Enigma of the Nyànyigo

Authority and Autonomy in 19th Century Colonial Cuba

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The following paper is the culmination of roughly ten weeks of undergraduate research conducted at the University of Miami during the spring of 2010. For this project, I had the opportunity to work with the Cuban Heritage Collection on this project via the Goizueta Foundation’s undergraduate Fellowship. The foundation has provided me and other undergraduate researchers a springboard to engage with unique primary source material, as well as the motivation to approach socio-cultural topics which should be analyzed through these sources. I was first informed about the opportunity to work with the Cuban Heritage Collection on this project by my research mentor, Dr. Katherine Ramsey. Her guidance not only helped me bring together many of my findings into a somewhat coherent argument, it stimulated new ways of approaching questions of race, religion, and power. This project was initially conceived as an analysis of religion and power under the Castro regime in the 1960’s. However, after learning about the religious secret society “Abakuà” during an initial visit to the CHC, I was left with several questions about the extent of their influence and its role during the mid to late 19th century. Thus, I decided to poke my head into what seemed like a mysterious and fascinating segment of history. With assistance from the deputy chair of the CHC, Maria Estorino, I was able to pull together several documents from the collection which were relevant to the questions I was asking. The sources available at the CHC provided a wealth of background information through the collective works of both Lydia Cabrera and Fernando Ortiz. Cabrera’s *La Sociedad Secreta Abakuà* is to this date the most complete analysis on the group, and anyone wishing to garner knowledge on the inner workings of the group would be wise to consult Cabrera’s work. Armed with the help of recent scholarly work by Dr. Ivor Miller in his work *Voice of the Leopard*, I proceeded to engage into an active investigation of the society
and its activities. Who were they? What role did they play in society? How did society view them? Why did they view them that way? These questions would lead to one overarching argument about the relationship between Abakuà and the Spanish colonial authority. A large portion of my research focused on one particular document, *Los Criminales de Cuba*, a collection of Inspector Don Jose Trujillo’s arrest during the last quarter of the nineteenth-century. This document not only initiated my project by presenting the Nyànyigos as a criminal element in Cuban society, but it also served as an open window into their world, revealing such things as local power networks. Trujillo was savvy enough to even record what is the earliest analysis of Abakuà as a whole, outlining many of the group’s traditions and practices.

This project is by no means an analysis of the Abakuà society as a whole; rather it is an analysis of the changing social dynamics of a society within a society. It is an attempt to understand and identify the changes in this relationship between colonial authority, and what can be considered local, civil authority. This paper uses the term Nyànyigo over the collective term Abakuà, despite the fact some might consider derogatory. This is however, an intentional choice on my part to distinguish the phenomena to be discussed between the members and the group as a whole. I have done this for two reasons, the first of which is the members of Abakuà societies identified themselves as Nyànyigos until the twentieth-century. Second, the term is a widely identifiable marker of the group, and many people of Cuban Heritage today can identify with the term Nyànyigo, especially those from the provinces of Matanzas or Havana. When I questioned my family of their dealings with any Nyànyigos, they were happy to recount tales of Nyànyigos who visited my grandfather’s bodega in Havana. The importance of using this term can best be explained in relation to Masonic groups. Masons are known as Masons, not under a
collective term Freemasonry or followers of Freemasonry. Thus, I felt it important to begin removing this collective label from arguments about the group, since aside from shared religious, moral, and...at the front of the argument between members of the society known as Nyânyigos, and the For me, this project became a sort of investigation into life in 19th century Cuba. My experience conducting research at the CHC was nothing short of amazing. Given the opportunity to work with the actual primary sources certainly fueled my passion for the subject. Ultimately, my research at the Cuban Heritage Collection has opened my mind to new questions about power relationships in colonial Cuba, and it has pushed me to look closer at the development of Afro-Cuban culture.

