

4-11-2001

Botánicas: absence in Cuba, proliferation in the United States

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

BOTÁNICAS: ABSENCE IN CUBA, PROLIFERATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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

MASTER OF ARTS

in

LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES

by

José A. Lammoglia

2001

To: Dean Arthur W. Herriott
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Jose A. Lammoglia, and entitled *Botánicas: Absence in Cuba, Proliferation in the United States*, 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.

Nadine Fernandez

Leonel A. de la Cuesta

Terry Rey, Major Professor

Date of defense: April 11, 2001

The thesis of José A. Lammoglia is approved.

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Florida International University, 2001

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my aunts Eva and Nara Lammoglia for the enthusiasm with which they carried out the part of the research done in Cuba. Professor Teresita Pedraza, who suggested the study. Dr. Manuel R. Moreno-Fraginals for helping me re-discover my native land.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the members of my committee for their trust, support, patience, and guidance. Their knowledge, and gentle but firm direction has been most appreciated. Dr. Nadine Fernandez knowledge of race relations in Cuba has helped me state some issues with clarity. Dr. Leonel A. de la Cuesta, most of all for his support and friendship during tough times and for his knowledge on Cuban History, which were of most importance for this thesis. Finally, I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Terry Rey. Nothing I can say is enough to acknowledge and appreciate his expertise, patience, guidance, friendship, and enthusiasm for the work.

Professor Teresita Pedraza who suggested the topic for my thesis, and who has been an amazing teacher, critic, and colleague. My research assistants in Cuba, Eva, Nara, and Jorge Luis Lammoglia for helping beyond my expectations. Daniel Gann from GIS for his knowledge and help in the construction of the block groups. My gratitude to my colleague Niurca Marquez for her support, as well as for her insights, also to those friends and colleagues from within the University as well as from the fields of medicine and dance. My thanks to the library personnel at FIU for their guidance and patience when I was pressed for time. Finally, I want to thank three people who have been instrumental in the completion of this thesis, Dr. Theodore R. Young, Director of Graduate Studies at LACC, Mrs. Michelle Lamarre, and Mrs. Maribel Herrera.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

BOTÁNICAS: ABSENCE IN CUBA, PROLIFERATION IN THE UNITED STATES

by

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Florida International University, 2001

Miami, Florida

Professor Terry Rey, Major Professor

The Afro-Cuban Religious Complex (ARC), developed in Cuba, where the material used in their rituals was obtained through different sources. However, the concept of a centralized store of religious goods, called *botánicas*, for the ARC did not develop in Cuba alongside the religion. The reasons for the absence of these stores in Cuba until the early 1990s is explored via personal interviews with members of the ARC, participant observation, 200 questionnaires distributed in Cuba and Miami, and anchored in scholarly works about the psychology and economics of migration, as well as in those concerned with religious anthropology and sociology.

Results indicate that class and religious conflicts prevented the development of *botánicas* in Cuba. The absence of these factors, a free market economy, and the ARC's appeal to non-Cubans, facilitated the proliferation of *botánicas* in the United States.

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To Osáin; orisha owner of the forest, trees, plants, and bushes.

Patakí de Osáin: Osáin le hizo la vida imposible a Orúnmila con sus brujerías. Como Orúnmila nunca había molestado a Osáin, no podía pensar que éste era su enemigo. Cansado de tantos problemas, Orúnmila pidió ayuda a Changó. Changó le dijo que preparara doce mechas hechas de algodón y con esto sabría quien era su enemigo. Mientras Orúnmila preparaba la receta que le había mandado Changó, Osáin se encontraba en el monte recogiendo hierbas para hacerle daño. En cuanto Orúnmila encendió las mechas, empezaron a caer relámpagos en el monte, uno de los cuales hirió a Osáin, dejándolo lisiado por el resto de la vida. Osáin posee sólo un pie, el derecho, y un brazo, el izquierdo. Camina a saltos y renqueando. Tiene una oreja enorme por la que no oye nada y una muy pequeña que es muy sensible y por la que puede oír hasta los pasos de los insectos. Sólo tiene un ojo (Sandoval 246-7).¹

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION.

Botánicas are Religious Goods Stores (for pictures see Appendix X, and X-A)

that provide the materials used in the Afro-Cuban Religious Complex (ARC) rituals.

¹ *Osáin's* myth: *Osáin* made life unbearable for *Orúnmila*, whom he was always making the target of his black magic. *Orúnmila* did not suspect of *Osáin* for he had never bothered the latter. Tired of his misfortunes, *Orúnmila* consulted *Changó*, who advised him to prepare twelve cotton fuses. While this was going on, *Osáin* was busy in the forest collecting more bushes with which to prepare more black magic against *Orúnmila*. No sooner *Orúnmila* lighted the fuses that lightning began to fall over the forest, laming *Osáin* for the rest of his life. *Osáin* has only one foot, the right one, and one arm, the left one. He jumps instead of walking, and limps. Has a huge deaf ear and a small sensitive one with which he can even hear the insects as they walk. *Osáin* has only one eye (Ibid 246-7).

In Spanish, the term *botánica* refers to: 1) Science that studies the plant kingdom, and 2) In Puerto Rico, stores that sell medicinal plants (Real Academia Española 223). There is much written on the subject of Afro-Cuban Religions and their rituals, however, to date, there is no study of the dynamics that account for the absence of *botánicas* in Cuba, or the conditions that lead to their development in the United States. This study seeks to fill this gap in the study of the ARC.

To verify the absence of *botánicas* in Cuba, a survey was conducted in Cuban cities known to have large communities of ARC practitioners. In chapter one, I attempt to explain these phenomena in terms of climate and fauna, and religious, ideological and class conflict. The development and proliferation of *botánicas* in the United States is discussed in chapter two, with climate and fauna, as well as individual liberty and a free market economy, demonstrated as factors. The theoretical perspective for this part of the study includes anthropological studies of religion and of the socio-economic and psychological causes and effects of immigration. Participant observation in *botánicas* was conducted to complete the research. Because of its large Cuban population, Miami is the main focus of this study.

In Cuba, the materials used in the ARC are obtained from many sources but not from centralized businesses like in the US. Migene González-Wippler argues that the first *botánica* appeared in New York City before the 1940s. Cubans traveled to the United States before the 1959 Revolution for a variety of reasons. Between 1901 and 1960, 252,954 Cubans made the US their permanent place of residence (Tweed 27). Many Cubans returned to Cuba to visit relatives but in spite of this the concept of *botánicas* was not transplanted to the island.

I argue that the concept of *botánicas* did not flourish in Cuba due to two dynamic factors: 1) the history of race relations in Cuba; and 2) the power exerted by the Catholic Church. Cuban and North American scholars in the area of Afro-Cuban religions have done a large amount of research on the ARC. On the Cuban side, the works of Fernando Ortiz, Lidia Cabrera, and Mercedes Sandoval are of utmost importance. More recently [1992], Jorge and Isabel Castellanos have grouped all of the previous researched and published it in a four volume work. In the United States, it is the works of González-Wippler and Joseph Murphy that have made a mark in academia on the subject of Afro-Cuban religions. Reference to *botánicas* first appears on the work of the Cuban scholars in their exploration of the evolution of Afro-Cuban religions in the United States. US scholars González-Wippler and Murphy have each written a chapter on *botánicas* in at least one of their works, however, neither of them discusses the possible reasons for their absence in Cuba. González-Wippler devotes a large part of her work on *botánicas* to the explanation of the historical development of the first store in New York City. Her work is of immense value as a historical document. Joseph Murphy, on the other hand, gives a more detailed account of the merchandize sold in these stores. He also makes a connection between the proliferation of *botánicas* in New York City and Miami after 1959, and the arrival of Cuban *santeros*² in significant amounts (35).

² Cuban *santeros* also settled in significant numbers in many other American cities, as well as in Venezuela and Puerto Rico (*Ibid* 35).

