
Lucumi Divination, the Mythic World and the Management of Misfortune

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Abstract: This paper examines Lucumi healing practices in relation to anthropological understandings of how symbolic healing works. This essay focuses upon divination because so much that is fundamental to the process of symbolic healing in Lucumi religion occurs during divination. After tracing the evolution of Lucumi Orisha worship, I describe Lucumi etiological theory, its basic categories of misfortune and how interaction between cowrie shell diviners and their clients sets people on the road to healing. After this I compare Lucumi divination practices with those of two other healer types who also use cowries in divination.

Keywords: Popular religion, ethnomedicine, Afro-Caribbean, divination, symbolic healing, Santería

Résumé : Cet article examine les pratiques de guérison Lucumi à la lumière des interprétations anthropologiques contemporaines relatives au fonctionnement de la guérison symbolique. Les guérisseurs Lucumi utilisent une pharmacopée de plantes, des techniques de guérison spirituelle et diverses autres formes de rituels, mais cet article s'intéresse avant tout à la divination, parce que c'est un canal fondamental de guérison symbolique dans la religion Lucumi. Après avoir retracé l'évolution du culte des Orishas Lucumi à partir de ses sources culturelles africaines et européennes, je décris la théorie étiologique Lucumi, ses catégories fondamentales de malchance et comment l'interaction entre les devins utilisant les cauris et leurs clients ouvre la porte à la guérison. Après quoi, je compare les pratiques de divination du Lucumi avec celles de deux autres types de guérisseurs qui utilisent aussi les cauris dans la divination.

Mots-clés : Religion populaire, ethnomédecine, afro-caraiïbe, divination, guérison symbolique, Santería

Introduction

This article examines Lucumi divination practices in relation to current anthropological understandings of how symbolic healing works. It is based on observations of the several variants of Lucumi and Yoruba Orisha worship that are found mainly in the major urban centers of the Eastern seaboard of the United States. These have been carried out both formally and informally among Cuban, Puerto Rican, African American, Nigerian and Euroamerican practitioners over the past thirty years (Brandon 1983, 1991, 2002, 2005). This essay focuses on the practices of priests, priestesses and devotees affiliated with Lucumi Orisha worship which originated as a distinct form in Cuba.

Lucumi healers use botanical medicine, spiritual healing techniques and a variety of other forms of ritual in their healing work but this essay focuses upon divination because so much that is fundamental to the process of symbolic healing in Lucumi religion occurs during divination. After tracing Lucumi Orisha worship's evolution from its African and European cultural sources, we describe Lucumi etiological theory, its basic categories of misfortune and how interaction between cowrie shell diviners and their clients sets people on the road to healing.

Lucumi Religion (Santería)

Origins, History and Extent

Orisha devotion, a religious tradition that venerates deities called Orisha and is primarily associated with the Yoruba ethnic group from whose language the term *Orisha* derives, is found mainly in the countries of Nigeria, Togo and the Republic of Benin and is an ancient religious system with millions of adherents in West Africa as well as in the African diaspora. Lucumi Orisha worship (also known variously as Santería, *regla de Ocha*, *regla de Lucumi*, *Oricha*, *Ocha* or simply *Lucumi*) is a Cuban variant of

this tradition, one of a number of related Orisha devotion cults existing in the Caribbean region, Central and South America, and the United States.

Orisha devotion came to Cuba initially through the importation of West Africans as slaves. In the beginnings of Cuba's involvement in the slave trade only a small segment of the enslaved Africans brought to Cuba came from areas where Orisha worship was prominent but between 1840 and 1870 more than one-third of all the Africans brought into Cuba were from areas where there were large numbers of Orisha worshippers. These people came from many different locations throughout Nigeria and the Gulf of Benin and bore a wide number of ethnic and other identities.

Although terms like Yoruba, Nago, Ketu or Lucumi probably were in use in West Africa before the Atlantic slave trade, West Africans from what is now Nigeria identified themselves with localized sociopolitical units distinguished by language and grouped around major towns and kingdoms rather than in terms of these broader designations (see Peel 2000: 283-88.) Before, during and after the Atlantic slave trade there were settlements of Yoruba speakers residing in what is now the Republic of Benin (see Parrinder 1947). Yoruba speakers in these areas were in close contact with the Fon, Ewe, Gun and other groups with whom they traded, borrowed and imitated deities, symbols and ritual practices.¹ During the slave trade people who would later be called Lucumi entered Cuba as people from Oyo, as Ijebus, Egba and Egbado, or people from Ondo, Ijesha or Ekiti all of whom spoke related and mutually intelligible dialects of the same language. Other existing sociopolitical units round the Gulf of Benin that included significant numbers of Yoruba-speakers, also contributed to the raw material out of which Lucumi identity was formulated in Cuba.² As J.L. Matory points out (2005), Lucumi is "a novel identity born of African and African-diasporic experience" (56).

Once they were in Cuba, all Africans, regardless of where they had originated, came under pressure to convert to Catholicism. To this end the Catholic Church organized Afro-Catholic fraternities called *cabildos*. The *cabildos* were mutual aid societies that recruited their members from among people belonging to the different African "nations" that Cuban officials recognized and around which they organized religious education, social relations, preferences for slave importation, work roles, prestige, marriage and public festivities. The nations were associated with a number of cultural and behavioural stereotypes that came to distinguish and symbolically define them. These "African nations" were new ethnic identities formulated within the Cuban context and

superseding the immigrants' former identities. Lucumi was one of these African nations and the *cabildos* organized around this identity were *cabildos de Lucumi*, each dedicated to and named after a specific patron Catholic saint whose icon its members carried in festival processions and displayed prominently at the *cabildo's* physical location. At the same time as the Afro-Cuban *cabildos* promoted Catholic religious education among the different African nations, as well as participation of Africans in the church's public festivals, the *cabildo* also provided a centre where people could gather regularly and secretly to venerate the Orisha. Within these Afro-Catholic institutions, many people continued to practice Orisha devotion, even if it was accompanied by, hidden behind or mixed with Catholic rites and ritual symbols. In this context devotees developed a system of correspondences that associated their West African deities with Catholic saints and began to call them *Orichas* and *Santos* pretty much interchangeably. In the late 19th century, however, when it became clear that the *cabildos'* African religious traditions—even in their mixed and modified forms—were not about to disappear, the Catholic Church and the colonial government joined hands to try and stamp them out. Lucumi Oricha worship, and the *cabildos* associated with them, became clandestine.

It was during this era of suppression that Lucumi religion was influenced by the spiritist doctrines of Hippolyte Rivail. Rivail's books began appearing in Cuba as early as the 1850s, but between 1870 and 1880 his writings spread like a tidal wave throughout the French and Spanish Caribbean and into Central and South America.³ Some Santeria priests came to view apprenticeship as a spiritist medium as a valid, even necessary, prerequisite for the practice of their religion. They became adepts in both systems and adopted some of Espiritismo's healing techniques. Another significant input during this period came from the increased contact with West Africa that took place after the abolition of slavery.

Saracino and others have documented a stream of trans-Atlantic travel and commerce uniting Cuba with Lagos, Nigeria during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when Ocha was taking on its present form and beginning its expansion across the Cuba landscape (Palmié 2002:162-163, 331:n.8). Recent oral history research has identified several key figures who emerged as influential Lucumi religious reformers in the late 19th century and early 20th century. All of them were either formerly enslaved Afro-Cubans who had journeyed to Nigeria after slavery's end and then returned to Cuba, or they were Nigerian immigrants who traveled freely between Nigeria and Cuba during this period (see Brown 2003;

Mason 1996; Ramos 2000, 2003; and Sandoval 2006). These reformers established a neo-African direction for Lucumi based in part on African precedents, partly on new inventions and partly in adaptations from what were already current styles of practice in the clandestine *cabildos*. The situation in which Lucumi continued to develop in the early twentieth century was quite complex: While official teachings of the Catholic Church were the pre-eminent institutional ideology and bathed everything else in its aura, a folk Catholicism existed outside and beyond its institutional reach, and Lucumi devotees interacted with spiritists, as well as the devotees of other Cuban neo-African cults, in an intricate mutually interactive field of negotiations and influences. It was the new religious form promulgated by the neo-African reformers of the late 19th century that became the dominant form in Havana and set a standard against which the Lucumi religious practices of other regions were evaluated. This is the form that was still spreading out into Cuba's rural areas in the 1950s and is mainly what was imported to the United States and elsewhere after the 1959 Cuban revolution.

The story of Lucumi, then, is partly the story of how an "ethnicity" was transformed over time. Aspects of the older local West African ethnic identities were deleted, reified or generalized in response to the logic of the Cuban historical situation and the definitions it imposed. Along this way Lucumi "ethnicity" absorbed a wide variety of cultural elements, many individuals who did not have ancestors from the original towns and kingdoms and people who did not speak Yoruba. Lucumi eventually came to be associated primarily with the worship of the Oricha/Santos as opposed to Lucumi ancestry, language or geographical origin. Disparate accidents of heritage and birth were made coherent by collapsing them all into a unique *religious* category, Lucumi, which people began to think of as an unchanging heritage. In this way, of all of the tributaries converging there, only the Lucumi came to be remembered as ancestral; all innovation and change were fitted into it (Brandon 1993:161).

While Catholicism and Espiritismo have affected the development of Lucumi Oricha worship, its ritual system and cosmology still presents a strong African character and close resemblances to the ritual practices of West African Orisha worshippers now identified as Yoruba. The names and personalities of the Lucumi Oricha are found in Yoruba Orisha worship, as are very similar divination procedures, ceremonial spirit possession practices, some liturgical music and musical instruments, dance as a medium of worship, ancestor veneration, reincarnation beliefs, and the practice of animal sacrifice. Ocha also employs songs, prayers and incantations in a

Yoruba-derived ritual language called Lucumi. Lucumi appears to be a dialect of Yoruba that has deteriorated over time by having lost the system of tones that is such a significant aspect of the Yoruba language's semantic structure. Lucumi is not in everyday use; it is mainly restricted to religious contexts and most devotees do not understand it.