Hopefully, the reader will understand this is a work in progress.
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1. Introduction

During the last quarter of nineteenth-century colonial Cuba, the provinces of Havana and Matanzas were inhabited by members of a fraternal society called Nyànyigos\(^2\). Throughout the course of their existence in Cuba, the Nyànyigos have adapted and responded to the institutions of *Slavery, Capitalism*, and *Colonialism*. Fernando Ortiz, a Cuban anthropologist best known for his work in Afro-Cuban culture, in his early work regarded them as vagrants and criminals\(^3\). The Nyànyigos however, are simply members of autonomous clans working under a shared religious, moral, and ethical code. Known collectively today as *La Sociedad Abakuà*\(^4\), the Nyànyigos have played an integral role in the development of both Afro-Cuban culture and

\[\text{Nangadó mariba} \quad \text{They went to the river to consecrate}\]

\[\text{Llegó enkabúyo} \quad \text{But the police arrived}\]

\[\text{Y el Ìreme Mboko con el bonkó} \quad \text{And the Ìreme masker escaped}\]

\[\text{Se desprendió} \quad \text{With the bonko drum}\]

\[\text{Huye!} \quad \text{Huye!}\]

- Ignacio Piñero\(^1\)

\(^1\) (Miller 2009) pp 168, part of earliest Abakuà recording.
\(^2\) Throughout this paper Nyànyigo is used as opposed to ñáñigo
\(^3\) (Ortiz 1906) pp 6
\(^4\) (Cabrera 1958) Lydia Cabrera, was the First to use the phrase to describe them
society. For example, we need only listen to a few sets of the Rumba to appreciate the Nyànyigos influence on Cuban music. In his exceptional work on the Abakuà, Voice of the Leopard, Ivor Miller notes that "Some of the deepest ties between Abakuà and culture are found in the rumba, which emerged simultaneously in both Havana and Matanzas." Nyànyigos have also played a role in the development of Afro-Cuban religion, and in some cases openly syncretized various religious elements into their cannon.

With regard to society, the Nyànyigos have adapted to meet the ever changing demands in Cuba since the founding of their first lodge in 1836. First, with the forming of the first Juego in Regla, the Nyànyigos demonstrated a willingness to accept creoles into an African tradition. With the initiation of whites in 1863, they tore down the traditional notions of race and class in colonial Cuba. Nyànyigos have always acted in solidarity; their brotherhood ties have clearly given them a social advantage over other groups. The Nyànyigo Juegos became more popular than older Cabildos during hard economic times, and they were well known for their benevolence as an aid society. By the eruption of the Ten-Years War in 1868, Abakuà had not only grown in numbers, but also in influence throughout the wharves of Havana and Matanzas. These ports served as a vital hub for a complex transatlantic shipping network, serving both commercial and civil interests. Given Cuba's position as the leading sugar producer in the Caribbean following the Haitian revolution, the high level of economic and social activity occurring at the docks cannot be understated. Throughout the nineteenth-century, and still even today, Nyànyigos held various positions in the wharves, serving as cooks, carriage drivers,

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5 (Miller 2009) pp 159
6 A Juego is a Nyànyigo type of lodge or clan. See (Cabrera 1958) for a glossary of terms
7 (Miller 2009) pp 78
firemen and even foremen\textsuperscript{8}. However, as the Nyànyigos monopoly over urban employment and trade strengthened, so too did the colonial and local authorities negative attitude towards the group.

The relationship between civil authority and Nyànyigo autonomy is a complex riddle that spans over a century. On one hand, the existence and authority of the colonial Spanish government in Cuba cannot be ignored. On the other, the autonomy and influence of Nyànyigo juegos make a strong case against any other civil authority on a local level. Understanding the relationship between the Nyànyigos and authority is therefore, the primary goal of this analysis. However, to accomplish this task, it is necessary to divide the historical context of the Nyànyigos into multiple paradigms, three of which occur in the nineteenth-century. These paradigms reflect the different perceptions towards Abakuà societies both internally and externally. Exploring these contexts also reveal a great deal about the adaptability of the Nyànyigo and Abakuà in the face of a rapidly changing society.

