to fast tempo. In Afro-Cuban batá, tempo-toque correlation tends to allow for the lumping of *toques* done within a specific tempo range. This characteristic of batá music is significant because it helps drummers and singers to string series of *toques* and songs into larger structures called *tratados*, which adhere to a tempo/toque scheme. Performers strategically plan *tratados* in such a way that they start slowly, then move to a moderate tempo, and finally to a fast one. Singers/drummers perform these suite-like entities for one specific *oricha*. That said, there could be several *tratados* performed during a *tambor*, each for a different god. For example, after the *oro igbodú* (series of rhythm salutes for the *orichas*), the *oro cantado* (series of rhythm and song salutes for the *orichas*), and Añá salutations, the drumming ceremony is now open for the honoring of any of the deities of the Lucumí pantheon. Once in this stage of the *tambor*, the solo singer may start singing *tratados* for specific *orichas* depending on who is in attendance.

*Tratados* can last quite a while and generally exhibit a tempo scheme that goes seamlessly from slow to fast. Each tempo region of a *tratado* contains one or more *toques* at prescribed tempos. As the *tratado* goes from one *toque*, or group of *toques*, at one speed to
another *toque* (or group), the tempo increases. These tempo changes have the potential for inciting trance possession in the attending priests. It is also a way to create musical development and gestural meaning.

The number of songs done within each tempo region of the *tratado* is entirely up to the solo singer. He or she may decide to repeat a song for a long time before switching to another song. This repetition increases the amount of musical tension because the ritual dancer and the drummers know (anticipate) that the singer will turn the rhythm soon (and adjust the tempo) by switching to another song. The new song may be in the same tempo region, or it may be a song that requires or allows for the drummers to turn to a faster tempo region. Sometimes the lead drummer may delay the change to a quicker tempo *toque* creating further tension. The delayed drum response to tempo adjustment/*toque* change augments the sense of resolution and arrival once the correct rhythm/tempo matches the singing. This mobile-like flexible form is a staple of *batá* music. The drummers do not know when the singer will change to a song that allows for a tempo change; the singer also does not know what song he/she will do until the ceremony is happening. How a singer decides to switch from one song to another depends on many factors that have to do with ritual considerations and musical tension-and-release strategies. When the song switches and drummers turn to a faster rhythm, expectations are fulfilled. Let us look at a hypothetical example to illustrate how tempo region changes work.

The *akpón* sees that a prominent priestess of Yemayá has arrived and decides to start singing for the *oricha*. He wants to sing an extensive *tratado* for the oceanic goddess, whom also happens to be his tutelary deity, so he chooses to start with a slow tempo song: “*Yemayá asesú, asesú Yemayá, Yemayá olodo, olodo Yemayá.*” The people attending know this song very well and start singing along, answering the soloist. The
iyá player knows that this song goes with a toque called yakotá, which is a slow 6/8 kind of rhythm that also hints at 12/16 meter. The solo singer sings three other songs in the same tempo category then decides to sing a song that he knows will also “flip” the drumming to a faster rhythm; he starts singing “omolode omo titiyó eleyó lade.” The iyá player hears it and immediately changes his rhythm to that of the toque called omolode, which goes with the song of the same name. The tempo shifts to a medium pace with a strong clave feel because omolode, being a slightly faster rhythm, does not have the 6/8 - 12/16 ambiguous feel that yakotá has. It is a straight 6/8 “pakitipakiti” sounding rhythm with a clear triplet-like interlocking pattern in the okónkolo and itótele chachás, while the okónkolo enú plays on the third ternary subdivision of the main pulse and the iyá accents the first note of the cycle. People are getting animated and find the switch esthetically pleasing and, ritually speaking, timely because the main ritual dancer is starting to get slightly agitated and show signs that a trance is imminent. The akpón notices the dancer’s outward pre-trance-like state as well and decides to switch to a set of songs that change the rhythmic feel a bit, but not the tempo. He sings “Yemayá mayo…” the drummers switch to the medium tempo toque called ñongo. By switching feel, but not increasing tempo, the ensemble has delayed the slow-fast scheme of the tratado. The sense of expectation increases with this delay. After a series of songs in this section of the tratado, the solo singer locks into one particular song for a while giving a chance to the batá drums to play around a bit with conversations and variations; the ritual dancer is at the edge of trance. Everyone can see that there is a sense of climax build-up, the room is resonating with voices and rhythms, and things are getting “hot.” Finally, the akpón sings “Balo nyio balo nyoe…” the iyá player plays a quick call (takon-takon), and the
itótele plays the emblematic kiki-kiki-kiki entrance to chachalokefún, a fast tempo and rhythmically energetic toque. When the iyá player lands forcefully on the “one” of the next cycle and the chorus of attendants answers, the ritual dancer falls into a deep trance, and her dance movements become that of the oricha; the queen of the orichas has arrived. Yemayá’s presence blesses the ceremony, and everyone feels happy, amazed and moved by the ritual drama that has unfolded. The singer signals the iyá player and the drumming suddenly stops. The tratado is now over. At this point, the drummers play a reverential rhythm and song for the deity while she salutes Añá (drum deity that lives inside the drum) by bowing (bale) in front of the drums. Once the oricha stands up after the salute, she is helped out of the room by priests to be ritually dressed. The singer and drummers are satisfied with the outcome. Everyone feels good. They take a brief break and then continue with the ceremony.