Historical Perspective:

The first *botánica* prototype dates back to the 1920s in New York. A Guatemalan born US citizen, upon his return to New York City from World War I, developed a concept that in time gave birth to modern day *botánicas*. Alberto Rendón was a pharmacist. Once back from the war, Rendón was hired by a drug store in Harlem. There, he experienced first hand the demand among African Americans and West Indians for plants, roots, herbal medicines and essences, which were central to their culture. The free entrepreneurial character of American society, paired with Rendón's knowledge and qualities as a merchant, prompted him to open up a store of his own toward that end, to cater to this clientele. Due to the unavailability of tropical herbs in New York City, Rendón arranged for the merchandise to be imported from Puerto Rico. To that purpose, the services of a domestic airline were recruited. He also built a small chemical laboratory in the back of his store to manufacture herbal remedies and perfumes sought by the clientele. The business opened to the public with the name of *West Indies Botanical Gardens* (González-Wippler 282-3).

Harlem became home to thousands of Puerto Rican immigrants in the 1940s, who brought with them their practices of spiritism and magic. Rendón's store provided them with the material used in these practices. Puerto Ricans lack of knowledge of the English language resulted in the linguistic phenomena that gave *botánicas* their actual name. The West Indies Botanical Gardens located on 116th Street between Madison and Park Avenues came to be called simply "*la botánica*" (González-Wippler 283-4).

The triumph of Fidel Castro's revolution in 1959 triggered a large wave of Cuban immigrants to the United States. This migration has continued, with periods of interruption, during the last forty-one years, however, the first group of Cubans that left were members of the ruling, upper, and professional classes. As time went by, disenchanted members of the middle class also began to leave the island (Pedraza, *This Too Shall Pass* 16-39).

In the word of Joseph Murphy: "*Santería* came to the United States in the head and hearts of Cuban emigrants, who came in waves after the revolution of 1959. It has prospered here, bringing growing numbers of Puerto Rican and black Americans into the ways of the *orishas*" (39). Both González-Wippler and Murphy each attribute the proliferation of *botánicas* in the United States to the influence that Afro-Cuban religions, in their capacity of popular or folk religion, has had on the many Latin ethnic groups that populate this nation. Father Sosa and Bishop Roman argue that this relationship is not a long lasting one for many ARC practitioners become disenchanted with the ARC and find refuge in the Catholic Church (Personal interviews. 16 Jan., 5 Apr. 2001). A study is necessary to correlate the number of members with the proliferation of *botánicas* in the United States.

Originally adherents of the ARC in Cuba were either black or mulatto, but in its more than three hundred years of existence, the ARC has gained many white members. The practices of the ARC in Cuba bore many negative connotations associated with slavery and ignorance. White membership into this religion is explained in terms of the nature of the relation between Cubans and the Catholic Church.

Many Cuban Catholics did not attend church on a regular basis. They drew from it many of its symbols to create their own social and religious space outside of Catholic boundaries. Cuban Catholicism was thus mostly nominal from its beginnings. In 1954, for example 72.5% of Cuba's Catholics were nominal and 5 to 8% practicing Catholics. Churches in the island were few even the Golden Age of Cuban Catholicism (1750-1850) (Tweed 15-7). Cuban Catholicism can be defined in terms of two popular sayings: "yo soy católico a mi manera," and "yo creo en todo, por si acaso" ("I practice Catholicism my way", and "I believe in everything, just in case"). As a result, many white Cubans crossed the boundaries between orthodox Catholicism and some ARC practices and beliefs.

A Brief History of the Afro-Cuban Religious Complex:

African slaves brought with them to Cuba their belief systems. Once in the island, these systems were major contributors to Cuba's cultural, social, and spiritual life. The two most significant groups, also known as *Naciones* [nations] were the Yoruba³ and the Kongo (Castellanos, et al. 11), being the largest of all ethnic groups brought to Cuba during the slave trade. As a result, their influence on the island's culture remains the most important (Murphy 21-3). The Yoruba people came from present day Nigeria. This region has a tropical climate (Sandoval 24).

The ARC developed from the syncretism between African beliefs and Spanish Catholicism. Several religions developed from this process also termed symbiotic by some scholars. The two most significant Afro-Cuban religions are *Regla de oshá* and

³ Everyone knows that Ecuatorial African tribes have a wide knowledge about the effect of plants in humans. For the Yoruba, each plant has its ache, or power, which can cause positive or negative effects in humans. These qualities of plants are controlled by their orisha owner, Osain, who must be propitiated to unleash the power of these plants (Sandoval 246).

Reglas de congos. *Regla de oshá*, also known as *Religión Lucumí* and *Santería*, is the most widely known. *Regla de oshá* is derived from different local African cults. As such, it lacks homogeneity or strict orthodoxy. The practice of *Santería*'s beliefs varies among different individual priests (Sandoval 1983). *Religión Lucumí* has an extensive pantheon composed of female and male deities. These deities or *Santos*, also possess human characteristics, much in the likeness of the gods of Greek mythology. The syncretic process that gave rise to *Regla de oshá* is believed to have begun in Africa prior to the slave trade⁴, during Catholicism's attempts to evangelize the continent (Sandoval 24,32).

Though less popular than *Regla de oshá*, the ARC is also comprised of *Reglas de congos*. Popularly known as *Palo Monte*, these *reglas* arouse mainly from Kongo and other central African cultures (Thompson 148). Worship of the ancestors run very deep in the African regions where these religions originated, paired with the believe that every thing has a soul, hence the animistic character of their believes (Cabrera 14-32).

Regla de oshá priests and priestesses are popularly called *santeros* and *santeras*. However, there is a hierarchical order. Titles respond to rank within the religion: *iyawo* [recently initiated], *babaloshas* [priests], *iyaloshas* [priestesses], *babalaos* [priests that occupy the highest position in the religion]⁵ (Cabrera 62-3). There are many names by which to identify *Reglas de congos* priests and priestesses:

⁴ This is overstated since only in *Kongo* was there significant Catholic influence. Since *Regla de oshá* is largely *Yoruba*, this claim is quite dubious.

⁵ *Babalaos* are consecrated to *Orinmila*, god of knowledge and oracles. Only *babalaos* have the right to use *Tablero de Ifá*, the most important divination system within the religion (Ibid 62-3).

palero, mayombero, Padre Nganga, Tata Nganga, Taita Nganga, and Ngangulero (Castellanos, et al.140).

The concept of the family was at the center of *Yoruba* beliefs. This connection between the living and the dead along blood -line was a pre-requisite for initiation into many African Religions. The separation of African families upon their arrival in Cuba, and the transculturation of the African religions into the dominant culture did away with the concept of initiation according to ancestry and brought about a new type of “family lineage” which responded to spiritual rather than physical relationships, hence the Cuban concept of *familia de santo* (family in saint). Ancestry in Africa was claimed along bloodlines, in Cuba this was modified to spiritual lineage. Some ancestors were offered divinity statutes after their deaths. The criteria for the achievement of divinity were the possession of certain powers referred to as *ashé* or *ache* (Bolívar Aróstegui 22-3).

Palo Monte is only one of the *Reglas de congos*, which are commonly grouped as *Palo Monte*. However, *Reglas de congos* serves as an umbrella rite for the following belief systems: *Biyumba, Brillumba, Kimbisa, Masunde, and Palo Monte* (Castellanos, et al.129-30). Central to *Reglas de congos* belief is the *Nganga*. In Cuba, the term applies to a ritual cauldron where consecrated bones and other materials are kept. These materials are the connection between the cauldron’s owner and the spirit of a dead person. Magic is done with the help of the dead. Some priests perform magic to solve problems, while others use their magical powers to harm others (Cabrera 120-1, 152-65). In any case, *ashé* is at the core of all ARC practices, whether deriving from West or Central African traditions (Murphy 8,11-5).

Afro-Cuban Religions are characterized by the presence of two components. The first is sacro-religious, and deals with *orisha* and ancestor worship. The second is magic-divinatory, and deals with cures and divination. Overtime, this duality resulted in the formation of two distinct groups within the religion, a congregation and a clientele. The two hardly ever meet (Pedraza, *This Too Shall Pass* 17). The magic-divinatory character of these religions was interpreted by the dominant class as black magic. González-Wippler, Murphy and Pedraza note that, in order to accommodate congregation and clientele, most *botánicas* have in residence either a member of the Afro-Cuban religious priesthood or a spiritualist (see Appendix I).

