

Institution: Cardiff University		
Unit of Assessment: Music, Drama, Dance, Performing Arts, Film & Screen (33)		
Title of case study: A rediscovered drum: Reviving musical heritage to empower marginalised Matanzas communities		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2012 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Amanda Villepastour	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Reader	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 02/02/2011 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014 - 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? No		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>The Cuban recording industry centres on Havana and marginalises other regional musical traditions. Villepastour's fieldwork in Matanzas Province and her identification of a culturally significant set of antique batá drums gave a new focus to the region's creative production and heritage preservation. She enabled the development of the first recording studio and musical archive in the province, co-produced the first commercial recording generated by the people of Matanzas, and attracted international attention to this formerly marginalised community of artists and musicians. Her research also empowered the extended family which owns the drums to fully understand and participate in their cultural heritage and gave voice to women whose collective memory is undervalued in a male-dominated drumming tradition.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>Batá drumming is at the heart of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería. Batá drums remain closely aligned with their Yorùbá predecessors in West Africa so are a powerful national symbol of African identity and cultural heritage in Cuba. In Santería the drums are also sacred vessels invested with tremendous spiritual, social and emotional power. Cuban scholarship, placing the beginnings of Cuban batá drumming in Havana, created an enduring Havana-centric origin narrative. Consequently, most batá recordings feature the Havana tradition, which has become the dominant representation of batá drumming particularly beyond Cuba. Villepastour's research challenged this narrative by revealing the history of batá in Matanzas, a rural province east of Havana [3.1].</p> <p>2.1 Discovering Ilú Keké</p> <p>Funding from the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust [G3.1] allowed Villepastour to build on her early research about Aña Bí - the most famous batá drums in Matanzas and considered to be one of the oldest surviving sets in Cuba. During fieldwork in 2012, she discovered that a set of contemporaneous drums were being played in Matanzas by drummers who were unaware of their provenance. Through her subsequent ethnographic work, Villepastour:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> identified the rich historical and social value of these little-known consecrated batá drums known as Ilú Keké, revealing that they: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> are closely related to the famous Aña Bí and likely to have been crafted by the same drum maker and played by the same musicians; are at least as old as (and possibly may pre-date) the more famous set; substantiated, through research with priests and instrument makers, the spiritual authenticity of the instruments despite competitors' efforts to discredit them [3.2]. <p>Villepastour made these discoveries by uncovering a multifaceted oral history and scrutinising the drums' physical features. She interviewed dozens of drummers associated with the instruments and gathered eye-witness accounts, oral histories and documents from members of the extended family which owns the drums [3.2]. In later field trips, she also gathered</p>		

previously over-looked accounts from female family members, sometimes passed through generations, on what was witnessed and heard in their homes during ceremonies or as drummers passed through the house. Previous research had relied almost exclusively on information from male drummers, as only males can play consecrated batá. The accounts from female members added a new dimension to Villepastour's ethnographic approach to documenting batá historiography.

2.2 Recording history

In 2016 Villepastour and Cuban musician Luis Bran co-produced a commercial CD [3.2] presenting her Ilú Keké research. Villepastour provided some financial support needed to assemble a mobile studio and record the drums with three generations of ritual musicians: two young singers, drummers who had been playing Ilú Keké in ceremonies since 2008, and three of the oldest surviving musicians who played the drums in the 1950s. The sessions documented previously unrecorded repertoire in a drumming style from the past, as these iconic musicians had neither been recorded nor played together due to the lack of music industry infrastructure in Matanzas. To Villepastour's knowledge, this CD marked the first time consecrated batá drums had been played for a studio recording, where unconsecrated instruments are routinely used.

As co-producer, Villepastour encouraged Bran's team to move away from the polished Havana folkloric recordings by recording with minimal digital editing and fully capturing distinct Matanzas traditions. Her concept design instigated field recordings of actual Santería ceremonies and the Matanzas soundscape alongside studio production, which highlighted the anthropological aspect of the recording and modelled a new approach in Cuba. As well as engendering changed behaviour in the studio to capture the research with the recording approach, Villepastour's detailed liner notes (6,000 words) [3.2] reported Ilú Keké's emerging history and significance. In 2018 the CD won a Special Prize for Musicological Research in Cuba's most prestigious national music awards, CubaDisco (a.k.a. "The Cuban Grammys").

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

[3.1] Villepastour, ed. 2015. *The Yorùbá God of Drumming: Transatlantic Perspectives on the Wood That Talks*. University Press of Mississippi. As well as editing, Villepastour contributed the introduction, a single-authored chapter and a co-authored chapter. Received 2016 British Forum for Ethnomusicology Commendation Book Prize.

[3.2] *Transmisión en la Eritá Meta, Ilú Keké*, MW001, 2016. CD.

