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Santeria Ritual Sacrificial Practices in Miami

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

SANTERIA RITUAL SACRIFICIAL PRACTICES IN MIAMI

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

by

Erhomarhua Afure

2018

To: Dean John F. Stack, Jr.
Green School of International and Public Affairs

This thesis, written by Erhomarhua Afure, and entitled Santeria Ritual Sacrificial Practices in Miami, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: June 29, 2018

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Dean John F. Stack, Jr.
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Vice President for Research and Economic Development
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2018

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Chief. Joseph Aminone Afure & Mrs. Deborah Afure.

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The success of this work is the product of the collective effort of many individuals and groups. Different persons provided information and contributed in varying capacities towards the completion of this project. First, I remain grateful to God Almighty for his gift of life and his kindness towards me throughout the duration of my stay in the USA.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS
SANTERIA RITUAL SACRIFICIAL PRACTICES IN MIAMI

by

Erhomarhua Afure

Florida International University, 2018

Miami, Florida

Professor Albert Wauku, Major Professor

The practice of Santeria ritual sacrificial practices among devotees in Miami was investigated, using ethnographic method.

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of Habitus, James Scott's theory of weapon of the weak, Richard Schechner and Victor Turner Performance theory were used for this study. These theories helped in the analysis of the data collected. The research explores the significance of sacrifice in Santeria. The study critically examined the goals for offering animal sacrifices among Miami devotees.

The study explored the cultural & economic space of Miami and how it hindered Santeria practice and equally sustained its survival. The effect of sacrifice, its meaningfulness to devotees are properly examined.

The research findings indicate that devotees offering of sacrifices enhances solution to their problems, it guaranties their future and sustain their spiritual wellbeing.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This fieldwork-based research focuses on sacrificial practices of Santeria in Miami. The religious practice of Santeria represents the extension of the Yoruba religion of Southwestern Nigeria to Cuba through the trans-Atlantic slave trade, starting in the 18th-century. Devotees of Santeria also refer to the religion as Lukumi or Regla de Ocha. The religion emphasizes the belief in many spirits, which devotees refer to as Oricha in Cuba and Miami, or Orisha in Yoruba speaking areas of Nigeria. The Orishas are the divine people who worship in Santeria. The Yoruba religion flourished in Cuba among slaves and non-slaves and became blended with Catholicism when the Spanish colonizers forced slaves to convert to their religion. A ritual practice that defines Santeria is sacrifice. Sacrifice in Santeria is an act of slaughtering an animal or surrendering a possession as an offering to God or to an Orisha. Initiation, divination, healing and ancestral veneration are contexts in which sacrifices feature prominently. The central place of sacrifices in Santeria is linked with the notion that it is the foundation of any solution devotees might be seeking to mundane and spiritual questions. So indispensable is this ritual in Santeria, that when Cubans migrated to different cities in the United States during and after the Cuba revolution of 1959, they carried with them this tradition of sacrificing. Today, these migrants have rooted these practices in places where they have settled such as Miami, New York, and San Francisco. This study focuses attention on the portion of the Santeria tradition of sacrifice that became part of the religious field of Miami.

Problem

Most Cuban immigrants in the USA are in Miami. Cuban settlements in the city such as Little Havana and Hialeah attest to the Santeria community's strong presence. A great deal of literature on Santeria ritual sacrifices has been published, but only a few researchers address ritual sacrifices in Miami. Moreover, the voices of Santeria devotees in Miami are for the most part muted in the existing literature on ritual sacrifices. This research will emphasize the perspective of Santeria devotees on sacrifices.

Ubiquitous on the religious landscape of Miami are signs of the strong presence of Santeria. Cuban devotees of the tradition have carried with them their religious ideas, faith, and ritual forms. For example, there are many Santeria stores referred to as Botanicas in the Cuban communities of Miami. I have observed how these Botanicas are always filled with crowds of customers buying candles, beads, herbs, oils, statues of Catholic saints, pigeons, roosters, and hens, all of which belong to the repertoire of Santeria's ritual paraphernalia. In this project, I investigated the importance of these items and analyzed how they are used in performing sacrifices. The study offers a phenomenological account and an ethnographic history of sacrifice as a key ritual of Santeria in Miami. The objective of the research, containing the results reported in the thesis, was to investigate, document, and analyze the sacrificial practices of Santeria in Miami. The research also sought to understand the significance of sacrifices for devotees of Santeria who migrated to the USA and live in Miami.

Research Questions

The field-work was guided by the following questions:

What is the phenomenology of sacrifices in the Miami portion of Santeria?

How has the migration of devotees from Cuba to Miami affected Santeria's tradition of ritual sacrifices?

What spiritual and anthropological meanings do devotees of Santeria invest in sacrificial rituals and how do they renegotiate these meanings as they seek to make sense of their lives in Miami?

What roles do sacrifices play as ritual forms in shaping the transnational connections devotees of Santeria in Miami have with their homeland in Cuba and Nigeria, the original home of the religion?

Research Methodology

The study involved the use of religious ethnography as the main methodological approach. This entailed participant observation of Santeria worshipping activities in Little Havana and Hialeah. I used interviews and focus group discussions with devotees, priests, and priestesses to elicit information about their experiences, rituals and the sacrificial practices of the religion. This method enhanced my collection of the raw data for this study. Additionally, I explored secondary sources of information, especially the research available on Santeria in texts. This portion of the research especially helped in my historical reconstruction of how the practice of sacrifice has evolved over the years in Cuba and in Miami.

Botanicas in Miami were important sites for the field work as these are the repositories of the crucial ingredients devotees need to make a sacrificial ritual performance possible. The project involved observing the ritual items and sacrificial objects devotees buy from Botanicas, and seeking, through interviews, information on what worshippers use these items for.

Through interviews, I found out from the participants what motivated their purchase of such items and what they expected from the sacrifices. Participating in dance forms and listening to the drumming and singing during sacrifices enhanced my understanding of performance as an indispensable aspect of sacrifices in Santeria. I used an electronic recording device to gather the collection of data. Santeria's sacrifices are lived religious experiences and a researcher can effectively capture this only by being a part of the proceedings. Herein lies the justification for using the qualitative approach, especially ethnography, in this study.

Purpose/Significance of the Study

The purpose of this research is to enhance our understandings of sacrifices in Santeria, which are greatly misconstrued not only in scholarly circles but, also, in American religious fields and subfields. Some scholarly work has been done on sacrifice as a ritual form in Santeria, but because the voices of participants are often muted in these studies, it is not clear whether what we read are interpretations of scholars or perspectives that devotees share. Believing that only insider perspectives can effectively shed light on the meanings and rationale of sacrifices, this study has privileged the voices of the participants in these ritual forms. Here lies the significance of this study, which offers an undiluted voice to the devotees. The research also has practical value in that

understanding the place of sacrifices, especially the use of animals in some portions, will contribute to public tolerance for Santeria in Miami.

The Argument of the Study

I advance two related arguments in this study. My first argument is that sacrifice is a form of prayer in Santeria and for that matter an indispensable aspect of the religious practice of Santeria devotees. As a Santeria ritual, sacrifice is informed by the Yoruba indigenous notions of reciprocity. According to these notions, the succor of a divine being cannot be secured without an offering. A strong belief among the Yoruba is that answers to prayers “travel” faster when the spirit whose help is sought is given some form of compensation. This idea is an extension of a cardinal Yoruba cultural theory about reciprocity, into the realm of the divine. In Yoruba culture, relationships between two entities must be mutually beneficial. Devotees of deities are obliged to offer items of value to them and in return secure blessings. This study will show how devotees of Santeria in Miami play out this cardinal principle through the practice of sacrifice. The chapters will show how devotees view sacrifices as prayers. Through sacrifices, devotees offer ashe or divine energy, which is the raw material deities need to provide answers to humans. The deities, in turn, return this favor in the form of material benefits for devotees. These benefits include wealth, good health, children, peace etc.

The second argument I make in this study is based on the premise that sacrifices are religio-cultural performances and as such, are channels through which cultural, and sometimes political, messages can be conveyed. In this connection, I argue that sacrifices of Santeria represent a mode of resistance to the hegemony under which devotees in Miami live their lives. As migrants from Cuba occupy marginal spaces in American

societies, many devotees of Santeria are denied benefits American citizens have. Many of these migrants cannot openly practice their religion because of public prejudice. Many of them lack access to health care because they are not citizens or because they are illegal immigrants. Some migrants from Cuba have difficulty finding work, housing, good jobs, etc. Rather than seeing themselves as victims of the laws of the state and the federal government, these migrants seek empowerment by relying on the Orisha or the gods as they navigate these structures. They enlist the help of the gods through the practice of sacrifices. It follows that through sacrifices devotees of Santeria in Miami express the resilience to survive in an otherwise harsh environment. They express their will to secure well-being despite their marginal statuses. They also demonstrate the viability of their religious tradition despite the overwhelming public prejudice against Santeria. Devotees of Santeria in Miami resist a system they find to be oppressive by enlisting the help of their gods through the practice of sacrifices. I argue that by performing resistance subtly through the performance of sacrifices the public frowns on, devotees of Santeria assert their rights to freely practice religion in the USA.

Chapter Outline

This thesis is divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 is the background of the study. It discusses the research problem, research questions, research objectives, research methodology, thesis chapter outline, and the purpose/significance of the study. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical concepts that undergird the study and shows how they engaged the data I gathered from the field. Chapter 3 offers a historical background of Santeria, emphasizing the place of sacrifice in this tradition. It traces the history of this tradition to the Yoruba indigenous religious traditions in their pre-colonial stages. The chapter

discusses how sacrifice in Santeria has always functioned as a core ritual practice and how it adapted to changes. The chapter also shows how sacrifice became rooted in Miami, its struggle for survival in Miami, and what we know about its present state. Chapter 4 discusses the phenomenology of sacrifices, emphasizing the ritual structure, the paraphernalia devotees use in its performance, the spirits involved, the key actors and their roles, and the contexts that occasion the practice. Chapter 5 discusses Botanicas in the USA. These shops are indispensable in the practice of Santeria sacrifices in the USA because they house every paraphernalia devotee need. The chapter discusses their histories and functions in the USA. The reconstruction will be based on the findings on Botanicas that are situated in South Florida. Chapter 6 is the conclusion of this thesis. It harmonizes the entire argument and findings. It also discusses leads for possible future research on Santeria's tradition of sacrifice in the USA.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL CONCEPTS AND RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

Relevant Theoretical Concept

Theoretically, the two arguments I have advanced in this study lead directly to three main analytical concepts. These are Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus, the Performance theory of Richard Schechner, and Victor Turner and James Scott's argument that resistance by the structurally weak can take the form of daily practices that subtly communicate resilience in the face of hegemonies. In this section, I discuss these ideas individually, but also examine them in terms of how they interact to create a coherent, whole frame for understanding the place of sacrifice as a ritual form in the Miami portion of Santeria.