It is important to note also the presence of *Spiritism* in the ARC. Spiritism is a mixture of Spiritualism and Kardeian thought. Spiritualism, which developed in the United States in 1848, is based on the earthly communication with the dead. With the aide of mediums, the spirits of the dead would recommend healing baths and other remedies to solve problems and pains of their relatives. The spiritists had their own guide in the other world. In the Caribbean these spiritual guides included West Indian mummies, pirates and gypsies. Hippolyte Leon Denizard Rivail, better known as Allan Kardec,⁶ (1804-1864) argued that spiritual progress could only be achieved via the process of reincarnation and with the guidance of a group of protector spirits. Assigned by God. At the core of this belief system is communication with these enlightened spirits. Kardec combined these practices with relevant Christian believes in a strict moral and ethical code of behavior. Kardec's teachings eventually received

⁶ Kardec's first book, *Livre des Spirits*, was published in 1857 (Pedraza 5).

the name of Spiritism⁷ (González-Wippler 274-80). Though of European origin, spiritism has come to be associated with Afro-Cuban practices and beliefs. Developed in nineteenth century Europe, it has basic elements of Christianity, but explains spiritual development from a positivist approach via the process of reincarnation (Pedraza 6). Spiritism's connection with the dead⁸ had some similarities with the beliefs of *Reglas de congos*. In effect all *santeros*, by virtue of their connection with their *orishas*, and their divination system, are considered spiritists. The opposite does not hold true for spiritists, however (González-Wippler 274).

Botánicas in Cuba:

This chapter suggests the following reasons for the absence of *botánicas* in Cuba during most of the twentieth century, a time in which they developed in the US: 1) Cuba's climate; 2) alternate means to obtain the merchandise; discount stores, street vendors, and market cubicles; 3) finances of the lower classes; 4) racism and race relations in the island; 5) The Catholic Church as facilitator of the preservation of African cultures in Cuba; and as creator of conflict between the upper and lower classes; and 6) resistance to evangelization and integration into the dominant culture by practitioners of the African religions.

Research for this thesis was conducted in Cuba and in Miami to determine whether or not there were *botánicas* in Cuba. The research included the use of primary and secondary sources and qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The

⁷ Kardec wrote several books on Spiritism, which were translated into numerous languages in the late nineteenth century. The practice of Spiritism was prohibited by the Catholic Church, however, they gained adherents in Latin America, especially in Brazil, Argentina, Cuba, and Puerto Rico (Ibid 276).

⁸ Spirit possession is very similar to *orisha* mounting, as *orisha* possession is called. In Cuba, the *orishas* were included in the files of spiritual guides present in spiritism. (Ibid 280).

quantitative methodology consisted of a questionnaire (see appendix II) given to a predetermined segment of the population. The qualitative methodology was participant observation in places that provided ARC ritual paraphernalia. The work of scholars in the field of Afro-Cuban religions, as well as those particularly concerned with immigration, anthropology, and sociology comprised my secondary sources.

A questionnaire was sent to Cuba, where it was administered with the help of three research assistants in Havana (Guanabacoa and Regla included), and Guantánamo City. In these areas, the Afro-Cuban religions have many followers. The questions were aimed at determining the presence in Cuba of *botánicas*, as they are known in the United States. Questions were also designed to determine other venues of obtaining the merchandise in question. A brief description of *botánicas* was provided to the research assistants working in Cuba, who followed up the questionnaire with a series of telephone calls⁹. My research assistants were able to travel extensively throughout Cuba, and were thus able to attain a wide geographic sample. Ninety-seven people in total responded to the questionnaire. The same questionnaire was also employed in Miami for comparative purposes¹⁰. The researcher matched the number of people questioned in Miami on the same subject. The parameters used to determine which segment of the population was to be targeted were as follows: 1) among the informants there was to be equal representation of those who were at least twenty one years old in 1959 and those who were the same age in 1997.

⁹ The people recruited in Cuba to do this part of the work are family members with university degrees: Eva Lammoglia, retired teacher of adult education, Nara Lammoglia, retired civil engineer, and Jorge Luis Lammoglia, art history teacher. Eva and Nara live in Guantánamo City, while Jorge lives in Havana.

¹⁰ An equal number of people in Miami answered the questionnaire. The criteria employed in the selection of the Miami informants was the same as that used in Cuba.

2) At least ten percent of those interviewed had to acknowledge being members of the Afro-Cuban religions. 3) The number of informants with a university degree had to be close to those with no formal education, and equality in gender representation had to be observed. The field work in Miami was made easier by Professor Teresita Pedraza. Her knowledge of the religion, and her friendship with Obá¹¹ Ernesto Pichardo, a well known *santero* leader, opened many doors that would have otherwise been closed.

The fieldwork conducted in Miami included the photographing of both the inside and the outside of *botánicas*. Taking photographs of store fronts was very easy, but not so when it came to taking pictures inside *botánicas*. Most owners prohibited the photographing of their stores, for various reasons: The owner of *Botánica La Africana* argued that the taking of photographs would compromise the store's sanctity explaining that his *orishas* were present in the store, and they prohibited the taking of photographs in their presence. In another *botánica*, the owner explained how photographing could not be done for she had just undergone eye surgery and was therefore unable to assist me in my work. Finally, with the help of a friend who frequents this particular *botánica*, the owner of *Botánica Nena* allowed photographing of the merchandise inside her store. *Botánica Nena* is located in 902 North West 27th Avenue. Its business card advertises the sale of religious goods, materials for the *iyawo*, herbs, and gifts (see Appendix III). A set of 50 slides resulted from this photographic session and subsequent visits.

¹¹ Title of male priests in *Santería*.

The works of Lydia Cabrera, Mercedes Sandoval, and Jorge and Isabel Castellanos, all mention *botánicas* only when talking about the ARC in the United States. Both Cabrera and Sandoval describe the many sources that provided materials for initiation into *Regla de oshá* and *Reglas de congos* in Cuba. Some of the material was obtained directly from the surrounding area: birds which flew freely about in the island, sea shells from the seashore, stones from river bottoms, and herbs from the surrounding vegetation: “We, blacks, go into the woods as if we were entering a church. It is in the woods that our Saints and ancestors live. We ask of them what ever it is we need in terms of health and material needs” (Cabrera, El monte. 15).

Cuba’s tropical climate and the proximity between urban areas and countryside and seashores no doubt facilitated such accessibility. Medicinal herbs grow freely throughout the countryside, making them accessible to everyone without the need for a “middleman.” Many Cuban cities are situated near rivers and seashores; thus, it is very easy to obtain the *orishas’* stones. With such availability, it can be concluded that buying the materials for initiation from a store would only mean an unnecessary expense.

All informants denied having ever seen in Cuba a store that corresponded to the description of *botánicas* provided by the interviewers. As to how the materials for rituals were obtained in Cuba, prior to the Revolution, there were several sources of ARC ritual paraphernalia: 1) cubicles located in market places; 2) small neighborhood retail stores; 3) department stores; 4) street vendors, called *pregoneros*; and 5) members of the religion who themselves manufactured the merchandise. Since 1959,

the purchase of many of these materials has become more difficult due to the centralization of Cuba's economy and the rationing imposed by the Cuban state.

Prior to 1959, these market place cubicles were located in a hidden corner. These cubicles had a small inventory of ingredients for cleansing baths, amulets to guard against evil eyes, and some of the main *orisha*'s necklaces and symbols. Also found in these market cubicles were small prints of Catholic saints. Printed opposite these figures one could find prayers and petitions addressed to the individual saints. The animals sacrificed to the *orishas* were also obtained from other cubicles located in the same market places.

The means of obtaining such sacrificial animals in the United States varies. Some *botánicas* pose as pet shops, where practitioners can obtain some of the small birds used in animal sacrifices. In the early 1980's the subject of animal sacrifices went before the US Supreme Court.¹² The judges voted in favor of the continuance of these rites. In an interview with Obá Ernesto Pichardo he explained the nature of these sacrifices: "The animal's blood is offered to the *orishas*, and poured over their stones. In order to accomplish this the animal must be killed fast, a procedure that involves the same amount of pain endured by those animals whose meat we buy in supermarkets around the nation." (Personal interview, 10 Jun. 1999).

The second, and perhaps the most important source of *Santería* goods in Cuba are called *quincallas*, the Cuban version of American discount stores. *Quincallas* did not specialize in the sale of religious goods, however, some carried images of Catholic

¹² In regards to animal sacrifices, in the case of the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye v. the City of Hialeah, the court pronounced itself in favor of the church (the Supreme Court of the United States ruling no. 91-948, 1993).

