

Notes on Those Called Arará and Mina in Cuba<sup>1</sup>

When in an ox is sacrificed to the souls of the royal ancestors in Dahomey, a goat is also offered for those sold as slaves. The priests sing:

*"Oh, ancestors, do all that is in your power/ so that the princes and nobles who rule today/ are never sent far from here as slaves./ Punish the people who bought our relatives/ who we shall never see again. Send your ships/ to the port of Whydah... (ahogad a sus tripulaciones)/ and make it so that all the riches of their boats return to Dahomey. "*<sup>2</sup>

The Ewe-Fon Presence in Cuba

One of the great lacuna of Cuban ethnography is the lack of studies on the Ewe-Fon in our country. Revisiting our classic works in this discipline (Ortiz, Cabrera, Lachatañéré), we only find information on the influences of these peoples on the colonial life and their modern survivals. Lost among all the studies where the presence of the Yoruba, Bantú and Carabalí fills page after page, we find the name of one of their gods (vodún) or of some of their musical instruments; at times, with more luck, we discover a summary description of a dance or a ceremony of old Dahomey origin. Here, the reference to a ritual; there, a bit of their language; but no article, and much less a book, dedicated to the Arará and Mina in Cuba.

The publication of *Les Amériques Noires* (Paris, Payot, 1967), by the master Roger Bastide, confirms for us the lack of investigation regarding this aspect of our culture. This work is a magnificent study of synthesis and interpretation of history and the contemporary problem of cultures brought

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<sup>1</sup>Chapter from a book in preparation on the Dahomeyan influences in Cuban culture.

<sup>2</sup>Mellville J. Herskovits. *Dahomey an Ancient West African Kingdom*. New York, J.J. Augustin Publisher, 1938, t. 2, pp. 64-45. (sic)

by the African captives, much of the elements of which, now nationalized, have been preserved and developed by us, their American heirs.

In the chapters dedicated to the study of the influences of the Dahomey on our continent, we follow, with an extraordinary richness of information, their fertile presence from the southern US, to our Antilles (Haiti, Martinique) and on to South America (Brazil and the Guyanas). Undoubtedly, Cuba is a blank slate in this search for the traces of the vodún.

The scarce bibliography of the topic could lead one to the erroneous conclusion of considering an Ewe-Fon *subculture*<sup>3</sup> nonexistent. With the intention of filling, in some way, this gap, I have dedicated the last ten years to collecting the most information possible on the topic, despite the traditional reserve which characterizes the sectors of our society who preserve this national patrimony. The collected material is due to the confidence given by some priests-informants of the cults called *Regla Arará* after they understood the necessity of overcoming their reticence for the benefit of developing Afro-American studies. I hope that these notes place the topic on the agendas of other scholars and will also stimulate them to undertake deeper studies.

The Ewe-Fon came to Cuba under various names: Arará Abopá, Arará Agicón, Arará Cuatro Ojos (four eyes), Arará Cuévano, Arará Magino, Arará Nezeve, Arará Sabalú or Sabaluno, Dahomey, and Mina.<sup>4</sup> While common nomenclature in slave texts, this has caused much confusion and headaches for modern africanists, when they have tried to identify these groups with their modern African counterparts. Many of these

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<sup>3</sup>I use the term *subculture* as defined by Edison Carneiro: "these cults, however (sea cual fuere el modo) they present themselves, are a world, a whole manner of behavior, a subculture..." (*Cnandomblés da Bahia. Rio de Janeiro, Ed. de Ouro, 1969, p. 36*)

<sup>4</sup>Fernando Ortiz. *Los Negros esclavos. La Habana, Revista Bimestre Cubana, 1916, pp. 26-28*; Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux. "Cabildos sólo para esclavos". *Cuba (La Habana), no. 7, January, 1968, p. 51.*

names, particular to the slave trade, fell into disuse upon its suppression; others were applied erroneously to various groups, or were given to captives according to the African port of departure and without taking into account their actual ethnicity. The slave came in with many different designations: sometimes as "general of the tribe", other times as "from the small nation from which they originated" and others as "with the name of the trading post where they were obtained"<sup>5</sup>.

We will try to identify the Ewe-Fon (more properly called Adjá) groups who entered Cuba, find the region of their origin in Africa and summarize the existing information about them, as a preliminary step to a more detailed study of their influences on our culture.

The establishment of diplomatic relations between our Revolutionary Government and the republic of Dahomey (now The Republic of Benin) is a stimulus for continuing this investigation, which I hope will contribute to strengthening our fraternal ties and to deepen the studies of historical and ethnic heritage common to our countries, each struggling today for a more just world which will definitively eradicate the exploitation of man by man.

## I

### On the name Arará

The first topic we should address relates to the Arará name, applied in Cuba, Santo Domingo, Colombia, Venezuela and Mexico to certain people arrived from Dahomey.

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<sup>5</sup>Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. *La población negra de México, 1519-1810. Estudio etnohistórico. México, D.F., Eds. Fuente Cultural, 1946, p.125.*

FROM "DIALOGOS IMAGINARIOS" c. 1979 by Rogélio Martinez Furé

Arará and Arara are common surnames in the Cauca Valley<sup>6</sup> (Colombia) and in Cuba.<sup>7</sup> Species of our flora and fauna<sup>8</sup> which are also popularly called by this name. And there is even a type of torture applied by the fascist dictatorship in Brazil which is called *pau de arara* (Arará stick)!

By 1924 Mr. Fernando Ortiz had definitely located the region of origin of these peoples: "The geographic location of the Ararás or Aradás is clearly Dahomey."<sup>9</sup> years later Aguirre Beltrán would agree: "The rivers of the Arará begin in the lagoon of Keta and end at Lagos."<sup>10</sup>

But although it is certain, as Alfred Metraux maintains, that "the word *radá* or *aradá* comes from the name of a kingdom or a village in Dahomey, Aradá,<sup>11</sup> authors such as Rómulo Lachatañeré and overall, Aguirre Beltrán, have shown that not all the captives called Arará came from the city of Ardrá (Ardá, Aladá).

For Lachatañeré, "According to Father Labat, the blacks who were brought under the name *arará* or *Aradá* were taken to markets of Widá and Ardrá, came from an area whose limits illustrate the possibilities of the extent of the Oyó kingdom [...]."<sup>12</sup>

But Aguirre Beltrán is even more categorical:

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<sup>6</sup>Rogério Velásquez. "Gentilicios africanos del occidente de Colombia." *Revista Colombiana del Folclore (Bogotá)*, vol. 3, no. 7, 1962, p. 120.

<sup>7</sup>One of the heroes of the assault on the Moncada Barracks, where the revolution against the Batista government began, was called Mario Martínez Arará.

<sup>8</sup> Fernando Ortiz.

<sup>9</sup>Fernando Ortiz. *Op. cit.*, 1924, p. 31.

<sup>10</sup>Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>11</sup>Alfred Metraux.

<sup>12</sup>Rómulo Lachatañeré.

The blacks of Ardá and the Arará are not one and the same. In colonial documents they appear clearly separated and as coming from different regions. Both words come from the same voice, Aladá; in spite of this the connotation of each one is distinct. Labat has informed us that the Arará were not native to the kingdom of Ardá. but rather brought to Ahydá from northeastern countries, between fifty and a hundred leagues inland [...].<sup>13</sup>

And to be still more precise, he adds: "[...] under the name Arará came non-Fon Dahomeyans, that is, tribes conquered and absorbed by Abomey, such as the Adjá, Ketú, Savé, Ewé, Savalú, and Mahí [...]".

However, he over-generalizes when he states:

The Arará, then, were individuals from the tribes of the inland Ewé-Fon families; those who inhabited the coast, by being more familiar, were given their individual names,

yet in the list of peoples he cited previously were the Ketú and Savé, who are part of the Yorubá group.<sup>14</sup>

I feel that under the generic name of Arará came peoples from the Adjá (Ewé-Fon) group, and also some western Yorubá groups from what is now Benin (ex-Dahomey). This occurred because in the territories that now form this West African republic, both groups were in contact for centuries, conquering each other, influencing one another, absorbing and being absorbed.

"In southern Dahomey are found the Fon, the Mahí and the Mina, commonly called Eastern Ewé, but who were already under the Yorubá influence."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. *Op.cit.*, p. 131-132.

<sup>14</sup> C.W. Newbury.

Except that, as Newbury states, "It well could be as has been suggested,<sup>16</sup> that a close ethnic relationship exists between the Yorubá and their neighbors the Adjá."<sup>17</sup> Although he believes "more evidence – particularly archaeological – is necessary to determine to what degree and in what period the Adjá and the Yorubá were culturally homogenous enough to be called the "civilization of Benin" [...].<sup>18</sup>

But is important to add, as proof of the ethnic affinities which existed between the two groups, the fact that those of the Adjá language as well as the Yorubá language have been included in the same linguistic group by knowledgeable specialists and that the men and women of these groups are typical representatives of the so called Guinean sub-group of the black race.

As in Cuba, in Mexico these peoples also came in "with a double name, that is, the general name of Arará and the name of their particular tribe<sup>19</sup> (for example, "Arará Magino"). This is also true in Brazil, where the name djedjé or gegé corresponds to our Arará. According to Verger:<sup>20</sup>

Djedjé is the name given in Brazil to the descendants of the Adjás (Fons, Ayizos, Guens, Mahís, Huedas, etc.) and which was given to certain inhabitants of Dahomey by an

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<sup>15</sup>Razas y pueblos del mundo. barcelons, Ed. Ave. [ca. 1957-1958], t. 1, p. 306.

<sup>16</sup>The (unánimes) traditions of the principal groups who today populate the lower Dahomey and the lower Togo; Adjá, Aladá-nu, Uatachi, Ewé, etc., clearly indicate that their ancestors came from the East." (Jacques Bertho. "La Parenté des Yoruba aux peuplades de Dahomey et Togo". Africa (London), Oxford University Press, vol. XIX, 2, April, 1939, p. 131.

<sup>17</sup>C.W. Newbury. Op. cit., p.6.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>19</sup>Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. OP. cit., p. 131.

<sup>20</sup>Pierre Verger. Dieux d' Afrique. Paris, Paul Hartmann, 1954, p. 12.

administrative error, assisted by the words used by the Brazilian interpreters.