The above scene shows how performers use specific tempo regions and categories of rhythms/songs that fit within these regions for musical and ritual purposes. The most prominent formal structure that results from these tempo strategies is the already discussed tratado. The chart below shows the toque scheme for the previously discussed example. Keep in mind that this is only one tratado possibility of many.

**Figure 4-1. Tempo/toque scheme of a tratado for Yemayá**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tempo</th>
<th>Slow tempo songs</th>
<th>Medium tempo songs</th>
<th>Medium tempo songs</th>
<th>Fast tempo songs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Toque</strong></td>
<td>Yakotá</td>
<td>Omolode</td>
<td>Nongo</td>
<td>Chachalokefún</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time
Let us look at the transcriptions of the rhythms used in this *tratado*.

**Example 4-9. Yakotá**

![Diagram of Yakotá rhythm]

**Example 4-9A. Omolode**

![Diagram of Omolode rhythm]

In examples 4-9 and 4-9A, the *iyá* switches from *yakotá* into *omolode* by merely playing the new rhythm and slightly adjusting the tempo forward. The other two drummers are supposed to catch up with this switch almost instantaneously.
Example 4-9B. Entrance *llame* into *ñongo*

Example 4-9C. *Ñongo* proper

Since *ñongo* (examples 4-9B and 4-9C) is in the same tempo category as *omolode* (example 4-9A), there is no tempo increase moving from one rhythm to the next (although some players may “lean” forward a bit tempo wise). The feel of *ñongo*, however, is different because the *iyá* part does not have the heavy downbeat that *omolode* does, and the *itótele* part is conversational. The way the *iyá* player gets to *ñongo* is through a call (*llame*), see example 4-9B.
I should clarify that tempo region changes happen in a way that seems as if the ensemble “slides” into the new tempo. This transition moment (the area between the two tempos) unfolds very quickly. During this brief instant the ensemble accelerates and swiftly settles into a new pace. The acceleration may begin with the iyá call, or it may happen during the answer to the call. Experienced ensembles make these transitions almost seamlessly with very little time spent within them. I should mention that the metronomic markings used in my transcriptions are a
guide and not necessarily a specific prescription. The fundamental concept here is that there are tempo regions (tempo ranges) and that toques exist within these regions.

The following table shows where some salient toques from the Havana style fall within these tempo regions. It is crucial to keep in mind that these tempo regions’ limits are not a sharp line. Toques can happen at slightly slower or faster tempos than the bpm markings I have given below. Consider them (bpm’s) as a basic reference.

Table 4-2. Tempo regions (ranges) in Afro-Cuban batá (Havana style)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Slow Tempo Region</th>
<th>Medium Tempo Region Toques</th>
<th>Medium Tempo Region Toques</th>
<th>Fast Tempo Region Toques</th>
<th>Fast Tempo Region Toques</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toques</td>
<td>Main Compound</td>
<td>Main Compound</td>
<td>Main Compound</td>
<td>Main Binary Pulse =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pulse = 50-75 bpm</td>
<td>Pulse = 80-110 bpm</td>
<td>Pulse = 95-220+</td>
<td>Main Binary Pulse =</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100-150+ bpm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latopa</td>
<td>Alubanché</td>
<td>Inle Salute</td>
<td>Oro Egun 1</td>
<td>Chachalokefún</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yakotá</td>
<td>Nongo</td>
<td>Olokun Cierre (Hv)</td>
<td>Meta</td>
<td>Yesá</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iyamasé</td>
<td>Obaloke</td>
<td>Ochosi Salute</td>
<td>Aro (fast section)</td>
<td>Osain 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telemiña</td>
<td>Ozun 2</td>
<td>Obatalá Salute1</td>
<td>Taniboya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oricha Oko</td>
<td>Obba 2,3,4</td>
<td>Eguado</td>
<td>Tui Tui (when done fast)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obba 1</td>
<td>Arará</td>
<td>(Osain 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ozun 1</td>
<td>Oggue Salute</td>
<td>Oyá Salute 1,2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KanKan</td>
<td>Elekotó</td>
<td>Chenche-Kururu</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osain Salute 1</td>
<td>Bayuba</td>
<td>San Lázaro 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obatalá Salute 2</td>
<td>Oyá Salute 4</td>
<td>Obatalá Salute 3,4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayuba Kante</td>
<td>Eni-Obobo</td>
<td>Orunmila Salute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oyá Salute 3</td>
<td>Cheke-Cheke</td>
<td>Ogún Salute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bembé-Campo</td>
<td>Bamilé-Ochún</td>
<td>Aggayú Salute</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obatilemi</td>
<td>Tozun-Tozun</td>
<td>Oyanbikú</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