Saints in their inventory. Other merchandise provided by *quincallas* includes incense, white clothing, colored and white handkerchiefs, as well as ribbons, candles, and soup tureens. These stores also sold cushions, bedroom slippers, bed sheets, dishes, water pitchers, serving plates, buckets and other items necessary for an initiation. Note that all of the items mentioned above are used in most households.

Following the Castro's government intervention of private business in the early 1960s, and the subsequent rationing of merchandise, most *quincallas* and department stores were closed.¹³ Those which remained open to the public offered a government controlled limited amount of merchandise via rationing cards called *libretas de abastecimiento*. The rationing of merchandise has continued since it was first implemented until the present, thus making it difficult for ARC practitioners to obtain the materials needed for their rituals. Between 1959 and 1979, as Cuba remained closed to foreigners and exiles alike, the materials for ARC rituals could be obtained in island, however with the degree of difficulty posed by the rationing. As travel to Cuba began to normalize again, after 1979, much of the ARC ritualistic materials have been taken to the island by foreign tourists and Cuban exiles returning to visit relatives.

¹³ On March 13, 1968, the Cuban state began the *Ofensiva Revolucionaria* (Revolutionary Offensive) with the purpose of constructing Socialism and Communism at unison, 50,000 small businesses were appropriated by the government. In this manner, Cuba ended with the last bastions of free enterprise still remaining in the island. With this political maneuver Fidel Castro tried to achieve the utopic Marxist Society at faster pace than that used by the other countries of the Socialist Bloc (Masó 710).

Responses to the questionnaire revealed yet another venue for obtaining the materials for initiation. Large department stores¹⁴ in Cuban cities also provide the merchandise for rituals. Providing a merchandise of higher quality than that sold in *quincallas*, the price range in department stores was also higher. Therefore, department stores were off limits to members of the lower and poor classes. According to Cabrera, Murphy and Sandoval, Afro-Cuban religions indeed count many followers from the Cuban middle and upper classes.

In Cuba, unlike the United States, members of the middle and upper classes practiced the ARC in secrecy for fear of being negatively stigmatized (Cabrera 273). The mechanism by which Afro-Cuban religions permeated into the upper classes is very simple. During the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century many of Cuba's white upper class children were placed under the care of women of color. As in many cultures, women in Cuba have traditionally been the most important socializing influence on children (Giddens 80). It is believed that many of these women, or *tatas*, belonged to the Afro-Cuban religious complex, and that in turn, they transmitted these beliefs to members of the upper classes under their care (Murphy 34). A second process by which these religions began to permeate the upper classes was miscegenation. Some slave owners had children with black women, who passed on their culture to their children. Afro-Cuban religions were thus appropriated from the subordinate group by the dominant one by the processes of miscegenation and primary socialization (Pedraza 6).

¹⁴ Members of the pre-Castro's Cuban middle and upper classes who had themselves being initiated into the ARC prior to 1959 participated in the Miami part of the inquiry. They provided most of the information regarding large department stores.

Cleansing baths¹⁵ and herbs were mostly obtained from ambulatory street vendors. These individuals advertise their wares by singing songs about them called *pregones*.¹⁶ Street vendors also sold amulets. Members of the Afro-Cuban religion's priesthood also prepared many materials for cleansing baths at home.

But not all of the materials needed for ARC rituals in Cuba can be obtained from the previously mentioned sources. Three legged iron cauldrons and *orisha* weapons are not readily available most of the time, for their demand in the market is minimal. Some members of the priesthood keep small inventories of certain objects in their own homes. Other items are handmade by these priests. In interviews with Obá Ernesto Pichardo, and with another *santero* who wishes to remain anonymous (known from here on as Pablo), the nature of the original soup tureens was discussed. These tureens, according to them, are made out of cooked clay. Once cooled, the tureens are painted in the colors of the different *orishas*. This means of production results in lower costs for such items in Cuba than in US *botánicas*¹⁷. *Orisha*¹⁸ weapons, when possible, are also manufactured at home by some *santeros*, at times, these items are made by members of the congregation who labor in steelwork foundries.

¹⁵ There are several types of cleansing rituals within the ARC, and the materials employed in these rituals vary as well. Cleansings are done for a particular individual, a family, or a congregation. As an invited guest, I have had the opportunity to witness several group cleansing rituals at the *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye*. Fruits and raw meat are used for some cleansings, bushes and essences at others, yet other cleansing ceremonies involve live birds, which are later sacrificed to the *orishas*. Some cleansings are called *despojos*.

¹⁶ Cuban born singer Celia Cruz has immortalized this *pregones* in her song *El yerberito moderno*.

¹⁷ A list of items and their prices is listed in appendix IV.

¹⁸ A list of the most important *orishas*, their colors, numbers, and attributes is provided in appendix V.

In Cuba, the *ilekes* (necklaces used for protection) were customarily made by the *iyawo*'s main godparent or *iyalocha*,¹⁹ which created a more intimate and familial relationship between *iyawo*²⁰ and godparent. Necklaces are color-coded according to the *orisha* they represent, and their beads, when more than one color is used, are arranged in a specific numeric order (see appendix VI), also according to the number of the *orisha* (Murphy 77-83). Whereas in Cuba necklaces are made out of glass beads, in the United States they are usually plastic. The purchase of other materials is left to either the neophyte or to the *iyalocha*. All materials must be obtained several days prior to the ceremony in which they are to be used. Both Cabrera and Sandoval agree on this topic.

In Cuba, individuals hired to assist in initiation ritual are responsible for collecting the stones or *otanes* that represent the different *orishas*, as well as for obtaining the herbs needed. Two types of herbs are used in initiations; one, medicinal, and the other magical. The stones are obtained from the surrounding rivers and countryside. Collection of herbs is the responsibility of an expert in these plants, usually a "son" of *Osain*, the Youruba god of magical and medicinal herbs, plants, and trees (Sandoval 60).

Race and Religion in Cuba, the legacy of slavery:

*Sin embargo, fuera de las fiestas y ceremonias, tanto los sacerdotes
que no se distinguen por su indumentaria ni por ningun otro signo
exterior, como los fieles, los ocultaban, pues hasta hace muy poco,*

¹⁹ Please note that the combination of letters *sh* and *ch* are used interchangeably in most scholarly works about the ARC.

²⁰ Name given to those going through their first year in the priesthood. Cabrera describes the first year in the priesthood as a learning period.

*eran despectivamente llamados collares de negros brujos y aún hoy, para no llamar la atención, olochas y practicantes en su mayoría los substituyen por la cadena y vistosa medalla de oro macizo de un anto católico dúplice de su oricha. Sólo en un tiempo las negras y negros viejos los exhibían*²¹

Slavery physically and psychologically abuses those subjected to it and usually establishes the central forms of racism and classism in any society for ensuing generations. The dominant class extends this to every aspect of their slaves' native culture and that of their descendants, including religion. We thus see how in Cuba the ARC was forced to the underground, and was always looked as primitive nefarious superstition.

Moreno Friginals explains how European slave traders cultivated divisions and hatred between different African ethnic groups to facilitate their domination of them. Slave masters in Cuba employed the same techniques to prevent the development of solidarity among Africans, which would have threatened the very basis of slavery on the island (Rubin and Tuden 215).

Fernando Ortiz notes one psychological outcome of slavery for Africans and their descendants in Cuba:

And it has to be recognized that for many Afro-Cubans this inferiority complex still abounds. But that negativist phenomenon, in reality a

²¹ "However, with the exemption of special festivities and during the performance of rites, neither priests nor practitioners were noticeably either by the manner of their dress fashion nor by other external signs. For until not long ago, the necklaces were referred to warlords amulets. Even today, in order to pass unnoticed *oloshas* and others substitute these necklaces with gold medallions bearing the image of the Catholic saint associated with the *orisha* they worship. Only during a period did black men and women wore them in public (Sandoval 122).

psychiatric and collective pathology, is not exclusive to blacks. We constantly see it in individuals and peoples of the most diverse races; and it is, without a doubt, the gravest obstacle to the dignification and social ascent of races dependent on higher levels of non-discrimination.

In Cuba, social inequality continued to be perpetuated by the dominant class even after the abolition of slavery. Cuban whites remained the beneficiaries of this social structure until the Revolution (Pérez Sarduy and Stubbs 29-30). The emancipation of the slaves put them at a level of “equality” with whites that was met with disgust by Cuban upper classes. In turn, new forms of discrimination were developed in the first years of the Republic to distance the two racial groups. Religious discrimination took pre-eminence in those years. The Cuban government called ARC practices a “social pathology,” and noted Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz called for the complete prohibition of Santería rituals,²² calling them “degenerate” cultural practices (Moore 30-1).