And to be more explicit he adds: "Djedjé is the corruption of the word Adjá. They are known in Brazil under the name of "nations" Djedjé Mahí, Djedjé Mundubí y Djedjé Dagomé (Dahomey)." <sup>21</sup>

In Haiti, Dorsainvil <sup>22</sup> also distinguishes between the Aradá, the Fon, the Mina and the Mahy, and definitely includes all of them within the Dahomeyan group. In conclusion, like Liscano, <sup>23</sup> the notable investigator of Venezuelan culture, I feel that "the Ewé-Fon, also called Dahomeyan, Ararás, Gegés (in America) were those who made up the first contingent to the French (and, I would add, Luisian) Antilles although without being insignificant their presence in other regions of the hemisphere, such as Cuba, Santo Domingo, Mexico, Uruguay, the Northeast of Brazil, Colombia <sup>24</sup> y Venezuela. <sup>25</sup>

## II

### Ewé Language or Adjá Language?

One of the topics of discussion among specialists is about the name that should be applied to the languages spoken by these peoples, Ewé or Adjá?

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<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>22</sup> Lorimer Denis et François Duvalier. "L'Évolution stadiale du Voudu". *Bulletin du Bureau d'Ethnologie (Port-au-Prince) no. 3, février, 1944, p. 18.*

<sup>23</sup> Juan Liscano. *Folklore y culture. Caracas, 1950.*

<sup>24</sup> Rogério Velásquez. *Op. cit.*, pp. 119-121, 125-133, 136; Nicole Pujol. "La Raza negra en el Chocó, antropología física". *Revista Colombiana de Antropología (Bogotá), vol. 15, 1970-71, p. 262.*

<sup>25</sup> Juan Pablo Sojo. "Algunas supervivencias negro-culturales en Venezuela". *Archivos Venezolanos del Folklore (Caracas), Universidad Central de Venezuela, no. 8, 1967, pp. 314-315.*

According to Pierre Alexandre<sup>26</sup> the Ewé (*Ehué*) or *Evegbé*, also called *Adjá*, is spoken in Dahomey, Togo, and Ghana by approximately 1.5 million people. Delafosse includes this language in the *Ebúrneo-Dahomeyan* linguistic group, but for Westermann and Greenberg it belongs with the Kwá group. The Anlo and Gen dialects are used in Ghana and Togo, and the Fon dialect is used in Dahomey. Theoretically it is official in the second country cited [Togo?].

In Ghana the Kwa group predominates, with other well documented languages such as Ewé, Twí and Fante.

In southern Togo, Ewé is dominant, but its teaching dialect, Gen or Mina, differs from current Ewé.

And in the southern portion of Dahomey, the Yoruba and Fon are dominant.<sup>27</sup>

Without doubt, other authors resist using the name Ewé for this language as well as including Fon as one of its dialects. They feel that the most correct is to use the term *Adjá*, "adopted with preference to the Ewé to understand the dialect group existing between speakers of Akán and Yorubá."<sup>28</sup>

Berto affirms that

Regarding the denomination of Ewé given arbitrarily to the group of people established between the Volta and the Uemé, an explanation for this pure accident is found in the fact that the Ewé dialect of the Ho region was the first and best studied by Schlegel, since 1857, by Ellis, in 1890, and mostly by Westermann in 1906, in a work of 638

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<sup>26</sup> Pierre Alexandre. *Langues et langage en Afrique Noire*. Paris, Payot, 1967, p. 16.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p.126

<sup>28</sup> C.W. Newbury. *Op. cit.*, pp.3-5



pages, *Ewe-Deutsches Wörterbuch*. This resulted in the anomaly of the dialect of the group most advanced to the west of all the Adjá migration acquiring an artificial primacy; and in the classification of African languages, the Ewé dialect gave its name to a subgroup of Ewé into which was gathered, as into a sack, Mahí, Fon, Mina or Ghen, Krépé or Kpando, and Ewé proper, while no mention whatsoever is made of the old dialect of Adjá from the region of Tadó, and which undoubtedly is in the origin of all the dialects spoken by the diverse groups who left the metropolis of Tadó.<sup>29</sup>

Herskovits says that

Fon, the language of Dahomey, is of the highest order of difficulty, as much in its phonetic structure as in its grammatical form, and, like other languages of the region, its complexities are compounded by its tonal values.<sup>30</sup>

And this tonal language

...is linked to Ewé, which has been studied thoroughly by professor D. Westermann. It is definitely not Ewé; and the affirmations to that effect that one encounters, or affirmations that Dahomeyans speak a dialect of Ewé, are the result of a curious historical accident. The tribes that speak Ewé are found in eastern Togo, and old German colony, and since German scholars were the most active in the investigation of West African linguistics, they gave all related languages the name of the predominant language of the colony in

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<sup>29</sup> *Jaques Bertho. Op. cit., p.131*

<sup>30</sup> *M. J. Herskovits. Op. cit., t. 1, p. VII*

which they worked. Undoubtedly, since these Togo tribes represented the advance guard of the Dahomeyan civilization, we have here the practice of calling the language of the largest group with the name of the smallest, as if, for example, it was said that French is a dialect of Normandy, or German is a dialect of Flemish.<sup>31</sup>

The Adjá languages were brought to the Americas by the captives of this ethnic origin, and exercised distinct influences on the European languages imposed by the enslavers. They were spoken in Bahía, Brazil, but were absorbed by the Nagó and the Yorubá.<sup>32</sup>

In Haiti, the "Fon predominate culturally" and their language "is the African language which has most influenced the French" of that country, but "not only lexicographically but also in phonetics and syntax."<sup>33</sup>

With respect to Cuba, elements of Fon (Fongbé), Magino (Mahy) and Mina (Gen), still remain, and await further study. In the province of Matanzas, principally, there are men and women who pride themselves on being able to speak these "languages", but their reticence is extreme, which

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. VII-VIII. Henceforth I will use only the term Adjá to designate the group of people and languages that exist among the Akán and the Yorubá, although this does not mean that problems of their designation have been resolved. Recently the Benin linguist J. Olabiyi Yai proposed "to call Fon that subgroup, reuniting previous improper previous denominations such as "Ewé" or "Adjá-Aïzo", because the Fon constitute the most important element numerically, without considering that the language already serves as a 'lingua franca'" among the elements of this subgroup, which includes the languages Fonaïzo, Adjá, Gen (Mina), Hwedá, Plá, Gun and Mahí. (J. Olabiyi Yai. "Remarques sur l'état actuel des recherches linguistiques au Dahomey". *Présence Africaine* (Paris), no. 68, 4<sup>e</sup> trimestre, 1968, p. 155).

<sup>32</sup> Arthur Ramos. *Las culturas negras en el Nuevo Mundo*. México, D. F., Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1943, p. 371.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 370.

makes investigation difficult. Some members of the well-known Zulueta family—in Perico and Jovellanos—are known to have great knowledge of songs, proverbs, oral literature, greetings and ritual invocations, sacred formulas and numerous words of Arará and Mina, as well as to have preserved with great purity their peculiar nasal "accent".

The collection and study of these linguistic survivals, conducted by specialists in the Adjá languages, is needed as soon as possible, to determine definitively the extent of these africanisms in contemporary Cuba and the degree of their purity.

### III

#### The Arará Abopá, Agicón, Cuatro Ojos and Cuévano

Little data is available about these groups. Deschamps Chapeaux<sup>34</sup>, who mentions the Arará Abopá and the Arará Cuatro Ojos, doesn't provide any additional information on them. Might the name Abopá have some relation with Abogá, which according to Verger<sup>35</sup> is one of the names given to the Yovogan? Regarding the Arará Cuatro Ojos, their name, evidently colonial, provides no clue as to their original African name.

The Arará Agicón were cited by Ortiz, and according to the eminent master "there existed in Havana a cabildo or society of blacks who were called thus, but their "precise origins" were unknown<sup>36</sup>. Lachatañeré also cannot place their origin, although he does include them in what he calls the Arará subgroup of Lucumí.<sup>37</sup> I believe I have found their probable

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<sup>34</sup> Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux. *Op. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>35</sup> Pierre Verger. *Op. cit.*, p. 10.

<sup>36</sup> Fernando Ortiz. *Op. cit.*, 1916, p. 27; *Op. cit.*, 1924, p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> Rómulo Lachatañeré. *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

place of origin: in a map from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (1789), published in the work of Newbury<sup>38</sup> there appears the town Bogadó, and written between question marks under the name, "Bohicón?". Taking into account the frequent pronunciation of *h* as a [Spanish] *j* in many Dahomeyan names, this name would be spoken as "Bojicón", just as Dahomey is pronounced "Dajomey" and Mahí, "Mají". The difference is slight, then, between Agicón and Bojicón. On this map, Bogadó (Bohicón?) is situated North-Northwest of Abomey, in the country of Mahí. However, on another map of 1865<sup>39</sup>, it is situated closer to this capital, although in the same direction, under the name Becon. Finally, on a modern map (1960), we find this village to the east and still closer to the famous city.<sup>40</sup>

About the Cuévanos, we know even less. Lachatañeré<sup>41</sup> includes them also in the "Arará subgroup of the Lucumí", but does not place them geographically; Ortiz only tells us:

They seem to be a type of Arará. Their name appears in the provincial Registry of societies of Havana with the title of the benevolent

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<sup>38</sup> C.W. Newbury. *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, fig. 4.