The spread of Lucumi outside of Cuba mainly owes its origins to Cuban exiles who left in 1959 and also those who were part of the exodus from the Port of Mariel in the 1980s. They brought Lucumi to the United States, where it spread to other Latino communities and to African-American, White, and Asian communities as well. From these contacts in the United States, Lucumi Orisha worship has made its way back into the Caribbean to Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Cubans transplanted the religion to Mexico, and also to Venezuela where the Santos/Orichas have already begun to win new devotees and exert an influence on Venezuelan popular religions.⁴

Beliefs

Despite the impact of Espiritismo and Christianity, African religious conceptions clearly dominate Santería's pantheon, ritual and world view. Santería theology recognizes a somewhat distant Supreme Being, called by various names, such as Olodumare, Olorun, Olofi or simply Dios (God) in Spanish. The Supreme Being created the universe and all things in it, including the Orisha who are the main focus of worship. The Orichas (also called *Santos*) are powerful spiritual beings—at once forces of nature, guardians of particular facets of human life, and magnified human personality types—sent by Olodumare to populate and civilize the earth and endow it with the essential powers necessary for the harmonious existence of all living things. While there are innumerable orichas throughout the world, and the number of them known among Yorubas in Nigeria is very large, only a few have special prominence in Lucumi, and each of these corresponds to a saint also known and venerated in Cuba's Catholic churches. The spirits of people who have died are also important. The ancestral dead are closer to human beings than they are to Olodumare or the oricha, and deceased family members continue to have an intimate connection with their descendants. The ancestral dead are capable of intervening in the affairs of their living relatives and can be called upon to intercede with the oricha. Though they are less powerful than the oricha and less attention is given to them, they still receive respect and veneration, and every devotee has a small domestic altar dedicated to them.

An encompassing energy called *aché* flows through and envelopes the whole hierarchy of beings from

Olodumare, through the oricha, the ancestral dead and other spirits, plants, animals and the entire natural world. This energy can be manipulated through rituals and can be made to manifest itself in different forms. Aché can be directed to the improvement of human life and the resolution of human problems by those who have learned how to perform the appropriate rituals and ceremonies, certain spiritual and artistic practices and through herbalism. Each oricha has its own divine power (aché) through which it is sustained and through which it acts on the aspects of the world over which Olodumare gives it dominion. When the oricha first formed human beings, they also taught them how to access each oricha's power. This knowledge is the basis of the rituals and doctrines of the different priesthoods. Through these rituals devotees expect to achieve an active harmony with the Supreme Being, a closer relationship with the oricha, the Dead and the natural world, and increased control over the forces affecting their lives and personal fortunes.

Lay devotees carry out a round of private offerings to the Santos in their homes. Lucumi priests and priestesses perform rituals in their homes, rented spaces or in the open air, and provide herbal medicine, counselling and symbolic healing to devotees and the general public. In spite of Lucumi's history of religious persecution, its adherents are generally tolerant of other religions. Many observe an annual cycle of celebrations coordinated with the saints' days of Cuba's Catholic church. Many regard themselves as Catholics, while others fluidly slip between the worlds of the Catholic mass, the spiritist's white table, and the Oricha drum-dance with little deliberation or anxiety.

Lucumi Religion and Healing

Previous studies of Lucumi healing in both Cuba and the United States have followed two distinct tracks. One is an ethnomedical approach grounded in anthropology which situates its studies firmly within the domains of belief and ritual efficacy as conceived from within the religion itself and focuses on microlevel interactions among healers and clients and, to certain extent, the larger social context. Foundational studies by Cabrera (1993[1954], 2001), Sandoval (1975, 1977), Halifax and Weidman (1973), Garrison (1977), Perez y Mena (1977) fall within this framework as does later work by Wedel (2004), Nodal and Ramos (2005) and myself (Brandon 1991, 1993, 2005). Existing in a seeming parallel universe is a biomedical literature stemming from the encounters of Lucumi adherents with the United States health care system, especially around issues of mental health. This literature is oriented largely around issues of practical concern to mental health professionals

who must attempt to distinguish culturally-constituted shared religious symbols from the idiosyncratic symbolism sometimes employed by delusional individuals, and to distinguish culturally cultivated altered states of consciousness (such as ceremonial spirit possession) from psychopathology (for example Iglesias and Iglesias 2006; Martinez-Taboas 1999; Ruiz 2010; Sandoval 1979; Somer 2006). A smaller and more recent literature, which often submerges studies of Lucumi healing within studies of spiritism, approaches the subject from the perspective of Hispanic folk traditions and cultural competency on one hand and complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) on the other (for example An-Fu, Wong, et al. 2006; Comas-Diaz 2006; Espin 1988; Littlewood and Vanable 2008; Viladrich and Abraído-Lanza 2009). Despite their differences in approach and emphasis, a unified picture of Lucumi healing arises from a consideration of the literature as a whole.

As a form of healing work, Lucumi is a multifunctional system heavily dependent upon a decentralized network of folk sector ritual specialists (called santeras and santeros) who receive fees for their services. Haunted by the image of a body permeable to all manner of influences that cause preventable suffering and death, Lucumi healers take a holistic approach to healing that emphasizes divination as a diagnostic and interpretive tool. The profound fatalism that divination would seem to imply is countered by a this-worldly, human-centred, instrumentalist orientation that actively solicits patients' participation in their own treatment, while promoting their dependence upon spiritual beings. The healers seem to have some recognition of the boundaries of their expertise and many have come to view themselves as having a complementary relationship to biomedicine, other folk specialists, and some CAM modalities and will sometimes refer their clients to them. At the same time, they continue to retain the practices, symbols, values and goals that make their healing system distinctive.

Healing work in Santeria is primarily a work of restoration. If we look at how santeros describe their healing procedures, and what they intend to accomplish by using them, we can derive a model of the healthy state they try to restore. This is a state in which human beings are clean, strong, cool, calm, fresh and balanced. Against this model of health we can see what needs to be countered: heat, dirt, "the bad," ritual pollution, malign spiritual influences and itinerant wandering spirits. Heat is countered by procedures that "cool," especially the head. "Dirt" can be cleansed by special baths and other procedures. "The Bad" can be transferred to objects, animals or plants, lifted into the air or concentrated and deposited

in a specific place. Ritual pollution can be washed away; itinerant spirits compelled to leave a person alone.

Integrated into the arsenal of Lucumi ritual healing techniques are an ethnomedical pharmacopeia of plants thought to possess curative, magical and spiritual powers, and divination systems whose task is to map out the forces impinging on the person, provide a plan of action, and link what has been found out to the person's fate in life and their spiritual path.

Lucumi Divination and Universals of Symbolic Healing

Taken together, the writings of Thomas Csordas (1987), Arthur Kleinman (1980), James Dow (1986) and Daniel Moerman (1979) elaborate a meaning-centered approach to ritual healing and describe a set of six basic conditions that need to be satisfied for it to take place; by implication these conditions should also apply to healing in Lucumi religion. First, the healing work takes place within a frame of reference comprised of culturally specific beliefs, idioms and metaphors. This frame of reference, which Dow calls the healing system's "mythic world" explains the nature of the sufferer's problems, how such problems arise and what can be done about them. At a conceptual level the mythic world provides the emic equivalent of a disease theory's etiological and nosological⁵ categories as well as a known set of possible healing strategies that can be brought into play. The mythical world, as Dow describes it, is "a model of experiential reality whose elements represent solutions to personal human problems" (Dow 1986:59-61). Lucumi divination provides gateway into healing and does this work.

Second, a "symbolic bridge," to use Kleinman's term, needs to be in place if the sufferer is to make a connection between their own personal sufferings, a wider context of social relations, cultural meanings and values and the concepts, images and ritual symbols available in the healer's mythic world (Kleinman 1980:41-43). The healer has to draw on what Kaja Finkler calls a "deep cultural grammar governing how the person orients himself to the world around him and to his inner world" (Finkler 1985:8). How much of this cultural grammar has to be shared between healer and client is an empirical question that needs to be answered but, theoretically, the failure to erect this bridge would be expected to leave the patient isolated in an individualized personal world of bodily or mental suffering that is not only not directly accessible to anyone else but also is not correlated with anything or anyone else in their world. Lacking this connecting bridge they remain an atom of pain and uncertainty with a

harassed consciousness. In Lucumi much of this symbolic bridge is provided by during divination. (The diviner outlines the nature of the problem, usually without gathering any information about it directly from the person who has consulted him.)

Third, the task, then, is to get the sufferer to accept the healer's mythic world as a valid framework that comprehends their experience. It is the healer's presentation of self, skills of persuasion, compassion and evocation, what I call the healer's available "tactics of the moment," and the sufferer's response to them, that activate the symbolic bridge between the person's unique experience of suffering and the healer's attempt to "reframe" it. In Lucumi healing this, too, occurs during divination.

Up to this point the process is portrayed primarily as a cognitive and conceptual one, the erection of an intellectual scaffolding which, while being a necessary condition for even the possibility of moving forward, has little emotional or motivational significance. To actually move forward, however, the sufferer, fourth, has to be motivated enough to invest their desires, hopes and fears in the effort of walking over the symbolic bridge and through the door into the healer's mythical world and its links to the wider social, cultural and cosmological concerns that exist there. In Lucumi healing interaction between diviners and clients elicits and guides this process.

Fifth, the healer can only guide therapeutic change by helping the client reframe their past and present experiences both cognitively and emotionally. It is in manipulating the concepts, memory images and tangible concrete ritual symbols of the mythic world they both have agreed to participate in that efficacy lies. Ultimately, the journey and the destination are of the same nature. The means through which symbolic healing takes place and the end result it achieves are both transformations of experience. In Lucumi healing, although the diviner may detail the rituals that need to be done, they might be carried out by someone else.

Finally, along with whatever mental, physical or spiritual relief they have obtained from the encounter, patients successfully "healed" in this way have also acquired a new way of thinking about their experiences and can now conceptualize them in terms of the healer's mythical world to some degree. Besides this new way of thinking about their experiences, they also have acquired a new way of talking about them and a new narrative about the encounter itself and its effects.⁶

Disease, Divination and the Management of Misfortune

Etiology in the Mythic World: How Diseases Arise

Santeros and santeras believe that illness and death are inherent in the world and the nature of human beings. Illness and death were created by God. Diseases were born with the creation of the world; death with creation of human beings. Once it became clear to God that humans were becoming too numerous to sustain on earth indefinitely, God created death to regularly take people away so that Earth would remain inhabitable. Illness and death come into the world with us; at birth they already surround the body. They are an inevitable part of what people experience as a result of their temporary residence on earth. Not even the santero or santera can escape them. Illness and death are likened to the wind: They have no fixed position, and are no more attached to one person than another. The price of bodily experience in this world is illness and death.