132
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Wemilere</strong> (Sokutanibo)</th>
<th><strong>San Lázaro 2</strong></th>
<th><strong>Changó Salute 2</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oro Mayoko 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Yegguá Salute</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Changó Salute 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Odudua Salute</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Oricha Pawa</strong></td>
<td><strong>Odu-Aremu</strong> (second section)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Toque Especial for Yegguá</strong></td>
<td><strong>Obatalá-Didé</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ewimpamí</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Oferere</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Dadá Salute</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Elube-Elube</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Oro Egun 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Eni-Alado</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Fomalogueude</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Elekete-Meji</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Ibeji Salute</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Final Cierre</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Changó Salute 3,4</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Omolode</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Moving Across Meter and Tempo**

I would now like to propose a series of salient features about tempo and meter in batá music. It might be useful to think of these features almost as if they were “rudiments” that regulate meter and tempo. Knowing how meter and tempo work will give us a window into how batá rhythm can support larger formal structures, such as *osos* and *tratados*, and how *bataleros* can “move through” the repertoire seamlessly. For drummers, knowing how meter and tempo work is
crucial to be able to perform the complex rhythmic operations that occur when transitioning from one toque to another. Let us look at them in detail:

- **Most toques are in 6/8 meter and 2/2 (or 4/4).** As we know, batá music did not develop as a written form of music, but as an oral tradition. However, when using western standard music notation in transcription and analysis, these two time signatures are adequate to represent most batá music. There are some exceptions though, mainly a brief section in the oro ighodú salute for Inle in which the rhythm unfolds in 7/4 time. There is also a brief section, a conversation, in one of the toques for Obatalá that features one measure of five beats. Also, there is a three-pulse single measure in a small section of the oro ighodú salute for Oyá. Finally, there is a toque for egun (the spirits) that occurs in 9/8 time. Again, not taking into account the exceptions above, most batá music can be written out in 6/8 and 4/4 (or cut-time).

- **Most batá rhythms occur in cycles of “two” and “four” pulses, each pulse in binary or ternary subdivisions.** There are larger cycles that may group two, three and four 4-main pulse cycles, but in general, most full cycles have 2 or 4 main pulses. In slower 6/8 rhythms, cycles consist of two main ternary pulses, a dotted half-note in length.

- **Slow 6/8 rhythms usually show a secondary (double-time) background subdivision, which implies a secondary 12/16 time signature.** These rhythms can be heard simultaneously in 6/8 and 12/16. Furthermore, the 12/16 feel can be considered analogous to 6/8 rhythms at moderate and fast tempos. This feature allows drummers to transition back and forth between rhythms through this double-time/half-time conversion. Also, slow 6/8 rhythms, with a small accelerando, can morph into medium tempo 6/8 rhythms, for example when yakotá switches to ūongo.
• **There is an abundance of 3:2 polyrhythmic relationships spread across different parts.** In slow 6/8 rhythms, as already mentioned, there is a 3:2 polyrhythmic relationship between the main background subdivision (eighth-notes) and the secondary background subdivision (sixteenth-note).

• **Most batá rhythms appear to incorporate timeline (clave) elements.** Although, the notion of clave as a ubiquitous “omnipresent” organizing concept in Afro-Cuban batá could be an influence of other types of music such as rumba and Abakua drumming.\(^6\) Sometimes slow 6/8 grooves exhibit a 6/8 timeline aligned with a chant, while at the same time, there might be a secondary clave that lines up with the sixteenth-note subdivision.

• **At certain moderate speeds there can be a similarity between the two rhythmic patterns below (example 4-10).** In other words, drummers purposely blur the distinction between ternary compound meter and binary meter when playing at moderate speeds. They do this adjustment for stylistic reasons. As a result, 6/8 and 2/2 ostinatos may exhibit a similar feel. Several examples come to mind: the second section of the Ozun salute, the salute for Ibeji, didilaro for Changó, and others. This stylistic tendency renders the emblematic (and prevalent) “ba-ki-ní” composite 6/8 and 2/2 pattern, comprised by the okónkolo chachá, the itótele chachá, and the okónkolo enú, as an almost singular rhythmic entity; it is neither in six or four (two). Notice that kilá exists within this composite pattern. The ambiguous interpretation of this composite pattern

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\(^6\) Some elders emphasize the role of clave in batá music, especially those that are also solo singers (akpón). Others claim that clave is a secondary organizational parameter and not as important as the language encoding aspect of batá.
allows for smooth transitions between binary and ternary rhythms, see example 4-10 below.

**Example 4-10. A prevalent composite rhythm represented in 6/8 and 2/2**

Finally, it is essential to keep in mind that most of the understanding of meter, tempo, and the relationships between different rhythms that such understanding reveals, comes from an embodiment process that develops gradually with the learning of individual parts from *kilá* all the way to *iyá* parts.