The first paradigm occurs with the formation of the first Juego in the town of Regla in 1836. Under this paradigm we see the transplantation of the African Épkè society in Cuba, expressed through the first initiation of creoles into the society\textsuperscript{9}. The second paradigm comes about as a result of Andres Petit and the initiation/foundation of the first white juegos in 1863. During this paradigm, we see the Nyànyigos develop beyond a mutual aid organization, a platform for revolutionary ideas, and a greater merging of Cuban and African cultures. The second paradigm is also a period of greater persecution from the colonial government, and

\textsuperscript{8} (Miller 2009) pp 103/ for Foremen see (Brown 2003) pp 24
\textsuperscript{9} (Miller 2009) pp 89
during the opening years of the Ten-Years War, the government exiles a large number of Nyànyigos to Spanish penal colonies in Cueta, Fernando Po, and Chafarinas\(^{10}\).

The third paradigm of the nineteenth-century occurs with the end of the first revolution, and the proceeding ban on Nyànyigo groupings in 1875. During this period, Nyànyigos come under the heaviest scrutiny; they are actively profiled for criminal behavior, and are seen as a threat to the colonial government because of their preservation of African traditions\(^{11}\). With the close of the nineteenth-century, a new paradigm begins to emerge during the United States occupation; it will not fully develop until well into the twentieth-century in the later scholarship of Fernando Ortiz and others in the form of Afro-Cuban folklore. In all contexts, the Nyànyigos have shown a constant skill for grasping the dynamics of society\(^{12}\). Thus, there is no clear progression in the way the Nyànyigo has been perceived. Rather, these paradigm shifts have been indicative of the resilience and adaptability with which the Nyànyigo has fought against repression in all forms.

**What is a Nyànyigo?**

What is a Nyànyigo? To understand the Nyànyigo and his beliefs, customs, and politics, one must veer away from Cuba and turn to the port of Old Calabar located in the cross river section of Nigeria today\(^{13}\). According to David H. Brown, the Efìk people who resided in the cross river region organized themselves into a graded association of males by the mid

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\(^{10}\) Ibid. For more detail on exile see pp 120-139

\(^{11}\) (Howard 1998) pp. 152, see 148-165 for post abolition policies concerning mutual aid societies

\(^{12}\) (Miller 2009) pp 77

\(^{13}\) For information on old Calabar see (Miller 2009) Introduction, (Brown 2003) pp. 9-14
eighteenth-century\textsuperscript{14}. The Épkè society served the functions of a government over the expanse of its influence, each new Épkè lodge was a symbol of local authority in its area. According to Ivor Miller, in the absence of a state system, regional trade networks were sustained through membership in a titled society, with each autonomous community having its own lodge\textsuperscript{15}. Therefore, like we shall see with Abakuà, Épkè lodges are autonomous but share a common set of rules which each Épkè member follows. The Épkè society is most notorious for having been involved with the increase in slave trade, and its existence was central to the operation of the local economics of exchange\textsuperscript{16}. Given the role of the Épkè society in fostering the slave trade, it is not unusual to note that membership in the society could be bought and sold. This is especially true in the case of Captain Burrell, a British trader who purchased and held rank in the Épkè society as early as 1820\textsuperscript{17}.

The legacy of purchased memberships would endure in both Épkè and Abakuà societies, and it demonstrates once again the resilience of this system to adapt to changing social conditions. By allowing the British to participate in membership, the Épkè leveled the commercial playing field. While the British gained a tool for stable business practice, the Épkè gained control of an otherwise uncontrollable situation. According to Shubi L. Ishemo:

\begin{quote}
Under the dominance of the rich, it succeeded in harmonizing the ancestral religion with the economic and political structures which were essential for the reproduction of the social order and the conduct of the slave trade. Thus it increasingly utilized extra
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{14} (Brown 2003) pp. 11
\textsuperscript{15} (Miller 2009) pp. 5-6
\textsuperscript{16} (Brown 2003) pp. 12
\textsuperscript{17} (Miller 2009) pp. 134-135 see also (Brown 2003) pp. 12
economic mechanisms to maintain its hegemony. The religious apparatus of the Épkè came to constitute a powerful instrument for social control.\(^{18}\)

What seems to be most interesting about the Épkè society was their propensity for maintaining their religious views within the confines of an economically motivated group. This helps us understand the ability for the Nyànyigo society to basically accomplish the same thing, albeit under a different context. Whereas the Épkè society modified its system to accommodate a rapidly expanding slave trade, in Cuba the Nyànyigo adapted its religious beliefs to “modernity”. Out of Old Calabar and the Épkè society dealings with the British came a huge swell of slaves that lasted from 1650 to 1841, the number of slaves estimated to have embarked from Old Calabar ranges from 133,000 to more than 250,000 slaves.\(^{19}\) Given that these slaves originated from Épkè society territories, it is safe to assume that a large number of slaves arriving in Cuba were Épkè members. If we also conclude that Havana was the main gateway for all slaves arriving in the new world, we can then assume that there was a heavy Épkè presence on the Spanish Colony prior to 1836.