Andres Rodriguez Reyes (2004) cites a Lucumi story that traces disease to discord and disagreements among several different parts of the body, each of which has a separate identity and personality of its own. According to him, "this parable illustrates that a break in harmony in the work of the organs of the body, and alteration or stagnation of their functions, are the fundamental causes of the appearance of health problems" (75-76). There are other Lucumi narratives that describe a similar picture (see Burguera and Castro 2002:29, 31). While such tales illustrate a general metaphorical idea of how and why diseases arise, Lucumi healers generally do not discuss the causes of disease in these terms.

According to Lucumi religion, much of human suffering is rooted in disturbed relationships among human beings, and in faulty relationships between human beings and the oricha, the ancestral dead and a variety of spirits. The most prominent oricha are associated with specific parts of the body which they can afflict and protect, as well as cure. Carelessness in dealing with the details of ritual interaction with the oricha can lead to sickness; so can unintentional violation of the behaviors that ensure the oricha's protection of the devotee from illness and death. If a devotee violates a food taboo imposed by the oricha to protect him from harm, or accidentally misdirects a work of magic intended to ward off a specific disease, he will get sick. The ancestral dead may intervene in offenses against family morality; sometimes this results in sickness, even across generations. Malicious people do not necessarily cease to be malicious people because they have died. After death they may still seek

out victims, either on their own or at the bidding of a sorcerer. In the latter case, the sufferer is ill because someone has sent a "dark spirit" to them. It is this dark spirit that is making them sick.

Santeros recognize naturalistic forms of disease causation as well as the more personalistically oriented ones just described, but they are specialists in the latter, seeking beneath apparent causes for the hidden interplay of the spiritual beings and invisible forces with which they are concerned. Over the last two centuries, Lucumi religious healers practices have developed and evolved within medically pluralistic societies in which help-seekers have a variety of options, both sacred and secular.⁷ In Lucumi etiology diseases can result from natural causes, social causes, spiritual causes, all three kinds of causes, or any combination of them. While they do not discount the influences of germs, the physical environment or other material factors, in the Lucumi system spiritual and social relationships play the dominant role in explaining the causes of diseases and misfortunes.

Basic Lucumi Disease Categories and their Relation to Divination

The emic nosological terms in Lucumi Oricha Worship are Lucumi language terms that yield a classificatory system whose meanings are mediated by divination practices and the imagery associated with them, and by references to God, the oricha and the Dead.⁸ Cowrie shell divination goes by several names: *los caracoles* (Spanish), *diloggun* and *merindiloggun* (Lucumi). The Spanish term meaning shells, likens the cowries to miniature conch shells found in the sea. *Diloggun* is an abbreviated form of *merindiloggun*, a Lucumi numeral referring to the traditional number of shells used in divination, sixteen. These naturally occurring shells, off-white in color, have a slitted mouth fringed with little ridges resembling tiny teeth on the front side and a rounded back on the other. For use in divination the backs are filed down to open up a wide circular cavity. The significant outcomes are determined by the number of front-side mouths that appear face-up when the shells as cast as a group. Each of the possible outcomes has a name. Collectively they are called *odu*, (also *ordu* or *ordun*) in Lucumi, and *letras* in Spanish. The shells are accompanied by a set of objects collectively called *ibo* or *igbo*. These objects play an assistive role in interpreting the *odu* during the divination process. All priests and priestesses receive a set of the shells and *igbo* objects during their initiation but not all of them go on to become expert in divining with them. I will not go into the internal details of the divination system or divination ritual itself here. There are a number of good accounts available for this.⁹ Instead, I will concentrate on

Anthropologica 54 (2012)

the knowledge production and motivational roles cowry shell divination in symbolic healing and on the interaction between diviners and their clients. In the immediate context, divination provides a practical classification in which disease is placed under a general category that designates misfortunes.

The two initial outcomes of throws of the cowries constitute the client's sign or letter (Spanish *letra*) and are considered to be neutral. Its valence, referred to as "how the letter comes," is determined by an ancillary technique in which the diviner gives a pair of small objects to the client who is asked to shake them up in his cupped hands and then hide them, one in each fist, so that they cannot be seen. The diviner casts the cowries again and this outcome determines which of the client's hands the diviner will select. The object in the chosen hand determines how the letter should be interpreted, whether "it comes by way of" *ire* (good fortune or blessing) or *osogbo* (bad fortune or evil). The third pair of throws of the cowrie shells yields the pair of letras that determine what type of *osogbo* is present. Disease, called *ano* or *aro*, may appear at this point "coming" as a kind of *osogbo*, that is, as one subclass of misfortune among others. Subsequent pairs of throws yield letras that guide the diviner's choice of objects for the client to hide and the diviner's choice between the hands in which they are hidden.

Aro and *ano* are both considered to be active and dynamic processes for which the imagery of travel, movement and oscillation are entirely appropriate. Some santeros distinguish between the two of them. For example, "When still, [and] it has possessed the body, it is called *Aro*. When it is already up on the body it is called *Ano*" (Luis Dionisio Alfonso, 43 years of being initiated, respondent for Reyes 2004). For Luis Alfonso, *ano* is a later, more manifestly and actively expressed form of *aro*, which can be "slept and awakened." *Ano* swings between being more active and less active; it oscillates, improves by becoming calm or intensifies by being aggravated; it sleeps and it wakes up in response to certain human motives and actions.

The diviner, delving deeper, must determine the origin of the disease, "how the *aro* comes."¹⁰ The different ways in which *aro* arises, (sometimes referred to as its *caminos*, Spanish for roads, paths) generate a classification of *aro*. To do this, the diviner employs the same hand-choice technique described earlier but goes down a list of disease categories (based on the ways that *aro* can arise). The oracle guides the diviner's selection of the client's hands, allowing the deities speaking to reveal yes or no answers through the meanings of the object appearing in the chosen hand, such as, "Does this *aro* come from the dead?" "Does this *ano* come from the *oricha*?" Once

the answers to these questions are determined, and the proper category of *aro* identified, the client is said to "carry" that sign or letter.

Reyes' informants give a list of categories of *aro*. These are Lucumi language terms that classify the types of *aro* by referring them to their cosmological place of origin, a particular spiritual being or class of spiritual beings, a spiritual component of the self or the means through which misfortune and disease come to affect the person. They are:

1. *Aro otonowa*, a term that means "illness that comes from the sky" is synonymous with another term "*aro Elese Olodumare*," or "illness by the hand of God." The link between these two terms comes from the idea that the Supreme Being resides in the sky like a king with a "celestial court" of which the *Oricha/Santos* are members. Illnesses falling under this sign are direct acts of God and the *Orisha/Santos* can do nothing that will save people from the fate that *Olodumare* has marked out for them. This does not close off the matter entirely, though, for there are still some rituals the santero can perform aimed at securing advice from the *Oricha/Santos* and the person's ancestral dead that can still be of help even if they cannot entirely alter the situation. Particularly if the *aro* is dire or possibly terminal, the diviner sends people carrying this sign to a physician. Aside from the fact that the santero does not have any therapy that will overcome the will of God, such referrals are self-protective and shield the santero from prosecution. A physician may well be able to do something about the biomedical aspects of the person's situation that a santero cannot, but neither one of them can overcome or reverse what *Olodumare* has destined.
2. *Aro elese Eggun* is sickness that comes from the Dead, which include the client's ancestors on one hand and, on the other, the more general dead who have no familial relationship to the person carrying this sign. In Lucumi religion, the ancestral dead continue to have an intimate relationship to their living descendants and expect to be remembered and honoured by them at small altars kept in their descendants' homes. When obligations to the ancestral dead are forgotten and unfulfilled or when offenses to family morality occur, the ancestors may indicate their displeasure and use disease to force actions that will atone or put things right. Not until the situation has been rectified will the person carrying this sign recover. On the other hand, there is also a fairly widely known form of sorcery through which someone can gain control of the spirit of a malicious dead person and send that

spirit to harm a living person making them ill. Sickness that arises because of this kind of malign magic is also considered to come by way of the dead.

3. The person carrying the sign *Aro elese Ocha*, has a problem with the Oricha/Santos and it is because of this problem that the Santos have made them sick. Perhaps the person is in debt to the oricha. They have asked the oricha for something, which has been granted, but the devotee has done nothing in return. Perhaps the oricha requires something of the person but the person doesn't know about it. One way to find about it is to be forced into a divination session where the oricha can speak to the person through the diviner. Sickness is one way to do this. If an oricha wants someone initiated into their priesthood and the person resists, the oricha may use illness to force them into it. The illness is the oricha's means of "pinching" the person and getting their attention. This is different from another situation in which the person initiates into the priesthood in order to come under a specific oricha's protection and power for the cure of the disease that afflicts them. In this case the oricha may be part of the therapy but not part of the cause.
4. *Aro elese Eleda*, "Illness from the Eleda," refers to part of a person's psychological makeup that also has a spiritual counterpart that continues to reside in the Other World. Corporeally, the eleda is considered to reside in a person's head. The eleda plays a key role in divination because it is through the eleda in the head that the diviner reads the eleda in the Other World. Thus, the diviner usually touches the client's forehead with his hands full of the cowrie shells before casting them the first time. *Aro* from the eleda indicates that the person is being made sick by their own thoughts and behaviours. They rebel against normal codes of behaviour; they disobey the rules of their society, family, religion, job, marriage and so on. They know that what they are doing is wrong but do it anyway. This causes them many misfortunes and may result in complex physical, mental and spiritual problems that also can affect other people.
5. *Aro elese Araye* is illness produced by witchcraft that was ordered by someone or just "picked up" somewhere.¹¹ When disease comes this way, it comes through the intent of someone who wants to cause harm. The person carrying this sign may have been the direct target of malign magic through any of a number of means which divination may be able to discover. On the other hand, the person carrying this sign may simply have been in the presence or

environment of a person who was targeted for harm and been affected just because of their social relationship to them. A person only has to pass through a place that has been affected by it, or come into contact with someone who has, to be affected themselves. Malign influences, and the illnesses associated with them, can attach themselves to totally innocent people, clinging to them. People like this are said to have "picked up" witchcraft in much the same way a person "picks up" a wad of chewing gum on their shoe after unknowingly stepping on it in the street.

6. *Aro omo Aro* or "Illness is the child of Illness" implies the illness of a child comes by way of a punishment for the religious or moral transgressions of a parent, especially the mother. An oft-cited example of this is found in a story in which the deity Ochun, pictured as a sexually promiscuous woman who has had a long string of abortions, becomes pregnant once again and consults a diviner to find out which of her many lovers is the father. The diviner puts an end to the Ochun's cycle of promiscuity, pregnancy and abortion by telling her that she must give birth this time, regardless of who (or even what) the father is. Ochun obeys and brings the pregnancy to term but the child is born sick, a divine punishment for her prior transgressions.