<sup>40</sup> *French Embassy. La República de Dahomey. New York, Ardlee Service, Inc., 1960, p. 31. It is interesting to note that in Cuba there is a group of houses called Ajicón, next to Guanamón de Herrera, a few kilometers from Nueva Paz, a town southwest of the province of La Habana. (Personal communication from the investigator Dennys Moreno, 1974.) It is also the name of a plant. According to Dr. Juan Tomás Roig: "Ajicón: The name given in Pinar del Rio and in the Isle of Pines to Solanum jamaicense, Mills, wild solanaceous plant found in sandy low-lying areas and near ponds. A creeping, thorny plant, it has rhomboid leaves and numerous round, orange-colored fruits." (Juan Tomás Roig. *Diccionario botánico de nombres vulgares cubanos. Havana, Ed. Del Consejo Nacional de Universidades, 1965, tomo I, p. 71*). Ajiconal is also the name of a river near the southern coast of Pinar del rio, Cuba.*

<sup>41</sup> Rómulo Lacatañeré. *Op. Cit.*, p. 46.

association "Union of children of the Arará  
Cuévano Nation".<sup>42</sup>

#### IV

##### The Arará Magino, Nezeve y Sabalú

Lachatañeré vacillates between considering the Magino as Lucumí coming from "the Mahín village in Yorubá territory" or originating "in the old kingdom of Mahet, north of Dahomey", but he is more inclined to "situate them as Yorubás, from the previously mentioned kingdom".<sup>43</sup>

The same occurs with Ortiz<sup>44</sup>, who writes of the Arará Magino:

A type of Arará, from which arose in Havana the mutual aid society of that name, with the celestial patronage of the Holy Spirit, according to the official registry. Among the people of the Aradá kingdom, classified by Peytraud, we find the Mahy. Could they be these? Perhaps, since the Mahí village is to the north of Dahomey. Pichardo places the Majís to the north of the Arará. On the other hand, Mahín is a village on the coast of Benin, near this village and it also agrees with Aradá.

Nevertheless, by 1924 Mr. Ortiz<sup>45</sup> is more precise, and adds to the previous that

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<sup>42</sup> Fernando Ortiz. *Op. Cit.*, 1916, p. 27; *Op. Cit.*, 1924, p. 33.

<sup>43</sup> Rómulo Lachatañeré. *Op. Cit.*, p. 45

<sup>44</sup> Fernando Ortiz. *Op. Cit.*, 1916, pp. 27-28; *Op. Cit.*, 1924, pp. 33-34.

<sup>45</sup> Fernando Ortiz. *Op. Cit.*, 1924, p. 34.

Although some call this people Magino, others call them Mají and use Majís as the plural. E. Redus says that Savalú is the old capital of the Mahí country.

The duality of forms Mají and Magino arises from Mají being the root, and "nu" a suffix of family character common to the region, according to A. La Herisse.

Today there is no doubt about the exact origin of those called Arará Magino. They correspond to the Mahí or Mahy, a small village of northern Dahomey conquered by the Fon in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and whose language belongs, as we have already said, to the Adjá group.. According to Herskovits, "Maxí, the northern region of Abomey" was "in old times an independent kingdom where many of the aboriginal inhabitants of the plateau sought refuge from the Aladaxonu conquerors".<sup>46</sup>

In Haiti they are also known as Mahí, and J. C. Dorsainvil<sup>47</sup> classifies them with the Dahomeyan group, together with the Aradá, Fon and Mina. In Brazil they are called Djedjé Mahí<sup>48</sup> and are also placed among the Adjá peoples.

The analysis of the songs, dances, instruments and religious beliefs of the Magino in Cuba confirms this ethnic affiliation.

The vodún Shakpata (Babalú Ayé) and Naná Burukú are gods of Magino origin and two of the most characteristic of the Regla Arará. Some of their most important cult centers are found in the province of Matanzas, Cuba. There, the Magino

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<sup>46</sup> M. J. Herskovits (and Frances). "An outline of Dahomean religious beliefs". In: *Memoirs of the American Anthropological Association*. Menasha, Wis., U.S.A., no. 41, 1933, p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> Lorimer Denis. *Op. Cit.*, p. 15.

<sup>48</sup> Pierre Verger. *Op. Cit.*, p. 16.

tradition is maintained with great purity in the cabildo San Manuel de Jovellanos.

In Brazil<sup>49</sup> as well, Obalú-Ayé and Omolú (Yoruba names of the vodún Shakpata) and Nanán Burukú are considered to be gods of Magino origin (Gegé Mahí, Djedjé Mahí).

And since 1691 there has existed a cabildo of this "nation" in Cuba.<sup>50</sup>

About the Arará Nezeve, Ortiz says<sup>51</sup>: "These people formed a cabildo in Havana. Its exact location is unknown. It has only been seen cited in an old manuscript".

Lachatañeré<sup>52</sup> thought that they were possibly the Nsella, a clan of the tribe semi-Bantu Ekoy, and did not consider them Dahomeyan; however, for Aguirre Beltran<sup>53</sup> they came from Save, a northern Dahomeyan village, between the Uemee and Okpara rivers. If that is the case, they would belong with the western Yorubá peoples, since Save or Shavi was one of its kingdoms.<sup>54</sup> But if the Nezeves are from Savi-Xavier, kingdom of the Hueda, in meridional Dahomey, conquered in 1727 by the Fon, then they would belong to the Adjá group.<sup>55</sup>

The Arará Sabalú or Sabaluno come from Savalú, a small northern Dahomeyan village, in the Mahí country. Curiously,

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15

<sup>50</sup> Fernando Ortiz. *Los caildo afrocubanos*. Havana, Impr. Y Papelería La Universal, 1921, p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> Fernando Ortiz. *Op. Cit.*, 1916, p. 28; *Op. Cit.*, 1924, p. 34.

<sup>52</sup> Rómulo Lachatañeré. *Op. Cit.*, p. 45.

<sup>53</sup> Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. *Op. Cit.*, p. 132. See the map in P. Verger. *Op. Cit.*, p. 4 and in the pamphlet *Dahomey...*, pp. 22, 31.

<sup>54</sup> C. W. Newbury. *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>55</sup> M. J. Herskovits. *Op. cit.*, vol. I, p. 7. "In 1727 Agadjá captured Saví, the capital of the kingdom of Whydah." (*Ibid.*, p. 17.)

Lachatañeré<sup>56</sup> does not place them, and includes them also in the Arará subgroup of the Lucumí. Nor, at first, did Ortiz,<sup>57</sup> who says:

I don't know where these children of Africa came from. In the offices of the Provincial Government is found the inscription "The Evolution, Mutual Aid Society of the African Nation Arará Savalú", under the advocacy of the Holy Spirit.

But by 1924, Ortiz adds to the previous: "According to what we have read in Eliseo Reclus, *Savalú* was the name of the old capital of the Mahí or Magí, Arará Maginos people."<sup>58</sup>

Today, it is easy to find this group on any modern ethnographic map of Africa.<sup>59</sup>

According to Mercier,<sup>60</sup> *Sakpata* comes from Savalú, north of Dahomey.

## V

### The Dahomé, Dajome or Arará Dajome

There is no doubt whatsoever regarding the origin of these captives, brought to Cuba under the names: Dahomé, Dajome, Dajomé, Dahomey, all different ways of pronouncing the name of the powerful kingdom established at the beginning of the

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<sup>56</sup> Rómulo Lachatañeré. *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

<sup>57</sup> Fernando Ortiz. *Op. cit.*, 1916, p. 28.

<sup>58</sup> Fernando Ortiz. *Op. cit.*, 1924, p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> See note 40, and P. Verger. *Op. cit.*, p. 4, s.n.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Mercier. "Los Fon del Dahomey". Introduction by D. Forde. In: *Mundos Africanos*. Mexico, D.F., Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959, p. 316.



18<sup>th</sup> century, the capital of which was Abomey.<sup>61</sup> They are also known in Africa as Foy, Fo, Efón and Efán.<sup>62</sup>

About the origin of the name Dahomey, Raymond Mauny maintains that "the coast [of Dahomey] was discovered around 1471 by the Portuguese", and that the origin of the name is obscure, "or could it be as legend has it, that is comes from "Dan-Homé" (built on the stomach of Dan; Dan was an old king of the country)?..."; but he adds that "as *Home* means palace in the Fon language (Fongbé), one would be tempted to say the name comes from *Danhomé*, "Dan's Palace".<sup>63</sup>

The founders of the kingdom of Dahomey<sup>64</sup> descended from the Ewé or Adjá Tadó, and ethnic group established since the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in the region of the Mono River, between Tadó and Athiémé., in what is today Togo–West Africa—and according to authors such as Betho, had emigrated from the East (Ifé) in earlier times, as we have said.

Groups in opposition to the reigning dynasty, through succession rivalries on the stepping stones of power, emigrated to the East and founded Aladá (Alladá), in the territory near the Dahomey, which would later be the capital of the kingdom of Ardrá, after dominating their neighbors. Later, and for equal motives, new emigrations occurred: one to the north, in the direction of the central regions of the country, which founded in 1625 the kingdom of Dahomey, whose capital received the name Abomey, after subjugating the Fon peoples already established there; and another towards the southeast, which founded the kingdom of Jakin (later known

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<sup>61</sup> Rómulo Lachatañeré. *Op. cit.*, p. 53.

<sup>62</sup> Arthur Ramos. *Op. cit.*, p. 368; Amaury Talbot. *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*. London, Oxford University Press, 1926, vol. I, p. 37; M.J. Herskovits. *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. VII.

<sup>63</sup> Raymond Mauny. "Noms de pays d'Afrique Occidentale". *Présence Africaine* (Paris), no. 34-35, octobre-janvier, 1960-1961, p. 64.

<sup>64</sup> Henri Labouret. *L'Afrique precoloniale*. Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1959, pp. 110-113.

by the Portuguese with the kingdom's name of Porto Novo). Both dynasties were designated with the name *Alladaxonu* or *Aladahonu*.

The culture of the Dahomey Fon is, for these reasons, a tributary in many ways of the Ewé or Adjá from the west (for example their political institutions, the ruling dynasty and the cult of its dead members, the patrilineal relationship system), as well as the Yorubá of the East (many gods from their pantheon, the divinitory system of Fa-Ifá-, diverse techniques, etc.).<sup>65</sup> "The same Fon of Abomey, who are said to be descendants from the Adjá from the west, have the tendency to derive from Ifé the majority of their institutions, arts, and cults."<sup>66</sup>

The presence of merchants in the Coast of the Gulf of Guinea from the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Portuguese, and later, Dutch, Danish, French, English and Swiss) was a fundamental stimulus for the imperialist expansion of the kingdom of Dahomey, which wanted to have an outlet to the sea and to establish direct commercial relations with the Europeans, and later (in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries) with the Creole Brazilians and Cubans trafficking in slaves. And this small, principally agricultural kingdom, driven by the economic interests in play in this region of Africa, plus the warlike character of the Fon, undertook the conquest of the Mahí, the Nagó, and the Aradá, and became more powerful.