The Épkè members who were brought to Cuba in chains quickly found a way to reorganize themselves as they had in Africa under the Spain’s Cabildo system. The Cabildo’s acted as a mutual aid society, but were restricted to African born slaves. According to an oral account, the wharves at Regla where the first slaves from old Calabar disembarked is referred to as \( \text{itià ororó kàndè} \), which means “a land on the other side of the harbor”.\(^{20}\) In 1836, Épkè leaders

\(^{18}\) (Ishemo 2002) pp. 260
\(^{19}\) (Ishemo 2002) pp. 262
\(^{20}\) (Miller 2009) pp. 39
who had organized under the Cabildo Apapà Epi\textsuperscript{21}, entered a cave near Regla and performed the rights to initiate the first Cuban lodge. This is the first paradigm for the Nyànyigo in Cuba, the Juego Efik Ebuton, was only established because of those Épkè leaders from Africa had the authority to do so. What makes this so special is that they chose to ensure their children would have the same protections of the Épkè society. The Épkè had effectively strengthened their position in the colony by opening the doors for Cuban born blacks to initiate into the society. Understanding why the Épkè members in Regla decided to initiate the Cuban lodge, allows us to understand the subsequent admission of whites twenty-seven years after the foundation of the first Juego.

**Who Conquered Who?**

In the mid nineteenth-century, tensions began to rise between the increasing number of Nyànyigos and a colonial government consumed over fears, possibly over the real threat of a revolution. The Haitian revolution had made such a possibility a reality, and it should be noted that the fear of this threat would have intensified after the Aponte conspiracy of 1812\textsuperscript{22}. The issue was further agitated by the decreasing number of illegal slave traders, and as Cuba prepared for life without slavery, so too did certain Nyànyigos realize that their future lay in the diversification of their juegos. This is especially true given the number of Nyànyigo lodges that began to spring up during the 1850’s and 60’s in Havana and Matanzas. These lodges became increasingly scrutinized for the links to increase in crime, especially during Carnival\textsuperscript{23}. The procession of the Nyànyigos during Carnival had become ingrained in the Cuban psyche as early

\textsuperscript{21} (Urrútia y Blanco 1882) pp. 364 See also, (Howard 1998) for a detailed analysis on Cabildos de Nacion
\textsuperscript{22} (Howard 1998) pp. 76-77 See also, (Ishemo 2002) pp 264
\textsuperscript{23} (Brown 2003) pp 134
as the procession itself. The image of the diablito became a symbolic image in newspapers\textsuperscript{24}, and its actions at the head of the Nyànyigo procession came to represent all things Nyànyigo\textsuperscript{25}.

In 1863, a Creole born mulatto named Andres Facundo De Dolores Petit, took the first steps in breaking down class and race barriers in Cuba. Petit is remembered in oral tradition as both a forger of Cuban society and a traitor to the secret of the Nyànyigos. He particularly remembered for his accomplishment in bringing the Catholic beliefs closer to Nyànyigo belief systems, or rather he opened the door for religious diversity. Miller notes that "seeking a mutual understanding between priests and Abakuà, Andres Petit named the crucifix 'Abasi'.\textsuperscript{26} A high ranking member of Havana’s Awana Bakoko Efor lodge, Petit swore in twenty-five white males into the Akanaran Efo Ekobio Mukarara lodge\textsuperscript{27}. Under similar guidelines as the first Juego in Regla, Petit’s initiation of an all white lodge begins what I consider the second paradigm shift of the Nyànyigos. By all accounts, the event was a calculated move on the part of Petit who is said purchased the lives of many slaves under the policy of coartacion\textsuperscript{28}. The event caused a stir of violence among various Juegos in what could be considered a race war or a disagreement over policy. Given that whites had been initiated into lodges prior to Petit's foundation of an all white Juego, it is easy to assume the latter of the two options. Petit’s actions had an effect both internally and externally on the Nyànyigos as a whole. Miller has noted that by all accounts Petit knew that their influence would help the brotherhood against