Although the major disease category terms are mediated by divination, the oricha themselves are a general purpose idiom through which objects in the world, colours, foods, plants, natural phenomena, emotional states, personalities, and so on are classified and represented. This classificatory idiom appears in the domain realm of disease in several forms. First, the oricha are associated with specific body parts or functions which they are said to "own," or which "belong" to them. Secondly, they are thought to confer certain tendencies and predispositions on those people whom they protect or who are initiated into their priesthoods, among these are predispositions to specific diseases, often of the body parts or functions with which a particular oricha is associated and which they also can heal. Lastly, each *diloggun letra* is associated with a number of oricha that are said to "speak" through it. Since these oricha are associated with body parts and diseases each *letra* has disease associations as well.¹²

Activating the Symbolic Bridge in Divination: What Needs to be Done and Who Will Do It?

The next step in the process of divination is an inquiry into whether or not it is possible to do anything about the

situation that has been revealed. This inquiry is called *lariche* and is concerned with whether there is any way to escape the *osogbo*, decrease its intensity, counterbalance it with an opposing beneficent force or banish it entirely. It is entirely possible that nothing can be done to alter the situation at any fundamental level. What can or cannot be done is a yes or no question answered with the use of the *igbo* objects and new casts of the cowrie shells.

The answer to the question, "What is it that can be done?" requires a divinatory probe of Lucumi's ritual system: Is it prayers? Cleansings? Baths or food offerings? Animal sacrifices? Or, entry into Lucumi religion or deeper participation in it through receiving particular religious objects or initiation into the priesthood? Perhaps the client should see someone else, such as an Ifa diviner, a spiritist medium or a physician. Once the appropriate category of ritual has been located what remains to be determined is to whom it should be directed: the *oricha*, the dead, the person's own head, other parts of the person's body, or their house, other possessions or family members. The culminating ritual prescription, specifying all the ingredients, locations, actions, conditions, precautions and recipients involved, is called an *ebo*, a term perhaps best translated as "the thing to be done" (see Brandon 2005, also Nodal and Ramos 2006).

Once all this has been revealed, the diviner spells out everything to the client by giving the initial *odu's* name, what *oricha* are speaking through it, whether it comes for blessing or misfortune, the specific kind of ire or *osobo* that has been revealed, whether there is something to be done about it, and what that something is. The diviner follows this initial report with proverbs (called *refranes* in Spanish) and then a story (*historia* in Spanish, *apatakin* or *apataki* in Lucumi) associated with the *odu* that opened the session. These stories often feature the *oricha* as characters, serve as mythic charters for the proverbs and present precedents for the prescriptions that the diviners deliver. They are also meant to serve as a representation of the problems that the client faces and, often, but not always, the ways they can be altered. Not all of these stories feature the *oricha*. Some *apataki* feature human beings from a long ago time, abstracted to a type (such as a man, a woman, an occupation or stage of life) and residing in a mythical Africa-like place sometimes designated with the names of known cities or regions in West Africa. These ancient people suffer misfortunes, seek the *oricha's* intervention and achieve satisfying lives. In other narratives their faith is tested, but in the end they come through, with the *oricha's* assistance. Other narratives recount the origins of particular rituals and customs (such as burial, the sacrifice of pigeons, or the use of stones in worship.)

Constraint and Agency in the Divination Process

While diviners operate under a great deal of constraint that is meant to allow the oracle to speak relatively independent of them, there is some small degree to which they are able to influence the interpretation of the *odus* as they appear and these interpretations are not entirely uniform from one diviner to another.¹³ A practice that sometimes lessens constraint is when the diviner is able to see a pattern in the outcomes that allows him, on the basis of long experience in situations where there is some ambiguity of interpretation, to exercise his own judgment. Even astute and knowledgeable diviners sometimes disagree about certain nuances of the interpretation of one *letra* within the context provided by the interpretation of many other *letras*. Having seen the patterns and how they fall together over and over again, he makes use of this experience, not to predict what will come next, but to reinterpret slightly what has already occurred. The diviner justifies this by saying that the slightly revised interpretation is based on his own *aché*, the power instilled by initiation.

It sometimes happens during *lariche* that a *letra* appears which says that advice and help are to be sought from the priests who are present rather than from the *Orisha* or the dead. In these situations, the priests and priestesses who are there are able to chime in with advice based on their personal knowledge of the client, including bringing up problems they know about that were not clearly revealed by the oracle and adding or linking them to the interpretations that have already been presented by the diviner.

"Is it not so?" Tactics of the Moment for Activating the Symbolic Bridge

The divination session confronts the client with their own experience interpreted through Lucumi's religious categories. The client's experience is a self-reality reflected back at them from a higher source of knowledge, one that is separate from the diviner but potentially curative. But the effect of this distances the assessment from both the diviner and the client's own experience.

In order to activate the symbolic bridge, the divination ritual has to evoke some level of emotional response in the client. The client cannot be expected to act if he does not attach a personal significance to what has transpired and a minimal indication of that personal significance is a response infused with some level of emotion. This emotional response is likely to be a momentary fluctuation in the client's physiological and mental functioning, initially experienced solely as a change of bodily state, maybe only

later to emerge into awareness where it can be formulated into conscious thought or as a cognitive evaluation of what the diviner has done. Since the context in which they are interacting has already been defined as one concerned with misfortune, those emotional responses could be expected to be feelings of disturbance, worry, anxiety or dread, fear, sorrow or resignation but it is certainly unclear how specific, muted or intense they have to be to move the process forward and activate the symbolic bridge presented by the diviner's interpretations. Clients may arrive at divination with a fund of emotion linked to their experience and their own interpretations (construction) of it that may not coincide with what divination unfolds. This fund of pent-up emotion remains there whether the diviner evokes it or not. It either attaches to the picture the diviner's shells present or comes out in some other way during the session at which point the diviner tries to reinterpret it in a way that attaches it to the mythic world. Perhaps it never does become attached to the session at all, admittedly an unsatisfying situation for the client, who is still emotionally burdened after everything is over and less likely to be motivated to do what the diviner prescribes. If some level of emotional response is not present at this point, the diviner will have to evoke it.

At some point, clients also have to evaluate the oracle's definition of the situation against their own experience. What the diviner says may or may not seem to them to fit and Lucumi diviners use a number of tactics of the moment to get past this point in the process. After reciting the *apataki* and its proverb, they may ask "Is it not so?" to gain assent to its meaning. Both affirmative and negative answers to this question set up a process of further dialogue for generating a personal meaning of the story for the client. Diviners may attempt to get the client to identify themselves with the story's framing of their experiences by asking them to identify a character in the *apataki* with someone known to them. "Who is X in your life?" Or a situation: "What in your life is like this?" In this way, a metaphor may emerge from the *apataki* that allows the client to see how the diviner's picture of the situation is "like" their own. The client can probe this metaphor by asking questions about the reading itself or the *apataki*, effectively creating personal meaning for it through dialogue with the diviner. If these tactics fail to elicit identification, the diviner displaces encounters with the person or situation into the future. ("If you have not yet encountered this [person or situation], you will in the future.")

The diviner can ask other questions along this line of bridge building through using the *apataki* as a metaphor, which can elicit long, complex emotion-laden narratives

from clients that disclose a lot of personal information but can vary a great deal in terms of their degree of relevance or similarity to what transpired up to that point. Letting clients talk allows them to present own version of a complaint and may evoke an emotional catharsis that attaches the client to the diviner and increases their motivation. Whatever the client presents during these narratives the diviner refers back to the *odu*, the *odu's apataki* and its proverb. An example from my fieldnotes:

L. gets read first by Jose. Her reading has a confessional quality to it, as she speaks a lot during the interpretation and reveals personal problems and information whenever Jose hits something that connects with her personal concerns. These Jose responds to by indicating that the specific things she says are her problems are what the *diloggun* said to him—confirmation of the truth-telling abilities of the oracle.... L's problems: romantic discord, problems on the job, general ambivalence. Jose tells her she has spiritual faculties she must develop, that she must help people. Jose asks her if she has any questions she wants to ask. She doesn't. He goes on: She will take a trip; she will separate from someone; she must do what he (Jose) prescribes.... Although the format was that Jose was telling her what her problems were, occasionally asking her for confirmation of what he said, certain general statements of his were the occasion for her to pour out a lot of personal information and feelings. At times she looked apprehensive and was wringing her hands. Afterwards she seemed relieved.

Continually referencing the *odu* does not preclude diviners from offering some sound pragmatic or psychologically oriented advice in addition to ritual prescriptions, and some do, depending upon the nature of the revealed difficulty. Sometimes the client has additional questions to ask the diviner directly at this point and the diviner may go into these related ancillary questions purely on the basis of their own knowledge or by repeating the divination procedure specifically in relationship to client's questions, something not usually done otherwise. This tends to clarify things more and also makes the client feel that the reading is more personally relevant, even if they have not felt so before.

In most instances, the client and the diviner are not alone. The diviner may have an apprentice priest who assists by recording the *letras* as they appear and writing down the prescription. More common is the situation in which the client has been brought to the diviner by a priest or priestess who may be the client's godparent in the religion. In this case, the godparent will be with the client throughout the entire session and may do the

recording instead of an apprentice or the recorder may be the godparent's apprentice rather than the diviner's. If the reading is done as part of a periodic series of regular readings within a priest or priestess's "house," there might not be only the godparent present, but an entire host of priests and devotees waiting for their own divination session or interested in the results of clients to whom they are ritually related. Much depends on the nature of the ebo that has to be undertaken.

The mythic world shared between diviner and client is also shared between the priest and client. The priestess guides and recommends to the client materials for the ebos client must do alone; and, at home, things such as a regime of baths, lighting candles, particular locations to visit to obtain or deposit ritually significant items, and so on. Priests instruct clients in how to prepare and use the herbs that are needed, sometimes supplying the herbs from their own cache or sending the client to a reliable market or *botanica* to purchase them. In other situations, the priestess is more direct and carries out ministrations on the patient's body such as bathing them, applying specially prepared plasters to the head, fumigating their body with cigar smoke, striking it and scraping it with the branches of long-stemmed flowers. Or they execute sacrificial rituals on clients' behalf in which food, plants or animals must be consecrated and then destroyed in order to alter the client's condition.