Habitus is defined as a system of embodied dispositions and tendencies that organize the ways in which individuals perceive the social world around them and react to it. The dispositions ascribed to are often shared by people with similar backgrounds, such as social class, religion, nationality, ethnicity, education, and profession (Bourdieu 83). The habitus is acquired through mimesis, which is an imitation of a group that reflects the living reality to which individuals are socialized and acquire social experience (Bourdieu 30). habitus, therefore, represents the way group culture and personal history shape the body and the mind, and as a result, shape social action in the present (Bourdieu 203).

Aristotle was the earliest scholar to use the concept of habitus. Marcel Mauss and later, Maurice Merleau-Ponty influenced the concept's contemporary usage. Pierre Bourdieu was the scholar who turned habitus into a cornerstone of sociological analysis. He used the idea to address the sociological problem of agency and structure. He showed how habitus is shaped by structural positions and how it generates action. He notes that when people act and demonstrate agency, they simultaneously reflect and reproduce social structure (Bourdieu 95). Bourdieu elaborated on his theory of the habitus while borrowing ideas on cognitive and generative schemes from Noam Chomsky and Jean Piaget's notion of the human dependency on history and human memory. Bourdieu offered an example, how a certain behavior or belief becomes part of a society's structure even when the original purpose of that behavior or belief can no longer be recalled. Such behaviors can become socialized into individuals of that culture. Pierre Bourdieu also notes how habitus consists of both the hexis, which is the tendency to hold and use one's body in a certain way, such as posture and accent, and more abstract mental habits, schemes of perception, classification, appreciation, feeling, and action (Bourdieu 170). Bourdieu asserts that these factors allow individuals to find innovative solutions to new situations without calculated deliberation. Human actions, he argues, are based on their gut feelings and intuitions, which are collective and socially shaped (Bourdieu 466). Building on these ideas, this study argues that sacrifice is a part of the religious habitus of Santeria devotees in Miami. The chapters of the study will reveal how responses from different respondents explained the role of habitus in the sacrificial practices of Santeria in Miami. Participants and priests of Santeria emphasized how the religion and the

sacrificial ritual practices are aspects of a cultural heritage passed on from generation to generation.

Habitus in this research refers to the African beliefs, worship forms, values, and ways of life in which sacrificing of animals to gods in the wake of crises is viewed as indispensable. These were passed on to Afro-Cubans during the Atlantic slave trade era and it became a way of life in Cuba. This way of life has been passed from generation to generation and has been transported to Miami by Cuban immigrants who came to settle in Miami.

Since the era of the slave trade in Cuba to this present generation of Cubans in Miami, the sacrificial practices of Santeria have allowed devotees of the tradition to find innovative solutions and answers to their newly emerging issues and questions. As the study will show, performing sacrifices in the face of challenges is a spontaneous response of devotees of Santeria. This predisposition is socially shared by followers.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus offers leads in our understanding of why Santeros in Miami perform ritual sacrifices, the way they perform these sacrifices, the items and types of animals they use in these sacrifices, and the importance of sacrifices in the performance of rituals such as initiation, divination, and healing.

I now turn my attention to the concept of performance. Performance is defined as an action or process of carrying out or accomplishing an action, task, or function. It is also an act of staging or presenting a play, concert, or different forms of entertainment. The theory of performance originates from a variety of fields. It is, however, most associated with the work of Victor Turner (1988) and Richard Schechner (1985). These

two authors drew attention to the performative nature of societies around the world and how events and rituals, as well as daily life, are all governed by a code of performance. Richard Schechner and Victor Turner divided performances into two categories: artistic and cultural performances. Artistic performance is marked and understood as art, such as solo-performance, performance art, the performance of literature, theatrical storytelling, plays, and performance of poetry. These categories consider performance as art forms. Cultural performances are events that occur in everyday life in which cultural values are displayed for their perpetuation. Rituals such as parades, political and religious ceremonies, community festivals, performances of literary, legal, social, and professional roles, certain kinds of language use, and individual performances of race, gender, sexuality, and class are cultural performances. From ethnographic studies done in different societies and in different contexts, these authors highlight how performances are central to human understanding. Performance theory suggests that every one of us puts on a performance in our society. Whether it is through the clothes we wear, the conversations we hold, or the food we eat, we are all engaging a performance designed as a signal-system to ourselves and to others of our place within our social group (Goffman 28). Butler drew attention to the way performances seek to reinforce and communicate our identities in society (Butler 69). He notes that when an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them (Butler 69). In this study, our focus is on sacrifice in Santeria as a religio-cultural performance.

Performance can entail the observance of a rigid structure of operating, but it can also be a means of resisting. Odai emphasized that this was the reason theatre districts in

medieval European cities were situated outside of civil and religious boundaries. He notes how governments, royalty and prominent individuals have frequently sought to ban theatres and plays because of their supposed capabilities of spreading and encouraging rebellion (Odaï 55). Plato similarly favored banning dramatists and performers in his book, *The Republic*, for rebellious reasons (Plato 435). Performance enhances threshold-crossing, shape-shifting and boundary-violating figures, such as shamans, tricksters, and jokers, who value the “carnavalesque” over the “monumental” (Conquergood 137-138). The concept of performance thereby enables an assessment of the ways in which individuals act and react to their worlds.

In this study, the sacrificial ritual practice of Santeria is understood through the lens of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner’s notion of cultural and artistic performance. The animal sacrifices, worship, and other events that occur in everyday life of Santeros as observed in this research is a display of Afro-Cuban cultural values and performance of historical heritage. The use of Yoruba language for incantation and for coded interaction between the priest of Santeros, and the Orishas (spirits) during divination and sacrifice is a manifestation of the code of performance in words and language. The artistic performance in Santeria involves the imagery of the Orishas (spirit), which represent saints of the tradition, spirits, and ancestral fathers. More important, sacrifices are performances and as such communicate several hidden messages, including resilience. In this study, I argue that the performance of ritual sacrifices in Santeria in Miami is a way of expressing resilience or resistance in the face of vicissitudes worshippers confront as migrants. Just as the slave masters’ imposition of Catholicism upon the slaves was resisted by the Africans using the artistic images of

Catholic saints in colonial Cuba, in Miami, the performance of ritual sacrifices in Santeria has helped many Cuban immigrants of Santeria to resist strictures imposed on them as migrants. These are subtle ways of expressing resilience in the face of the challenges they face in adapting to the unfamiliar environment of Miami. In situations such as illness, dealing with difficult court cases, seeking to legitimize their stay as migrants etc. The devotees of Santeria offer sacrifices to the Orisha, requesting favorable results. Many of the devotees who participated in this research attested to the efficacy of sacrifices in providing a solution to their problems as migrants. The details of the devotees' experiences and expression are contained in the main body of the research. An example is how devotees see sacrifices as resolving the crises caused by the prohibitive cost of health services for one without insurance in the United States. In this chapters of the study, we will read what devotees said about how the sacrifices done relating to healing have helped many of them to respond to the challenges of the prohibitive cost of health service or the denial of health care. This point leads us to the last theoretical concept I have used in this study, that is, James Scott's notion of "Weapons of the Weak" (1985).

James Scott identifies two forms in which the structurally weak in society can resist the hegemony. These are through organized revolts or rebellion [often violent], but importantly, non-violent everyday subtle forms of resistance. He refers to these measures as "ordinary weapons of powerless people" (Scott 316). He argues that such non-violent everyday subtle forms of resistance exist in two forms. These are actions that typically avoid any direct or even symbolic confrontation with authority but preserve and defend the interests of the subordinate all the same, and ideologies that contest [subvert] the

claims of the super-ordinate class (Scott 316). These measures, Scott argues, are everyday ordinary practices requiring little or no coordination or planning. They also represent forms of individual self-help and are quiet and piecemeal. Examples are slander, mockery, feigned ignorance, false compliance, passive noncompliance, and deception. Scott also argues that ideologies such as those enshrined in religious beliefs and other popular discourses of the weak may have counter-hegemonic undertones (Scott 319). Scott argues that these “weapons” may not really have a significant direct effect on those in power, but they are not trivial because they enable the weak to create their own spaces within which they preserve their interests/dignity. They also produce ideas that mitigate or deny the claims made by the superordinate classes or exist vis a vis those of the super-ordinate classes (Scott 302).

Following Scott’s argument, I argue in this study that sacrifices in Santeria function as weapons of the weak for devotees in Miami. Through sacrifices, devotees perform resistance to the hegemony under which they live as migrants. The ceremonies during which sacrifices are performed offer spaces within which devotees in Miami enlist the help of their deities in engaging conditions that impinge on them daily. These conditions are created by state and federal policies. Furthermore, as a “weapon of the weak” the regular performances of sacrifice demonstrates the viability of Santeria despite public prejudice against it in Miami. Sacrifices are performances that demonstrate the strong presence of Santeria in Miami despite the overwhelming public prejudice against devotee. The economic benefits that accrue to the performance of sacrifice in Miami are key to the survival of some ritual agents. The study will show how priests of Orisha and Babalawos in Miami see initiation, divination and healing ritual sacrifices as an avenue to

generate income for themselves. Also, the Botanicas where ritual sacrificial items are sold, generate huge profits for the salespersons, who are mostly priests and priestesses of Orisha worship. I argue that these benefits linked with sacrifices also show how they are weapons of the weak. They are practices through which migrants, who live on the margins in Miami can survive economically. Placed together, the notion of Habitus, performance, and the idea that the structurally weak of societies can resist hegemonic oppression through subtle forms such as sacrifices constitute a coherent body of ideas we can use to engage Santeria's sacrifices in Miami, theoretically.

Review of Relevant Literature

In this chapter, I review some of the available literature on sacrifice as a ritual form in Santeria. The aim is to locate the study in an ongoing scholarly discourse on sacrifices among Orisha worshippers in Nigeria, Cuba, and Miami. In this way, we will be able to easily identify the contributions this study is making to the existing scholarship. An important theme in the scholarships on sacrifice in Santeria is how this ritual has always been an integral and indispensable aspect of indigenous Yoruba religions, the foundations of Santeria. Most of the proponents of this theme investigated why sacrifice is offered in Yoruba religion. They reveal the items used for sacrifices and offer insight into how the sacrifices are performed.

The writings of Omosade Awolalu, JDY Peel, and Abimbola stand out in this category of writers. In his work titled *Yoruba Beliefs and Sacrificial Rites*, Omosade

Awolalu describes sacrifice and identifies two categories of sacrifice in the Yoruba religion. He notes:

Sacrifice has a structure that involves paying homage, presentation of the person and her petition to the Orishas, immolation of the victim and disposal of the sacrifice. Sacrifice is like divination because it is usually a personal affair. An individual can only be present at his or her own sacrifice. The tradition of Orisha practice involves sacrifice for those who intend to celebrate and appreciate the supernatural beings and for those whose intentions are to prevent the occurrence of adversity. (Awolalu 55)

Awolalu further divides these categories as follows: Thanksgiving, votive, propitiatory, preventive and substitutionary sacrifice. Awolalu's description of the categories of sacrifices offers insight into the devotee's purposes and motivations for offering sacrifices to Orisha.