In 1922, only a few scant years before the onset of the afrocubanismo movement, the administration of Alfredo Zayas (1920-1924) passed comprehensive legislation that prohibited Afrocuban gatherings involving drumming and dance. Because of the affront they were believed to represent to the moral values of the white middle classes, and because of the associations between such activity and the “theft, abduction, or murder of [children] of the white race.” Zayas banned all

²² Later on Fernando Ortiz became the most important defender of these same practices, as noted by his later works on the subject.

performances of rumba, Santería, and abakuá ceremony, as well as other African-influenced expression. The extent to which this legislation was enforced remains unclear. The mere wording of the prohibition, however, describing Afro-Cuban artistic forms as “symbols of barbarity,” testifies to the extent of cultural intolerance at that time (Moore 31-2).

Being maligned by virtue of this structural social inequality, the ARC has a largely underground history in Cuba. White Cubans commonly mistook the ARC to be similar to European witchcraft,²³ which they also misunderstood to be as based on pacts with evil spirits and demons. Witches were accused of having flying broomsticks, sucking childrens’ blood and of copulating in orgiastic feasts with goat-like creatures giving birth to human-demon halfbreeds (Ortiz 181-88). Afro-Cuban rites in general were believed to be black magic, or *brujería*, alone, and no differentiation was made between the latter and white witchcraft. This misperception was at the heart of class struggle in Cuba until the 1959 Revolution. Members of the ARC priesthood have knowledge of *brujería*, but only make use of it when trying to undo a black magic spell placed on one of their clients. The work of *brujos*, the term applied to those who do black magic, otherwise is rejected by the ARC priesthood (Cabrera 63). Both in Africa and Cuba there was a differentiation between good

²³ “Perhaps because of the practice associated with a few Afro-Cuban religious sects in Cuba (most notably Palo Monte) of using human bones in their rituals, African-derived religions were often falsely accused of involving child sacrifice. Chávez Alvarez (1991) documents this phenomenon and cites half a dozen well-publicized trials through the late 1920s in which blacks were convicted and in a few cases put to death for allegedly kidnapping and killing white children” (Ibid 31).

[*nkisi*], or positive magic, and bad [*ndoki*], or negative magic²⁴. *Nganguleros* deal with both kinds of forces. Although only some *Nganguleros* actually practice black magic, or *brujería*, as it is called in Cuba, ignorant fear of them was widespread (Castellanos and Castellanos 133-4, 140, 144). The early works of Fernando Ortiz helped disprove this assumption, but the social harm to the ARC was already done. In effect Afro-Cuban rites were performed in secrecy throughout most Cuban history, which is the main reason why there was no such thing as a religious goods store for these religions.

It is important to note that the formation of Afro-Cuban religions took over three hundred years (Sandoval 43). The liberal Spanish Penal Code of 1870 decriminalized the ARC practices, but, as previously stated, the elite continued to hold them in disdain. The ARC remained quite variegated until the early twentieth century when a *babalocha* named *Sama* and his lifelong companion, a Yoruba woman named *Latuan*, took upon themselves the unification of different Yoruba cults under one liturgy. The new religion was called *Regla de oshá* (Bolívar Aróstegui 25). Bishop Roman goes further: “I suspect that *Santería*, as we know it now, really formed and gained strength in the United States, not in Cuba, where it was not heard of as often prior to the Revolution, as it is now in the United States” (Personal interview. 5 Apr. 2001).

In nineteenth century Cuba, the Catholic Church was one of the few institutions that provided a sense of equality between those of African descent and those of European descent, as was most noticeable in urban centers. The Church’s

²⁴ These are originally KiKongo terms. See Thornton.

true intentions for this is still discussed in scholarly circles. The percentage of African slaves that lived in urban center in nineteenth century Cuba fluctuated from 20 to 50. The restrictions placed on rural slaves were always harsher than those experienced by urban ones. Slave owners, moreover, invested in their slaves' education. The investment had a dual result: first, it represented more material gains to the slave owner. Second, it gave new social importance to urban slaves as well as those people of color who had gained their freedom. Many slaves and free blacks and mulattoes became prominent figures in Havana, Guantánamo, Santiago de Cuba and other cities (Brandon 66-70). Having acquired a better place in Cuban society many blacks and mulattoes felt less inhibited when practicing their religious rituals.

From 1509 to 1899 the primary institution in maintaining national unity in Colonial Cuba was the Catholic Church. Being the oldest non-governmental institution in Cuba, it exerted significant power in government affairs during most of the colonial period. By virtue of the *Patronato Regio*, church and state were intrinsically united since Pope Alexander VI gave Spanish Monarchs the supremacy over the churches of the Americas. However, the Church's power over Cuban society diminished slowly throughout the nineteenth century. The Cuban Constitution of 1901 provided for the separation of church and state (de la Cuesta 4). During the nineteenth century, the ethnic and cultural composition of the island had become extremely heterogeneous and stratified. Spanish migration alone had formed a mosaic composed of Basques, Castellians, Andalusians, and Galicians. A similar mosaic of African ethnic groups also developed on the island as a result of the slave trade (Murphy 28). Cuba also received significant numbers of French and Haitian migrants

from *Saint Domingue* between 1791 and 1820 (Alen 10). Thus by the twentieth century Catholicism and the ARC, especially *Regla de oshá* were well entrenched as the dominant religions on the island, each drawing from a rich variety of cultural sources.

In terms of ritual practice Spanish Catholicism consists of two cults: “the basic cult,” and “the cult of personages.” The core of Catholic worship, composed of the sacraments, comprise the basic cults. The cult of personages is divided into two subgroups: general, and specialized. Pertinent to this research is the specialized cult of personages, or the cult of the saints. This cult has spurred associations like The Daughters of Mary and The Sacred Heart, which gave rise to rich folk practices accompanying festivities of these Catholic personages. While curtailed at times by Catholic authorities, the cult of Saints²⁵ has also been used as a means to attract more adherents to the Mother Church, a time tested technique. In centuries past, the Catholic Church, while evangelizing different ethnic groups, has encountered much resistance to its assault on “pagan” cults. In response, the Church often accommodated such practices and was forced to accept more syncretism than it would have liked (Bandon 46), allowing saint cults to absorb “pagan” customs.

Popular religion is a very complex and changing phenomena that can be explained in terms of many dynamics: class struggle, social organization, historical circumstances and relations within the family. Ultimately, however, they remain the construction of the poor and oppressed masses (Rey 15-6). The ARC is categorized as

²⁵ Please see Juan G. Atienza’s *Los santos paganos: dioses ayer, santos hoy*. Barcelona: Robinbook, SL. 1993.

a popular religion. As such, it has played an important part in the history of class struggle in Cuba. The same complex has played a slightly different role in the United States of America, which to a degree explains the absence of *botánicas* in Cuba, and their proliferation in the United States.

The Catholic Church and Cuba's Spanish authorities played an important role in the dynamic of race relations on the island by legitimating the slave trade (Bolívar Aróstegui 23-4). All the same, the Cuban Church played an important role in preserving African culture by grouping slaves according to their nation of origin. In reality, this was no more than a scheme to convert Africans to Christianity. On the other hand, Bishop Roman argues that the evangelization of Africans in Cuba was not carried out in an efficient manner for two reasons: 1) the Catholic priests inability to speak the different African languages; and 2) the fact that the evangelization strategies of the time lacked the anthropological knowledge available to priests today (Roman, A. Personal interview 5 Apr. 2001). Jorge and Isabel Castellanos argue that in reality the Afro-Cuban religious complex is not only the result of a prolonged process of acculturation, but represents a form of cultural resistance on the part of the Africans to the ethnocentric nature of the dominant culture (11). Thus religion was central to both the ideology of the oppressor, in the form of Catholic dogma, and the ideology of the oppressed in the form of the ARC, whose development the Church unwittingly supported.