Like the Mandinga and the Tuculers of Sudanese Africa, fearsome warriors are found among the Guineans. It is a testimony to the Fon of Dahomey, that under their dynamic impulse, conquered the Nagó and the Mina, and subjugated to their

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<sup>65</sup> C.W. Newbury. *Op.cit.*, pp.5-16; Paul Mercier. *Op. cit.*, pp. 315-318; Pierre Verger. *Op. cit.*, pp.17,175; Bernard Maupoil. *La Géomancie à l'ancienne Côte des Esclaves*. Paris, Institut d'Ethnologie, 1961, p. 32.

<sup>66</sup> Bernard maupoil. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

authority the kingdom of Judá, as well as that of the Aradá,<sup>67</sup>

or Aladá (1727), and who sustained long battles to also conquer the kingdom of Jakin.

In spite of the historic reversal that they suffered in their eastward expansion at the hands of the Yorubá subjects of the Oyo empire (they were obliged to pay an annual tribute to Alaafin, supreme monarch of the Oyó, since the reign of Tegbesú [1731-1781] until the beginning of the 19th century [1818]; a tribute that was charged by the Yoruban army formed by several thousand cavalry soldiers), after the decadence and collapse of the Oyó empire, from the economic crisis provoked by the internecine wars and by the surprise attack by the Fulani of Sokotó-Northern Nigeria-, in 1835 the Fon liberated themselves from the exploitation of the Oyó and restarted the fortification of Dahomey, enriched by the slave traffic, the infamous trade which they controlled in this region under the government of the king Gezó (1818-1858).

The king monopolized the trade with the Europeans. The cult of the sovereign dead of the reigning dynasty was converted, according to some authors, into a type of State religion. The militarization imposed on all the subjects became so strict that Burton characterized Dahomey as a type of "little black Spartacus".<sup>68</sup>

It was under the reign of Gezó, the great monarch who reestablished order in the interior of the kingdom and rebuilt the army, that the famous batallions of amazons (akhosusi), formed by hundreds of wives of the king, who vied for the most dangerous combat places and carried out the most marvelous feats of warlike prowess. For other

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<sup>67</sup> Lorimer Denis. *OP. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>68</sup> C.W. Newbury. *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

authors, such as Talbot,<sup>69</sup> these battalions were formed under the reign of Agajá (1708-1732) and restructured by Gezó after liberating his people from the vassalage imposed by the Yorubá.

Towards the end of the 19th century, with the slave trade over, the penetration of the country by French colonialists began. The battalions of amazons, together with other sections of the Fon army, resisted heroically, in spite of the arms superiority of the Europeans. The famous monarch Glelé (1858-1889), and even more so, his son and successor Behanzín (1889-1894), tried to salvage the integrity of the kingdom by adapting to the new economic and political realities of the time, introducing fundamental changes in the state mechanism and promoting the so-called "licit" trade in place of slave traffic, which had constituted the principal source of Dahomeyan power.

Behanzín, an "exceptionally intelligent and gifted man, a popular chief, valiant and magnanimous,"<sup>70</sup> was able to keep the French troops in check "in the two wars that lasted a year and a half (May 1892-January 1894), but finally was toppled and exiled, first to Martinique and then to Algeria, where he died in 1906. Today he is considered one of the heroes who symbolizes African resistance to colonization.

By 1882 a French "protectorate" already existed on the coast of Dahomey. In 1894 the French turned this country into a colony and extended its name to all the territory bordering on the north to Niger and the Upper Volta, south to the Gulf of Guinea, east to Nigeria and west to Togo.

Dahomey formed part of French West Africa from 1895 to 1958, when it became a Republic within the French Community, and on August 1, 1960, it was declared "independent".

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<sup>69</sup> Amaury Talbot. *Op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 39.

<sup>70</sup> Endre Sik. *Histoire de l'Afrique Noire*. Budapest, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1965, vol. 1, p. 323.

As Mauny has said:

The immense group of palaces of Abomey—the town wall measures 4 km in diameter—is a precious source of information for whoever wishes to evoke the past of the kingdom of Dahomey. These palaces, raised during the 18th and 19th centuries, are in ruins for the most part, but those of Ghezó (1818–1858) and Glelé (1858–1889), sites of the IRAD museum, are almost completely preserved. Important restoration, conservation, and investigations by specialists have permitted the return of the former aspect of some of these buildings; their exterior decorations (bas-reliefs in colored clay) at the same time that the furnishings (thrones, tapestries, *assens* (?), etc.) were revalued and exposed to the public.<sup>71</sup>

The Dahomey entered Haiti<sup>72</sup> as Fon and Brazil as *Djedjé Dagomé*.<sup>73</sup>

In Cuba we can cite the house of *Mayito*, in Matanzas province, and the three *dahmoeñó* societies, in Perico, of the same province, as example of the temple-house where the Dahomeyan inheritance (drums, dances, ceremonies, songs, foods, etc.) is purely conserved, and called by them *dajomeñó*, thus using a classic Fon expression, since in Dahomey the word *dahomenu* means "the people and the things of Dahomey".<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Raymond Mauny. "Notes Bibliographiques". *Bull. de l'I.F.A.N. (Dakar, Senegal)*, t. XXXI, no. 4, oct. 1969, p. 1217

<sup>72</sup>Lorimer Denis. *Op. cit.*, p. 18; J.C. Dorsainvil, *cit. in Arthur Ramos. Op. cit.*, p. 142.

<sup>73</sup>Pierre Verger. *Op. cit.*, p. 16.

<sup>74</sup>C.W. Newbury. *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

## VI

### The Mina

There has been extensive discussion of the origin of the people called Mina. Virtually all studies agree that this designation arises from the name of the fort San Jorge da Mina built by the Portuguese in the 15th century, on the coast of what is today Ghana. "*El mina* was the oldest (1470) slave trading post, visited by Christopher Columbus before his trip to America."<sup>75</sup> "The black name of Mina seems to come from *Fuerte de El Mina* or *de Mina*, the great Portuguese emporium of the slave market on the West African coast".<sup>76</sup>

But when an attempt is made to identify the diverse human groups who entered distinct regions of America under this name, the imprecisions and contradictory dates begin.

According to Patterson,<sup>77</sup> an

...important region for later microstudies is the Slave Coast, the coast of the Popós to Lagos, which was known to the Luso-Brazilian world of the 18th century as the Costa de Mina. The ports of this coast manipulated the trade of the Dahomeyan states and Oyó, and were important suppliers of slaves for the Americas. English, French, and Portuguese forts were maintained in Whydah, and the trade was active there as in numerous other villages.

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<sup>75</sup>Fernando Ortiz. *Op. cit.*, 1916, p. 43.

<sup>76</sup>Arthur Ramos. *Op. cit.*, p. 270.

<sup>77</sup>K. David Patterson. "A note on slave exports from the Costa da Mina, 1760-1770." *Bull. de l'I.F.A.N. (Dakar, Senegal)*, t. XXXIII, sér. B, no. 1971, p. 249.

However, Montiel<sup>78</sup> writes that "in the 15th century the Portuguese nicknamed the Gold Coast (today Ghana) a *Mina* (the mine)", and adds: "the *Mina* called themselves *Gen* and spoke an Ewé dialect".

Cornevin<sup>79</sup> affirms that

...Regarding the opinion of Moreau de Saint-Mery on the *Minas* [...] it seems in the first place that *Mina* has meant trading post since *the Minas came from El Mina* (today Ghana) in the 17th century, in the Anécho region, where there was a large active and intelligent population on horseback (?) between Togo and Dahomey. They insured a not insignificant portion of the black assistants of the slavers. [Italics by R.M.F.]

The *Mina* entered Brazil, Colombia, Venezuela, Mexico, Uruguay, Cuba, Haiti, and Santo Domingo.<sup>80</sup> En Colombia and Venezuela the name can still be found as a surname.

Even today, in some isolated rivers, between Buenaventura and Guapi, many families have names like *Mina*—and in Yurumangui—, Congo, Mandinga or Canga; in the Guapi River, names like Biáfara, Cambindo, *Mina* and Cuemí; and finally, in the Iscuandé River, names such as Carabalí and Congolino.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup>Voncent Montiel. *L'Islam Noir. Paris Du Seuil. 1971, p. 292.*

<sup>79</sup>Robert Cornevin. "Note au sujet des origines des esclaves aux Antilles". *Bull. de l'I.F.A.N. (Dakar, Senegal), t. XXVii, no. 1-2, janvier-avril, 1965, p. 370.*

<sup>80</sup>Richard Konetzke. *Colección de documentos para la historia de la formación social de Hispanoamérica. 1493-1810. Madrid, 1962.*

<sup>81</sup>Nicole Pujol. *Op. cit., p. 262.*

—R. Velazquez. *Op. cit., p. 133-134.* "*Mina: apellido del Cauca, Valle, Nariño...*" *It is the last name of the famous black Colombian singer*

However, American investigators have not had better luck with their identification. Nina Rodrigues<sup>82</sup> affirms that

In Bahía, the tradition of the Minas has been preserved. The Africans perfectly distinguish the different types of Minas: *Minas-Ashanti*, who are generally called *Minas-Santés*, and *Minas-Popos*. The latter are people of the Tshi language, who crossed the Volta and occupied a small area in the territory of the *Gegés*...

According to Ramos,<sup>83</sup>

It seems that the name of *Minas* for the slaves of Rio de Janeiro included all blacks who were not of the Bantú group, including those slaves from the Ivory Coast, the Gold coast, and the Slave Coast. The confusion among our scholars remains today.

Nevertheless, for him they were Dahomeyans.

In Venezuela there have even arose truly ridiculous statements, as sharply pointed out by the investigator Ramón y Rivera:<sup>84</sup>

Mina is the name given to a tribe which inhabits the district of Popós, in Dahomey. And having made

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Leonor Gonzáles Mina, "La Negra Grande de Colombia".

<sup>82</sup>Nina Rodrigues, in Arthur Ramos. *Op. cit.*, p. 270.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup>Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera. "La música afrovenezolana". In: 25 *estudios del folklore. Mexico, D.F., Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1971, p. 227.*



this investigation and many others among different authors, it is difficult to confirm the statements of some of our historians such as Dr. Pedro M. Arcaya - of such proven seriousness and merit- when he states the Mina and the Loango are the same, and even goes so far as to claim the word *Mina* "is a patois word from Curaçao".