J. D Y. Peel, a respected western anthropologist, whose specialization is in Yoruba, bolsters Omosade's observations:

Sacrifices are pivotal in Yoruba tradition. Sacrifice is at the heart of the devotional relationship between a devotee and a deity in Yoruba religion. To be a devotee is to make sacrifices to the gods, referred to as ebo. The act of sacrifice was much more significant and central than the act of prayer in Yoruba tradition. This is because prayer is a mere expression of devotees desired a relationship with the gods, whereas sacrifice officially and religiously establishes a relationship with the gods. Same way the offer of gift reaffirmed relationship among members of the

civil society, so also sacrifice establish a bond between humans and the gods. (Peel 99)

Peel identifies how sacrifices are part and parcel of the Yoruba religious tradition. It is the act of sacrificing that affirmed individual devotion to a deity. Without sacrifice, there is no bond between a devotee and a deity in Yoruba religious tradition. Therefore, an individual cannot be a devotee in Yoruba religious tradition without offering sacrifices to the Orishas. The findings from this project reflect this theme. We claim that devotees of Santeria in Miami see their sacrifices as the sine qua non of their responsibilities as devotees. Sacrifices guarantee their well-being.

Wande Abimbola narrated the significance of sacrifice in Yoruba religion, stating that:

Sacrifices are central and are the totality of Yoruba religious practice. Sacrifice helps to maintain the belief system and establish a connection between the clients, the diviner, the divinities and the ancestors, through a system of service and reward. Devotee or client refusal to offer sacrifices makes it impossible for this structural system of worship in Santeria to be complete. Such act is disobedience to the divinities, and if client or devotees has used the divinities to achieve their goal without fulfilling their obligation to offer sacrifices in reciprocation, such clients will not only lose the favor of the divinities but will also be punished for disobedience to the divinities. (Abimbola 11)

Abimbola's account indicates that sacrifices mean everything in Yoruba religious practice. The act of offering sacrifice is beneficial to the participants and the clients. And the refusal to offer sacrifice is a punishable act. It is either devotee offer sacrifices and

enjoy the benefits, or they receive the punishment for not offering sacrifices. Sacrifices, therefore, affect the lives of those that partake in their performance and those who do not.

In his book titled: *Walking in the Night: The Afro-Cuban world of Santeria*, Raul Canizares emphasized what motivates the performance of sacrifices in Santeria, why animals feature prominently in Santeria's sacrifices, and the types of animals that devotees sacrifice in Cuba:

Animal sacrifice varies in Santeria, large mammals are not commonly sacrificed since relatively just a few priests are grounded and have the right to kill such animals. Sacrifice is performed for different purposes and it varies from the very easy (a bunch of red banana for Shango) to a very complex (several goats, hens, and chickens used in an initiation) Although all sacrifices seem to be termed *ebbos*, some Santeros refer to the simpler ones as *addimus*. (Canizares 87)

From this description, we note some changes taking place as the ritual becomes rooted in Cuba. The relative absence of specialists translates into the less importance attached to the sacrifice of larger mammals. We are not sure however how large the mammals he is referring to are. Canizares also notes some continuities with the Yoruba practices in Cuba when emphasized how devotees only consume the meat of the animal used for sacrifices during Thanksgiving or initiation ceremonies. He offers insight into other continuities with the sacrificial practices in Nigeria, the source of Santeria when he describes how animal's sacrifices are performed, whose right or responsibility it is to perform the animal sacrifices, and the conditions under which the sacrificial animal can be eaten by the devotee. He notes that thanksgiving offering can vary from a simple fruit positioned in front of an image of an Orisha to an expanded feast where hundreds of animals are killed and cooked for a

multitude of guests (Canizares 87). These sacrifices are offered either in appreciation of the good fortune and wellbeing of the devotees or for certain favors obtained from Orishas. He notes how it is the responsibility of trained babalaos (Orisha priests) to perform the sacrifice of large mammals and how any sacrifice offered for propitiatory or preventive purposes are most times not eaten by the devotees. We understand from this study how sacrifices still vary in Cuba as in Nigeria and how devotees' treatment of what is left of the carcass after the sacrifice is determined by the type sacrifice that was performed.

Marry Curry sheds some light on the African-American appropriation and use of Yoruba sacrifices in her book titled *Making the gods in New York-The Yoruba Religion in the African American Community*. She stated:

Sacrifice is often offered in response to a divination outcome, it has a variety of purposes. However, its cardinal purpose is to achieve or restore a state of balance between individual and supernatural forces Sacrifice may be offered for propitiation (to appease the anger of divinities). It can be done to avert a foreseen tribulation, to achieve certain goals, to remove evil forces or to fulfill vows.

Additionally, there is a sacrifice for the head. Sacrifice for the head is most frequently offered. It involves an offering made to a person's head (ori), for an orisha who is responsible for the person's fate actualization. Sacrifice fulfill a purpose by which people can restore existing defects in their destiny (ori) and it is a way for people to amend their mistakes as they continued in their daily life.

(Curry 55-56)

Curry further notes how sacrifice is viewed as food for the Orisha and the ancestors, which devotees offer as a token of appreciation for their continuous watch over devotee's

affairs. This thesis develops this theme emphasizing how sacrifices replenish the ashe or divine energy of the Orisha.

In her book, titled: *Worldview, the Orisha, and Santeria- Africa to Cuba and Beyond*, Mercedes Sandoval focuses on the Cuban portion of Yoruba sacrifices as expressed through sacrificial rites of Santeria. She notes how sacrifice is a vital aspect of Santeria as it is in the traditions of the Yoruba in Nigeria:

Sacrifice, or ebo seal the coalition or accord between Orisha and the devotee. The Orisha/Santo and spirits are offered cooked food, the blood of an animal, fruits, and other gifts that they specifically enjoy. In most circumstance, the offerings are aimed to establish a state of communion with the supernatural realm. The devotee may be soliciting or appreciating the Santo for a favor, or simply honoring an orisha. Sacrifices are also offered in obedience to Oracle or celebration of Orisha festival. Devotees partake in eating the animal used for sacrifice, except when the animals are offered as a scapegoat to an aggrieved orisha or sacrificed to abolish a harm caused by witchcraft. In such circumstance, the carcass is disposed of in line with the ritual protocols. (Sandoval 113)

Sandoval's description offered insights into how devotees' sacrifices to the Orisha help to maintain the communion between them as supernatural beings that control the supernatural world and the devotees who depend on the supernatural verdict for existential survival. This fact buttresses my argument in this thesis positing how sacrifice is an integral aspect of the religious tradition of Santeria.

In her work, titled: *Where Men Are Wives and Mothers Rule*, Mary Clark introduces us to the gendered dimension of the practice of sacrifice in Cuba. The crux of her

argument is that, unlike many mainstream religions, Santeria exists within a female-normative system in which all practitioners are expected to take up female gender. She examines the practices of divination, initiation, possession trance, witchcraft, and sacrifice, exploring the ways in which Santeria beliefs and practices depart from the historical assumptions about and the conceptual implications of these basic concepts.

Although Yoruba and Cuba's societies are hierarchically patrilineal, sacrifice in orisha tradition is developed for both men and women as participants. However, it will be incorrect to postulate that there are no gender discrepancies in the ritual sacrificial process. While all participants are restricted by certain rules, there is more restraint against women than men. However, both genders can be participants of sacrificial performance, either for or on behalf, directly or indirectly. (Clark 113)

Because of their roles as mothers, aunties, wives and sister's, women feature more prominently in Santeria's sacrifices. These roles demand constant answers from the Orisha and only through sacrifices are women able to secure answers when mundane efforts have failed them. She argues that many of the key ritual agents in the performance of sacrifice are women because gender is a fluid concept within Santeria and the qualities of being female form the ideal of Santeria religious practice for both men and women.

Clark sheds light on how the religious tradition of Yoruba is not gendered discriminating in structure. It designates gender roles in sacrifices. The tradition of performing or offering sacrifices to Orisha is open to all devotees. The Orishas which sacrifices are offered to also have male and feminine categories and both categories are active divinities that have their variety of preferred sacrificial items. This is an intriguing

perspective on the discourse on sacrifice in Santeria. Although it offered crucial research leads, the limits of this study do not permit their exploration and will be considered in future research.

Murphy emphasizes the link between the lives of orisha and the wellbeing of devotees and how sacrifices are part of the equation. In *Santeria African Spirit in America*, when he writes:

Orishas and human being need each other for survival, without ashe of the Orishas, human beings would despair of their destiny and loss supernatural protection. And without ashe of sacrifice, the Orishas would wither and die. The Orishas are powerful beings, however, they are not immortal beings. Orisha relies on the devotion of devotees, and an essential form of devotion is the food offered to Orishas thorough sacrifice of the favorite animals and offering of their blood to the Orishas. (Murphy 15)

This is to say sacrifices are indispensable in Santeria because on the one hand without them the Orisha will die, and on the other hand without sacrifice, the devotees will be vulnerable and be exposed to dangers or calamities of life. Murphy also offers more insight into what sacrifice is, and what is often offered as sacrifice by the devotees to the Orishas.in Cuba. He describes sacrifices as ebo, showing how Cubans have retained Yoruba usages in their religious practice. Ebo, he argues, is a ceremony performed on the demand of Orishas. Such ceremonies include purifying baths, feasts or initiation ceremony. The ebos are the sacrifices demanded by the Orishas through revelations. He hints at the symbolism of animal blood. The blood of an animal symbolizes life. The offer of blood to the Orisha as sacrifices represents an offer of life (ashe), which reproduces life for the devotees. This

represents an indigenous Yoruba philosophy of sacrifice, blood and life. A portion of the scholarly discourse on sacrifices in Santeria focuses on their practice in Miami. In an analysis of how the performance of sacrifices has undergone a transformation in Miami, Marry Curry offers insight into the changes in the ritual:

In Nigeria, kola nut referred to as obi which contain four pieces is used during performance of divination. However, in Cuba and the United State which include Miami, kola nut is uncommon. The lack of kola nut in Miami necessitated its replacement with coconut. In place of kola nut, coconut became referred to as obi in Miami and is broken into five pieces for the performance of divination. (Curry 54)

The replacement of a kola nut with a coconut for the performance of divination and sacrifice in Miami is a manifestation of the dynamism of Santeria. It also shows how sacrifices and other aspect of Santeria are significant wherever devotees migrate to. There is no excuse or any justification for devotees' refusing to offer sacrifices to the Orisha. In the absence of the Orisha's favorite object, that is, an animal or any item for sacrifices, an alternative is introduced to maintain the relationship between the devotees and the orishas.

In his book, titled: *Living Santeria-Ritual and Experiences in an Afro-Cuban Religion*, Michael Mason explains how the motivations for performing sacrifices have not changed much in Miami:

People often offer sacrifices when they seek healing, and usually, the first ritual they undergo is rogacion de la cabeza (a prayer for the head). This involves the use of coconut, water, and cotton which are applied to feed the head. Most believers

cover their heads with hats or handkerchiefs during the ritual performance. If their destiny requires initiation, they get initiated while seeking healing. Initiation directs the changes and elevates an individual in the tradition. During the first stage of initiation, a priestess places consecrated necklaces, with herbal waters and blood of a sacrificial animal over the neophyte's head and onto the shoulders. Each of necklaces has different colors which symbolize powers of the Orishas. (Mason 34)

Other scholars note the structures that condition the performance of sacrifices in Miami. Canizares highlighted that the South Floridian authorities have attempted to regulate animal sacrifices in Santeria despite the difficulty in enforcing this rule.