The syncretism that gave rise to the Afro-Cuban religions is linked to the existence on the island of associations of mutual help called *cabildos*, especially in the case of *Regla de oshá*. The origin of *cabildos* is traced back to the Spanish city of

Sevilla, during the reign of King Don Alfonso X el Sabio (Alfonso the Wise), in the thirteenth century. The civil and religious laws that existed in Spanish-ruled Catholic Cuba gave the slaves some rights. These included the right to own property, to get married by the church, to personal security, and most important of all, the right to purchase their freedom, or *coartación*. In turn, the Church supported gatherings for dance and other festivities of Africans in mutual help associations. Membership in these *cabildos* was organized according to ethnicity of origins. *Cabildos* were an urban phenomena, because their presence depended on the number of blacks living in each city. Rural slaves were allowed to maintain their ancestral dances but there were no *cabildos* on Cuban plantations (Sandoval 43-6).

The Afro-Catholic syncretism that gave birth to the ARC is misunderstood by many scholars to have begun in the New World, as argued by Thornton:

Most scholars who have taken an interest in the conversion of Africans to Christianity during this period (early 16th century), have focused their attention on the Americas and restricted themselves to the conversion of slaves. To some extent, this is a misleading approach, because the conversion of Africans actually began in Africa, and modern scholarship has largely overlooked this aspect of the problem. Although only a limited number of slaves were Christians before their arrival in the New World (mostly central Africans), the impact of

African Christians was much greater than their numbers²⁶ (Thornton 254).

The same was true of the worship of Catholic Saints (Thornton, The Kongolese Saint Anthony 129-155). “Thus, where Africans have borrowed from Europeans they often did so willingly and on their own terms in their home territories, and not always under the stultifying influence of slavery” (Thornton 8). By grouping Africans and their descendants in specific *cabildos*, the Catholic Church hoped to Christianize all of their members in an effective and peaceful manner (Murphy 29). In truth, as stated above, the Christianization of Africans had begun in Africa, especially in the Kongo, and so had the worship of Saints. Thus *Cabildo* saint cults should be considered in part the extension of Central African Catholic practices.

During feast day celebrations, *cabildo* members used to take out in procession the images of their African deities, eventually this was also banned by the Spanish authorities in Cuba. The deities were replaced by images of Catholic saints associated with the *cabildos*, slaves having linked their deities with those of the Catholic Church (Sandoval 46-7). To some extent this new tactic was only a strategy used by Africans and their descendants to mask their religion, but Afro-Catholic syncretism resulted more from the fact that Africans actually took interest in and thus adopted Catholic Saints –ARC syncretism thus is understandable as a mosaic rather than a mask.²⁷

²⁶ Castellanos et al. agree with Thornton on this issue (11-3).

²⁷ The latter was also a means of avoiding direct confrontation with the island's civil authorities. In time, as Spanish authorities became aware of this strategy, processions were also prohibited (Ibid 47).

Afro-Cuban Religions After 1959:

The prejudice to which Afro-Cuban religions were subjected by the Cuban upper class during the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century confronted a new obstacle in 1959. The Revolution set out to eliminate any institution that posed a threat to the construction of the new state. Organized religion was employed to ensure the loyalty and solidarity among members of the upper class. At the same time, Cuba's new atheist ideology was antithetical to organized religion. By 1960 the Government began a strong attack on Christian churches. Having lost the support of the elite, and facing a political confrontation with them, Fidel Castro recruited the lower classes for battle. The ARC posed no threat to the government because of the fragmented nature of their organizations and their inability to promote solidarity among members. As a result, the government followed a different approach when dealing with ARC practitioners than with Christians. Those who were in favor of the revolution were allowed to continue their rituals, albeit, in secrecy and as long as these rituals continued not to pose a threat to the institution of the state. Members of the Afro-Cuban religions who opposed the government were given the same treatment afforded to members of organized religions (Pedraza 14-5).

Afro-Cuban religions served another purpose during the turbulent times that followed the 1959 change of power and ideology. They assumed the role of spiritual provider that was once occupied by organized religion, and by doing so, provided support in the times of anomie that followed the onset of the Cuban Revolution. The co-existence that ensued between Government and Afro-Cuban religions was briefly interrupted in 1973 following Castro's claim that these religions were promoting

antirevolutionary attitudes among children. Finally, in the 1970s, the Cuban state felt that religions no longer posed any threat to the revolution. This was reflected in the 1976 Cuban Constitution, which provided some breathing room for the practice of religious beliefs, but without providing protection against discrimination.

Furthermore, the constitution of 1976 prohibited religious proselytizing and continued to defend the State's ideology of scientific materialism, thus allowing very little space for the ARC practices (Pedraza 13-4).

In 1975, in preparation for its new foreign policy towards Africa, the First Party Congress put Afro-Cuban traditions under the "folklore" category. The 1976 Cuban Constitution concurred with the Party's new political maneuvers in its foreign policy. These tactics were geared to create new ties with the African continent by highlighting Cuba's African heritage. It also served to lure European tourism to the island by heralding the sensual and sexual powers of Afro-Cubans, and the exotic nature of their religions (Pedraza, *This Too Shall Pass* 27-8). However, the folklorization of the ARC was aimed at preserving the cultural aspects of the religion, not the ongoing religious practices. La Compañía Nacional de Danza (National Dance Company) has performed stylized ARC ritualistic dances, to public acclaim,²⁸ all over the globe, following the government's intent of attracting tourism to Cuba.

As part of Cuba's government-sponsored African folklore, however, the sacred character of Afro-Cuban religions was demeaned. As a result, the possibilities for the development of solidarity among its members was diminished further. Still, the need

²⁸ As a professional dancer, although not in the category of the Afro-Cuban genre, I see government sponsorship of dance as a necessity for the preservation of a nation's history.

to attract European tourism to the island not only resulted in a new government leniency towards Afro-Cuban religions, but prompted the creation of the first Cuban *botánica*. Fashioned in the likeness of its American counterpart, it opened its doors in the early 1990s with a similar inventory to the one in US *botánicas*. The store is located in Havana, and most of its customers are foreign tourists in search of souvenirs (Lammoglia 17). By 1996, while visiting Cuba, a well known Miami *babalao*²⁹ found two kiosks or market cubicles that sold *botánica* merchandise in *el Parque del Curita* in Old Havana. Kiosks of this type proliferated in that neighborhood, which has since being demolished, as he noticed in a second trip in 1999³⁰ (Castro, A. Personal interview. 27 Mar. 2001).

One could argue that in Cuba, market place cubicles that sold religious materials for the Afro-Cuban religious complex were the forerunners of *botánicas*. While this argument has some validity, it must also be noted that many other venues co-existed with this cubicles. Thus, we should not call them a *botánica* prototype.

Father Juan Sosa, a Cuban Catholic priest in Miami, mentioned knowing of the existence of one of these cubicles in *la Plaza del Vapor*. Plaza is the Spanish term for market place. This particular plaza is located in a lower class neighborhood within the old city, or Old Havana. This was not a place frequented by members of the Cuban middle and upper classes (Calvera, M. Personal interview. 17 Jan. 2001). Therefore

²⁹ Initiation into the ARC, as noted before, follows a strict hierarchical order, with *babalaos* at the highest position of the scale. Only males are allowed to become *babalaos*, and only *babalaos* can use the *Tablero de Ifá* for divination purposes (Sandoval 62-3).

³⁰ *Babalao* Adrian Castro noticed that the merchandise offered in these kiosks were as good as those sold in *botánicas* in the United States, but at lower prices. A *Tablero de Ifá* that sells in the United States for \$100,00 US dollars can be bought in Cuba for \$5.00 same currency. He also stated that the merchants accepted either US currency or its equivalent in Cuban pesos (a dollar is equivalent to approximately 20 Cuban pesos).

we may conclude that in Cuba both concept and existence of *botánicas* were unknown to a vast majority of Cubans.

CHAPTER II

Botánicas in the United States

Several factors led to the development of Afro-Cuban religious goods stores in the United States. 1) The differences in climate between the Caribbean and the US forced the creation of an import market for herbs and roots from tropical areas into the US; 2) The fact that the United States is a Protestant country by and large, with laws that its citizens against discrimination along religious lines³¹ greatly weakened the control exerted by Catholicism over Afro-Cuban religions in the Caribbean; constitutional Rights defending freedoms of expression, assembly and creed, moreover, brought ARC out of secrecy; 3) US consumerism also provided an incentive for the creation of these stores, especially once Cubans acculturated to American ways; 4) Class membership in the US responds to economic parameters (to a certain extent) which aided many Cubans from the island's lower classes in climbing up the social ladder; 5) The psychological role played by the ARC in the process of acculturation; the ARC gained large numbers of followers from other ethnic groups in the US. In turn, this increase in membership increased the demand for religious goods in the country, especially in areas with large concentrations of Latinos such as Miami,

³¹ This is true especially after the Civil Rights movement and the Kennedy administration.