Selected grant:

[G3.1] A Villepastour, 'Batá conversations: Guardianship narratives about the batá drum in Nigeria and Cuba', British Academy/Leverhulme Trust, 17/12/2012-24/01/2013, £3,369.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Villepastour's identification of the Ilú Keké drums and subsequent research into their lineage led to a series of impacts, including increased support for the music industry in Matanzas and preservation of a marginalised national tradition. Her inclusive approach empowered the extended family which owns the drums to participate in their own cultural heritage. Further, her work with heritage institutions preserved Matanzas' key role in batá history.

4.1 Supporting the music industry in Matanzas

Villepastour's work on Ilú Keké gave focus to a creative nucleus of people who developed Matanzas' first recording studio, Sendero. She brokered a contract with Music Works NYC, for worldwide distribution of the Ilú Keké CD [3.2], which is the first commercial recording to be generated by the people of Matanzas and helped launch Sendero's mobile recording studio. Luis Bran, the CD's co-producer, confirmed: "[Villepastour] was instrumental for us... helping us produce and finance our first production" [5.1a]. CD tracks have been streamed 11,963 times worldwide in countries as far reaching as the USA, Mexico, Ecuador, Italy, Brazil, Canada, Peru, the UK, Spain, and Argentina [5.2].

Bran integrated Sendero into an artists' collective called El Almacén. Cuba is a communist state so economic information from independent businesses is inaccessible. The success of Sendero/El Almacén, however, can be seen from the expanding scale of their projects, and the increasing number and calibre of incoming international clients (including several Grammy-winning musicians and large student groups from North America). Further, following international recognition the CubaDisco prize garnered in 2018, Bran's subsequent documentary project '#Música Cotidiana' was nominated for a CubaDisco award for Best Documentary (2019) [5.1b].

International musicians and researchers introduced to Bran via Villepastour's research and her community-building in Cuba, testify to the economic benefits. Dance researcher Melissa Noventa spent time in Matanzas in 2016 after Villepastour *"had the foresight to see how Luis [Bran] and I could mutually benefit from each other's work"* [5.3]. She stated: *"the main beneficiaries from my trip were the dancers and musicians with whom I conducted research. They earned \$20-\$50 CUC per session, which exceeds their monthly salaries"* [5.3]. Another of Bran's collaborators [text redacted] stated: *"Amanda's research in Matanzas since 2012 [and]...the 2017 CUBADISCO Award...have raised the profile of Sendero/El Almacén and helped to increase the organisation's possibilities of project work, reaping significant financial benefits for all involved"* [5.4].

By helping artists to build communities, Villepastour brought *"a new, exciting dimension to cultural life in Matanzas"* [5.5]. Cuban music specialist Sara McGuinness (University of West London) had few contacts in the creative industries outside Havana. She was *"inspired by Amanda's Ilú Keké research project opening up new opportunities in Matanzas"* and her collaborations with Bran, Villepastour, and her own UK and Cuban team *"generated innovative ideas and financial benefits for the Cuban collaborating artists and technicians"* [5.5]. Villepastour's introduction of McGuinness to Bran in 2016 led to collaboration on an Erasmus-funded pilot study in November 2017. They subsequently created an immersive virtual performance space which brought Matanzas music to UK audiences in events at Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum (18 May 2018, 1,600 visitors) [5.5] and the Evolutionary Arts Hackney Concert Hall (La Linea Festival, 5 May 2019) [5.5]. Crediting Villepastour's network-building, McGuinness confirmed she *"opened many doors for me and other foreign collaborators"* and that the resulting opportunities *"would not have been possible without her"* [5.5].

4.2 Preserving musical heritage

With the recording industry centred in Havana, the distinct musical traditions of Matanzas (including repertoire, performance techniques, and unique ritual practices) were under-represented. Historically, Matanzas artists relied on researchers and producers from Havana or abroad to interpret and document their traditions. By co-producing the Ilú Keké CD with a Matanzas team and bringing together three elder batá drummers to record, Villepastour preserved a sacred musical legacy in a locally accessible form. This safeguarded the traditions for future generations and ensured Matanzas' place in the batá's national heritage.

Regarding the recording's importance, Bran stated that the younger drummers *"didn't know a lot of the old ways, or the houses where these people would have played, certain nuances about this music, mostly because these [older] drummers, when they reach a certain age, they just retire, so the communication between them and the young drummers, unless they come take lessons with them, gets lost"* [5.1].