Batá players, especially *cajeros*, try to connect rhythms in ways that *toques* flow into each other without interruption of the musical fabric as much as possible, thus forming larger formal units. The way *toques* progress from one to another in the *oro igbodú* is a prime example of how drummers “weave” rhythm by manipulating meter and tempo. For instance, let us look at *latopa*, and the salutes for Ogún, Ochosi, and Obaloke as played in the *oro igbodú*, and see how
each rhythm merges on to the next. I should clarify that there are several general ways and many individual variations on how to perform this progression. However, the point here is that no matter how a drummer chooses to play this sequence, he will always try, to the best of his abilities, to do it in a flowing manner. Again, to accomplish this fluidity, the batá player must know feel/meter/tempo organically. Besides, he must understand how the rhythms relate to the timeline in all toques.

The following transcription of the iyá part will illustrate the process of moving from one toque to another. I have only transcribed the “básico.” I have left out conversations and variations because the critical issue here is to see how the iyá moves from one toque to the next. Also, it will be crucial to keep in mind the flow from feel to feel in addition to tempo adjustment. As I have mentioned already toques (and respective feels) operate within a tempo range, with tempo and feel working together to become part of the identity of the toque, as much as its rhythmic signature (meter, timbre, polyrhythmic texture, etc.).
Example 4-11. Transcription of the iyá part (with the timeline) of the first four toques in the oro igbodú
OGÜN SALUTE  $\frac{\cdot}{\cdot} = \frac{\cdot}{\cdot} = 90-106$

to suddenly quasi half-time feel

OCHOSI SALUTE

\[\frac{\cdot}{\cdot} = 68\]

Increase tempo bit by bit within a few cycles to $\frac{\cdot}{\cdot} = 92$

OCHOSI 2

*There is disagreement on how the clave pattern fits with this *touque*, so I will limit myself to transcribing just the main pulses

OCHOSI 1

Increase tempo during this figure to \[= 100\]
I can summarize the tempo/meter flow scheme of the *toques* transcribed above the following way:

1. It starts with a low 6/8 *toque*—*latopa*; its first four sections hint at a 12/16
2. The last section of this *toque* increases to an almost moderate 6/8 tempo, which eliminates the 12/16 feel, therefore making a potential transition to an even faster tempo and binary meter much easier
3. The next *toque*—Ogún salute, consists of a moderate binary rhythm in which the previous pulse unit (dotted quarter) becomes the new pulse unit (half-note). That said, players tend to lean forward tempo-wise once they get to Ogún
4. When going to the Ochosi salute, the pulse becomes twice as slow for a brief period, and a relatively quick accelerando gets us to the new (Ochosi) tempo, which is just a little slower than the Ogún tempo
5. Ochosi gets a little faster during the transition to the third section, and the feel becomes a little “agitated” (tempo leans forward), the tempo then slows down a bit in the next sections, and it stays there for the next couple of sections.

6. The last section of the Ochosi salute speeds up considerably and briefly slows down arriving at the Obaloke salute tempo/feel, which is a moderate tempo 6/8 toque as well.

7. Lastly, I can say that although there are some metric/pulse modulations (especially double-time/half-time changes) happening here, there are also many sliding (accelerandos/ritardandos) adjustments of tempo. I suggest that these sliding adjustments are crucial to the understanding of tempo regions and how rhythms “moves in and out of them” as the different toques progress. The diagram below shows how this tempo sliding takes place.

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**Figure 4-2. Tempo adjustments across different toques played in succession**

As we can see here (figure 4-2), there are several tempo regions. Roughly from slower to faster tempos, there are the following: slow tempo ternary pulse (6/8), medium ternary pulse (6/8),
medium tempo binary pulse (2/2), quick ternary pulse (6/8). There are fluctuations within tempo regions, but in general, these are the main tempo areas. In this example (4-11), there are several different ways by which the tempo slides from one region to the next: by short-range accelerandos/ritardandos, by long-range accelerandos/ritardandos, and by sudden metric modulation (half-time feel, in this case). Medium tempo ternary pulse rhythms can easily move into medium tempo binary pulse rhythms, as from latopa to Ogún’s salute, by a simple feel change and a slight push in the tempo. The way 6/8 and 2/2 rhythms relate to each other via binary-ternary subdivision ambiguity facilitates the change. As a final observation, I can say that the majority of the time, the tempo/feel fluctuates around medium tempo ternary pulses and medium tempo binary pulses. In other words, most of the time is spent playing in these two feels/tempos with brief peak moments at faster speeds. Based on all the available data from the diagram, and its analysis, we can further reduce the tempo/feel scheme to the following:

Slow 6/8–12/16 to medium 6/8 to medium 2/2 to brief half-time back to medium 2/2 to fast 6/8 to medium 6/8, see figure 4-3 below.