Authorities in some areas of South Florida have tried to work out an agreement with some group of Santeros so that they can practice their religion without violating the legal and moral codes accepted in American society. The Santeros have basically been offered the freedom to practice animal sacrifices so far as no animal suffers, the meat of the sacrifice animals is used for food, the only animal used for food are slaughtered and lastly, the carcasses should be disposed of properly. This may sound fair, but Santeros find this term impossible to accept because a great majority of carcasses of animal sacrifice in Santeria do not end up in the dinner table and carcasses are not deposited until the Orisha gives directives for the disposing of the carcasses. (Canizares 87)

Animal sacrifices have continued to blossom in Miami against the backdrop of the discrimination suffered by the devotees. This is because, as this study will show the sacrifices are meaningful in the lives of the devotees. Sacrifices guarantee of devotees' security.

Some scholars have written about how Santeria shapes itself and practices such as sacrifice to the negative public perceptions in Miami. For example, Canizares notes:

Despite the guarantee of religious freedom in the United States and in Miami, many Santeria devotees are reluctant to publicly proclaim their faith. This is because they are stigmatized, and their tradition of animal sacrifices is labeled by Americans to be a barbaric practice. (Canizares 26)

Canizares also notes how Santeros refusal to disclose their faith in the public is linked with the lack of value people have for Santeria. This means that the Supreme Court legalization of Santeria animal sacrifices in the United States did not erode the wrong or negative perceptions of the public. A strong basis for the stigmatization and discrimination against devotees of Santeria is the groups' practice of animal sacrifices. This explains the tradition's secret practices that have helped it to survive the resistance.

Mary Clark opined that the killing of animals for sacrifices is the most problematic aspect of Santeria:

One of the problems in discussing sacrifice is that the term denotes several types of activity and its discussion easily slips from one interpretation to the other. Despite the controversy surrounding animal sacrifice, Santeros believe that offering blood and other manufactured items to their divinities are necessary for devotee's well-being. In the early 1990s, the city of Hialeah Florida passed a series of ordinances that de-legitimized unnecessary killing, torment, torture, or mutilation of the animal in public or private ritual ceremony that is not primarily for food consumption. However, the city allowed killing of animals for a host of other purpose, except sacrifice. It became obvious that the ordinances were meant to suppress the Church

of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, a local congregation of Santeria. The congregation fought against the ordinances as a violation of their First Amendment right to freedom of religion. The devotees argued that animal sacrifice is a fundamental part of their faith, which symbolizes their holy communion. At the Supreme Court hearing, Douglas Laycock, a professor of law at the University of Texas argued that the only way to declare sacrifices unnecessary is to prove that Santeria is a false religion. However, the legitimacy of Santeria as a religion was not questioned as part of the hearing. Justice Anthony M. Kennedy overturned the city's ordinances, citing the 1981 ruling in *Thomas v. Review Board of Indiana Employment Security Division*, stating that the practice of animal sacrifice may appear obnoxious to some, however, religious belief need not be acceptable, logically consistent or comprehensible to others to merit First Amendment protection. (Clark 109)

This narrative shows that Santeros' resilience and commitment to their beliefs and practices regardless of public criticism has contributed hugely to the survival of the religion and the practice of animal sacrifices in Miami. Canizares sums up the terms of the counter-argument of purveyors of Santeria in response to the prejudice of the Miami public:

Obviously, in the United States, the practices of animal sacrifices have triggered great atmosphere of misunderstanding between believers in Santeria and nonbelievers. Santeros opined that a society that allows the mass slaughter of animals, often under deplorable conditions to simply eat their flesh has no right to criticize Santeros ritual slaughter of animals as religious sacrifices. The contemporary American culture consistently practices what may be the cruelest and

miserable treatment of animals than any culture in history. The abuse and exploitation of animals for research and conditions of mass-breeding farms create a higher level of brutality and barbarity that is unethical and unimaginable in the eyes of indigenous cultures that over the ages have maintained a balance and sense of purpose in their relationship with animals and the practices of sacrifices. In these cultures,

the relationship between animals and humans are built on affection and respect, telepathic communication, the deification of animals as messengers of the divine. Santeros justifiable killing of animals for sacrifice and for food characterize their place in the universe. (Canizares 86)

Canizares argues that an intellectual and judgmental perception of animal sacrifices is hypocritical in the USA. He emphasized that in every society, even vegetarian animal-rights activists have derived support from an infrastructure that thrives on the inhumane treatment of animals. Nature is built on a cycle of life and death that affects every life form, from the easiest to the most complex form. In every breath we take, there are sacrifices of tens of thousands of microscopic organisms, Canizares argues. This debate is an ongoing one and an important context of this study, as the field work was done in Miami.

One thing missing from the literature reviewed above is the voices of practitioners of Santeria themselves in the telling of the tradition's story and in describing their experiences with sacrifices. Another slant missing from the discussion is the broader and underlying socio-political and anthropological meanings of the persistence of the practice of sacrifices in Miami. Practitioners of Santeria are not always scholars and do not care

too much about the deeper socio-political and anthropological implications of their actions. They are simply religious actors building on their discourses and practices to engage the realities of their daily lives. In this study, I attempt to fill in these two gaps in the literature by focusing more on lay perspectives on Santeria sacrifices and the socio-anthropological and political implications of its resilience as a ritual form of a group that lives on the margins of a very prejudicial American society.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SANTERIA

Introduction

This section of the thesis offers a historical account of the Miami portion of Santeria. It features a discussion of the migration of Santeria from Cuba to Miami. It also discusses the challenges devotees of the tradition have faced in Miami because of the negative perception of the public against the practice

Yoruba origin of the Santeria Religious Tradition

As a religious tradition, Santeria originated in West Africa. It is an agglomeration of the indigenous religious practices of the Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria. Lopez offered insight to the Yoruba origin of the tradition. Lopez is 40 years old young priest who was my neighbor at SW 102nd Avenue, Fairway Height Blvd Miami. What drew my attention to him was the items and paraphernalia I saw at the front entrance of his house. I observed that the items were alike with African indigenous religious paraphernalia which were related to my ongoing research at that time. This drew my attention to walk up to his house and knocked at his door. His mother came out but couldn't understand English. I waited a while outside until Lopez walked up to me with his little daughter. I introduced myself and told him why I came to see him. He was very open when I told him I'm a Nigerian student from FIU. He told me he is a Santero priest and he was in Ogun State Nigeria for a visit to his ancestral home about 4 months ago. Lopez who is an average height, fair skin Cuba immigrant couldn't have a detailed conversation with me at that moment. We reschedule because I was heading to school and I needed to take the bus to avoid missing my class that morning. While walking down to catch the bus, a lady living

near Lopez's house, Joyce, called me to ask what I was doing at Lopez house? I responded to her and she advised me against speaking with Lopez, alleging that Lopez practice witchcraft. She claimed that her friend who worked for the Miami Dade County Department of Agriculture told her of an experience she had during her fumigation of Lopez's property, in which she saw some scary animals and items that were diabolic looking. In my second visit with Lopez, I had the opportunity to have a conversation on this topic, Lopez argued that Santeria is not a religion. He described Santeria as a way of life, noting:

We are Africans and our ancestors are from Yoruba in Nigeria. I have gone to Yorubaland twice to identify with my roots. The colonial masters that enslaved our ancestors cannot eliminate the African in us. Santeria is our heritage and helps to define our identity as Afro-Cubans.

Lopez's account offers us valuable insight into a narrative, Martino, another devotee, offered. Martino is a 47 years old male devotee from Cuba. He was the Botanica worker who attended to me at Botanica Oni-Oni, located at 11322 Quail Dr in Miami. During my visit to this Botanica on a Sunday morning, Martino narrated how he became a devotee:

I inherited the tradition of Santeria from my parents. My parents were faithful devotees of Santeria in Cuba and always prepared herbal medicines for sick people and they treated different forms of illnesses. When I was growing, I was always involved in assisting my parents either to kill chickens for sacrifices or to mixed herbs for medication of clientele. This experience equipped me with the knowledge of the tradition.

Martino further emphasized how sacrifices became rooted in Miami:

Sacrifices were the means through which our enslaved ancestors in Cuba communicated with their African ancestors and spirits. The offering of sacrifices to their ancestral spirits of Africa was helpful in shaping their daily lives and strengthening their struggle for survival in Cuba. The effectiveness of the tradition attracted many in people in Cuba, which accounted for its survival, its growth and spread to Miami through Cuban's immigrant in Miami.

Lopez and Martino's narratives bolster the scholarly account of Santeria's origin by Murphy who narrated how the Fon kingdom of Dahomey invaded the Yoruba people, leading to the fall of the Oyo empire. This development prompted the mass enslavement of thousands of Yoruba people. African slaves, who were shipped to Cuba and Brazil between 1800 and 1840, were predominantly Yoruba people (Murphy 21).

In Cuba, the Yoruba people and their descendants were referred to as the Lukumi. Wedel asserted that most Yoruba slaves were sent to the western provinces of Havana and Matanzas in Cuba (Wedel 71). Santeria began its development in these parts of Cuba and made a great impact on the lives of slaves as well as slaveholders. The institution of Cabildos sustained the survival of African indigenous practices in Cuba. The Cabildos were organizations or clubs established for mutual aid, religious devotion, and entertainment for free blacks and slaves in the urban centers of Cuba. Sandoval describes the Cabildos as Spanish originated religious associations created to provide their members with financial support, health care, and religious celebration (Sandoval 83). The Cabildos, which were grouped along ethnic lines, were also referred to as the Naciones (nations). The Roman Catholic Church sponsored them as part of its effort to eradicate

what remained of African beliefs among the slaves and their descendants in Cuba. In the Cabildos, the slaves celebrated their ancestral worship forms with African music and dances, using the Roman Catholic worship tradition as a pretext. The slaves' use of Catholic images to depict African spirits and ancestors without the knowledge of the Catholic authorities strengthened the syncretism of Orisha-Catholic worship in Cuba. The Yoruba-Cuban Cabildos gave birth to Santeria. Literally, Santeria means, "the way of the Saints," in the popular Spanish usage of that time. On the slave plantations located in the countryside of Cuba, slave owners sometimes used the remedies provided by ritual agents of Santeria to deal with health issues. This was the only way these slave owners could cope with the absence of modern European originated health care facilities in the rural areas of Cuba. The patronage of Santeria's indigenous healing technologies by slaves and slave masters enhanced the popularity of the tradition in Cuba.

From Cuba to Miami

Torres is in his late 60s, of average height and is dark in skin complexion. Torres is a Cuban immigrant living in Little Havana. He is an Orisha priest. My first conversation with him was on phone. I introduced myself and informed him that I was referred to him by Corina, a graduate student from the Department of Global and Sociocultural Studies at FIU. He was nice during our phone conversation We decided on a date and time to meet



at his residence.

Photo i. Torres & I at his residence in Little Havana and his display of Bata drums used for Orisha worship.