Chicago, Los Angeles, New Jersey, and New York City.³² Our survey indicated the following distribution of *botánicas*.³³

<u>State</u>	<u>Botánicas</u>
California	93
Illinois	24
Florida	91
Louisiana	1
New Jersey	35
New York	16
New Mexico	3
Texas	6
<u>Washington</u>	<u>4</u>

³² The two tables that follow are the result of a web search in the yellow pages telephone directory, addresses: WorldPages.com, and smartpages.com.

³³ Haitian *Vodou* also makes use of *botánicas* as religious goods stores. This study does not look into their case for reasons of brevity. Most *botánicas* that sell *Vodou* materials have Haitian Creole or French names.

Cubans and other Latinos live in many parts of the Florida peninsula. The next table breaks down the area by city and its corresponding number of *botánicas*.³⁴

Florida	<i>Botánicas</i>
Altamonte Springs	1
Boca Raton	1
Boynton Beach	2
Delray Beach	1
Dereland	1
Fort Lauderdale	2
Golden Beach	1
Hialeah	10
Hollywood	1
Homestead	4
Jacksonville	2
Key Biscayne	1
Kissimmee	1
Lake Worth	2
Miami	36
Miami Beach	1
Miramar	2
North Miami	1
Opa Locka	2
Orlando	7
Pembroke Pines	1
Pompano Beach	3
Ponte Vedra Beach	1
Tampa	4
West Miami	1
West Palm Beach	2

Physical Description of a Miami *Botánica*:

*Botánicas*³⁵ often advertise in the telephone yellow pages under “Religious Goods Stores”. As in other cities, in Miami, their size depends on economics. They

³⁴ What is known as Greater Miami includes several municipalities: Miami, Hialeah, West Miami, North Miami, South Miami, Miami Beach, Hialeah Miami Lakes, and Village Green. Each municipality has its own local government.

³⁵ A large portion of this section is the result of field work, the results of which were first presented at the 1999 South Eastern Conference on Latin America Studies (SECOLAS), in Lafayette, Louisiana.

are usually part of strip malls with large clear glass display windows, behind which stand images of Catholic saints. Worship of Catholic saints, especially the Virgin Mary, was historically open to folk interpretation in Europe and Latin America, both in churches and in domestic shrines. Such shrines are common in Miami's Cuban neighborhoods and house images of one or two saints (Brandon 46-7). The image size depends on three factors: 1) the devotion of those in the household; 2) whether the image's place was determined by devotion alone or as "payment" for a special request granted; and 3) the homeowner's economic power. The two most common images of Catholic saints in these stores and home shrines are Saints Barbara and Lazarus, even though the Catholic Church deleted both of these Saints from its calendar in the 1970s (Cabrera 272). A third image that is always present in both stores and shrines is that of Our Lady of Charity. Other images frequently on display are those of Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Christopher, and Saint Francis of Assisi.

The cult of the saints had been imported to the New World from Africa³⁶ and Europe. Catholic saints are believed to act as intermediaries between humans and their supreme God. Traditional African religion features a similar relationship between their orishas and *Olodunmare*, their high God of creation (Bisnauth 165). A connection was thus made in Cuba between Catholic Saints and African deities³⁷.

In most *botánicas* soup tureens are displayed next to Catholic images. Most of them are manufactured in China or Italy, and play an important role in *Regla de oshá* initiation, as we will see below. Small plants in separate containers are usually placed

³⁶ Catholicism had entered Kongo in the early part of the sixteenth century (Thornton 235).

³⁷ Appendix V has a list of the main *orishas* and their Catholic equivalents.

on either side of the store's main entrance, which are also pasted with stickers inviting payment by American Express, Master Card, Visa, and Discover credit cards. Inside, walls usually have shelves to the ceiling, while glass display cases line the floor forming an open-ended rectangle. Sometimes other display racks are found on the floor, depending on space availability.

Catholic religious goods are usually grouped together with cards bearing representations of Catholic saints on one side and prayers in Spanish on the other. I have counted altogether over thirty different saint cards in various *botánicas*. Corresponding dashboard saints often stand near them. Other larger saint statues are also found, usually St. Lazarus, St. Barbara, and Our Ladies of Charity and Mercy, some of which are life-size. Rosaries, in many colors, hang from the racks. Bottled Holy Water is also sold by the ounce. Crosses and other Catholic ritual paraphernalia are also available.

Afro-Cuban religious items occupy the remaining space available in both counter and racks. Fancy soup bowls are usually stacked by size. Some are similar to those sold in *Sedano* and *Varadero* supermarkets. Others are larger, and their shapes suggest their ornamental purpose. These tureens are used to house the *orisha's* essence or *fundamento*. The tureens found in *botánicas* only come in yellow, blue, white, red, green, and brown. The color, in some of them, appears only in decorations, as in one white bowl carried by many *botánicas* in the area that has gold decorations on its surface and is for *Oshún*, *orisha* of rivers, whose color is yellow or gold. The same merchandise can be found in virtually every *botánica*, which suggests the existence of major wholesalers. All of the tureens have tops; their ritual importance

is described below. One *santero* described them thus: “Unlike their Cuban counterparts, which are made of baked clay, soup tureens in the United States are made out of ceramic. The difference in construction materials increases the price of the latter.”³⁸ Wooden tureens are kept in a different part of most stores visited. They also vary in size and have covers. Three legged iron cauldrons are frequently located close to the wooden bowls. These are part of the materials employed in initiation rites for *Reglas de congos*, also discussed later.

Necklaces, called *ilekes*, are displayed on racks. *Ilekes*, or *elekes*, are color coded, and were originally made out of glass beads, as noted by Lidia Cabrera (122). At present, most stores sell mostly plastic beads, but carry some glass ones in their inventory, for one to two dollars more per half pound.

There are three common symbols that do not derive from Catholicism. The first is the *Elegguá*, or the orisha of the roads. He is symbolized by concrete cone-shaped busts three to five inches big with cowry shells as eyes and mouth. An allusion to ancient tribal scars can be seen on the faces of these *Elegguás*. The second figure that calls attention to the observer is a life size mannequin depicting either a woman or man of the black race. The mannequin is dressed up in the fashion used by the original African-Cuban *santeros*. The men wear white, while the women have dresses made out of checkered material. The third image is composed of two dolls. They represent the twins *Ibeji*, or Sts Cosmus and Damien.

Herbs, roots and tree barks are kept in plastic baskets around the *botánica*'s floor. Also in plastic baskets are many of the metal attributes of the orishas, such as

³⁸ Pablo. Personal interview. 20 Jul. 1999.

horseshoes, irons, and nails. These are called their “weapons” and “work tools.” Live plants, as previously noted, are also sold in *botánicas*.

Many herbal essences and remedies are sold in sealed bottles, among them: *Mire oil*, *Ashé*, *Ven a mi*, *Afrodita*, *Sígueme*, and *Siete Potencias Africanas*; 14.4 ounce aerosol sprays: *Bendición de dinero al hogar*, and *Go away Evil*; and incense powders such as: *Amanza guapos*, *Siete Potencias*, *Arraza con todo*, and *La mano poderosa*.³⁹ This merchandise is usually found in racks throughout the store, not necessarily behind the counters. Cowry shells are on display in the same manner. These are used in the Regla de oshá divination system.

Literature on Afro-Cuban Religions and related subjects is also sold in *botánicas*. Among the most interesting I have found were one of Natalia Bolívar Aróstegui’s books, an homage to a dead *santero* written by one of his godchildren, a book titled *The Orishas’ Horoscope*, and several books on angels, which has developed in popularity in the United States in the last ten years. The last two books provide an example of the adaptation or transculturation process of the Afro-Cuban Religions into North American culture, since astrology and angels feature prominently in US “New Age” culture. Also for sale is a book that contains the prayers and songs of many ARC rituals known as *libreta*.