Figure 4-3. Tempo and meter progression in the first four toques of oro ighodú
This diagram gives us a small window into the metric/tempo operations that players have to make to navigate across tempos and feels properly within larger groupings of batá toques. In conclusion, it is crucial, when looking at the rhythmic organization of longer musical structures in batá music, to keep in mind the strategic shifting of the pulse, its subdivision type, hinted simultaneous meters/feels, and over-all tempo tendencies in a group of toques that are performed in sequences, such as the one in the example above.

**On Clave**

In addition to tempo, meter, feel, and poly-rhythmic organization, two more parameters influence rhythm in batá music: (1) oricha songs (their poetic meter and musical phrasing), and (2) timeline(s), i.e., clave(s). Given that there has been important scholarly work done on how batá (in Africa) renders and encodes text, and due to space constraints, text encoding and surrogate speech in Afro-Cuban batá will not be part of this study. I hope that further research in this area will be the subject of future works. I elaborate on the topic of clave in the volume *The Afro-Cuban Handbook*:

*Clave* is the Spanish word for key [as in clue to a riddle]… *Clave* acts as the basic building block out of which rhythmic vocabulary is built…*Clave* consists of a simple rhythmic pattern that is divided into two parts. One part propels the rhythm the other part anchors it. For instance:
*Clave* is used as a guide to create [and perform] rhythms that outline it, or rhythms that go “against” it. Different [*clave*] patterns are used for different styles of Afro-Cuban music… (Diaz 2009)

When I wrote this book, I was working from a performer’s point of view. I was more concerned then with how *clave* is used instead of how it is defined in musicological and analytical terms. From the performer’s view, *clave* is a pattern that serves as a template to orient (to position entry points, accenting parameters, and downbeat hierarchies) all rhythmic data. It also informs the stylistic rhythmic treatment of the music. Given that in the vernacular of Cuban music *clave* has two sides, each lasting half of the rhythmic cycle (two beats), it is possible to talk about *clave* as a having an intrinsic binary phrase structure. As a performer, we make sure that all patterns “fit/feel right” with the *clave*. We do not tend to talk about *clave* in analytical terms, and for the most part, accept it as a general principle of Afro-Cuban music.

In the field of ethnomusicology, Cuban *clave* patterns are part of a broader category of rhythmic patterns called timelines, which are an essential component of several types of Sub-Saharan African music. Ethnomusicologist Gerhard Kubik has the following to say on the subject:

Time-line patterns are structured, short cycles of specifically spaced action-units, generating sound mostly on one pitch level. They have been called “rhythmic ostinato” (David Rycoft, in a conversation) or “a brief repeated sequence,” characterized by an asymmetric inner structure, such as $5 + 7$ or $7 + 9$, against which the “melodic and rhythmic phrasing of other performers is juxtaposed.” They are percussive patterns produced either by hand-clapping or by striking a musical instrument with penetrating sound such as a bell, high-pitched drum, the rim or the wooden body of a drum, a bottle,
In those forms of African music in which time-line patterns are employed, they constitute a further (fourth) reference level of timing besides the elementary pulsation, the beat and the cycle. (Kubik 2010:59)

Timelines are cyclical and usually played on loud-sounding high-pitched instruments. They serve as a reference layer of the musical fabric and have the potential to exist solely as mental objects; not always manifested sonically. I want to add a few more ideas that I believe are crucial to understanding timelines, and therefore understanding clave. Timelines are mostly asymmetrical, but because they are juxtaposed with regular and symmetric beat cycles, we can divide them into two equal-length parts, each exhibiting a distinct rhythmic feel. In Cuba, as I have discussed already, timelines are known as claves, and all music that uses clave(s) as a rhythmic organizing principle is therefore “in clave.”

Besides timelines being divisible into two parts, music that uses timelines seems to “oscillate” because rhythmic patterns mirror the oscillation between the two sides of the timeline. This oscillatory quality has been difficult to define by researchers. What is oscillating? Many scholars, including Kubik, follow an additive approach when discussing the timelines. For instance, a common additive description of the widespread standard pattern timeline (x . x . x x . x . x . x) considers it a simple 5 + 7 pattern (Kubik 1994:44). The main problem with describing timelines in simple additive fashion is that such explanations leave out vertical considerations embedded in the simultaneities of polyrhythmic music, and the interaction of timelines with the main pulse. Puerto Rican-born drummer and percussionist Efrain Toro suggests a different view on timelines (clave). Toro proposes that clave, in general, is an alternation between downbeats and upbeats along the triple subdivision of one half of the cycle.

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64 This 5 + 7 additive description is often broken down further into 2 + 3 + 2 + 2 + 3.
juxtaposed over (or against) two pulses (Toro 2014). In other words, *clave*’s oscillatory nature comes from this constant alternation between downbeats and upbeats at the triplet subdivision. Let us look at the following diagram of the standard pattern to grasp this concept better.