In the end, the person can either carry out the diviner's instructions or not. Carrying them out is participation in the religion; thus, divination serves as a recruiting device because it coerces participation in ritual. This participation in turn requires the creation of social bonds with priests and priestesses. For those who persist, divination can be a powerful regulator of behaviour. Through divination priests or priestesses can restructure a person's behaviour by prescribing rituals, initiations and behavioural prohibitions. This remolding of behaviour is a long term process carried out jointly by the priest, the diviner and the client. It is a process given compelling force because the authority behind it is not that of the diviner or the presiding priest but that of the oracles themselves and the oricha that "speak" through them.

Divination Without Borders

In this part of the essay, I explore Lucumi diloggun divination as a practice that is distributed across a field, a cultural continuum created by the interactions among several religious groups that have interacted in Cuba historically and continue to do so in present-day Latino communities in the United States. Within this field of interactions, the boundaries between different religious

groups often overlap each other, become blurred or, through sometimes complex ritual negotiations, come to constitute closely connected, but parallel, worlds. In Cuba there evolved an informal prestige hierarchy that elevated the status of Ocha above the other Neo-African cult groups and singled out cowrie shell divination as a distinctive prototypical ritual symbol, a marker for participation in Santeria. Employment of the Lucumi-associated cowrie shells for divination became a kind of status symbol that conferred prestige on other healers who used them and symbolically linked them to Lucumi. This partially explains why, if we look at all the healing contexts in which it appears we find that Lucumi cowrie shell divination crosses religious boundaries and is not confined to regla Lucumi alone. In some of these contexts there is a clear and visible connection to West African-inspired Lucumi practice and its mythic world; in others that connection is so veiled or so ambiguous that both clients and practitioners can disagree about what is actually going on. Because of this it will be interesting to see how diloggun divination appears at different contexts across this continuum.

I use observations of the divination practices of two healers, Mercedes Gomez and Elio Rios,¹⁴ as examples for comparison to Lucumi practices. Both of these healers I observed in multiethnic but heavily Hispanic urban areas of the northeastern United States. Though they appear unique, Mercedes and Elio, while quite different from each, are representative of many other very similar healers who occupy distinct locations along this cultural continuum of Caribbean inspired Latino healing practices.¹⁵

I start with the premise that divination is a particular kind of ritual performance, a stereotyped ritual performance in which the actors attempt to discover knowledge that is not otherwise available to them. They do this by assigning meaning to the occurrence of natural or man-made events over which they have no control. If a device is used, that device is manipulated by the diviner in such way that it generates randomly occurring events. Although diviners voluntarily relinquish control of the device's outcomes, they are obligated to assign meanings to them by using a system of concepts and rules whose content and significance derive ultimately from a source of knowledge that is hidden and not accessible directly.

If we are interested in comparing divination performances, we can approach this in a number of ways. If there is a divination device, we would be concerned with its nature as a material object and the values (religious, esthetic, social, functional or otherwise) associated with it. We would be concerned with the mechanical techniques diviners use to manipulate the device so as to minimize

the diviner's control of the outcomes while maximizing their randomness. The mental processes and cultural rules used for determining outcomes and assigning meanings to them would interest us, also. But, in addition to things—which have to do with the diviner, the device and the knowledge system that underlies interpretation—we could compare how diviners and their clients interact with each other during the performance. For example, does the relationship of the diviner to their reputed source of hidden knowledge affect their interaction with clients?

Clients usually seek out divination with a specific question or purpose in mind, with an intention formed, if only vaguely, before they enter the divinatory context. But not all forms of divination acknowledge the client's intention explicitly within the divination performance itself. Whether or not this occurs, then, is something we should be concerned with as well. In relation to the universals of symbolic healing outlined in my introduction, it appears that the process of activating the symbolic bridge necessarily requires the client to engage in some form of psychological projection. Here I understand the term projection to mean something a little broader than defined by the Freudian psychoanalysts who first used it. At the same time as my usage includes projection as an unconscious defense mechanism in which clients who have unacknowledged emotions, motivations, thoughts and feelings they are unable to accept as their own thus, they attribute them to someone else and experience them as alien and outside of themselves; the term also includes the kind of projective identification that occurs when clients distance themselves from their own unacceptable ideas and emotions and project them onto someone or something else but continue to experience some connection with them. Since, if the meaning-entered perspective on symbolic healing requires some form of projection somewhere in the process, the questions then become: Does that opportunity for projection occur in divination ritual or some other part of the healing process? If it occurs during divination, what form does it take? With these questions in mind, and having already described the Lucumi practice, I will proceed to comparing the kinds of divination performances the three healer types present.

Mercedes Gomez

Mercedes Gomez was initiated into the Santeria priesthood in the United States after long experience as an spiritista medium in Puerto Rico. Her current style of practice is a somewhat clunky juxtaposition of Ocha and Espiritismo, with Espiritismo dominating in her healing work. While venerating the oricha and employing Ocha style ebos and cowrie shell divination, her practical

healing work often involves removing the lower level *causas* that spiritists specialize in, as well enlisting the oricha or the Dead by prescribing rituals directed to them.¹⁶

Several afternoons a week, Mercedes Gomez can be found behind a curtain, in the back room of Botanica San Lazaro, a religious goods store specializing in herbs, candles, statues and a variety of other items used by devotees of popular Catholicism, Espiritismo and Santeria. It was here that she did consultations that often led her clients to the apartment building where she lived. That apartment building was the closest she ever got to establishing a church or a temple. In the basement of the building, the landlord allowed her to hold spiritist group sessions a couple of nights a week; her apartment was where she kept her oricha altars:

Mercedes' session at the botanica usually starts with her seating the client at a table covered with a white cloth and then closely inspecting the client visually. It is only after this silent visual inspection that she takes out her cowrie shells for divination. The area on the table where the shells will be cast is demarcated by a half circle of lit white candles. She casts the shells within this candle-enclosed arc with a very brief prayer preceding the first and only throw. At this point, after eyeing the pattern formed by the shells for a few moments, Mercedes goes into a trance state. Her head droops momentarily. (On other occasions I have seen her body exhibit an evident shudder or tremor. Sometimes she stands, arms parallel to her torso, slicing the air in front of her with up-and-down motions, all signaling her entry into trance.) It does not take long for her to enter trance and it is from this dissociated state that her spirit guide describes the client's problems and overall life situation. Sometimes the spirit that speaks through Mercedes is an oricha; sometimes not; this time it is not. [Brandon, fieldnotes]

Although Mercedes is bilingual, her spirit guides always speak Spanish so she usually has someone at hand who translates if the client does not know the language. Upon emerging from her trance state, Mercedes is able to resume speaking to this particular client in English:

No longer in trance, she explains to the client that the bad luck and troubles she is experiencing now actually originated long ago. She was troubled then, too. A jealous lover had a spell placed on her, enlisting a lowly evolved spirit, a *causa*, to torment her and make her life miserable. Fortunately, the influence of this spell can be neutralized and the spirit removed with the proper rituals. The client has to attend a spiritist *reunion* and also receives a list of items to purchase, including two birds (one white, one black), Florida water, white chalk,

honey, four large stones and a small bouquet of long-stemmed gladiolus flowers), all of which will be used in a cleansing ritual, separate from the reunion, that will occur on another day and in a different location from the botanica.

The *reunion* was a group session at her apartment building and involved about thirty people. The majority of the attendees were experienced female trance mediums, mediums-in-training or clients. Under Mercedes' guidance the spirit mediums were induced into a trance state while listening to recorded music. They manifested their various spirit guides and then were brought out of possession before Mercedes went into trance herself manifesting several different spirits in succession. One of these spoke directly to the congregation as a whole and then addressed several people individually about their problems and progress in spiritual development. Oricha often put in an appearance at Mercedes' reunions by entering through her or through another medium, but they are only one among the many types of spirits that make their presence known during these seances.

As for the other rituals, the client and Mercedes met a few evenings later, at her apartment. There they went before Mercedes' oricha and egun altars, offered prayers and sacrificed one of the birds. Then they proceeded to a nearby park to carry out a cleansing ritual. In this ritual, Mercedes scraped and struck the client's body with the gladiolous flowers before breaking and discarding their stalks; and, holding the remaining bird by its legs, she rubbed it and down the client's body before releasing it into the air, all the while intoning a steady stream of prayers.

El Brujo Elio Rios

Elio is an eclectic practitioner who, while identified publicly as both a brujo and palero, also holds spiritist reunions.¹⁷ Elio is as well known for his active involvement in local Hispanic community affairs as for he is for his spiritual work and his willingness to do magical harm to someone for a reason and a fee. Since both his community involvement and his religious and magical work bring fairly large numbers of people to his home, Elio is a man who feels he must take certain precautions. He has an intercom and a video camera aimed at the entrance to his two-story home and visitors have to ring a bell, stand at Elio's door and identify themselves before he will admit them and direct them downstairs to where he does his consultations. The following description is from an observation of Elio with one specific client but it is typical of his way of interacting with many others:¹⁸

Elio is dressed in white clothes from shoes to cap, and across his lap he wears a red cloth. He sits in a chair which is adjacent to a desk. Before beginning the divination session he asks for the name and address of the client as well as their date of birth. He then inscribes this information onto a three-by-five inch index card and files the card in a small box on a table nearby. Elio also inquires into how the client heard about him. These preliminaries done, the session begins in earnest.

Elio works seated in a chair but his cowrie shells can be seen lying on the floor. To begin, Elio picks up the cowrie shells from the floor and casts them down on to the floor again, accompanying this motion by a rapid almost unintelligible prayer in which he mentions the client's name and date of birth. In this fashion, minus the prayer, he throws the shell four times, following each throw with a set of questions.

The first throw is followed by questions regarding love, love problems, the client's history of romantic involvements, and so on. *Estas enamorada? Hace tiempo? Hay problemas con esa person? Falta alguien de tu casa? Tienes compromiso oficial? Hay otro hombre dependiendo de ti?*¹⁹

The second throw is followed by Elio's first prediction, in this client's case, that she would soon move, for example change residences. With the third throw Elio asks the client questions to determine what brought her to visit him.

Elio: Have you lost anything?

Client: My job

Elio (asking for specifics): What happened? Didn't you like it? Did you have any words with someone at the bank?

He then goes on to explore family and social relations: Do you have problems with anyone around you? Your husband, your family? And then, he gives his diagnosis: a spirit sent by someone to do her harm.