For Aguirre Beltrán<sup>85</sup> of Mexico:

The most important center on the coast, as we have said, was the castle-trading post of San Jorge de Mina; it was natural that the blacks taken from there and shipped to America would be known as "Minas Blacks", the name which they also had among us. The fortress being situated in Fantí territory, it was thought that the Mina came from that tribe; Claridge, however, believes that the *Minas* arrived on the coast at a later date than the immigration of the Fantí groups, and in reality are but a branch of Ashanti.

These blacks, who properly should be called *Minas*, were without doubt rare in the slave markets, given the smallness of their tribe; on the other hand, other blacks, also called *Minas*, were better known: they were those acquired at the fort, where slaves of different origins were concentrated. In such cases the slaves generally had a double-name, that is, the name of the fort and the name of the tribe. With this double name came to Cuba, for example, the *Mina-Popós* and to Brazil the *Mina-Nagós*, the *Mina-Kru* and the *Mina-Santé*.

San Jorge de Mina had since its beginning maintained commercial relations with its nearby regions. Pereyra tells us that nearby peoples such as the *Atis*, *Akans*, *Brongs* and *Gas*, simultaneously with interior peoples such as the *Mandingas* and

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<sup>85</sup>Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. *Op. cit.*, pp. 125-126.

the Sosos, began to trade Gold for European products. The same author tells us that the slaves obtained in Benin, in the early period of the slave trade were taken to San Jorge de Mina to be sold. When trading post fell to the Dutch they continued the practice; from which arose the necessity of giving slaves from Minas a double-name.

The same confusion exists in Uruguay. according to Carvalho Neto,<sup>86</sup>

It was Marcelino Bottaro who, for the first time, formally pointed out the existence of Minas people in Montevideo [...].

The Minas are Sudanese by origin, inhabitants of the Gold Coast, where the Portuguese built their Fort of Elmina or of S. Jorge. They were called previously Fantí-Ashanti, a name which little by little they lost, receiving the name of the fort: Mina from Elmina. This fort was of such magnitude, that it gave its name not only to the Fantí-Ashanti but also to many blacks shipped from there to America.

And he adds:

It is fitting to observe, by the way, with Arthur Ramos, the name Mina has two meanings, both broad and narrow, which has considerably added to anthropologist's difficulties [...].

To raise the subject in Uruguay we should first of all ask: Of which Minas are we speaking? Of the Fantí-Ashanti? That is, of the Minas in the strict sense? Of the true Minas?

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<sup>86</sup>Paulo de Carvalho Neto. *El negro uruguayano*. Quito, Ed. Unversitaria, 1965, pp. 64-65.

He also feels that the Mina cited by "Marcelino Bottaro, in his *Rituales y Candombes*, were not Fanti-Ashanti," since "there was insufficient evidence to assure it".

They were most probably Minas in the broad sense. Such, at least is the feeling of Bottaro's reference when he says that the Congos of Uruguay, along with other blacks, were also known by the name Minas...

For this reason I cannot understand how Pereda Valdés, without dispute, can speak of Minas Ashanti in Uruguay.

Nevertheless, instead of clarifying the subject, it becomes more complex when he admits that

It is fitting to add that the pattern of the streets of Montevideo, built in July of 1812, by Bartolomé de los Reyes, not mentioned by Pereda, also refer to the Mina [...]. Lino Suárez Peña does much the same when he describes the rooms of "Minas Magi" and "Minas Nagó" [...].

This entry of Suárez Peña's adds to the confusion, since Nagó is the name of a group of Sudanese until now unrecognized in Uruguay.

Cuban scholars have also confronted the problem of locating with certainty the origins of this ethnic group. For Dr. Ortiz<sup>87</sup> the Minas are a

people of the Slave Coast, to the Southeast of Dahomey [...] According to Deniker, they were in large number dominated by their western neighbors the Ashanti and sold by them to slave traders. Their location is precise. In Cuba we had a cabildo called Mina Popó of the Gold Coast, which makes their origin even more clear.

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<sup>87</sup>Fernando Ortiz. *Op. cit.*, 1916p. 43.

Lachatañeré<sup>88</sup> includes them in the Ewé-Tshi group and tells us they entered Cuba as "Mina Popó and Minas Achante".

For his part, Deschamps<sup>89</sup> states that in the colonial era the Mina formed themselves in to distinct cabildos: Mina Ahanti, Mina Fanti, Mina Guagüi, Mina Muson and Mina Popó of the Gold Coast.

In Haiti Dorsainvil<sup>90</sup> considered them Dahomeyan.

If we analyze all of these statements we can confirm that:

- a) The majority agree that the name Mina derives from the fortress of San Jorge da Mina, built by the Portuguese in the 15th century.
- b) They also agree that those called Mina came from the area surrounding the fortress, but uncertainty prevails when attempts are made to determine which region. While for one (Ortiz) they are people from the Slave Coast, "to the southeast of Dahomey", for another (Patterson) they come from the Slave Coast, but from the coastal area from the Popós to Lagos; or maybe according to Montiel and Cornevin, from the Gold Coast (today Ghana), but "a caballo (?) between Togo and Dahomey" (Cornevin), or still more vaguely, for Ramos they are from the "Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast, and the Slave Coast."
- c) Distinct peoples of diverse ethnic groups entered the Americas (principally Cuba, Haiti, Venezuela, Colombia, Brazil, and Mexico) under the name Mina, although investigators more frequently relate them with the Fanti-Ashanti or with an Ewé branch (Adjá).

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<sup>88</sup>Rómulo Lachatañeré. *Op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>89</sup>Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux. *Op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>90</sup>Lorimer Denis. *Op. cit.*, p. 18.

I believe authors such as Suely Robles Reis de Queiroz<sup>91</sup> and above all, Pierre Verger<sup>92</sup> are those who have located most precisely the famous Mina Coast. For the first, "in Brazil those slaves who came from the eastern ports, along the coast of what is now Dahomey, were called Mina. This coast was known as the Mina Coast or the east coast of the Mina".

And according to Verger, "we call the Mina Coast that part of the Gulf of Benin located between the Volta and Cotonú Rivers".

And it is from here that originated those that we can now call *true Mina*, people of the Adjá group, who correspond to the present Gen, still called Mina in Africa, according to Monteil.<sup>93</sup> Verger is categorical in situating them and clearing up the confusion that other investigators have fallen into:

For the Portuguese, the first navigators who frequented it, the Mina Coast (a dependency of the Castle of São Jorge da Mina founded in 1482, *but not to be confused with the Gold Coast*) [italics by R.M.F.] was of little interest: they found there neither gold nor anything that they were after. Even ivory was rare, and slaves were then still a small market [...].<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Suely Robles Reis de Queiroz. "El Origen de los negros brasileños". *Revista de la universidad de México. Mexico, D. F., vol. XXV, no. 2, octubre, 1970, pp. 22-24.*

<sup>92</sup> Pierre Verger. *Flux et reflux de la traite de nègres entre le golfe de Benin et Bahia de Todos os Santos du dix-septième au dix-neuvième siècle. Paris, La Haye, Mouton, 1968, p. 27.*

<sup>93</sup> Vincent Monteil. *Op. cit., p. 292.*

<sup>94</sup> Pierre Verger. *Op. cit., 1968. p. 27.*

He adds, even more explicitly:

Although the slave trade in the region of the castle was later prohibited by the Portuguese, the name of the Mina Coast remained linked to that part of the coast to the east of São Jorge da Mina, beyond the River Volta, during the 17th and 18th centuries. *The name "negre de Minas" did not in Bahía designate an African of the Gold Coast, but rather a black from the Coast of Sotavento, today the coast of Togo and Dahomey.*<sup>95</sup> [Italics by R.M.F.]

The similarities which exist between our Arará traditions and the songs, ritual rhythms and mythological considered to be of ancient Mina origin by our people, confirm their Adjá affiliation.

Together with this first group (true Mina), other blacks related to the Gen, belonging to the Adjá group, also entered under this name. These would include those called in Cuba the Mina Guagüi, the Mina Popó of the Gold Coast (Mina Popó in Bahía, Brazil), and the Mina Magi of Uruguay (perhaps the same Arará Magino and Djedjé Magí of Cuba and Brazil, respectively).

Newbury<sup>96</sup> says that "pre-Fon and residual post-Fon groups have been called Watyi (Wotchi), closely related to the true Ewé, Wemenu, the Wawe (or Gedevi) and possibly the Efón (with Yorubá scarifications)".

Regarding the Popó, a name still preserved as a surname in Colombia, the Cauca Valley and Chocó<sup>97</sup>, and which according to Ortiz "entered as Minas or Minas Popós." Big Popó and Little Popó were coastal villages of the Gold Coast, in

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<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>96</sup> C. W. Newbury. *Op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>97</sup> Rogério Velásquez. *Op. cit.*, p. 136.

which the slave trade existed on a large scale [...],<sup>98</sup> in reality they did not come from the Gold Coast, as Aguirre Beltrán<sup>99</sup> has shown beyond doubt:

The first of the Ewé-Fon people to appear to the East were the *Popó*. On the border of Togo and Dahomey, on the left bank of the mouth of the Mono River [Italics by R.M.F.] and on the marshland islets which the Portuguese called by the suggestive name Tierra Anegada (Flooded Land), a small kingdom of the Popó was founded. At war with their neighbors to the west, the Coto, and the east, the Ardá, they were often captured and sold as slaves, despite the protection of the canals and lagoons of the region. Today, the inhabitants of this region are classified as Ouatchii, of the Ewé-Fon family. Oldendorps says they called themselves Papaa, but in Mexico they came in as *Popó*.

All of these groups previously mentioned would be included in the group called Eastern Ewé.

Other groups, related to the Akán or Twi, and other *non-Adjá* groups, also entered under the name Mina, after the port from which they were shipped. In Cuba these were the Mina Ashanti, the Mina Fantí, and perhaps the Mina Musona (?) (R.M.F); in Brazil the Mina Ashanti (or Mina Sante) and Mina-Kru; in Brazil and Uruguay, the Mina Nagó; and even the Mina Caraborí of Uruguay, cited by Suárez Peña<sup>100</sup>

They are all easily identifiable, since they have all played an historic role in African History: the Ashanti and the Fanti today inhabit Ghana, and are well known to scholars. The former founded a powerful kingdom at the end of the 17th

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<sup>98</sup> Fernando Ortiz. *Op. cit.*, 1916, p. 46.