**Example 4-12. Standard timeline pattern or 6/8 clave**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>and</th>
<th>and</th>
<th>and</th>
<th>and</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Downbeats | Upbeats

Ternary subdivision of first half of the cycle | Ternary subdivision of first half of the cycle

**Example 4-13. Standard timeline pattern or 6/8 clave over the main pulse**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>and</th>
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<th>and</th>
<th>and</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1  | 2  | 3  | 4   |

So, based on the above diagram, and echoing Toro, at the root of *clave*, there is a 3:2 polyrhythmic relationship for each half of the 4-beat cycle. In the first half, the “3” is represented by downbeats, and in the second half by upbeats.

Toro’s view on *clave*, from a performer’s standpoint, is very comprehensive (and compelling) because it takes into account the interaction of the timeline with the main pulses, which is one of the primary references for simple accompaniment parts and dance steps. In

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David Peñalosa and Peter Greenwood (2012:65-67) arrive at a similar conclusion.
addition, it reveals the vertical “dimension” of this rhythmic design. Toro applies this idea to sixteenth-note background-subdivision cycles (4/4 or 2/2 time signature) *claves*. By doing so, the binary (and quaternary) background subdivisions affect the rhythmic feel of the ternary accent patterns of 6/8 *clave*. This rhythmic/feel transfer makes the original ternary subdivisions acquire a binary (or quaternary) feel.

It is tempting to consider *son clave* (one of the most used *clave* patterns in Cuban dance music) as entirely different from the ternary feel of 6/8 *clave* (standard pattern) because of *son*’s binary background subdivisions. That would be a premature and erroneous observation. As we know, most performers intuitively recognize that there is a relationship (possibly equivalence) between ternary and binary subdivision in most Afro-Cuban music styles. For instance, many performers have a difficult time conceiving of styles “in 6/8 time,” such as *rumba columbia*, and styles in 2/2 time, such as *guaguancó*, as having a different background subdivision scheme. Therefore, a similar concept applies to timelines existing within these styles. The same type of ambiguity, as already explained, exists in batá music. The following examples (4-14, 4-14A, 4-15, and 4-15A) illustrate the “binarization” of the standard pattern and the further omission of some of the attacks to transform 6/8 *clave* into 4/4 (or 2/2) *clave*.

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66 For more on the binarization of ternary patterns see Rolando Perez’s *La binarización de los ritmos ternarios africanos en América Latina* (1986).
Example 4-14. Standard timeline pattern (6/8 clave) represented as a 6-pulse cycle

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Example 4-14A. Standard timeline pattern (6/8 clave) represented in a binary (4/4) cycle

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Example 4-15. Son clave

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Example 4-15A. Rumba clave in binary (4/4) meter

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While I agree with this reading of clave and timelines in general, I am not claiming here that binary-background timelines “evolved” from ternary-background ones. The point here is that
there is a correlation between ternary and binary timelines across different Afro-Cuban music styles and that performers apply this connection all the time.

**Batá and Clave**

Batá players refer to clave within batá in different ways. Sometimes they talk about clave in the sense of clave as a timeline, as I have above. Other times clave acquires a more esoteric meaning, more like a quality or a state: something/someone “has clave,” or something/someone “is in clave.” Things are in clave when the rhythm is groovy, smooth and stylistically correct. When a player starts his training, it is not uncommon for the teacher to say: “he has clave,” meaning the student has a natural aptitude for playing complex grooves and rhythms.

Clave can also be the subject of debate. Some players are more clave centric than others. Many bataleros, especially those who also sing, have a clear notion of how clave fits all batá rhythms. Others propose that clave is not always present in batá rhythms because language, having been the primary seminal justification for the creation of batá music, is a more structurally critical parameter. My observations about clave will give us an idea of how clave (as a timeline) relates to batá music. However, my study is far from conclusive. Research in this area is in its beginning stages. The following are some of the most salient points regarding clave and Afro-Cuban batá music:

- Several slow 6/8 rhythms appear to have two claves, structurally speaking. One clave that lines up with the eighth-note subdivision and another one twice as fast that operates within the 12/16 meter suggested by the use of dotted eighth-notes in some of the drum parts. Usually, the songs that go with such rhythms establish which way the 6/8 clave operates, or rather how the 6/8 batá rhythm fits with the 6/8 clave of the song.
• Some of the drum parts may clearly state clave. Often, however, clave is only partially outlined.

• Some ambiguous rhythms seem to reject the notion of clave.

• Some toques, such as ñongo, especially in live performance situations, almost “demand” the use of hand-clapped clave. Often the articulation of clave patterns with handclaps makes the performances more animated and rhythmically vibrant.

• When batá rhythms are played in more extended sequences, how the clave fits (its direction) may change from one toque to the next.

• Moderate and fast tempo toques tend to be more rooted in clave than slow 6/8 toques.

• The rattle (achere) that sometimes plays with the batá ensemble does not always play clave patterns. In slow rhythms, it plays the pulse subdivisions (eighth-notes), and in fast rhythms, it may play the main pulse, i.e., quarter-notes, dotted quarter-notes, half-notes, etc.