Torres started to tell story of how sacrificial tradition and practice of Santeria came to Miami, after welcoming me to his home:

The emergence of the sacrificial tradition of Santeria in Miami began in 1959, following the movement of many Cubans to Miami during a revolution in Cuba at that time. I was into the tradition because my family was an Orisha worshipping family in Cuba before my arrival in Miami. My faith in Orisha offered me the courage to move on to a new life in Miami. My experience and knowledge of the tradition earned me a living upon my arrival in Miami. It happened that some Cuban immigrants that escaped to Miami at that time fell sick. Some had challenges and needed spiritual help. Among the immigrants, those who knew me from Cuba as a priest of Orisha consulted me in Miami to offer them spiritual solutions. Through those who benefitted my herbal and spiritual remedies, I became popular in Little Havana and started making money from my services to the people. Some beneficiaries of my herbal medication and spiritual solution voluntarily converted into the Santeria tradition. The efficacy of Orisha response to clientele's problems in Miami made sacrifices popular among people seeking spiritual solutions to existing problems in their individual lives.

Torres's brief narrative buttresses my argument that sacrifice in Santeria is an intrinsic aspect of the religion. Sacrifice is the driving force of Orisha worship. It is a form of prayer. Without sacrifices, the spirits will be inactive, and the requests of devotees cannot be granted. As Torres stated, it is the people's quest to proffer solutions to their problems that made sacrifice a strong and popular aspect of the Santeria religious tradition in Miami.

Jeff Gonzalez, an American born devotee and a researcher of Santeria also offered his perspectives on the history of Santeria in Miami. He was my gatekeeper during this research. I had attended his classes and presentations on Santeria in my first year at FIU. His emergence as my gatekeeper was facilitated by my major professor, Dr. Albert Wuaku, who encouraged me to do field research on Santeria for my thesis. During my first visit with Jeff, he gave me six books on sacrifices in Santeria and provided me with names and cell phone numbers of four devotees which were helpful in my research. During my second visit, he offered me an account of how sacrifices in Santeria became rooted in Miami. He also told me about his own history as a Santeria devotee, driving home the prominent place of sacrifices as problem solvers in his own move into the religion.



Photo ii. Dr. Jeff Gonzalez and I at his office in FIU MMC after our conversation.

When the trans-Atlantic slave trade ended, only few Yoruba freed slaves left Cuba and Brazil for Nigeria. Some of these individuals established a pattern of travel that involved moving to and from Cuba, Brazil, and Nigeria. This facilitated a cross-fertilization of cultural and religious practices between these communities. This development strengthened the Nigerian cultural influence in Cuba and Brazil. Migrants from Cuba living in Miami continue this tradition of traveling to Nigeria. This cross-cultural factor contributed to the spread of the

tradition of sacrificing to Orisha. The tradition in Miami was brought from Cuba. However, it is heavily infected with contemporary Nigerian practices because of the cross-fertilizations of ideas and practices. I was 15 years old in 1978 when I first attended an orisha worship event in Miami. I was influenced to be a devotee by my grandparents. They actively offered sacrifices to Orisha on my behalf because they knew it would protect me at all time, and I know it did.

Jeff Gonzalez's emphasis reveals how the sacrifice tradition of Santeria in Miami is a product of the cross-fertilization of religious beliefs and practices from Cuba and Nigeria. Because of growing links between Cubans in Miami and the Yoruba homeland in Nigeria, these ritual forms are now rooted in Miami.

Alexandro, a 52 years old male and an American born-Cuban devotee of Santeria in Miami placed more emphasis on the sacrificial practices of Santeria in his account. My encounter with him was made possible by Torres, a priest of Orisha who I have written about earlier in this study. Alexandro welcomed me enthusiastically and showed me around his orisha's sacred altar, before settling down with me in a quiet room in his home.



Photo iii. Orisha temple at Alexandro's residence in Little Havana.

Alexandro began with the story of his experience with Santeria in Miami, hinting, in the process, at an aspect of its history:

I was born in America to Cuban parents. When I was little, I fell sick and my mother took me to Orisha priest in little Havana for healing. The priest instructed my mother to provide items for the performance of sacrifice. My mother provided the items and a divination was performed. The divination informed my mother that I have a divine calling to be a priest of Shango. That was when my mother paid for my initiation into the Santeria tradition. As a child, I grew up in the tradition with my mother and since my adulthood, I have been dedicated to the tradition as a priest of Shango. I have never regretted being a devotee of Santeria, despite the hostility of some persons against me, accusing me of witchcraft and animal cruelty. I have always been committed and dedicated to Shango because everything has always been good for me. My physical and spiritual well-being has been sustained from childhood until now through Shango. My Mom offered sacrifices and dedicated me to the Orisha as a child.

The highest point of Alexandro's testimony, the restoration of his health, also marked his childhood initiation into the tradition of Santeria. His mother's offer of sacrifices to the Orisha was instrumental in this restoration. The point here is that the ability of sacrifices to effectively secure solutions to problems bedeviling devotees of Santeria has been crucial in its rooting in the religious field of Miami.



Photo iv. Alexandro and I at his residence in Little Havana.

The Struggle for Survival of the Santeria Religious Tradition in Miami

The rooting of Santeria as a religious practice in Miami has not been as easy as the devotees who brought it from Cuba had hoped. Many devotees talked about the challenges they have experienced in Miami, often describing at length the efforts they have invested into maintaining their beliefs. The greatest challenge in rooting the tradition in Miami, they argue, has to do with the practice of animal sacrifice.

Unlike in contemporary Cuba, there is public prejudice against Santeria in the United States, especially in Miami, where it has a strong presence. Non-Santeria worshippers in Miami tend to discriminate against the tradition and its adherents. What has sustained the spread, growth, and survival of Santeria in Miami is the rule of law, especially the constitutional guarantee of the freedom of religion in the United States.

Ernesto, a priest of Ogun in Miami was among the research participants my Jeff Gonzalez introduced me to. Ernesto is a famous practitioner of orisha who travels around the world to provide services to his clientele. The first time I contacted him on phone, he

was in Nigeria. Upon his return from Nigeria, he called me from Chicago. He told me of his plans to travel to Cuba in the next week. We could only meet after his return from Cuba. His narrative on Santeria in Miami emphasized the challenges of discrimination faced by Orisha devotees in the city:

The laws and systems of the United States are against our practice. Many people discriminate against us because of our religious belief in Orisha and the use of animals for sacrifice. The stigmatization of the Orisha faithful in Miami is responsible for Miami devotees' private practice of the tradition. I'm talking to you now about the tradition of Santeria because of who recommended you to me. Otherwise, we don't discuss our religious practice with non-Santero devotees, because some persons may be spies and they would report our killing of animals for sacrifices to the law enforcement agents. Although practicing is challenging in face of this hostile environment our resilience and the managing of the secrets of what our traditions are, among ourselves have helped us to survive as Orisha faithful's in Miami.

These words underscore a way in which the negative public perceptions of Santeria in Miami have shaped its expression. Miami devotees still offer sacrifices underground. Despite the negative public perception, Santeria has enjoyed the patronage of migrants from different ethnic backgrounds in Miami

Louis is 37 years old, and a male African-American devotee of Santeria in Miami. He was the worker who attended to me at Milokan Botanica, located at 740 NE 167th St, in Miami. In his narration of the story of Santeria in Miami, Louis also told me of what

the tradition means to devotees, especially him. He also emphasized the challenges devotees face in practicing their Santeria in Miami:

It is all about your beliefs. The practice is significant in all aspects of life. It is my belief in it that has seen me through different challenges and I came out stronger. I had nothing to boast of 10 years ago. But since my wife introduced me to this tradition and I got initiated, my life has been turned around for better. I can now boast of my own business, happy family, good connections and many more. I know many people who won court victories, were healed and secured excellent jobs with the help of Orisha. I don't mind the negative perception people have about what I do. Whatever you do, people may say good or terrible things about it.

Louis highlighted the moral code of the Orisha tradition, noting that the Orishas are good spirits that forbid evil or immorality: "If you worship Orisha, you must keep your hands clean and stay away from evil and disobedience". Louis explained, before stating forcefully that the negative perception of outsiders about the tradition stemmed from their ignorance.

He went on:

Some persons criticize us because we offer animals as sacrifices to Orishas for a greater good. Some of these critics come to us behind closed doors to seek solutions to their problems. The tradition has continued to grow and has survived in Miami because we believe and have continued to keep to our faith. Also, our solutions for people are effective and it is attracting more people to us.

Louis's views point directly to an element of religions of African provenance that have shaped their histories wherever they have flowed to. This is their pragmatic value as demonstrated in their ability to offer practical day to day solutions to mundane issues. In this connection, we can conclude that despite the negative perceptions of the public against Santeria, its ability to solve problems, especially for Cuban migrants, is crucial in explaining its survival in Miami.



Photo v. Louis and myself at

Milokan Botanica.

I came across Amenta at Botanica La Caridad, located at 10901 SW 24 in Miami. She is a 50 years old, slim bilingual lady, who is also a relative of the owner of the Botanica. Although we had limited time for a lengthy discussion because it was an unscheduled visit, Amenta also offered me valuable insights into the history of the tradition in Miami as she hinted at some demands the practice of Santeria places on worshippers. She explained further how the challenges migrant life imposes on devotees have made many overlooks these demanding aspects of the tradition. Her point was that although a difficult religion to practice devotees have clung to Santeria because as migrants, many of them cannot go on without it:

I'm Iyalo Ocha, a "mother of Orisha" I'm a godmother to many devotees of Orisha in Miami. The tradition demands certain restrictions, which are sometimes challenging for some people. Sometimes, an Orisha restricts her devotees from eating certain foods and re-define devotees' way of life. The rules of Orisha may restrict devotee from participation in certain social events, mostly night party that conflict with the rule or the traditions. Orisha worship is financially demanding and this aspect of it has frustrated the initiation of few prospective devotees because of the cost of funding initiation. However, despite the misconception of people and the financial involvement of practicing orisha tradition, the population of adherents has continued to increase in Miami mostly among immigrant because in their struggle for their survival as immigrants, especially in their drive to succeed socio-economically and meet their health challenges, they need to use the religion.

Amenta's emphasis above shows the vicissitudes that come with migrant life and the relevance of Santeria's roles in overcoming these. Worshippers tend to overlook the social and economic challenges that accrue to be a practitioner of Santeria in Miami. This is a crucial factor in explaining the tradition's history of success in Miami.

Many of my respondents mentioned the monumental court case that pitted the City of Hialeah against the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc, a Santeria community, in 1993, describing the victory of the community as the highest point of the tradition's history in the USA. The victory voided the law of Hialeah that deemed devotee's public or private sacrifice of animals to be unconstitutional. The judgment affirmed and acknowledged Santeria as a legitimate tradition with a right to engage in its religious rituals, including animal sacrifices.