\textsuperscript{24} (Villergas 1863) See for mid nineteenth-century caricature of Nyànyigos and the ireme costume
\textsuperscript{25} (Ortiz 1906) 6-7
\textsuperscript{26} (Miller 2009) pp 115
\textsuperscript{27} (Brown 2003) pp. 22, the name of the lodge means “The Efo mother of the brothers of the white skin”
\textsuperscript{28} Coartaciòn is a Spanish policy of purchasable emancipation, see also (Cabrera 1958) pp. 24-64
government authority. The inclusion of whites, especially from elite Families, posed a significant threat to the colonial government embattled in a revolution. Internally, the inclusion of whites posed another problem; many accounts link the rising levels of Nyànyigo violence in the streets to a disagreement over the integration of whites into the group. These clashes between different juegos occurred over a multitude of reasons, some of which relate to the respect shown between members of black and white juegos. What should be considered simple disputes between clans working under a failing colonial system is often misinterpreted as part of the societies moral propensity for criminal activity.

According to Howard, the white Nyànyigos became as fearsome, or more so, because they seemed to presage the slippage of the nation in general into the vortex of contagion, atavism, and Africanness. This, combined with the fact that threat of revolt had been realized in 1868, led the colonial government to begin a thorough persecution of the Nyànyigos. Thus the relationship between the Nyànyigos and the colonial government was forever changed. While it is certainly true that the colonial government had been ordered to take steps against any clandestine organization of as early as 1839, when the Spanish crown ordered its colonies to keep a watchful eye out for the groups. Nyànyigo persecutions would not begin until the Ten-Years War. This once again calls into question the legitimacy of the colonial government, with regard to how it managed local affairs, why did they not suppress the group when given the obvious chance? The answer lies in the influence of the Nyànyigos throughout Havana and Matanzas. We can only speculate as to the penetration of the group into the government, but

29 (Miller 2009) pp106
30 (Urrútia y Blanco 1882) pp 369 see also (Monteagudo 1908) for a detailed account of the dispute
31 (Brown 2003) pp 137
32 (Howard 1998) pp 82
what is certain is that with the escalation of the Ten-Years War, Many Nyànyigo groups were rounded up and deported to Spanish penal colonies throughout the Atlantic³³.

**From Exiles to Criminals**

Deportations did little to curtail the growing number of Nyànyigos in Havana and Matanzas, while their influence spread all over the Atlantic through various penal colonies undoubtedly creating stronger networks. In Cuba, juegos remained exclusive to the provinces of Havana and Matanzas, indicating strong ties to these commercial centers. The growing number of Nyànyigos led to increasing efforts on the part of the local authorities to stop large number of initiations occurring after the abolition of slavery in 1880. The last paradigm of the nineteenth-century begins with this explosion in lodges According to one observer, punishment of the Nyànyigos was difficult, and he notes that the accepted cause was that judicial officials were in their youth Nyànyigos. However, Charles Pepper sees "the more probable explanation was that the criminals understanding the process of the Spanish justice bought immunity from the magistrates³⁴. Whether or not Mr. Pepper is correct, both his suggestions indicate the ability for Nyànyigos to penetrate the judicial system. Further questions are raised by the placing this account against the backdrop of ever growing legal persecution imposed on the Nyànyigos following abolition. We can assume that the Nyànyigos were in frenzy, drums beating loud at the Juego of Don Jose Rodriguez Ramos the evening of July 10, 1881. That night a group of Nyànyigos from all walks of life had come together to initiate new members³⁵. Among those present that night were painters, artists, tobacco workers, and students, all in

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³³ (Miller 2009) 122-130 for a rich explanation of Nyànyigo dispersal
³⁴ (Pepper 1899) pp 155, see also 150-60
³⁵ (Urrútia y Blanco 1882) Detailed account of the arrest pp 358-359
their mid 20’s. Unfortunately for the Juego, during the summer of 1881, Chief of Police Don Jose Trujillo, was involved in a series of arrests that targeted the ever expanding association of Nyànyigos. These men were most likely engaged in their initiation ceremony when Inspector Trujillo, accompanied by vigilantes, municipal guards, and other police crashed the ceremony.