• Rumba clave (and its 6/8 version) and 6/8 clave (standard pattern) are the preferred claves in Afro-Cuban batá music as referential tools, and as a rattle/bell/handclap accompaniment. 6/8 clave is used in the accompaniment of oricha songs in every style of Santería music (güiro, bembé, etc.). It is possible that the use of this pattern (6/8) as an accompaniment to songs justifies its use in batá music as well. Both forms (6/8 and 2/2) of rumba clave are probably preferred because of their ambivalence as far as meter goes. Such ambivalence enhances interesting rhythmic manipulation potential. However, I must point out that in Brazilian Candomblé (Brazilian form of orisa religion), what we call in Cuba son clave is used for the accompaniment (bell patterns, handclaps, etc.) of binarily subdivided rhythms in orixa (oricha) songs. It is possible that the only reason
rumba clave is preferred in Cuba over son clave for the accompaniment of oricha rhythms and songs is a stylistic choice that has to do with taste, and not with any intrinsic property of the patterns.

Example 4-16. Claves (timelines) used in Afro-Cuban batá

The following example (4-17) shows examples of patterns in Afro-Cuban batá music that outline clave, either entirely or partially. Again, the acheré (rattle-like instrument played by the lead singer) and handclaps could articulate the clave/timeline patterns shown here, or clave patterns could remain a tacit element of the musical texture.
Example 4-17. Batá patterns that articulate clave in some form

- Itótele
- Okónkolo
- Iyá

Regular clave (6/8)

Double time clave (12/16)
There are batá patterns that appear to articulate clave, but once we see how the pattern lines up with the cycle (or how they line up with the clave of the song that goes with the rhythm), it becomes clear that the clave-like pattern in that particular drum part is not being used to emphasize the actual clave of the rhythm. In other words, when looking at the drum part pattern alone, clave seems to go in a certain way, but when the actual clave of the rhythm as a whole is later revealed by the structure of the beat cycle and the song(s), then, clave seems to go in a different way.

There are two remarkable examples in which clave appears to be part of the patterns in a straightforward fashion, and then we learn that clave is in an unexpected place of the cycle! The rhythms in question are the okónkolo patterns for bayuba-kanté (played for Oyá) and bayuba (played for Changó). *The bayuba-kanté toque okónkolo* is an eight-ternary pulse cycle. It starts on the second beat of the cycle right after the iyá plays its entrance. To the novice, however, this pattern seems to start on “one,” but after a while it becomes clear that what was thought to be “one” is actually “two.” After that initial confusion, a second confusion may come up because of how part of the pattern appears to fit with clave. Since the second half of this okónkolo part is identical to a fragment of an okónkolo part for Aggayú, we may want to orient this section of the rhythm the same way we do with the toque for Aggayú. In Aggayú, this part of the pattern lines up perfectly with the first few accents of the clave. In bayuba-kanté however, the rhythm is oriented differently. Let us look at the rhythm as it “feels” when one first learns it, then how one may think it fits with clave, based on the comparison with Aggayú, and finally how it truly fits with clave and the cycle.
Example 4-18. Bayuba-kanté okónkolo part, starting on the “wrong” “one”

Example 4-18A. Okónkolo part for Aggayú toque and clave

Example 4-18B. Bayuba-kanté okónkolo part, still “wrong” by orienting it in a similar way

players orient Aggayú’s rhythm with clave

Example 4-18C. Bayuba-kanté okónkolo part, adequately oriented with clave and the cycle
The second example of a pattern that seems to outline clave, but actually it does not, is the bayuba okónkolo part. In this case, clave appears in full in the part. However, clave occurs here twice as slow as the main subdivision of the beat. In other words, clave exists here at the quarter-note level instead of the eighth-note level. That, by itself, is not that unusual in batá since rhythms can operate at different levels, i.e., 6/8, 12/16, etc. What is truly puzzling is that this pattern matches clave entirely, but it starts on the “wrong beat,” see example 4-19A below.

Example 4-19. Bayuba okónkolo part and correct clave

Example 4-19A. Bayuba “wrong” clave at the quarter-note level revealed once we put “one” on the third main pulse of the cycle, which shifts the entire pattern one full measure to the left

The rhythmic manufacture of batá drumming generates considerable complexity and variety. However, when taking an in-depth look at the many different toques and their several components: polyrhythmic texture, meter, tempo, and timeline correlation; it is possible to come
up with a relatively simple set of generative principles. These principles are, rhythmically speaking, responsible for the remarkable variety and abundance of batá rhythms:

- Polyrhythmic ratios of 2:1, 3:2, 4:3, 3:8, and others, can be potentially distributed across the ensemble at different levels: (1) across individual parts, (2) between hands of individual drum parts, and (3) across different distinguishable and functional timbral zones. The three-chachás, the okónkolo-enú/okónkolo-chachá/ítótele-chachá composite and iyá-enú/ítótele-enú composite are the most contrasting and structurally salient of these zones. The chachás (and sometimes the okónkolo enú) are generally responsible for the rhythmic frame (or what I call the “harmonic” feel, as in more static sonority) of the toque, while the enús tend to act more as melodic expressions, as in “flowing” with melody-like design across the span of the cycle.