The point of the discussion on the history of Santeria in Miami so far is that as a migrant religious tradition, Santeria must constantly struggle for survival in Miami. This is because of the weighty impact of state and national policies and public prejudice against African originated traditions in general, and Santeria, in particular. A discussion of Santeria's history and ritual life in Miami must shed light on the uncertainties that provided a motivation for Cuban migrants to root it in Miami, and its continuous struggle for survival as a religious tradition. For its devotees, Santeria's practice in Miami has more to do with survival under the pressure of the empire than a mere expression of faith or performance of identity. Santeria's survival in Miami attests to the peaceful and constructive ways in which Cuban migrants are creating, living, and transforming their Yoruba originated religious heritage amid and despite imperial and state policies. The fortunes of Santeria, I suggest, are inextricably linked to the struggles of its Cuban

creators, whose day to day lives as migrants in Miami are even more disrupted than the lives of those relatives they left behind in Cuba.

Santeria Sacrifices and How it adapted to Changes

The movement of Santeria heritage from Yorubaland in Nigeria to Cuba, its transformation into Santeria and finally, its secondary migration to the United States has affected the practice of sacrifices. For, instance, despite the guarantee of its free expression by the Supreme court ruling, some animals such as the dog cannot be used for sacrifice in Miami, although in Nigeria, this is a favorite animal used in sacrifices.

Ogun is an Orisha that loves dog sacrifice and in Cuba and Africa, a dog is mostly sacrificed to Ogun. However, dogs cannot be sacrificed to Ogun in Miami because it is unlawful. Killing dogs for ritual purposes in Miami can lead to a devotee's imprisonment.

Lazaro explained that in Africa and Cuba, dogs are affordable and can be lawfully used for sacrifice. He asserted that in Miami, dogs are viewed as having rights because they are pets and therefore considered to be humans' friends. On the one hand, dogs are expensive in Miami. On the other hand, and more importantly, it is illegal to kill dogs for sacrifices in Miami.

All the Orisha are worshiped uniformly and collectively in Miami, however, unifying Orisha worship is not a widespread practice in Nigeria where devotees worship specific Orisha. The cultural factors and the fewer population of devotees in Miami compared to Africa and Cuba are the reasons for devotees unified worship of multiple Orishas in Miami. Allegiance is pledged to multiple Orisha simultaneously in Miami. Jeffery Gonzalez offered insight into how changes occurred in the tradition, stating that

about forty years ago it was a part of the tradition of devotees of Santeria to celebrate their initiation anniversaries every year. They considered this to be a marker of the beginning of their relationship with the Orisha.

Jeffery Gonzalez explained further:

On the eve of a devotee's initiation anniversary, the hairs or feathers of the animal are being offered to the Orisha as a sacrifice. On the day of the anniversary, the animal is cooked and eaten by invited guests and selected members of that Santeria community. This tradition did not survive in Miami because of the high cost of the live animal, challenges of getting people to slaughter the animal, and problems linked with the process of cooking for a large population of devotees.

The negative social perception of outsiders and legal challenges associated with the ritual slaughter of animals at the period the tradition first arrived in Miami are contributing factors to the elimination this practice in Miami. This tradition has continued in Cuba because animal sacrifice is not perceived negatively in Cuba and the tradition of Santeria is well embraced by the populace.

Some Santeros are not receptive to animal sacrifices in the United States. Some members of Orisha worship are vegetarian. Vegetarian members of Santeria in Miami find it difficult to offer animal sacrifices. They prefer to offer fruit and vegetables to their Orishas. The tradition, however, considers these items too as sacrifices. Most respondents emphasized that the offering of sacrifices to Orisha in Miami has increased over the years because of the increase in the population of Orisha worshipers and the increasing search for solutions by clientele.

Ernesto Arango described how restrictions imposed on the devotees of Santeria by the ordinances of the city of Miami gave birth to clandestine practices. He noted:

Bush rat is one of the best meat for Elegua, however, the rearing of bush rat in Miami is illegal unlike in Cuba and Africa where the bush rat is common. In Miami, you cannot find bush rat easily. What we do is that we secretly and illegally rear bush rat in Miami. The cost of a bush rat extremely high in Miami.

The point here is that sometimes, devotees of Santeria need to shape their practices to the conditions of life in Miami. With regards to sacrifices, such innovations can increase the cost of their performances.

Some respondents identified factors that make the sacrificial tradition of Santeria in Miami different from its practice in Cuba and Africa. For instance, many pointed out how sacred spaces are public in Nigeria and Cuba but must be kept secret in Miami because of the different ethos of Miami as an American city. Devotees' creation of sacred spaces in their homes are ways of resisting persecution or condemnation from the public in Miami.

Conclusion

In Miami, some persons were initiated to Santeria tradition as an outcome of their search for supernatural power that will enhance their survival as immigrants. There are people who became devotees because of their love and quest to be identified with their African roots. Others were born into the tradition or were influenced by their peers to join. The spiritual values of Santeria have enhanced its prosperity and encouraged devotees sacrifices of animals in Miami. The economic system, socio-religious and political

landscape of Miami has affected Santeria's sacrificial practice, leading to its transformation in Miami.

CHAPTER FOUR

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SANTERIA SACRIFICES IN MIAMI

Introduction

This chapter discusses the importance of sacrifices in the religious tradition of Santeria in Miami. It examines the structure of Santeria's sacrifices. The chapter's main argument is that sacrifice in Santeria is an indispensable aspect of prayer and for that matter a part of the practitioners' religious habitus. Sacrifice is linked with the understanding of health which means the totality of well-being. I argue that sacrifice is the spiritual technique that restores good health in Santeria. The chapter will describe the phenomenology of Santeria's sacrifices. Building on testimonies of devotees of the tradition in Miami the chapter will demonstrate the indispensability of sacrifice as a ritual practice in their daily lives. The chapter will also evaluate the economics of sacrifice driving home the point that they are a crucial basis of the economic well-being of Santeria devotees who are mostly Cuban migrants. For this reason, we can say that sacrifices function as weapons of the weak. It is a basis for a sub-economic culture in which these migrants who live on the margins of society in Miami dominate. Aside from offering devotees a sense of being empowered in their endeavors the proceeds that accrue to this practice is the basis of the survival of many Cuban families.

Sacrificial Practice in Santeria

The performance of sacrifice is part and parcel of worship in the Santeria religious tradition. The worship of Orishas is incomplete without offering sacrifices. This ritual is important in maintaining cordial relationships between devotees and the Gods that protect them. Sacrificial offerings are a key to deriving favor from the gods. Devotees have a

contractual relationship with the Gods and performing sacrifices is one of the terms of the contract. Sacrifice is linked with the notion of health in Santeria. Health is defined as the totality of well-being (material/spiritual/social). One possessing well-being of mind, body, and spirit, and living in harmony with neighbors and in a healthy environment (physically and ritually) is being very healthy. This means that the meaning of health has a communal dimension. A community can be diseased. A person of a community enjoying good health in its totality is said to enjoy “ire” Ire means blessings of God/ and spirit beings. The desire of all devotees is to live within the bounds of “ire.” Ashé the divine force infused throughout creation and the human community is a key determinant of health. Human beings are healthiest when this force is most abundant, and they become diseased as it wanes. Arun or aro —or disease is caused by both natural and supernatural forces. Supernatural agents that can cause a disease or determine the outcome of a naturally caused disease, include the Orisha, Witches, Sorcery, Ghosts, Evil eye-or curse, Eleda, related. (Olopuna 67).

A direct attack from supernatural forces-Orishas- [aro else ocha] may feel neglected and turn against indebted people, making them sick. Sacrifice, then, is a cultural healing mechanism or technique. Among the Yoruba, on whose religious beliefs Santeria, builds its religious culture---Sacrifice is referred to as ebo. The words “ru ebo” in Yoruba means “to perform the sacrifice.” We must note here that the act and object are the same and called “ebo”. Sacrifices, “offerings”, “purification” are the same in Yoruba thought and religious practice. The practice of sacrificing to gods is based on the principle of reciprocity, a guiding principle of all kinds of relationships among the Yoruba. The sense is that the relationship between two entities must be a mutually

beneficial one. If humans expect to enjoy the succor of the divinities, they must be willing to make offerings to them in return. Also, the practice of sacrificing [“Ebo”] relates to the notion of Ashe, or divine energy. Sacrifices “Ebo” reinforce the Ashe of deities. The deities return this Ashe to humans in the form of spiritual protection and other material benefits. Sacrifices then are like food for the deities. Through sacrifices, humans tap into Orishas’ ashe to meet their needs. Humans can do so because their sacrifices reinforce/replenish the ashe of orishas. Sacrificing ensures that the Orisha have Ashe constantly. Only then can they furnish their devotees with the resources they need to move on in life.

Devotees of Santeria identify distinct categories of sacrifices. One category is *Ebo eye ebo woni* or the ritual slaughter of animals. Normally, devotees sacrifice animals during the ordination ceremony of priests. The goal is to invite the protection of the Orisha. The most essential element in this form of sacrifice is the blood of the animal. Because blood is the physical vessel of ashe in the cosmology of Santeria such sacrifices replenishes the Orisha’s ashe. **Ebo shure** is another category of sacrifices. This involves the offering of foodstuff to deities or ancestral spirits. If the purpose is cleansing of ritual dirt from a devotee, it is advised that no human has contact with the food because the ritual dirt removed from devotee contaminates it. **Ebo misi**, a purificatory bath usually prepared with herbs and other elements. They are ripped up in a basin containing water, which forms part of the sacrifice. **Ebori eleda**, another form of sacrifice is an -important offering from an olorisha (devotee). Devotees describe it as a “ritual feeding” of an individual’s spiritual head or Ori, which oversees the person’s destiny. This sacrifice is

intended to open the gates for material success and peace to flow into the life of the devotee.

The choice of what to offer is determined by tradition/convention or by Oracle. But the item must be without blemish, that is, not be sick, malnourished, mistreated, or weak. It must be pleasing to the Orisha. It must be what the person would himself or herself like to consume. Moreover, each Orisha has his or her own tastes and taboos and these inform what can be offered to him or her. For example, Ogun prefers dogs, palm wine, roasted yams, oil, snails, tortoise and in some cases, the ram. Orunmila loves rats and mudfish. Obatala is fond of snails fried in shea butter, cooked white maize (egboo) white kola nut or bitter kola [orogbo]. The occasion calling for a sacrifice also determines the object that can be sacrificed. The object sacrificed transfers its qualities to the supplicant for his or her beneficial use. These objects also have symbolic meanings. For example, a snail embodies the qualities of gentleness, calmness, and peace. These qualities are demonstrated through the snail's motion and behavior. When a person is praying for life to be smooth, free of all types of danger, a snail may be among the items sacrificed. The slow cautious and steady movement of snails enable them to avoid readily getting into trouble. Also, since Ogun is fiery, objects offered to calm his anger include the snail and palm oil.

The occasion calling for a sacrifice also determines the object that is sacrificed. For example, noted for its serenity in flight, neatness in appearance, and the agility of its movement, devotees seeking good luck and longevity sacrifice pigeons. In times of crisis that threaten an entire community--the sacrificial object is costlier, often a bull. Most sacrifices are linked with special events or personal needs -especially during a crisis

when devotees turn to oracles to solve problems. Dictates of the Orisha, personal intuition dreams, revelations, omens, simple devotion may be motives for making a sacrifice. The goal mostly is to avert a crisis or secure a success. The point of this discussion is to demonstrate the phenomenology of sacrifice as a Santeria ritual, emphasizing its place as a technique for securing the welfare of devotees. It is an integral part of the religious habitus of Santeria, informing how devotees feel, think and act in their day to day, lives. In the next section, I turn my attention to testimonies of devotees about the importance of sacrifice in their lives.