<sup>99</sup> Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. *Op. cit.*, p. 130.

<sup>100</sup> Lino Suárez Peña, in Paulo de Carvalho-Neto. *Op. cit.*, p. 306.

century, with Kumasi as its capital, and offered tenacious resistance to the English colonial invaders throughout the 19th century. In Havana there was a cabildo called Mina-Ashanté.<sup>101</sup>

The Fantí, who live along the coast of Ghana, were great commercial intermediaries of the Europeans who were toppled by the Ashanti, who wanted to directly control this commerce.

The Kru inhabit Sierra Leone, and the Nagó are Yorubá from Dahomey. The Caraborí are called Carabalí in Cuba, from meridional Nigeria; many of them, perhaps "slaves obtained in Benin, in the early days of the slave trade" and "brought to San Jorge da Mina to be sold", as Aguirre Beltrán says.<sup>102</sup>

## VII

### The Adjá in Colonial Cuba

Few references exist about the life of the Arará and Mina in colonial Cuba. The information is found scattered in newspaper announcements, books of slave contracts (asientos), testimonies, or descriptions of collective festivals by travelers or writers, but we have no work dealing with their life and customs, no chapter from a novel, much less any published colonial-era study of these groups. Nothing that describes for us their customs, that speak of their values as a civilization, that would give us more intimate and vital aspects of these thousands of men and women who left their cultural and biological seed in almost all of Cuba's provinces. The scorn of the enslaver-class for the "people without history", as they were called

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<sup>101</sup> Fernando Ortiz. *Op. cit.*, 1916, p. 130.

<sup>102</sup> Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán. *Op. cit.*, p. 126.



by Juan Pérez de la Riva (he considered them simply "things", and not humans, an ideology sustained by the exploitative system), had as a result that scarcely any written documentation exists about dozens of African groups and sub-groups that populated our island for around 300 years of Spanish domination. They were simply a labor force, the only interest in them was their economic profitability.<sup>103</sup>

Nevertheless, it is also the case with the Arará – in spite of their lesser numbers than the Lucumí (Yorubá), Congo, and Carabalí – that today it is easy to find their cultural influences in Cuban traditional life, as much in its religious manifestation as in secular. The remnants of some of the colonial cabildos still survive, later transformed into *Mutual Aid Societies* or simply *Casas de Santo*, their musical instruments are played and their sacred dances are performed, and even their gods or vodún are worshipped. Oral tradition has in this case been more powerful than the written word.

Thus, the socioeconomic contradictions of the capitalist regime permitted that true subcultures of African background have been preserved, the dominant Spanish culture not having been able to completely assimilate certain sectors of "the watershed of Cuban nationality whose origin is not derived from Spain but rather from Africa".<sup>104</sup> Economic exploitation, social discrimination, and the blocking of access to sources of modern education permitted and directly stimulated these people to cling in the past to the remains of their inherited traditions. This was a defensive reaction to the obligatory transculturative process imposed by colonialism to benefit its interests, and a refusal of certain cultural forms which transmitted many of the alien values of the defeatist bourgeoisie. It is in these socio-economic causes

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<sup>103</sup> Sergio Aguirre. "Seis actitudes de la burguesía cubana en el siglo XIX". In *Ecos de Caminos*. La Habana, Ed. de Ciencias Sociales, 1974, pp. 73-96.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, "De nacionalidad a nación en Cuba", p. 422.

that we should first look for the reasons for the survival of these subcultures, whose conservation is result of the class struggle which marked our colonial and pseudo-republican history, united by a historical conscience in these sectors of our people to be the heirs of traditions also with positive values, and with singular characteristics within the Cuban national complex, as Roger Bastide<sup>105</sup> has well called "el principio de

corte". This is a phenomenon that is also found in other parts of the Americas. We recall that according to Alejandro Lipschutz,<sup>106</sup> "among the 300 million inhabitants of our continent there are at least 100 million who are conscious of their cultural being, distinct from their Iberian or Anglo-Saxon culture."

To a certain extent these people were able to overcome some of the contradictions which existed within the dominant culture, which wanted to assimilate them in order to better exploit them, and their desire to salvage something of their ancestral patrimony, and which corresponded to other stages of civilization; or at least, they found certain "vital" solutions which enabled them to survive as harmoniously as possible within the narrow limits permitted by the exclusive culture of the exploiters.

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<sup>105</sup> Roger Bastide. *Les Ameriques Noires. Les civilisations africines dans le Nouveau Monde*. Paris, Payot, 1967, p. 31. "In previous works and based on our own experience, we have proposed to investigators interested in the study of marginal people the principio de corte. Effectively, this principio de corte is also found among us: the same individual does not play the same role within the many groups of which he is a part; but this has a particularly strong importance for the marginal person, because it enables him to avoid the tensions of cultural shocks and breaches of the soul; the Brazilian black can participate in Brazilian economic and political life, while at the same time being faithful to African religious brotherhoods, without feeling a contradicton between the two worlds in which he lives."

<sup>106</sup> Alejandro Lipschutz. *Perfil de indoamérica de nuestro tiempo*. Antología 1937-1962. La Habana, Ed. de Ciencias Sociales, Instituto del Libro, 1972, p. 92.

What Edison Carneiro<sup>107</sup> has said of the Bahían *candomblés* of Brazil is also applicable to Cuba:

These cults, no matter the way in which they present themselves, are a world, a whole way of behavior, a *subculture*, that can be conquered only through profound and substantial alterations in the archaic conditions (objective and subjective) of which they are certainly a reflection.

Today, with the abolition of classes in our new post-revolutionary society, these subcultures are little by little developing in the great riverbed of the *national*, not without contributing their positive values. With all vestiges of mass exploitation and exclusive ideology which originated in the colonial period, the process of a new Cuban and revolutionary culture is accelerated. With the fertile abundance of afrohispanic mixture into socialism, we see the conclusion of the process of the *cubanization* of the descendants of Spanish and Africans which began in the 16th century, and the culmination of "the evolution of our nationality with the clear achievement of Cuban sovereignty", as Sergio Aguirre writes.<sup>108</sup>

The scarce documentation of the Arará, confirmed by those who know our archives very well, such as Lucioan Franco, Manuel Moreno Fragnals or Pedro Deschamps, makes difficult any attempt to study the development of their social institutions, the *cabildos*, permitted by the Spanish crown for its own exploitative interests and to prevent at all costs the formation of class consciousness among the oppressed masses and to stimulate division between them.

With these few existing references we will try to describe these *cabildos* generally.

## VIII

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<sup>107</sup> Edison Carneiro. *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

<sup>108</sup> Sergio Aguirre. *Op. cit.*, p. 448.

Cabildos and Societies

The presence of the Arará on our island dates from the dawn of our history. According to María Teresa de Rojas,

the nations which supplied us with slaves during the 16th century (Archivo de Protocolos y Libro Baraja de la Catedral) – these are not cited in the Actas – are the following: Anchicha, Angola or Engola, Arará, bañol or bañón, Biafra or biafara or biara, Biocho or biojo or bicho, brán or brani or brant, Calabará, Cazango, Congo, Cucana, Embo, among Angola and Congo, Jolofo or Yolofo, Mandinga, Manicongo, Mimigola, Mozambique, Nalú, Mozambo, Mosombo, Terranova, Zape, Zembo or Zambo. Nowhere among those mentioned appears a single Lucumí, who would be so important to Cuba two centuries later, and of the Arará, numerous in the 19th century, we only find one in the Libro Baraja.<sup>109</sup>

However, one century later the situation with respect to the Arará was different, and thanks to Fernando Ortiz<sup>110</sup> we know that by the end of the 17th century there was a "cabildo of the Arará Magino nation" in Havana (1691), and these institutions flourished throughout the 19th century, subject to the rule that regulated the social lives of the captive.

The existence of the "slave" was the same, no matter which ethnic group he or she might be from. The rural captives lived under a fierce regimen of forced labor on the sugar plantations, in virtually the whole process of production sugar, on the coffee plantations, in mines. etc., under the

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<sup>109</sup> *María Teresa de Rojas. "Algunos datos sobre los negros esclavos y horros en la Habana del siglo XVI". in: Miscelánea de estudios dedicados a Fernando Ortiz. La Habana, vol. II, 1956, p. 1278.*

<sup>110</sup> *Fernando Ortiz. Op. cit., 1921, p. 24.*

vigilant eyes of overseers and their foremen. The slaves responded with suicide, individual or collective escapes, or the rebellions which were ruthlessly crushed by the agents of the enslaver's repression.

The lives of the urban slave, while less terrible than their unfortunate counterparts in the fields, were also strictly controlled: they performed all domestic work, all walking sales, the construction of fortresses, town walls, palaces and roads, the loading and unloading of freight, etc., all under the threat of corporal punishment, the lash, the stocks, shackles or the vile garrote. There were also the conspiracies, the urban fugitives, the uprisings also viciously repressed. This whole violent picture of the class struggle among the slavist colony has been studied in rich detail in our country by masters such as Ortiz, Fragonal, Bonilla, Aguirre, Franco, Deschamps, and others. We believe it is unnecessary to elaborate on the subject here.

The Arará or Mina captive lived with all of these events that perturbed colonial Cuba.

In the countryside they were at times permitted to "tocar tambor" (play drums) after work, on days designated by the church or the Crown. In the cities they participated in the festivals of Corpus Christi and others; they were limited, they were assimilated, "they were whitened".

Later they left the Palacio to make room for others, and paraded, in perfect order, the *Congos and Lucmies* with their large feathered hats, blue-striped shirts and red calico pants; *the Ararás with their cheeks full of scars from cuts made by red-hot irons, replete with seashells (caracoles), and the fangs of dogs and alligators, numbers of bones and enameled glass and the dancers wearing around their waists a large roll formed by a hoop covered with vegetable fibers* [italics by R.M.F.]; *the Mandingas* abundant in

their wide pants, short jackets and turbans of blue or pink silk, bordered with *marabou*; and many others, of difficult names and fantastic costumes that were not entirely of African style, but rather reformed or modified by civilized industry.<sup>111</sup>

The figure of the Arará and Mina became so well-known in the Havana slavist society that we read in an ad placed in the *Papel Periódico de la Havana* on 17 January, 1799: "A Mandinga woman of about 22 years of age, with the basics of washing and cooking, healthy and without defects, for 400 pesos libres. Can be seen front of the *Cabildo de los araraes*, first corner of the Navarette Houses."<sup>112</sup> Undoubtedly, for the seller to be so sure it would be found, the location of this *cabildo* would have been known by all the inhabitants of the Capital at the end of the 18th century.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ramón Meza. "El día de Reyes". *La Habana Elegante (La Habana)*, no. 2, año V, 9 de enero, 1887, pp. 4-5.