Reviews and testimonies from researchers who understand the complex challenges in Matanzas highlighted the unique preservation and heritage value of the CD:

- ethnomusicologist/broadcaster [text redacted]: *"I don't know of any other ethnographic album quite like it, certainly not for Cuba ... And it's a marvellous piece of research with huge potential for the right kind of impact"* [5.6];
- ethnomusicologist Ruthie Meadows (University of Nevada): *"[it contextualises] the batá set's historical significance within contested oral and academic narratives"* [5.6];
- Melissa Noventa, (PhD researcher, Queens University, Ontario): *"[it] engage[s] the listener directly with a historic voice from the community; something that is"*

unprecedented in any album I have heard previously, and a key component to decolonizing ethnography” [5.3];

- Black Grooves, a music review site hosted by the Archives of African American Music and Culture at Indiana University: *“[the CD] ensures that Ilú Keké takes its rightful place in Cuba’s history of batá drumming” [5.6].*

Ilú Keké and its drummers have since garnered considerable ritual and musical prestige. Bran says: *“Through Amanda’s research we have now discovered that this drum dates back from the time when the first sets of drums actually appear in this province. The discovery is monumental and the drum has been restored ... And it’s a source of pride nowadays. This is probably the most in-demand religious drum that is played in the city of Matanzas” [5.1].*

4.3 Empowering the family owners of Ilú Keké to participate in their own cultural heritage

Villepastour’s inclusive approach integrated the voices of the extended Soler family (owners of Ilú Keké – approaching 100 members across Cuba) into the drummers’ discourse. In discovering the drums’ intergenerational biography and revealing their historical significance [3.2], she motivated the family to fully participate in an important aspect of cultural heritage.

[Text redacted] confirmed that *“Compared to what I had previously heard about Ilú Keké, Dr Villepastour’s research has turned everything upside-down and changed the way we think about their history and value”* and *“It is clear that Dr Villepastour’s research has increased the cultural, spiritual and moral value of these instruments. Recognition of the true history of the drums and the continuity of their representation has united the family as they have become aware of their spiritual and cultural value in the province of Matanzas” [5.7].*

Although only men can play the consecrated batá drums, women have an important role within the Santería religious tradition. A family member who is an initiated senior priestess emphasised that drums are *“the spiritual heart”* of this religion and stated that *“As a result of Dr Villepastour’s research...numerous religious grandchildren are now in closer contact to protect Ilú Keké’s spiritual heritage. The spirituality of my family is transmitted through the hands that play the drum” [5.7].*

4.4 Building a musical archive in Matanzas

Villepastour’s work with heritage institutions in Cuba preserved Ilú Keké’s historical legacy and drew attention to the key role of Matanzas in the batá’s national history. [Text redacted] has committed to include Villepastour’s Ilú Keké research materials in his archive, a move [text redacted] has stated will *“provide a real incentive to deepen the study of other musical practices that characterize the province” [5.8].* Formal agreement of this was delayed due to the Covid-19 pandemic [a letter of intent is provided, - 5.8]. However, [text redacted] confirmed the *“vital importance”* of Villepastour’s research *“as a concrete action in the processes of safeguarding cultural heritage in Cuba” [5.8].* [Text redacted] is predominantly focussed on literature and poetry; inclusion of Ilú Keké research marks, therefore, an important expansion of their music collection.

[Text redacted] also opened up opportunities for the Soler family, including female family members, to fully participate in batá historiography by donating materials. Yamira Alfonso Soler stated that *“Due to the research, we have all been given voice in a way that allows us to continue contributing to the research through a planned archiving project in Matanzas City” [5.7].* [Text redacted] confirmed that it *“has given the family a voice, including the women; they too are normally excluded from conversations about the batá but this research has given them a voice as well” [5.7].* For [text redacted], this inclusive approach *“strengthens the social value of our commission as an institution” [5.8].* [Text redacted] confirmed that: *“It was her [Villepastour’s] idea to encourage the Soler family to deposit further materials related to the drums, which would undoubtedly become a stimulus for similar research by other researchers. It is momentous and the seriousness and depth of the work contributes significantly to the realization of this important tradition” [5.8].* Referring to *“the added value”* of bringing women’s

voices to this field, [text redacted] also stated: “*that actually becomes an act of historical justice*” [5.8].

Villepastour undertook her sustained programme of research and impact in Matanzas in the face of political sensitivities and practical difficulties associated with fieldwork in Cuba. Her work delivered significant benefits for music, heritage and culture in the region. There is now infrastructure in place to support music production, local communities have been empowered to document their own traditions, and there is a new, richer understanding of Matanzas’ role in Cuba’s cultural history.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

[5.1] a. Afropop Worldwide interview with Luis Bran, 2016, b. ‘CubaDisco music awards announced this May: the winners + videos’, Cuba50, 29 May 2019

[5.2] Ilú Keké CD streaming data

[5.3] Testimonial from dancer/musician Melissa Noventa

[5.4] [Text redacted]

[5.5] Testimonial from Sara McGuinness

[5.6] Reviews of the Ilú Keké CD [Text redacted]

[5.7] Testimonials from Soler family members

[5.8] [Text redacted]