Alexandro, who I introduced earlier in chapter three of this thesis, forcefully explained the necessity of offering sacrifices to the Orishas in Santeria in the following words:

I pour libation and give food sacrifices to my Orisha Shango every morning before I go out. I feed my Orisha to make her happy and to maintain a cordial relationship with her. It is working for me very well. My Orisha is happy with me and she always gives me information about my life. I get information from my Orisha either in the dream or through revelation. If it is a problem, my Orisha will always provide a solution for it.

As argued earlier, without sacrifices the worship of Orisha is incomplete. Alexandro explained that solutions to clienteles' problems are revealed by the Orisha through sacrifices that accompany divination. Through the divination process, the Orisha diagnoses the problem and prescribes the specific items required for the sacrifice that

would redress the issue. Sacrifices are necessary tools for achieving solutions to devotees' problems. As we can see from Alexandro's description, sacrifices are linked with the process of divination. Divination is the use of supernatural means to seek knowledge of the unknown, especially the future. The offering of sacrifices to Orisha by clientele is mostly guided by the directives revealed through divination. Divination requires specialized skills and knowledge. This is crucial if the diviner must understand the message obtained from the Orisha.

Jeff Gonzalez, who I earlier introduced in chapter three of this study as my gatekeeper, offered keen insights into the reasons devotees offer sacrifices to Orisha in the following words:

A devotee may perform sacrifices as a show of gratitude for a benefit derived from the gods or as means of appeasing a divinity. The most important element in sacrifice is blood. Blood is a symbol of life and power. In addition to blood, parts of the animal that cannot be eaten by devotees are often offered to the Orisha. I personally offer annual thanksgiving sacrifice to Shango once in every year in appreciation of Shango's kindness to me. I also offer animal sacrifice to my Orisha when I am weak or feeling overwhelmed and need psychological balance. For many years this practice has helped balance my spiritual life and offered me happiness. Sacrifices involve different forms. There are sacrifices that are designed to influence stronger connections to the deities, sacrifices to derive a solution for problems of individuals, sacrifices for initiation, divination, and healing etc. I recently visited Nigeria and before I left the United States to Nigeria, I offered a dove and cow to Ogun to enhance the safety of trip.

Jeff Gonzalez continued to expound on the benefits of sacrifice, illustrating with the story of his brother's experience with the ritual:

After my brother and his wife had their first child, it was difficult for them to have a child again. Having made many efforts to have more kids without expected results, they carried out a divination and offered male and female ducks as sacrifices to Yemaya as instructed by the divination outcome. Six weeks after the sacrifices, my brother's wife got pregnant and later had a twin, a boy, and a girl.

Jeff's story uncovers how devotees' offer of sacrifices to Orisha serves as guarantors of the needs they desire to meet. In a sense, sacrifices constitute their first line in resisting strictures that stand between them and their ability to meet their needs. Sacrifices become more crucial for those of them who, as migrants live on the margins of American society and have little or no access to resources members of the larger society have. It is in this sense that we can argue, following James Scott, that sacrifices are weapons of the weak for some devotees of Santeria.

I had earlier introduced Torres in Chapter three of this study as an Orisha priest I knew through Corina, a senior colleague at FIU. Torres described how he disobeyed Orisha Obatala and how his sacrifice to Obatala helped him to avert the possible effects of the wrath of the god:

I was warned several times by my Orisha to stop the drinking of alcoholic drinks, but I did not listen. Obatala revealed to me the dangers of not obeying the instruction to restrain from alcohol. However, I was reluctant to stop the intake of alcohol. One night after I finished drinking with my friends at the bar, I came

back home and couldn't walk anymore. All my efforts to stand up did not work out, and it was later confirmed to be a stroke. When I consulted my Orisha through divination, he told me 'I warned you, but you refused to listen, that is your punishment for disobedience'. I had to offer sacrifices to Obatala to enhance my spiritual cleansing and recovery of my health. I also used herbal solution for the restoration of my health.

Torres explained that since the restoration of his health, he has stopped the drinking of any form of alcoholic beverages as a gesture of obedience to his Orisha. Torres's punishment for disobedience and his actions and experiences re-shaped his personal history. What we see here is that sacrifices have moral significances for devotees. Restitutions to gods for transgressions come in the form of sacrifices. Once a sacrifice has been offered the individual feels a sense of relief because he or she has atoned for a misdeed. This brings about closure, allowing the person to go on with his or her life.

Linda Alenjanro is a slim and dark skinned American born-Cuban devotee of Santeria in her 40s. She is among the persons Jeff Gonzalez referred me to during my entry into the field. A great deal of our conversation was over the phone. She started the conversation with a discussion on the difference between religion and spirituality:

I have a problem with the word religion which means to bind together in Latin. My father told me religion is conquest. Religion is designed to keep people in bondage, to keep people blind, religion and colonization are both same. We are Africans, Africans practice spiritualism, not religion.

She continued:

Santeria is African spiritualism and to survive you need to keep close to your enemies. This is the reason our ancestors offered sacrifices to Orisha to enhance their spiritual wellbeing in the colonial era and they represented the Orishas with the images of Catholic saints to further enhance the acceptance and survival of sacrifices to Orisha against the will and order of the white colonial masters. This practice was passed from generation to generation as a culture and spiritual way of life of Afro-Cubans. It is not a religion as speculated by people from outside. For us in Santeria, sacrifice is a key to unlocking spiritual doors and fulfilling a God-given purpose.

Linda's historical analysis offers more insight into how sacrifice is a weapon of the weak. She alluded to this idea, referring to the period in history during which her enslaved ancestors disguised the ritual by directing it towards Catholic saints, which the colonial regime considered legitimate. Sacrifices then offered Africans a context for resisting colonial impositions. This process continues today in Miami. In the face of the overwhelming public opposition towards Santeria, the continuous, even daily, the performance of sacrifices constitutes an expression of resilience. My point here is that as a ritual form, the ritual of sacrifice channels feelings of Afro-Cuban resistance to the hegemony in Miami on different levels. On one level, it demonstrates the will of devotees to go on despite the constraints they experience daily as migrants. On another level, its daily practice demonstrates the resilience of the tradition, its ability to thrive in midst of overwhelming social and political opposition.

The Economics of Santeria Sacrificial Practices in Miami

The sacrificial practice of Santeria has economic value for Orisha priests, botanica owners, and the devotees. I discuss the economics of sacrifices in Santeria in this section. Sacrifice is not only beneficial economically to the devotees of Santeria in Miami, but also to the priests and persons who are into the sales of ritual paraphernalia devotees use for sacrifices. This understanding of sacrifice will lead me to account in which Torres acknowledges how sacrifices have empowered him economically.

Torres narrated his experience, attesting to the economic benefit he has derived from sacrifices in Santeria:

The tradition of sacrifices to Orisha has always helped my economic well-being since my arrival from Cuba to Miami. I derive spiritual benefits as an outcome of my sacrifices to the Orishas. Additionally, I gain and sustain economic wellbeing through the sacrifices that are offered by clients who seek my services for divination, healing, and initiation. I have been into this practice for long and it is my means of earning a living. Since the time of my early arrival from Cuba to Miami, my service to multitudes of people who seek spiritual solution across the United States has given me the opportunity to make big financial gains. The sacrifices offered by these clientele is not just the sacrifice of animal and food items. It includes the sacrifice of money as payment for my service. Also, I am most times contracted by my clients to buy the items needed for the sacrifices. Through this opportunity I make profits. My services include healing, oracle divination, initiation and provision of a spiritual solution. These services require sacrifices and the sacrifice is all about money, either for purchasing of the

sacrificial items or for payment of the orisha priest's services. I couldn't work legally when I first arrived in Miami. But this religion has given me a business opportunity for over 20 years now in Miami.

Torres emphasis on how he benefited economically from sacrifices for his clientele or devotees helps to buttress my argument that sacrifice in Santeria is a weapon of the weak. The monetary gains accruing to sacrifices from clients is a basis of his livelihood. This was even more crucial for him in the past when it was not possible for him to work legally work in the United States. Moreover, the naivety of some clients on the types and cost of sacrificial items was an instrument of economic empowerment for Torres who uses the opportunity to financially gain more from them. This is a form of economic opportunity linked to sacrifices in Santeria. I also witnessed the economic value of sacrifices at the Botanica where I observed clients and devotees purchasing items to be used for sacrifice. Amongst the items sold at the Botanica are leaves, candles, beads, cowries, native pots, images of Catholic saints etc. There were items not worth more than \$50 in Nigeria, however, they are worth over \$500 in Miami Botanicas. Yet, these unaffordable prices did not seem to deter clientele. This is because these are core ingredients in sacrifices and clientele desperate for help cannot be deterred by their inflated prices.

Lazaro commented on how the ethos of Miami's economy has affected sacrifices in Santeria:

The cost of living in Miami is very high and the situation has affected some devotee's ability to afford certain sacrifices in Miami. The cost of a bush rat in Miami is worth more than \$500. It is expensive because people who sell it, rear it

secretly and illegally. Bush rat is the best meat of Eleggua. However, not every worshiper of Eleggua in Miami can afford bush rat for sacrifice. The money that is paid to orisha priests as service fee is also a challenge to some prospective devotees in Miami. However, despite this economic cost and financial commitment involved in sacrifices, many devotees see no other way of solving their issues than offering sacrifices to the orishas. So, they look for the money to pay.

The owners of Botanicas pay taxes to the government from the proceeds of sacrificial items sold, and clientele pay taxes to the government while purchasing sacrificial items at the Botanica shops. Sacrifices in this aspect contribute to the economic development of Miami. Priests or devotees who cannot work in the United States are indirectly helping the economic growth of Miami either through their services or patronage of the Botanicas although the hegemony does not support them.

Sacred Space and Santeria Festivity in Miami

Despite the prominent place of sacrifice in Santeria In Miami, it is difficult to find a public temple of orisha where they are performed. This is because the social stigma attached to Santeria in Miami pushes devotees to perform their rituals in hiding, that is, in spaces away from the public gaze. In other words, the wrong interpretation of the practice by the public creates a hostile environment for the performance of sacrifice by devotees of Santeria in Miami. The protagonists in the projection of a negative public image of Santeria's sacrifices are members of the animal's rights movement who forcefully push a narrative that presents sacrifices, a sacrament of Santeria as nothing but the subjecting of animals to cruel and inhumane treatments to the animal. This negative view of sacrifices

largely explains why Santeria has remained to be something of an underground religion in Miami.