On the fourth throw Elio asks the client about her spiritual beliefs and practices: Do you use something to protect yourself? Do you have a saint in your house? Do you go to church? He then goes on to discuss solutions. He reassures the client that she will get a job "within a month" and offers to do a "work" for her. This will require her to leave a photograph of herself with him and come back a week later for a *trabajo* (magical work eventuating in a special object). When the work has been completed, she is to put this object under her bed or in a place where no one else can see or touch it.

All three healer types use the same divination device and, in a general way, employ the same mechanical

technique for manipulating the device, voluntarily relinquishing control of the outcome or generating randomness. As an initiated santera, Mercedes Gomez received her sixteen cowries and the ritual right to use them as part of her initiation into the Santeria priesthood. Elio Rios is a palero, not an oricha priest, and it is unclear how he received the shells he uses, if they were consecrated in any of the Cuban neo-African traditions or if his right to use them is somehow ritually sanctioned. Mercedes casts her cowrie shells onto a white-covered table with candles on it, the favored location and setting for intimate spiritist séances. Elio, however, more closely approximates certain aspects of the performance of Lucumi cowrie shell divination. Although he is seated in a chair, he does not cast the shells on to a table but instead opts for the floor, the most traditional alternative for Lucumi diloggun divination.

We don't know anything about the mental processes Mercedes and Elio use for interpreting the outcomes of cowrie shell casts and assigning them meaning, because Mercedes and Elio never externalize these things during their performances. However, their observable behaviour does betray certain clues. In Lucumi diloggun divination, only pairs of outcomes form meaningful units for interpretation. From this perspective, Mercedes' single cast of the shells before going into trance is semantically meaningless. She casts the shells but once and does not convey the resulting odu to the client but instead immediately goes into trance. Casting the cowrie shells associates her with Santeria in the eyes of clients and confirms her self-identification as a santera but her main divination technology is actually spirit mediumship. Her possessing spirit speaks, not the shells, and that possessing spirit may or may not be an oricha or ancestor. It may very well be that Mercedes does not interpret the outcome of the cast at all, even though she looks at it, but merely uses it as a prop, as a symbol of her affiliation with Santeria and as a foundation or spur into trance. Certainly, even in the trance state, she does not name and convey the resulting odu to the client. Despite her initial utilization of the shells, Mercedes has replaced Lucumi diloggun divination with her own spirit guides. Juxtaposing that single shell throw with spirit possession implies that trance mediumship is a kind of divination, too.

Elio casts the cowries four times, the minimal number able to establish what the odu is and determine whether it comes by way of ire or ossobo, but the way he asks questions after the throws implies that each of them is a thing in itself rather than a member of a pair that forms a single meaningful unit. It is as if each shell toss were just a way of segmenting the flow of questions, of separating one area of questioning from another, as opposed to the castings forming meaningful pairs that provide information

affecting the overall interpretation of what is going on. Furthermore, Elio does not convey the odu to the client. It may very well be that Elio, like Mercedes, also does not really interpret the outcomes at all. In these two cases, then, the cowrie shells and their manipulation do not directly connect divination outcomes to the mythic world of Lucumi religion. Instead, they demarcate a particular context and sequence of behaviours as being divination. The throws of the shells embody the symbolic prestige value of Ocha divination within the divination contexts set up by Elio and Mercedes, but they do not connect this to Lucumi religion's mythic world.

The interaction between Mercedes and her clients is rather one-sided during the consultation session. Her interpretation of the client's situation consists of pronouncements from a dissociated state along with occasional questions phrased as requests for confirmation by the client. The initial phases of Lucumi diloggun divination are equally one-sided and hierarchical but the client is more active in the Lucumi practice because of the hand-choice procedure using the igbo objects. In all three performances, though, messages are seen as being conveyed to the client by a superior source of knowledge that is using an intermediary, whether that intermediary is a divination device or an entranced medium. Mercedes' interaction with clients becomes more egalitarian during the reunion, where Mercedes becomes the first among equals (the other spirit mediums), and people are encouraged to act out and surface psychological anxieties and unconscious conflicts while in the trance state. In the Santeria ebo, the client must obtain all the ingredients and participate in the ritual carried out under the santera's guidance and with her assistance, and this is the same as for her as for our typical Lucumi diviner except that she is more likely to supervise and execute the ebo herself. Bureaucratic overtones converge with a consciously constructed aura of mystery and disorder created equally by Elio's inquiries about referrals, his collection of client information for storage in an index card file, the multitude of occult symbols strewn about the room and hung on the walls, and birds freely roaming outside of their cages. Elio's mumbled prayer and first throw of the shells declare the transition from the bureaucratic to the ritual has occurred. After this initial stage, Elio's interaction with his clients is much more conversational, a kind of call and response of questions and answers that, other than the insertion of the cowrie shell throws and his prediction that the client will change residences, could just as well be a fairly ordinary interview in a non-ritual context.

The three healers differ in terms of the degree to which they explicitly acknowledge the client's intention within the divination session. Clearly, the client's intention

is most relevant to Elio because he actually asks the client to tell him about it; Mercedes, however, does not, and neither does the Lucumi diviner. In Elio's divinatory encounter with the client, because he gains nothing from interpreting the shells but still thinks client's intention is relevant, there is nothing else he can do but ask the client directly. As a spiritist, theoretically, he could go into a trance state like Mercedes does (and as he does, too, during the reunions he hosts) but he does not do so, most probably because, unlike Mercedes, he does not regard diloggun divination and spirit possession as interchangeable. For Elio, apparently, once the context has been set for Santeria style cowrie divination, spiritist trance does not belong in it.

At the end of his divination performance Elio prescribes a magical work to be done, but directed at whom? The client does not know and Elio does not tell. Elio does not invoke the oricha or the Dead, and does not employ the refranes or the apatakins. Some of the form of the interaction style of Lucumi appears (such as the several cowrie tosses) but the shells don't get to speak. Instead Elio asks the client to speak, to tell him much that the Lucumi diviner expects to get from the shells and the spiritual entities that speak through them.

After casting the cowrie shells Mercedes switches codes and relinquishes both control and consciousness to her oricha and other spirit guides who are supposed to be able to discern what is in the hearts of clients. Lucumi diviners do not try to surface the client's intention in the divination session in part because they believe that the shells will tell them and it impresses clients when they are correct. Furthermore, and equally important, for Lucumi diviners the client's intentions are fairly irrelevant. Many of the issues clients bring to them they regard as relatively trivial and even the more significant ones are only surface manifestations of the more profound issues in their lives of which most clients are completely unaware. (That is why they need diviners.) What Lucumi diviners are concerned with, then, are the underlying spiritual entities that are causing the fundamental problem at issue and what can be done to make these entities stop doing it. For them the transient but pressing problems of the moment that initiate the client's anxiety, suffering and conscious intention to seek out divination are simply the call for closer contact with the Olodumare, the oricha and the dead, and a spur to deeper participation in Ocha.

Each of the healer types is in a somewhat different position vis-à-vis their ultimately hidden sources of knowledge. The Lucumi cowrie shell diviners realize quite well that they are in a mediating role. They operate the mechanism of divination, keep the texts and proverbs available and, despite some leeway given by their *aché*

and the pressure of contemporary circumstances, they interpret the outcomes according to a complex set of fixed rules, behaviours and constraints that they have not created but have submitted to. As a result they attribute the authority for their pronouncements to their lineage tradition, the shells, the oricha and the dead rather than to themselves. Mercedes, as a spirit medium whose consciousness is displaced when she conveys the possessing spirit's pronouncements to clients, attributes their authority to the spirit guides and the oricha who incarnate themselves within her, rather than herself. Elio's position, on the other hand, is more ambiguous. Knowing that he is not relying on either the interpretations of the cowrie shells and the oricha that speak through them, although the client may believe so, and not allowing himself to take on the role of the dissociated spirit medium, what he has done instead is ground his authority in the attribution of special powers to himself. Elio puts forward a view of himself as endowed with special and unique spiritual powers and abilities and it is from these special powers and abilities that his authority ultimately arises. This undergirds his eclecticism. Rather than claim that all his disparate practices are essentially the same, he claims that what tradition or method he uses doesn't matter much. They are just vehicles. His special and unique abilities allow him to make all of them work the way he wants them to, which is what he appears to be doing in his employment of cowrie shell divination.

Elio's style of divination does not admit of any occasion during which the client might project unconscious or barely conscious perceptions of desires onto a template or stimulus provided by him. Like other spiritists, including Mercedes, he makes use of clients' projections during the reunions he leads rather than during divination. In the context of the spiritist reunion, clients are encouraged to surface and act out psychological conflicts. Projection, if it occurs at all, happens during the reunion during which Mercedes the santera may, (in spiritist fashion) "work" a *causa* or lower level troubling spirit. By guiding and pulling the client through the process of surfacing the conflict and acting it out, Mercedes attempts to bring about a symbolic resolution of it. Sometimes this process involves narrating and enacting a dramatic and powerful portrait of the client's unspoken feelings whose efficacy depends upon the client identifying with it. But these narratives don't come from the corpus of stories and proverbs which are the Lucumi diviner's stock-in-trade. Furthermore, these impromptu symbolic narratives and enactments are part of the technology of altering a misfortune as opposed to discerning its true nature. The Lucumi diviner, however, makes use of the apatakins as projective vehicles in order to shape, in interaction with the client, a reframing

of the situation according to traditional precedent and to help erect the symbolic bridge between the client's situation and Lucumi religion's mythic world. Mercedes and Elio effect a symbolic bridge by different means in their spiritist meetings; and the mythic world to which they bridge there is that of a spiritism in which the oricha sometimes put in an appearance as opposed to the mythic world of Lucumi religion in which the oricha are omnipresent and central figures. Elio and Mercedes use the cowrie shells as symbols of divination and to demarcate the divinatory context, but the diloggun diviner's odu, refranes and apatakins do not appear within it. Because of this the shells cannot speak.

Discussion

At this point we can draw some conclusions about the nature of the Lucumi illness categories produced by divination, how the diviner puts Lucumi religion's mythic world at the service of a distressed or troubled client, and, the relationship dynamics at work during the divination encounter.