<sup>112</sup> Cited in Fernando Ortiz. *Op. cit.*, 1921, p. 15.

<sup>113</sup> We have another example in some verses published in the same *Papel Periódico de la Havana* at the beginning of the 19th century, cited by Manuel Moreno Fraginals in his classic work *El Ingenio. El complejo económico social cubano del azúcar. Tomo I. (1760-1860). La Habana, Comisión Nacional Cubana de la UNESCO, 1964, note 5, p. 169. According to the author, these verses were perhaps directed against the Neyra, a well-known family descended from Juan Gregorio de Nayra, considered the richest Mulato in Cuba in the first half of the 18th century, and whose descendents were totally whitened in subsequent marriages. Nevertheless, in 1802, proceedings were launched against one of his descendents, María Josefa de la Luz Hernández, to block her marriage, based on the stigma of blood (race?). The verses said:*

That the rich brown man  
confesses that his grandfather was Arará  
That's good.  
But, that he makes his money  
and is still brown,  
is not right.

*Que confiese un pardo rico*

According to M. Pérez Beato,<sup>114</sup> "The building of the Cabildo Arará was on the Calle de Compostela (a la de ?) Conde". And also in this century its exact location was remembered: "Up to the first years of the Republic the [house] of the Ararás was located at Compostela no. 171, called the "solar of the Arará".<sup>115</sup>

But this was not the only cabildo of this "nation" in Havana. The life of the diverse institutions founded by the Arará and the Mina in our capital must have been active, given that throughout the 19th century, and after their prohibition by the Spanish government, we see their continuous creation under the name *societies*.

"In 1892 the societies *Cabildo Zabalino* and *Sociedade Ajícarco o Ajícario* were founded", though the origins of their names were unknown to Ortiz,<sup>116</sup> who also mentions "another association with the name *Cabildo Cuatro Ojos*"; they were short-lived. This last cabildo undoubtedly originated from the Arará Cuatro Ojos of whom Deschamps has written.<sup>117</sup>

By the beginning of the pseudo-Republic, in 1909, there were still inscribed in the association registries of the Provincial Government of Havana "open or veiled origins"<sup>118</sup> of Arará and Mina cabildos, among fifteen others originating from other African "nations":

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*que su abuelo fué arará,  
bien está.  
Más, que lo haga su dinero  
aunque pardo, señorón,  
no hay razón.*

<sup>114</sup> *Cit. in Fernando Ortiz. Op. cit., 1921, p. 15.*

<sup>115</sup> *Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux. Op. cit., p. 50.*

<sup>116</sup> *Fernando Ortiz. Op. cit., 1921, p. 25. Could the first cabildo's name be related to the sabluno?*

<sup>117</sup> *Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux. Op. cit., p. 51.*

<sup>118</sup> *Fernando Ortiz. Op. cit., 1921, pp.21-22.*

"Unión de los Hijos de la Nación Arará Cuévano."  
Mutual Aid and Benefits Society.

"Arará Magino." Mutual aid society, under the  
advocation of the Holy Spirit.

"La Evolución." Mutual Aid Society of the African  
nation of Arará Sabalú, under the advocation  
[also] of the Holy Spirit.

"San Cayetano." Minas Popó Costa de Oro.  
Instructional, Recreational, and Mutual Aid  
Society.

Deschamps<sup>119</sup> has noted that the "Arará preferred the Holy Spirit as the patron of their cabildos", which is confirmed in the references which appear in the above list of societies, and by the importance which the Holy Spirit still possesses in certain celebrations of the Arará houses.

I feel it is useful to transcribe at length the valuable and exceptional information which Ortiz<sup>120</sup> offers us about the internal organization of some of the Habanero societies and cabildos:

*La Sociedad Hijos de la Nación Arará Cuévano:*

The *Hijos de la Nación Arará Cuévano* society was founded "for all types of protection of its members". It does not have its own property. The president, the director, and the treasurer, he says, "were the *stewards* of the association". It has an auxiliary of *ladies*, in addition to the gentlemen, composed of a *Matron*, of from two to six *stewardesses* [*camarera*], a *mayordoma*, and six voting members. Its catholic patron is the Holy

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<sup>119</sup> Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux. *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

<sup>120</sup> Fernando Ortiz. *Op. cit.*, 1921, pp.22-25.



Spirit and attendance at its festival of the 2nd day of Pascua de Pentecotés is obligatory. This society had a rather brief life.

*Unión de los Arará Cuévanos*

There was another, called *Unión de los Arará Cuévanos*, whose declared purpose was mutual aid in case of sickness or death. It had its own property, a holiday dedicated to the Holy Spirit, and was located at Calle Antón Recio, 70. Its government consisted of a king, a secretary, and four voting members, as well as an honor board of women. In 1895 it was solemnly dissolved after no more members remained.

*Cabildo Arará Magino*

The "Cabildo Arará Magino" was founded or *legalized* on 25 February 1890. To be a member, one had to be *honorable* and never have belonged to the "extinguished" association of the Nañigos (Abakuá). [!!!] "The cabildo will give fiestas on all the customary festive days of its nation, that is, the African dances, prohibiting the entrance of *toques* not of their nation". The directors' positions (1 president, 2 vice-presidents, 3 matrons, treasurer and secretary) are lifelong. Its properties, (casa de San Nicolás, 276, and part of Compostela, 171, that was deeded on 23 November 1691) cannot be sold except by *unanimous* agreement of the members. It was reorganized in 1892. In 1909, a new arrangement was made under the name *Arará Magino and their descendants*. On the 1st of January of every year a festival had to be celebrated in the style of their country of origin with *güiros* and *panderetas* [a way to not say drums?]. Their goal was to "perpetuate in

Havana that which was the Arará nation". Women now occupy 12 voting positions on its board.

*Sociedad Arará Dahomé*

The *Arará Dahomé* society was legalized and modernized on 16 March 1889 by the *moreno* Ramón Rodríguez on Calle Esperanza, 37. This house, like Florida 40 and the 3rd part of Compostela, 171, belonged to them. They could celebrate their religious festivals, *in agreement with the catholic church*, as well as dances and raffles. In case of its dissolution, its property would belong to the parish of the Holy Spirit. By administrative act María de Jesús Puig was appointed (to...?). Some time later, Ernesto Noriega, a neighbor from Calle Florida no. 42, in his capacity as president of the mutual aid society "África", denounced María to the Court of the East, arguing that, calling herself administrator of the dissolved mutual aid society "Arará Dajomé", she not only was wrongfully occupying the house at Esperanza 37, which belonged to the cabildo, she had also kept the dissolution of the society secret, letting it give up another house, at Florida no. 40, which also had been given to the cabildo by María Joaquina Mesa.

*Mina Popó de la Costa de Oro*

The Mutual Aid Society of the Mina Popó Nation of the Gold Coast was founded under the heavenly patronage of San Cayetano, reestablishing, according to the act, the former cabildo. It had some real estate, but it lost possession of it. Its annual fiesta was celebrated in the church of

FROM "DIALOGOS IMAGINARIOS" c. 1979 by Rogélio Martinez Furé

Sto. Cristo. It was directed by an administrator, two male presidents and 3 women. It was dissolved.

In this information given by Ortiz we see the last flashes of the cabildos clearly in the process of disintegration, the desperate efforts of a few of the heirs of these institutions to try to keep them alive, to adapt them to a new historic period, reorganizing them and *legalizing* them before the government. We can see the economic decadence of some cabildos, owners of property, which was lost among the thorny paths of Spanish (*leguleyismo* [legalism]?) and at the hands of unscrupulous lawyers. Others disappeared "from no longer having any members left", that is, from old age. We can also see the attempts of some associations to maintain orthodoxy of tradition in the face of transculturative processes, "prohibiting the infiltration of *toques* (rhythms) that are not of their nation", preoccupied with celebrating "traditional festivals in the style of their country of origin", and "perpetuating that which was the Arará nation". Heroic efforts by these men of the people who feigned their customs to pass unnoticed before government hostility; likewise, we see more and more participation of women in cabildos as conservators of cultural values. Thus, we have the bitter fruits of divisionism which weakened the struggle with the true common enemy - the fatalistic bourgeoisie class - while mired in byzantine disputes over questions of property rights and usufruct.

And there was no lack of intentions to return to Africa after the abolition of slavery. Companies were even created - as later in the United States the Jamaican Marcus Garvey would direct - to collect monies, found schools or to rent shipping lines to permit a return to the mother country, in an illusory attempt to conserve their cultural identity and find better economic possibilities. But all would end in disappointment, the same as with Garvey's projects: lack of experience, an idealistic and evasive solution, perhaps the hidden hand of Spanish colonial interests, or of nascent North American imperialism; perhaps demagoguery.

For the great interest of this singular chapter of our history, permit us to cite Ortiz *in extenso*:

In 1892 there began a very curious association called "The African Union and its descendants". Its bylaws reveal modern criteria and a certain culture. Its object was the union in Cuba of Africans, establishing schools, payment of medical bills, etc. In 1893, it requested the use of the African flag, ;*their flag!*, in accord with the treaty between Spain and the "International Association of the Congo" (*sic*) of 7 January 1885, a blue flag with a gold star in the center. The Spanish governor denied permission, declaring that "the Africans in Cuba were not foreigners, but rather had come to be considered Spanish". The bylaws of such a *picturesque* society state that "in case of mourning the women will attend dressed in white with black accents (p 144).

In 1894 Mr. Williams George Emanuel was named by the society the "only representative of the African race to the government", and in 1895 changed its name to "Aurora of Hope", extending its legal radius to all of the island, and adopting the advocacy of the Santo Rey Mago Melchor. Among the mutual aims of the society was included that of sustaining the "traffic of steamboats between Africa and Cuba"(!).