- By shuffling which hand, drum part, or sonic group plays a component of a polyrhythmic ratio it is possible to generate many rhythms. Therefore, it is common to observe that many different toques have similar rhythmic make-up, but the drum “voices” have been shuffled (re-assigned).

- Polyrhythmic ratios such as 3:2 and 2:3 can also be manifested linearly in individual drum parts and across parts.

- Toques exist within a continuum of tempo zones. Different toques fall within these zones or ranges. The main tempo zones are: slow 6/8, slow 4/4 (or 2/2), medium 6/8, medium 2/2, fast 6/8, and fast 2/2. Often the rhythmic interpretation of medium 6/8 and medium 2/2 rhythms make them almost indistinguishable, as far as rhythmic feel goes.
• It is possible to move across these tempo zones by simple metric modulations, such as double-time and half-time operations, or by swift accelerando/ritardando. This kind of movement is necessary when creating longer formal structures beyond a single toque.

• Balance and reciprocity, and rhythmic and melodic considerations are to be maintained across the repertoire.

• Timelines (clave) have only “local” influence in toques. This influence starts to diminish across larger formal structures. At that scale timelines are cut short and “turned around.” In slow 6/8 rhythms, it is possible to think of two simultaneous claves because of the two simultaneous background subdivisions.

• Timelines are the most visible in medium and fast tempo toques.

• Timelines also have a strong connection to oricha/egun songs.

In short, batá rhythm is multi-dimensional, and its design impacts not only linear rhythm, but also vertical polyrhythmic structures. The resulting structures are stable and hierarchical interlocking patterns that manifest according to polyrhythmic makeup, melodic and harmonic profile, and alignment with timelines and song accents. Furthermore, the rhythmic organization of batá music, based on artistic principles and esthetic criteria, influences how performers encode language and make use of speech surrogacy. Batá speech encoding, in addition to common functionality (especially in Nigeria) and religious notions, is also affected by musical ideas and choices of how sound is arranged through time.
Conclusion

Batá drums are in many ways similar to other types of Afro-Cuban music (and Sub-Saharan African drum ensemble music in general), for instance: the use of timelines as an organizing principle, polyrhythmic hierarchical interlocking parts, and the use of speech-like rhythmic phrasing. However, in many other ways, batá drumming is unique. The following are some of the most distinct characteristics of Afro-Cuban batá drumming:

- A marked separation of timbral structures
- Elaborate polyrhythmic orchestrations across different sounds and drum parts that yield a variety of repertoire and textures
- How the iyá (the leader of the ensemble) covers multiple different roles
- The way in which large formal structures can be assembled and maintained by the manipulation of meter and tempo

The remarkable and artistically sophisticated composition of batá music justifies the analytical study I have undertaken in this dissertation. The speech encoding aspect of batá was (and remains) of tremendous importance for the conception of this music in Yorubaland. In Cuba, speech surrogacy remains an important component of the tradition despite considerable loss of drum language intelligibility. However, batá music’s logic and compositional intricacy are capable of creating meaningful musical objects, without having to rely exclusively on speech encoding and religious and spiritual ideas. Functionally, batá music is linked to the spiritual, social and communicational realms that it inhabits. But artistically speaking, batá drumming’s meaning goes well beyond the semantic meaning of encoded Yoruba that the enús and chachás “speak.”
The analysis I have carried out in this dissertation can also be applied to the study of other kinds of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Caribbean musics. For example, the differentiation of clear timbral complexes within a rhythmic cycle, as described in batá music, can illuminate the fleeting sonic design that changing parts, such as the quinto (in Cuban rumba) and the maman (in Haitian yanvalou) create when they interact with more static supporting parts.

In addition, the melodic-rhythmic profile of batá conversations, as presented in this study, can serve as a guide for the development of a robust musical theory of other conversational drum interactions in several Afro-Caribbean styles such as Cuban son, palo, arará and abakuá, Haitian vodou drumming, Dominican palo, Guadeloupean gwoka, and others. My work about Afro-Cuban batá is by no means conclusive; more research is needed, particularly in the areas of song-toque relationship, use of dynamics, and batá stylistic development and evolution across different geographic regions in Cuba and secondary diasporas. I hope that this dissertation encourages more exploration of the composition of batá music. Finally, this study should also invite further musical analysis of other African and African diasporas drum-based musical traditions.
Figure A-1. Diagram showing the potential meter/tempo operations connecting batá tempo regions

In the figure above (A-1), the iyá player can direct, at his own will, all of the potential tempo/meter shifts shown above. However, in tratados, these shifts are usually triggered by changes from one type of song to another. Yet, cajeros might choose to delay drumming changes momentarily. Choices as such make the expectation/resolution effect even more significant once the rhythm change finally happens.
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