During my research, I discovered that all the devotees I visited had their temples in rooms in their homes. The orishas are well decorated by the devotees and placed either on a shelf or in a space reserved for them in devotees' living rooms. The decorations on orishas and the way they are positioned make the spaces look like art galleries in devotees' homes. Sometimes the sacrifices are offered to the orishas inside the shelves in which they are stationed. However, some sacrifices, especially, those used in cleansing rituals are secretly thrown into 4 or 3-way junctions in the city of Miami or its suburbs at night. This is the only context in which a sign of Santeria sacrifices is visible to the public. Negative public perceptions aside, state and federal laws restrict the public practice of sacrifices in Miami. The fact that sacrifices have remained to be core ritual practices of Santeria despite this duress underscores its cardinal place in Santeria's ritual culture. Nothing said or practiced in Santeria has any meaning for devotees unless it is accompanied by one form of sacrifice or the other.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I argued that sacrifice is an indispensable aspect of Santeria's religious habitus. In a Geertzian sense, it is a model of and for reality for Santeria worshippers. It reflects how they think about the world and shapes how they respond to happenings in their lives. Without sacrifices prayers in Santeria are not considered to be complete. The chapter reported narratives of devotee respondents pointing to the indispensability of sacrifices in their day to day lives. The chapter also hints at the economy of Santeria

sacrifices. They have become the hub around which an underground economy that sustains the lives of Cuban migrants, the majority of whom live on the margins of society, revolves. Because of these observations, the chapter argues that sacrifices are weapons of the weak, following the lead of Scott. Sacrifices offer forms of empowerment for an otherwise marginalized population, providing members with the assurance that supernatural forces will give them succor if they perform the correct sacrifices. Sacrifices are also the mainstay of the economies of individuals who must literally carve a living out of nothing in Miami because of their status as migrants. Despite these benefits, Santeria's sacrifices have remained something of an underground praxis in Miami because of public prejudice against it.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Botanica and its importance in Miami, South Florida

In this chapter, I focus my attention on Botanicas in Miami. The functions these shops play is indispensable in the practice of sacrifices by devotees of Santeria in South Florida because they house every paraphernalia devotee need for performance of sacrifices. Literally, they are hubs around which Santeria as a tradition, especially its tradition of sacrificing evolves. It follows that a discussion on sacrifice in Santeria cannot be considered complete without a focus on Botanicas. In this discussion, my emphasis is on the functions these shops play in the culture of sacrifices in Miami. The point of the discussion is that these shops are symbols of the rootedness of Santeria as a religious tradition in Miami. The discussion will be based on the findings on Botanicas that are situated in South Florida.

A Botanica is a retail store that is involved in the sales of folk medicine, religious items, candles, amulets, and other products used for medical practices. Botanicas also sell oils, incense, perfumes, scented sprays of the various brand. Botanicas emerged in the United States following the mass migration of Cubans and other Latinos to the United States of America. These shops are commonly found in Hispanic communities in American cities. In Miami, especially in the portions where immigrants from the Caribbean and Latin America live Botanicas literally dot the landscape. The term Botanica is derived from the Spanish term "botany" which means "plant." These spaces then function as dispensaries of medicinal herbs, which are sold in dried or fresh packages. Botanicas also feature a variety of products used in Roman Catholic religious practice such as rosary beads, holy water, and images of saints. Among the latter,

devotional figures of Afro-Caribbean and Latin American provenance are well represented.



Photo vi. items sold at Milokan Botanica.

Although the Catholic Church officially allows the use of herbal medication, it prohibits magico-religious practices. Most Botanicas in Miami have products associated with other

religions and spiritual practices. Alternative medical solutions found in botanicas are used to treat a variety of illness, such as arthritis, asthma, hair loss, menstrual pain, and diabetes. Because the traditions that use the resources Botanicas offer view ill health holistically many botanicas offer forms of spiritual solutions to problems that may not necessarily need biomedical attention. Thus, there are products that are designed to attract love, bring good luck, financial prosperity, deflect jealousy and secure spiritual protection. The patronage of Botanicas by many Latinos in the United States is motivated by the efficacy of the indigenous health care delivery their owners offer their clientele. Beyond their medicinal store functions, botanicas also serve as unique sites for the display of religious culture and Santeria is one tradition in Miami, whose culture Botanicas display in Miami. Botanicas that feature ritual paraphernalia linked with Santeria create a real visible picture of the African-Cuban cultural religious heritage in the diaspora. The spaces that Botanicas create do not only serve health care purposes. They have become the meeting places for Santeria devotees. They are seen as cultural symbols of Afro-Latino communities in America. In Miami, especially in the suburbs of Hialeah, Little Havana, and North Miami, Botanicas are found along the streets. Often, they are located in between grocery shops. The inside portion of these botanicals has a sacred ambiance, with an assortment of religious items being sold to customers who flow in and out daily.



Photo

vii. images and medicinal products at Botanica Oni Oni

I was intrigued by the constant inflow of devotees of different racial backgrounds into the Botanicas I visited during my field research, to purchase different religious items. It was,

however, challenging to engage these Botanica customers in conversations about their intentions for purchasing these items. They seem to be very discrete. Majority of the devotees I approached at the Botanicas I visited were skeptical about my interest in what they were purchasing. They were reluctant to engage in conversation that concerned their religious tradition, especially the aspect that deals with sacrifices, with me. Even the sales persons claimed not to know what the items being sold are used for. These attitudes simply reflect the status of Santeria as an invisible religion in Miami. The negative public perceptions have engendered these attitudes among devotees. During my field research, I observed that the Botanicas have private rooms in which customers could discuss their issues privately with the attendants. This made me realize that botanicas did were also spaces for consultations between devotees and attendants.

The Botanica is the only public space where the items for Santeria sacrifices can easily be seen by non-devotees of the tradition. Although the items are arranged in ways that make them visible to the public, a non-devotee of Santeria or Vodou will never understand what these items are and what they are used for. One may probably think the sculptures or statues arranged in the botanicas are merely artworks for home beautification or images of Catholic saints. In this study, the botanica can be described as not just a shop, but as an indigenous clinic and a networking outlet for clientele, devotees, priests and spectators of the orisha tradition. Without the presence of botanicas, it is difficult to see a public space where members of Santeria gather in Miami. Devotees and the priests of Santeria in Miami perform sacrifices in the Botanicas, making them ritual spaces too. Although, there are times when sacrificial offers are performed at the banks of a river or on the beach area, because of public prejudice many devotees prefer to

use their homes or Botanicas to sacrifice. The botanica play a remarkable role as a point of contact for devotees, non-devotees, researchers and adherents of Santeria.

Conclusion

The place of botanica in this research deals with Santeria presence in Miami. Many critics and individuals who have heard about Santeria and its sacrificial tradition have no idea how the religion is practice and have not seen sacrifices, either Santeria religious space with their eyes in Miami. The Miami social hegemony which is anti-tradition of Santeria sacrifices is responsible for the absence of Santeria public religious space in Miami. However, the botanica's existence in Miami functions as resistance against the social hegemonic system by functioning as a public religious space of Santeria where sacrificial items are sold and patronized. Hence, the botanicas function as stores and as public religious space for devotees of Santeria and for people of the various religious divide who visit the botanica for patronage or for research purposes.

The items for sale at the botanicas are colorfully arranged in shelves and glass cases. The items had assorted colors with number codes symbolizing the specific Orisha each was linked with. Some of the items sold at the Botanica are also used by Catholic faithfuls and devotees of Vodou. Botanica Oni-Oni at 11322 Quail Dr, Botanica La Caridad at 10901 SW 24 and Botanica Milokan at 740 NE 167th St, Miami, FL 33162 feature prominently in this research.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION OF THESIS

Conclusion and Summary of Findings

This section of the thesis summarizes my observations, experiences, and findings in the field. It also summarizes the general argument of this research, regarding the sacrifices of Santeria in Miami, and its meaningfulness to devotees.

The presence of Santeria (Lukumi) in Miami is linked with the mass migration of Cubans to Miami in 1959. This was during the Cuban revolution. Since then, the practice of Santeria has flourished in Miami, contributing to the economic growth of the city through the sales and huge patronage of Santeria ritual paraphernalia. The practice of Santeria in Miami has attracted interest among academics in recent years. In Miami, sacrificial practices of Santeria have often been misinterpreted and misrepresented by uninformed non-Santeros who are often opposed to the slaughtering of animals. The exotic spiritual and mystical manifestation of the power of the Orishas has also been misinterpreted as magic and witchcraft power by non-devotees in Miami. These misconceived notions of people about Santeria have driven the religion and its practices, especially, sacrifices, underground in Miami. But from the points of view of devotees of Santeria, the ritual killing of animals is in keeping with their worldviews. This study suggests that the claim of outsiders in Miami that Santeria sacrifices are expressions of witchcraft is a result of ignorance, prejudice and international media brainwashing by a hegemony that has failed in every means to eliminate the cultural heritage of Afro-Cubans. Many previous critics of the sacrifices of Santeria in Miami, who later converted to the religion of Santeria have attested to the kindness and faithfulness of the orishas. I

discovered that the devotees offer sacrifices to the Orishas to ensure effective answers to their prayers. The offer of sacrifices to a divinity, be it an animal or any other form is an indispensable aspect of most religions. These include Christianity, Judaism, Islam, African religions, and Buddhism. There cannot be a religion without sacrifice, even if it takes a different form. It takes being a member of a specific religion to understand what sacrifice is and what is acceptable as a form of sacrifice. Sacrifice in Santeria is not different from the Christian tradition of offering various items to God as a sacrifice, including the Christian use of animals for thanksgiving offering. The Christian ritual of drinking wine and eating bread as holy communion is a manifestation of eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus Christ for the sanctification of the body. If the blood of Jesus Christ can be consumed symbolically by his followers as a tradition and is not demonized and condemned because it is the faith of the people and it works for them, then the inherited practice of sacrificing animal and offering their blood to orishas by its devotees is justified because it is the faith of the devotees and it works for them.

The U.S. Supreme Court's recognition and legalization of animal sacrifices of Santeria in 1993 furthered strengthen the presence of the religion and its praxis in Miami. The historical knowledge and the religious practice of Santeria have helped in defining the identity of Afro-Cubans, the Caribbean's, and African Americans. The practice has contributed to the establishment of cordial relationships and bridges between Afro-Cuban descendants, African Americans, the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Africans generally. Santeria's sacrifices in Miami involve different forms, such as initiation sacrifices, divination sacrifices, and healing sacrifices. Devotees or clientele who seeks solutions from Orisha priests to the problems bedeviling them often derives solutions through

Orisha. The Orisha priest afterward prescribes certain rites and sacrifices. This is to ensure good fortune and to enhance the solution being sought to the devotees' or clienteles' problems.

It is devotees' or clientele's attempt to achieve solutions to their problems that required sacrifices to the orisha. The performance of sacrifice in Santeria is not a practice of witchcraft. Neither is it an anti-social activity in the way it is being perceived by outsiders. Sacrifice in Santeria is a means to an end. A sacrifice is simply a form of prayer, it is a tool for influencing and commanding the supernatural realm to manifest the will of a human. It is a part of the religious habitus of Santeria. More importantly, it is the most important act of resistance to the vicissitudes devotees face daily as migrants in the USA. It has also become a mainstay of the economies of many Afro Cuban families who profit from the supply of the ritual paraphernalia used in, Symbolically, the rootedness of Santeria's sacrifices as a ritual form in Miami attests to the resilience of Santeria in an environment in which the majority of the population is quite hostile to it.

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