Mr. Emanuel, founder and, I am told, a Protestant minister, proposed the reorganization of diverse cabildos into a powerful society of fantastic purpose, which with the payment of dues and the adjudication of the different houses of the cabildos could undertake mutual aid on a grand scale, able to monopolize the representation of hundreds of thousands of afrocubans, etc. Such a

proposal never got beyond an unhappy attempt. In 1896 there was an assembly was held, attended by representatives of the cabildos of the Dahomey, Gabalú, Mina, Carabalí, Mandinga, Mundukuka, Masinga, Mumbanque, Mundamba Luamú Numbara and St. Efigenia de Guanabacoa; and after lively protests Mr. Emanuel was expelled from the Aurora of Hope. The Aurora didn't stop there, however: on 18 April 1897 there was a meeting among Juan Sifré, president of the Gangás; Eduardo Balló, president of the Mandingas; Eusebio Zayas, president of the Lucumí, and Federico Rencurell, president of the Minas, approving new bylaws with a few variations. Later, the operation of this strange association leaves no trace; but in 1910 Mr. Emanuel was giving signals that he had not abandoned his *ideal*, presenting himself to the government as a representative of Native (Oriundos) Africans, for their civilization in the country, before the government, etc., and as deputy and *liquidator* of the African cabildos, requested certificates of the dissolution of some cabildos. The author of this book [Fernando Ortiz] knew Mr. Emanuel years later, and learned from him that has not abandoned his plan to represent all Africans before the Cuban authorities and to *recover* all of the properties which belonged to the cabildos, and which he claimed, and it is possible, were squandered by the ignorance of their owners and the malice of whites and some of the leaders of the cabildos.<sup>121</sup>

The solution to the problems of the free Africans and their American descendants was not in their return to the mother land, but in the revolutionary struggle to destroy the colonial system and establish a new nation, "with all and for the good of all", that they had been helping to raise with their blood during nearly four centuries. "It has been

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<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26

FROM "DIALOGOS IMAGINARIOS" c. 1979 by Rogélio Martínez Furé

calculated that 70 percent of the contribution of blacks and mulattos which made up the army on the march which was the "Liberating Army."<sup>122</sup>

The solution found by these tens of thousands of Africans and their descendants was, converted into mambises, they were a fundamental force for the liberation of Cuba and the building of a new Country, without forgetting the ancestral one, thus contributing in the creation of a new culture of Anillean synthesis – afrohispanic– in which is found the influence of the best of the patrimony of the exploited Africans together with the best of the Spanish heritage of the former exploiters, despite the obstacle of the bourgeoisie and the liberals.

Some "houses" or the remnants of "societies" which were old Arará cabildos still exist today, principally in Matanzas, Cárdenas, Jovellanos, Perico, Agramonte, La Habana, Cienfuegos,<sup>123</sup> Rodrigo y Santiago de Cuba,<sup>124</sup> while in other areas their memory is still preserved, or their attempts at reorganization.

A few years ago one of the causes of the dissolution of an Arará cabildo in the barrio of Jesús María (Havana) was that, the line of bokonú (diviners) having been extinguished, the old sworn drummer who remained, called Catalino, did not want to cooperate in the reorganization of the cabildo, despite the fact that some Arará priestesses were inclined to continue and protect

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<sup>122</sup>Sergio Aguirre. "El cincuentenario de un gran crimen". In: *Op. cit.*, p. 340.

<sup>123</sup>Fernando Ortiz. *Los instrumentos de la música afrocubana*. La Habana, Publicaciones de la Dirección de Cultura, vol. IV, 1954, p. 398. Informant Marcos Zulueta, from Jovellanos (Havana, 2 February 1977). Lydia González Huguet. Personal communication, Havana, May 1964.

<sup>124</sup>Fernando Ortiz. *Los instrumentos...*, vol. II, 1952, p. 24.

its religious customs, precisely because "he could not take orders from a woman".<sup>125</sup>

Regarding the Mina, they were numerous in the province of Matanzas —especially in Pedro Betancourt— according to one informant.

The Mina cabildo in the city of Matanzas was on Calle Daoíz, no. 144. Its *capataces* or leaders were Manuel Cota (from 1864 to 1878) and Pascual Vera (from 1878 to 1900), according to documents in the city's archives.<sup>126</sup>

Anselmo Suárez y Romero, that most contradictory person of our 19th century, has left us one of the few references to the Mina, when in 1840 he wrote: "If Italy is in Europe the country blessed with harmony, so is the land of the Mina in Africa. The music of these people reaches the soul and speaks to the heart; especially those songs that they sing in memory of their dead, with the cadaver in the middle on a raised platform, with them all around, sobbing."<sup>127</sup>

Pichardo also offers one of the few references to this "nation" in his well-known dictionary, a reference to their origins and music: "*Mina*: A person from this African region. Their funeral songs are extremely sad."<sup>128</sup>

And another on their influence on traditional cooking: "*Bollo Mina*: In Cuba, cooked corn flour, stuffed with sweets (dulce) and wrapped in plantain leaves."<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. III, p. 58.

<sup>126</sup> Israel Moliner Castañeda. "Matanzas: los bailes congos". *Revolución y Cultura (La Habana)*, no. 50, octubre 1976, p. 58.

<sup>127</sup> Anselmo Suárez y Romero. "Ingenios". In: *Colección de artículos*. Havana, ed. C.N.C., 1963, p. 243.

<sup>128</sup> Esteban Pichardo. *Op. cit.*, p. 428.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

## IX

### The Adjá seen by the Slave Society

The interests of the slave owners tried to objectify the distinct African groups, attributing to each one certain "qualities" or "defects", from the point of view of their class.

There are the negroes of the Congo, generally idle, bad, inclined to thievery, passionate for music and dance.

The Lucumí, arrogant, proud; the macuás from the coast of Mozambique are of indolent character, but sweet and agreeable; the Carabalí from the west coast of Africa, greedy, industrious and a little restless. The Mina have a stupid look about their faces; the Arará, without character nor energy(!). The Manidinga, docile, submissive and honest.<sup>130</sup>

According to another opinion:<sup>131</sup>

There were *Mandingas*, well-built and beautiful, clever businessmen and tireless, somewhat fatalistic but inclined to fight for their freedom; The *Lucumís* are intelligent and adaptable to European civilization, good workers and they buy their own freedom; the *Carabalí* moderate in dress and economy, when they achieve their freedom they dedicate themselves to small businesses. The Congo were the happy note, laughing, playing African music with their drums. Their songs and dances dominated in the city and countryside. *Ararás* and *Mina*, accustomed to

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<sup>130</sup> X. Marmier. "Lettres sur l'Amérique", cited in Lydia Cabrera. *La sociedad secreta Abakuá. La Habana, Ed. C.R., 1959, p. 67.*

<sup>131</sup> José Luciano Franco. *Folklore criollo y afrocubano. La Habana, Publicaciones de la Junta Nacional de Arqueología y Etnología, 1959, p. 67.*



servitude, liberated themselves only with difficulty.

For a French traveler, a "specialist" in the distinct "qualities" or "defects" of the African captives, the Arará "were docile, good workers, and not too sensitive to slavery because they had been born into it." And the "Dahomey were bad slaves, prone to suicide and to nostalgia".<sup>132</sup>

But historic truth destroys the myth of the supposed passivity of the Mina and the Arará in the face of slavery: there is the conspiracy of Bayamo in 1812<sup>133</sup> and the rebellion of the Matanzas coffee plantations in 1825<sup>134</sup>, in which they actively participated; there were also the cimarrones "Pascual y Pancho Mina, celebrated and famous for their crimes throughout la Vuelta de Abajo",<sup>135</sup> in the first decades of the 19th century, who fought to their deaths for liberty:

[...] in August of 1835, another of the captains of the cimarrones, who during 20 years had held ranchers and soldiers in check, the famous Pancho Mina, was surprised and felled in an ambush prepared by the captain foot soldier of Cayajabos Francisco Rubio Campos, on the Coffee plantation of Teresa.<sup>136</sup>

There are also the

[...] celebrated cimarron chiefs known as "Caoba" and "Sabicú", Mina negroes, brothers, and of great

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<sup>132</sup> *Cit. in: Fernando Ortiz. Op. cit., 1916, p. 59.*

<sup>133</sup> *José Luciano Franco. "La rebelión de los africanos in Camagüey and Bayamo". La Gaceta de Cuba (La Habana), no, 108, 1973.*

<sup>134</sup> *Israel Moliner Castañeda. "La sublevación de los cafetales".*

<sup>135</sup> *José Luciano Franco. Los palenques de los negros cimarrones. La Habana, Ed. Departamento de Orientación Revolucionaria del Comité Central del Partido Comunista de Cuba, 1973, p. 80.*

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid., p. 85.*

influence among their people, and apparent leaders of the great Palenque of la Cueva del Cabildo, in Bartolina, [where] they lived until the beginning of the Guerra Grande [1868] in these islets [of la Ciénaga de Zapata, to the south of Matanzas Province], where they had their women,<sup>137</sup>

and those "who died in 1877, fighting together with the army of Mambí, to liberate Cuba from Spanish dominion".<sup>138</sup>

And as definite proof of the falsehood of interpreting the rebelliousness or transitory passiveness of oppressed peoples from a biological perspective, we recall the rebellions that shook Bahía, Brazil, at the beginning of the 19th century, in which Gegé, Hausa and muslimized Yorubá almost overthrew the Portuguese colonial domination of the region; and above all, the Haitian Revolution, the first and only triumphant revolution initiated by slaves in the history of humanity, in which the most diverse African groups actively participated; the culmination of all the rebellions and struggles in Santo Domingo, almost all of which, says Dorsainvil,<sup>139</sup> were headed by the Dahomey, captive whom the revolutionary practices turned into freedmen. All of which proved that, beside their biological and ethnic characteristics, in the moment in which the objective and subjective conditions are ripe, oppressed peoples rise up and triumph over their oppressors.

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<sup>137</sup> J.A. Coscullela. *Cuatro años en la ciénaga de Zapata*. La Habana, 1918, cit. in José Luciano Franco. *Op. cit.*, 1973, p. 92.

<sup>138</sup> Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux. "Palenques". In: *Mambisa-Palenque*. La Habana, C.N.C., 1976.

<sup>139</sup> Cit. in Arthur Ramos. *Op. cit.*, p. 143.