Zempleni (1985) points out a number of important distinctions that bear on our data. These include the relation of illness etiologies to other kinds of misfortune, whether there are single or multiple causal agents, the distinctions between instrumental, efficient and ultimate causes and between causes predicated on a temporal sequence and those predicated on a conjunction of circumstances. In Lucumi, illness is understood as a specific category of misfortune. Lucumi's basic illness categories are etiological. Instead of classifying illnesses on the basis of descriptions of symptoms, Lucumi nosology classifies illnesses by identifying their causes and origins. Given its overall etiological orientation and emphasis on spiritual beings as causes, it is noteworthy that one illness category, *ano omo ano*, depends upon a temporal sequence of events to define it—the original transgression and the intergenerational inheritance of its consequences—while a subclass of another, *ano elesé araye*, allows for a cause that is really a conjunction of circumstances, as in the case of someone who inadvertently “picks up” witchcraft aimed at someone else.

The etiological orientation of Lucumi's illness categories affects the goals that diviners and healers set for themselves and channels their efforts in a particular direction. Any specific client's problems may stem from multiple causes and from multiple causes that are interacting with each other. Some of these causes may produce misfortunes other than illness. Some apparent causes may lie outside of the expertise of the Lucumi priest or priestess. Furthermore, although the diviner will

nearly always prescribe some kind of ritual regardless of which way it comes out, both good fortune and misfortune appear whenever the diviners throws the shells. Either way the diviner is concerned with efficient causes, with who or what is causing the problem, and who or what can clear away the obstacles and provide the protection that assures the full realization of future happiness.

The framework within which Lucumi healers work is better described by Dow's concept of the “mythic world” and its particularization than by biomedical concepts such as “clinical reality” and “explanatory model” (Kleinman 1980:42). The Lucumi diviner particularizes Lucumi religion's mythic world for the client in several ways. The diviner does this, first, by revealing and naming the specific odu the client “carries,” which is the voice of Dios, the oricha or the Dead directed to him or her at that time and place. Through the apatakins and refranes associated with the odu, the diviner verbalizes the mythical precedents for the client's current situation, bringing into play characters, values and strategies from that mythical world and identifying the client with the goings-on that happened there. Finally, the diviner particularizes the mythic world of Ocha for the client through prescribing the ebo which constitutes the ritual means for communicating with specific beings existing in that world and puts the client into contact with it.

As Dow points out (1986:62), it is the healer who defines the context of the encounter and the parameters of the relationships occurring in that context. At the same time as the Lucumi diviner establishes a relationship with the client, the diviner also establishes the client's relationship to the mythical world. The Lucumi diviner serves as a privileged intermediary who contacts the Other World on behalf of his clients and makes its powers available to them through prayer and casting the cowrie shells. In terms of the interaction between the diviner and the client we can divide this process into two parts. In the first part, the diviner and client interact solely through the divination apparatus. The diviner acts the most and appears to do all the talking. The client speaks during this part through externalized nonverbal acts that generate meaningful interpretations through the medium of the igbo objects. Although the oricha, the dead and God oversee the process, it is the interaction between diviner and client that allows them to enter the earthly world and manifest there, metaphorically, as speech, as the odu. Both the diviner and the client, then, participate in a process but, even though the results of casting the shells are meaningful, the outcomes are not under the full control of either the diviner or the client. Even so, the initial interaction appears rather one-sided. It is the

diviner who provides the interpretation even though it is the oricha who are speaking. The diviner functions much like a translator who translates the nonverbal symbolic language the oricha and the Dead speak into a humanly verbalizable language the diviner can convey to the client orally.

This first kind of interaction changes with the introduction of the refranes and apatakis. The proverbs and stories represent puzzles or riddles whose relevance to the unstated problems the client has brought with them may be far from obvious to the client. Solutions can only be reached through a negotiation between the diviner, functioning on behalf of the mythic world to which he is committed, and the client's ability to align their experiences with the symbolism of the mythic world embodied in the proverb and the narrative. In the second part, the client becomes more active. In interaction with the diviner, who continually guides them back to the odu that first appeared, the client is invited and aided in interpreting the refranes and apataki in the light of their own concerns. As the client provides input, the diviner tries to accommodate and assimilate it by referring it back to the initial interpretation of the odu and by incorporating that input within it metaphorically and rhetorically. With the prescription of the ebo, still more initiative is given over to the client who must secure all items and make all the arrangements. The client is then in the position to either carry out the ebo or not. Assured and ritually correct contact with the denizens of the mythic world requires the mediation of a priest(ess) who must be enlisted and paid. Hence, in the context of the diviner-client relationship, the client becomes progressively more active and more autonomous as the process proceeds. Taken to fruition, though, the client, while becoming more active in the diviner-client relationship, also becomes more dependent on the beings in Ocha's mythic world, and the client's relationship with the mythic world is always mediated by the priesthood.

In some forms of symbolic healing, and in psychoanalysis and emotive therapies using various forms of psychodrama, the patient dramatizes and acts out the mythic world. This also occurs in Espiritismo, especially when a patient's cure requires a process of spiritual development geared towards a career mediumship. In Santeria, however, the healer-as-diviner particularizes the mythical world but does not act it out; neither does the client.

In the overall cultural context in which Lucumi healers work, they often cannot assume that the relationship between the mythic world of Lucumi religion from which they particularize the symbols they use and the general

cultural mythic world that links the client's self to the overall social system of which they are a part is a straight forward one. The complexity of late modern urban culture with its social stratification, pervasive industries of commercial culture, and media-mediated perceptions that assure the sociocultural invisibility of some groups and the domination by cultural stereotypes of others creates situations for immigrant groups and other groups that are socially marginalized in which the communication links between society and the self become highly variable, complex and conflicted. The intracultural variation that exists with subgroups of Hispanic immigrants in relation to class, racial and ethnic identity, and competing religious orientations all contribute to the complex cultural continuum in which Lucumi healers work. Even within the realm of Ocha itself there are the differences in knowledge between healers and lay people, including devotees, and differences in beliefs and styles of practice that, while objectively minor, may still be significant in the context of a healing encounter. This kind of complex intracultural and intrasocietal variation poses a serious problem for all meaning-centered approaches to symbolic healing that prioritize an a priori belief system and a high degree of cultural sharing between the healer and the client. Nonetheless, Lucumi diviners are able to particularize the general symbols of Lucumi religion's mythic world for culturally diverse clientele in a way that, when effective, is able to effect an evocation of emotion in clients which is felt and recognized by them and also allows unconscious and somatic processes to be brought into play through the symbolically mediated communication practices (the tactics of the moment) that diviners employ.

We have noted the distancing of the client's lived experience that occurs during diloggun divination. Scheff views this distancing as an important and universal element in ritual action more generally and in healing ritual in particular (Scheff 1977, 1979:62-67). One would guess that an important therapeutic goal would be to model the client's experience and emotions at an "aesthetic" distance that is neither so close that it is emotionally overwhelming, nor so far distant that it is ineffective in mobilizing emotion at all. The odu, refranes and apatakis are the models of their experiences that clients are confronted with. Lucumi diviners present the apatakis in the form of a comparatively short verbal recitation rather than a lengthy dramatic multidimensional, multisensory enactment. The odu are highly abstract representations of the client's state only symbolized concretely as patterns of lines on a sheet of paper, while the refranes are often cryptic comments on the client's situation or about the historias/apatakis whose fictional characters live

in a mythic world whose time frame is an abstract and unspecifiable past. In terms of Scheff's descriptions of the means of managing emotion in ritual, Lucumi divination leans heavily on techniques of stylization. Although Scheff seems to hold that, at the correct distance, this process results in a reintegration of affective and cognitive process, catharsis he calls it, it seems pretty clear that the degree and the frequency with which this occurs in Lucumi divination are highly variable and catharsis, even when it occurs, is not a goal or a bench mark that Lucumi diviners strive to attain. Techniques of stylization increase rather than decrease the affective distance between the client's lived experience and the diviner's representation of it.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of the distancing employed in Lucumi divination can be expected to vary with the client's level of participation in Lucumi religion. To a devotee or priest(ess), the transactional symbols the diviner brings out are not only more familiar than to a lay person whose only contact with Ocha may be an emergency resort to a diviner, but also will have more emotion attached to them because of deeper knowledge and associations and experiences through working with and experiencing them in variety of contexts with varying degrees of intensity and personal meaning that melds personal experience with collective meaning.

The skillful manipulation of an *apatakin* can suggest a different way for the client to evaluate their experience and their framing of the problem. If the client sees this as inadequate or inappropriate, it is always possible for them to redirect inquiry after the diviner has explained everything the shells have said; when this happens, it is simply an occasion for asking the shells to speak again on some other, perhaps unaddressed, aspect of the *odu* the client carries. What is crucial, uncertain and also difficult to study is the degree of emotion that must be attached to the *apatakin* for it to be effective motivationally, something the diviner judges by whether or not the client performs the prescribed *ebo*.

Comparison of "mainstream" Lucumi diviners with Santerismo Mercedes Gomez and eclectic Palero Elio Rios shows us several things. Both Mercedes and Elio perform technical aspects of Lucumi divination procedures to some degree and both have brought aspects of its interactional style into their practices. But the cowry shells, while continuing to have an association with Lucumi divination, appear in their performances mainly as status enhancing symbolic artifacts unattached to the illness categories or the textual material that are integral to their use in Lucumi divination. Because it is the illness categories and the texts that link the cowries shells to Lucumi's

mythic world during divination, when these things are absent Lucumi religion's mythic world disappears from the encounter and the nature of the mythic world becomes indeterminate. A vacuum opens up which can be filled in various ways or simply left as an absence unperceived in the new context. What seem to be the connecting threads across the religious contexts of the cultural intersystem in which Santeria, Espiritismo and Palo all participate are the influences of Catholicism on one hand and spiritism on the other. Inside of this, the groups manifest variably the influences of other specific subcultural similarities and differences resulting from past and ongoing interactions with each other as well as a generalized pattern of persistent countercultural adaptation to the society surrounding them. It was most likely, then, that popular Catholicism, spiritism or a combination of the two would be brought into to fill the breach. An eclectic like Elio, however, could fill it with Palo's mythic world as well or be willing to cast his net even further afield.

Conclusion

How can inspecting the positions of cowrie shells make a specific and meaningful statement about a client's situation? In the case of Lucumi *diloggun* divination, it may well be that the corpus of knowledge on which Lucumi diviners draw does more than provide a reflection of the social, cultural and spiritual situation of the current client at the current time but is itself an expression of the social, cultural and spiritual world it expresses.