The detailed arrest report notes that there were three live roosters\textsuperscript{36}, and other instruments linked to an initiation ceremony, which again indicates the level of familiarity with Nyànyigo groups. The arrest documentation also notes that several of the men including Ramos had prior arrests for a wide variety of civil infractions including homicide\textsuperscript{37}. Of particular note in this case was Don Abel Martinez Brito, who was first arrested in 1865 for laziness, and subsequently again in 1867 for vagrancy. Brito was placed in the San Jose Asylum in 1869, and in 1871 he was twice detained for importation of arms. From 1874-1878, Brito was arrested regularly for homicide, battery, and thievery, until in June of 1878 he was once again captured for smuggling arms. One would have to wonder why this individual was able to elude long prison sentences for his actions, but his story raises larger questions about Nyànyigo networks. For example, Brito was smuggling weapons during the middle of the Ten-Years war, lending credence to the argument that the Nyànyigos had a hand on everything entering and leaving Cuba. This is also evidenced by the fact Brito was deported in 1879 to Santander Spain aboard a steamship, and returned only a year later\textsuperscript{38}. The relative ease with which Brito was able to escape his punishments again demonstrates one of two things: either the Spanish government

\textsuperscript{36} The number of roosters should = number of initiates see (Garcìa 1908) pp 102-107 for detailed initiation ceremony
\textsuperscript{37} Close inspection of the primary document reveals that homicide was either not viewed as a severe crime, or these individuals had been pardoned early. Imprisonment for homicide seems to have been limited between 4-8 years.
\textsuperscript{38} (Urrútìa y Blanco 1882) pp. 360
was completely inept both on and off Cuba, or the influence of the Nyànyigos has been grossly understated.

One month prior to the arrest discussed earlier, Inspector Trujillo had made an arrest that linked the theft of two oxen to a group of Nyànyigos and an accomplice butcher who is never named in the report. The main focus of Inspector Trujillo’s assault on the Nyànyigos was to prevent ritual practice and initiation. The colonial government was less concerned with the violent acts some of these Nyànyigos had supposedly engaged in. Rather, it seems Inspector Trujillo was more apt to document the activities, customs, and language of the group³⁹ that this was the angle civil authorities’ pursued to extirpate the Nyànyigos. His targets on these arrests, and a subsequent analysis of the Nyànyigos, are included in Los Criminales de Cuba y Don José Trujillo. The Nyànyigos criminal legacy during the last quarter of the nineteenth-century is without a doubt an important consequence of their clandestine activities. It is therefore not surprising to see an increase in the regulations governing juegos in general, and white juegos specifically. A list of rules concerning the how white members and juegos should operate appears in the newspaper El Curioso Americano⁴⁰. Clearly, the Nyànyigos understood their dilemma, and attempted to remedy the perception others had of them, either to increase membership or to stifle local authorities. One thing is certain however, the Nyànyigos were not a disorganized bunch of criminals; rather they were labeled as such due to their position in society.

Conclusion

³⁹ (Urrútia y Blanco 1882) pp 370-374 for a detailed analysis of the Nyànyigos
⁴⁰ (Pérez 1893) pp. 35-55
What my research has taught me is that sometimes power relationships should be understood in a multi-stranded way. For example, the Nyànyigos clearly held ritual, local, and in some cases economic authority, but this system operated underneath the larger umbrella of a defunct colonial government in Cuba. The relationship between the Nyànyigos and colonial authority is best understood, like all things Afro-Caribbean, as form of resistance. However, the resistance demonstrated by the Nyànyigos can and should be viewed as a success. From 1836 onward, the Nyànyigos effectively stood their ground between a growing modern agenda, and decrepit colonial regime. According to Miller, nearly every phase of Abakuà’s expansion was engineered by Abakuà leadership with a specific goal in mind. Adaptability and Abakuà are synonymous, and because of its adaptability, it has endured in literature, art, music, and in the juegos still existent in Havana and Matanzas today. The arrival of the Americans in 1899 presented new problems for the Nyànyigo. No longer under an inept colonial system, the Nyànyigos slowly receded from the role of criminal, to that of cultural creator. All things Nyànyigo began to influence the new Cuban society, free from Spanish corruption; the more sacred elements of the group began to surface in literature. Furthermore, it is important to note that even the British saw the twisted relationship between the Nyànyigos and the colonial government. The British were also well aware of the Nyànyigo influence in the port cities. In a memo to the Earl Granville, Consul General Crow writes:

"PS Just as I was closing this dispatch I saw an article in the New York Herald which I think it well to send as it will further show your Lordship how uncontrolled the negroes really are. If things are so bad in the capital under the direct control of the Central Authority it can easily be imagined what they are likely to be in the interior when so many thousands

41 (Miller 2009) pp. 104
more are let loose, and how desirous the Government must be in the interest of the slaves themselves not to precipitate emancipation. The Nanigos is a secret society something like the Indian Thugs whose object is assassination and such is its hold on the Negro that the severest measures on the part of the authorities have failed to break it up”\(^\text{42}\)  

The article Crow is referring to notes the dispersal of a white Juego during a police raid, it goes on to note the "Governor General was instructed to send to Spain a plan for the judicial division of the island so as to establish as soon as possible the system of public and oral Tribunals for criminal offences as it now exists in Spain and to abolish the old and vicious system still prevalent in Cuba”\(^\text{43}\). The British response to the Nyànyigo phenomena is admittedly hilarious, especially given their role in conducting business with the Épkè a century earlier. The Nyànyigo, effectively captured the imagination of outside observers, those who witness their processions during Carnival regarded them as clearly different from other Cabildos and organizations\(^\text{44}\). some observers even noted the establishment of juegos in penal colonies like Ceuta. If the Nyànyigos had influence at Spanish penal colonies, then we can assume why Brito was able to escape the fate of Devils Island\(^\text{45}\).

What we have discussed here are three very distinct adaptations of the Sociedad Abakuà, each one defined against the backdrop of a larger social context. First, with the creation of the first Juego we have seen the Épkè societies adapt to slave conditions by initiating the first Creole lodge. Second, we see the Nyànyigos become diverse racially and socially. Again, this is primarily an adaptive response, more likely one due to increasing social

\(^\text{42}\) (Great Brittain 1883)  
\(^\text{43}\) ibid.  
\(^\text{44}\) (Cabrera 1958)  
\(^\text{45}\) The name given to the penal colony of Fernando Po
tensions on the colony in the mid nineteenth-century. Third, we see the Nyànyigo adapt to growing concerns over their criminal behavior by exposing many of their once secret rules. Later in the twentieth-century, this method of survival would lead to studies into Afro-Cuban culture and folklore. According the Ishemo, the secret nature of Abakuà associations, their language, symbols etc., preserved, adapted and readapted African cultural forms....by syncretizing them to other cultural forms, they significantly contributed to hat is today Afro-Cuban culture. If nothing else, we can say with certainty that Épkè, Abakuà, and the Nyànyigos are all part of a unique African tradition that has allowed these groups to maintain autonomy and authority in their own governance, no matter the situation, including slavery.

While this paper is by no means a complete analysis of the power relations between the Cuban colonial government and the Nyànyigos during the nineteenth-century, it nonetheless is a platform from which to investigate other issues. For example, we are left with several important questions regarding the disposition of the Nyànyigos during 1844, the year of the lash. While, there is only minimal evidence to support a major Épkè or Nyànyigo role in the affair, it still remains as a crucial moment in Cuban history when the colonial government’s fears lost control. There is also the question of the Nyànyigos actual role in Cuban independence, and how it should be viewed given the precedent set by Masonic groups in North America. Questions are also raised as to the actual British role in this phenomenon; clearly there is more to their story than has been presented both here and in other academic works. Ultimately, we can only speculate about much of these issues. Much of the questions I initially raised were confirmed by Ivor Miller and his work, but it nonetheless falls short of

46 (Ishemo 2002) pp 270
presenting an accurate picture of the situation, rather like other scholars, Miller has focused on more contemporary studies of the Sociedad Abakuà.

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