On the one hand, a system like Lucumi cowrie shell divination has been shaped over time by generations of diviners who have poured into it insights from what they deem to be the fundamental problems of human life as they appear to them in the social, ecological and cultural environments in which they lived. Because the *odu*, *refranes* and *apatakin* have resulted from a codification of many people's repeated subjective experiences in a specific cultural setting, the descriptions of situations that the divination procedures produce can be specific and are meaningful to people who have lived in that setting or in one that resembles it. "What the shells say" is not meaningful solely because each client believes that a transcendent force or power is backing up the system's pronouncements—indeed, many clients of Lucumi diviners say initially that they "did not believe in such things"—but rather because the long process of sifting, analyzing and codifying the repeated experiences of people living within a particular cultural system (or type of cultural system) concerning the things that are important and valued by them only results in pronouncements that are meaningful and potentially useful to clients in specific

situations. These situations, while occurring to a specific client in the present, have in fact been lived many times before by many other people. The problem for using them in healing is not that of making meaningful or specific statements, but of rendering those statements appropriate and effective.

At the same time as the ritual aspects of cowrie shell divination show great and specific continuities with African (Yoruba) practices, some apatakins show clear imprints of the Cuban experience. Sometimes they refer to African ethnic groups from the Congo basin. (It is unlikely that Nigerian Yorubas had any contact with these groups in their home territories in Nigeria but Lucumi certainly encountered them in Cuba.) Other apatakins associate the West African Orisha Babaluaiye leprosy, venereal diseases and HIV and AIDS rather than with smallpox as West Africans continue to do. The exuberant sexuality, sensuousness and even promiscuity that feature prominently in apatakins about the oricha Ochun in Cuba are largely absent in her African counterpart. This sexualized persona, even extending to conceiving Ochun as a mulatta, long the biracial erotic ideal of Cuban men, certainly betrays an infiltration of Cuban aesthetic and erotic values into the African conception. In Santeria divination ritual action seems to define a broad channel for the more variable and rapidly changing elements of the oral literature through which much of Lucumi's mythic world is presented. The continuity of these stories, then, is in the hands of Lucumi diviners, for it is they who must apply their "traditional" precedents to the problems of contemporary people, whether they are in the Caribbean or elsewhere.

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Notes

1 One example of this is the deity Shopona most widely known in Nigeria as Babaluaiye or Obaluaiye and also appearing in the pantheon of Lucumi religion. Babaluaiye is the Yoruba language honorific for a West African deity known and worshipped under a number of other names in southwestern Nigeria, the Republic of Benin and in Togo. The wide geographic diffusion of his worship crosses ethnic boundaries as well as national ones, and he has been found among the peoples now known as the Yoruba, Fon, Mahi and Ewe peoples at least since the 19th century and probably predates that period. Across this region, the deity referred to as Babaluaiye in Yoruba remains a recognizable figure despite the various names and the distinctive ethnic colourations different groups have given to him and is

always an earth deity, sometimes but not always, connected with infectious disease, most specifically smallpox. Rosenthal (1998) states that the Ewe have this same deity known under the names Aholu and Saca. See Verger (1998:255-260) for a number of excerpts from 19th-century ethnographic accounts that give many of the alternative names for Shopona used among the Mahi, Fon, Ewe and Yoruba peoples.

- 2 Close inspection reveals cultural elements deriving from other non-Yoruba speaking peoples including important ceremonies Lucumi priests have attributed to the Hausa and Nupe (see Angarica 1955: 80, 81-82; Brandon 1993:95; Cabrera 1973).
- 3 Writing under the pen name Allan Kardec, this French engineer proclaimed the revelation of an updated, scientific spiritualism. His books described the results of a positive investigation of the spiritual world which others could also carry out through mediumistic séances, and he preached a kind of Christian morality based on suffering, charity and spiritual development.
- 4 A small number of exiled santeras have made their way to Europe and, through them, Santeria became established in Spain, spreading from there to other European countries.
- 5 Nosological: referring to the act or science of disease classification.
- 6 Symbolic healing can take place at many levels at once: psychological, physiological, social, cultural, spiritual. The exact mechanisms of its physiological effects are poorly understood (relieving muscular tension, pain reduction, lower blood pressure) nor whether they are mediated by the autonomic nervous system, the endocrine system, the immune system or neuropeptides such as endorphins or some combination of all or some of these.
- 7 Including lay understandings of disease causation not peculiar to them. (For example, there has been no real investigation of the degree to which the humorally based hot/cold classification so widespread in Latin America, overlaps with or is isolated from Lucumi etiological ideas.)
- 8 Santeros practice three kinds of divination: divination with four coconut shells (called *obi*), cowry shell divination and Ifa divination using a chain called *opele*. Although my description from here on will be concerned cowrie shell divination or *dillogun*, the basic facts are the same for the practice of Ifa divination as well. Divination with coconut shells (*obi*) is never used for diagnosis in healing.
- 9 For reliable accounts of Santeria cowry shell divination see Bascom 1980; Brandon 1983; Gonzalez-Wippler 1992; Ocha'ni Lele 2000; and Rogers 1973.
- 10 Note the statement of Reyes' informant Luis Dionisio Alfonso: "When Aro appears to somebody, it is invested by which ways it comes." Here the phrase "When Aro appears to somebody" refers to it as an outcome of a divination procedure, while "the ways in which it comes" refers to the possible points of origin of aro.
- 11 Sandoval 1975 provided a disease typology for Santeria. Disease caused by (1) object intrusion [witchcraft entering the body]; (2) soul loss [an enemy buys the person's spiritual protector; in the head]; (3) resulting from contagious magic; (4) spirit intrusion. Her account of Santeria's disease typology is however, an etic one and very limited at that. Her four disease types mainly resolve into a single

one: diseases due to forms of sorcery based on conscious human intent differing only in the means through which they are accomplished. Spirit intrusion, however, also is possible without a sorcerer's intervention. In terms of the Lucumi emic classification, Sandoval's four types would all fall under *aro elese araye*, with the possibility of some forms of spirit intrusion falling under *aro elese Eggun*.

- 12 Reyes provides a list of those associations located by Bolivar Arostegui in Cuba (Reyes 2004:76-77, citing Bolivar Arostegui 1984). Use of the *igbo* objects indexes different aspects of the client's life (work, finances, marriage, children, and so on) but the diviner can also ask questions that link back to these concerns. These objects are: *otá* (a small smooth black stone equals strength, immortality), *efun* (a piece of white chalk made from powdered eggshells that speaks in all *odus* and is always affirmative), *ayé* (an elongated seashell equals hardship), *ungun* (a small bone from the left hind leg of a goat sacrificed to Eleggua), *owò* (either a single whole intact cowrie or a pair of filed ones attached so that the two mouths face outward equals money, finances and sometimes paired with either *efun* or *ota*), *apadí* (a piece of broken pottery equals loss, defeat, marriage), *osán* (a guacalote seed equals children and their concerns, sometimes brought into play in cases of illness), and *ori ere* (also called *eri-aworan*) a small doll's head equals the client's *ori* or spiritual consciousness.)
- 13 To give some examples: Although some diviners recognize many more oricha as speaking through each *odu* than others do, what one finds is that there are a small number of oricha that all diviners recognize as speaking through each *odu*; some diviners recognize additional oricha speaking through these *odu* as well. The greater number of oricha speaking through an *odu* could have the effect of blurring the specific disease significance of the outcome. Because each of the many orishas' correspondences to body parts and diseases are present, the effect is to make different *odu* more alike. This would allow the diviner to read a greater number of ills from each outcome but not necessarily distinguish among them very clearly.
Some diviners use a larger number of *igbo* objects than others. (The range goes from four to eight.) But regardless of how many *igbo* objects a diviner uses, there are four specific ones that are always present. Since these objects are always used in pairs, and tend to be used as if they expressed binary oppositions, the selection of additional objects sets up finer and more varied sets of oppositions through which to probe the nature of the problem and generates hybrid categories that shift the net of significance around, even within a rigid framework of binary opposition and yes or no answers.
- 14 The names of both of these healers are pseudonyms.
- 15 My use of the concepts of field and cultural continuum draw on the field theory approach of Kurt Lewin and Lee Drummond's theory of cultural intersystems (Drummond 1980; Lewin 1951). For an application of the cultural continuum concept specifically to Cuba and Santeria see Brandon 1993:162-165, 172-175, 181.
- 16 This style of practice, which I have characterized as Santerismo, and which I erroneously attributed to recent developments among Puerto Ricans on the United States mainland,

actually existed in Cuba since the 1940s as a somewhat similar practice called *espiritismo cruzado* (English: crossed spiritism). The main difference between santerismo and *espiritismo cruzado* is that practitioners of *espiritismo cruzado* were not Santeria initiates who used spiritist healing techniques but instead were spiritists who had been influenced by Santeria but never initiated into its priesthood. My earlier characterization of Santerismo appears in Brandon 1993. Borrello and Keegan's 1977 article on New York City botanicas also describes a practitioner of this type. A Cuban account that, while mainly illustrating Cuban *espiritismo cruzado*, gives a brief glimpse of yet another spiritist using cowrie shell divination is Mikelsons (2005:237).

- 17 *Palo*, or *Las Reglas de Congo*, is a collection of closely related Cuban religious groups whose beliefs and practices have been developed and inspired by those of Africans from the Congo River basin of central Africa who were enslaved there and then imported into Cuba. Use of the term *palo* (meaning stick) is a Cuban innovation that singles out the sticks of wood that appear prominently in the altars of these religious groups as a characteristic and defining feature of them. While much of the liturgy, chants and invocations of the various *Palo* groups are in a mixture of Spanish and Kikongo-inspired vocabulary, Catholicism, *Espiritismo* and *regla Lucumi* have been significant influences upon them as well. *Palo mayombe* also has a system of symbolic correspondences associating their own deities, called *mpungu*, with both the Catholic saints and the Lucumi oricha. Devotees of *palo* have evolved a complex relationship with Lucumi since the late 19th century and the early 20th century. *Paleros* do not appear to have any distinctive divination tradition of their own. Instead, they have borrowed both coconut and cowrie shell divination from Ocha. They are reputed to be powerful sorcerers and witches (Spanish *Brujos*). For descriptive accounts of *Palo* in Cuba see Cabrera 1979; Ochoa 2010:8-11; and Thompson 1983:121-125.
- 18 My thanks to Vivian Garrison for allowing me to incorporate her fieldnotes from this session.
- 19 "Are you in love? Can you make time for this? Do you have problems with this person? Is something wrong at home? Are you engaged? Do you have some other man depending on you?"

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