One of the arguments presented in this research deals with the relationship that exists between geographic distances and availability of ritual paraphernalia. As previously stated, it is difficult to perform many Afro-Cuban rituals in North America in the manner in which they were done in Cuba, since the topography and fauna are

³⁹ The English translation for some of these Spanish terms is provided in appendix VII.

different. Therefore, *botánicas* provide bottled water from rivers, lakes, wells, and the sea. These waters are used in cleansing ceremonies, as mandated by the different orishas. Such inventory in most *botánicas* include: *agua de río*, *agua de mar*, *agua de pozo*, *agua de lago*, and *agua de lluvia*.⁴⁰

Clothes are also sold in *botánicas*, since several changes of clothes are required in each initiation. Still most ritual garments are purchased from department stores or from related business. *Botánias* also provide their customers with the colored handkerchiefs used in particular rituals and checkered skirts for the officiating priestesses, as well as garments made out of *saco*, which is a rough material used to hold sugar in Cuba. Of a dark beige color, it is associated with St. Lazarus in *Reglas de oshá*. Many *orishas* “like” a musical instrument, thus, miniature reproductions of them are also sold in *botánicas*. Worshipers put them next to tureens as offerings to the individual deities.

Pre-Columbian cultures of the Caribbean have also made their mark on *Santería*. An example of the latter is a figure representing an Indian who always present in *botánicas* (Murphy 39-48). One also finds wooden canes and swords, which represent various *orisha* weapons and attributes.

Candles, also color coded, are held in long glass containers. Printed on the container’s outer surface are the images of the Catholic saints associated with the orishas, along with prayers for the individual deities. These candles have made their way into Publix supermarkets, and Eckerd’s and Wallgreen pharmacies in Miami. In

⁴⁰ Water obtained from rivers, sea, wells, lakes, and rain water.

1992, post Hurricane Andrew, it was thanks to the availability of these candles that my neighborhood had light at night during the ensuing blackouts.

Lastly, many powders can be acquired upon request from *botánica* attendants. Traditional African medicine relied much more on herbs than European medicine. Today such cures thrive in African-based religions in the Americas, and hence relevant materials are found in *botánicas*. In fact, it is the sale of these powders and herbs that gave *botánicas* their name, as noted above.

An account of *botánicas*' inventories would not be complete without a description of stones and *cascarilla*, a powder made from crushed eggshells. Cascarilla is a major ingredient in many afro-Cuban rites, including the foods of the orishas (Pedraza and Lammoglia, Preserving a Culinary Religious Tradition. 5). Cascarilla is symbolic of the Cross and "good things."⁴¹ *Botánicas* have a significant supply of river pebbles and other types of stones, which are called *otanes*. They are usually kept in plastic containers. These materials have a particular symbolic meaning in initiations, which is discussed below. Thus, *botánicas* have an inventory that includes most of the materials for ARC rituals. Only four legged sacrificial animals are not sold in these stores. The proliferation of *botánicas* in cities with large Hispanic population is a measure of economic success, as well as an indication of the growing number of people who practice some form of this religion.

Ritual Contexts of *Botánica* Merchandise:

There are two major differences between the rituals of *Regla de oshá* and those of *Reglas de congos*, which have fewer initiation rituals, and consequently, *Regla de*

⁴¹ Female cooks. Personal interview. 17 Jul. 1999.

oshá places greater emphasis on initiations and requires a larger amount of materials for initiation. Three rituals from *la Religión Lucumí* are here discussed in terms of the materials employed in them. *Ilekes* or necklaces are given to an individual for personal protection, and serve the same function that an amulet does in other cultures. *Ilekes* are a personal item not to be worn by anyone but she/he who receives them. Not every member of the congregation receives the *ilekes*; the *orishas* make this determination. Their intentions are communicated to the person to receive the *ilekes* through a process of divination that involves four small pieces of coconut called *obinus* and cowry shells called *ekwele* (Murphy 64, 72). The *ileke* ceremony is conducted over a period of two days. Carried out in the godparent's home, only an overnight stay is required of the novice. Only one change of clothing is involved in the ceremony, and minimal animal sacrifice, usually one bird, is offered to the *orishas*. In Africa *ilekes* were manufactured from pearls, ivory, white and red corals, and other materials from the region. In Cuba, they were made of crystal, while in the United States the beads are mostly made from plastic. In Cuba these *ilekes*⁴² are usually manufactured by *Iyalochas* and *Babalorichas* (Cabrera, Yemayá y Ochún 120-7).

Of all the rituals in *Regla de oshá*, initiation to the priesthood requires the most materials and animal sacrifices. Its rituals are more elaborate than those for initiation into *Reglas de congos*. This rite requires that the neophyte spend anywhere from seven to fourteen days in the godparent's home. A series of cleansing baths must be done on a daily basis, followed by a complete change of clothing. Novices receive the *aché* of their *orishas* on an individual basis. Each novice will keep his/her own

⁴² The number of basic *ilekes* varies, Cabrera says 4, while González-Wipler mentions 5.

orisha at home. The *orishas*, the stones containing their force, or *otanes*, and many of their attributes are kept in soup tureens. The novice must also provide other materials for the initiation rituals, such as cushions, plates, handkerchiefs, incense, herbs, powders, bells, cowry shells, floor mats, beaded bracelets, *ilekes* and animals (Cabrera, Yemayá y Ochún 133). The novice must also provide the changes of clothing and other toilette materials (González-Wippler 175).

Initiation into *Reglas de congos* requires fewer materials: only a three legged iron couldron, a cross, several birds, herbs, cleansing baths and several small birds are needed in the preparation of the *Nganga*, or ancestor's house (Cabrera 160-1). Some *botánicas* sell the smaller birds used in these rituals. The stores that include animals in their inventory advertise both as *botánicas* and as pet shops (Lammoglia 18). The *Nganga* also houses human bones, but to the best of my knowledge, these are not sold in *botánicas*.

The *orishas* and the ancestors must be taken care of and “fed” on a regular basis. Aside from this, both priests and congregation undergo periodic cleansing rituals, the material for which is found in *botánicas*. Merchandise is also purchased in *botánicas* by the non-practicing clientele who go to these business in search of quick remedies to their temporal needs (Pichardo, E. Personal interview. 20 Aug. 2000).

Climate Differences:

The United States climate is not favorable to the growth of many wild herbs, bushes and trees found in the Caribbean. Therefore, in the face of a growing demand for these products among ARC practitioners, they had to be imported. The case of the first *botánica* in the US, previously discussed, is a perfect example: In the 1920s, Mr.

Redón made arrangements with a local airline in New York City to import plants from Puerto Rico (González-Wippler 283).

The case of South Florida is slightly different. The climate is similar to that of many Caribbean islands, however, the peninsula's soil is not favorable to the growth of many of the plants used in ARC rituals. Many of the herbs and bushes that grow in Cuba happen to also grow in Central and West Africa. Once in Cuba, Africans incorporated plants that grew only in the island. The vegetation in Florida, furthermore, is not as varied as that of Cuba. The peninsula's soil is sand based, and not very fertile. Over the years, especially after 1979, when Cubans began to travel back and forth from their homeland once again, many seeds were smuggled to Miami. Some plants have adapted to the South Florida's soil and climate, (others have not), and continue to be imported from the Caribbean (Pichardo, E. Personal interview. 15 Jul.1999).

Church and State:

Pre-revolutionary Cuba and the United States had very different policies regarding the relationship between religion and the state. As previously noted, the papacy had granted the Spanish monarchs the right to oversee the Latin American Church. In the United States of America, the laws protecting against discrimination along religious lines in the wake of the Civil Rights movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s. Therefore, neither organized religion nor the ruling class has been allowed since to openly exert any type of pressure in the land against freedom of religious practices, or to coerce the US population towards professing only one faith.

The Constitution of the United States provides for freedom of expression and religious worship. It also prohibits discrimination on the basis of creed.⁴³

In the US, mainstream churches often conflict with smaller sects, cults and other independent religious movements, but the state's secular nature and its laws have allowed ARC to claim an open place in US society. Indirectly, this has facilitated the development of *botánicas* in the country. The economic achievement of Cubans in the United States has also played an important part in the evolution of the Afro-Cuban religious complex in America. The sociological dynamics of this relationship are a function of assimilation into a host society and the nature of the host's cultural system (Camara 52). This assimilation is also dependent on the economic advancements of the subdominant group (Dubois 14).

Immigration and Economy:

The United States' influence in Cuba and its population at the beginning of the twentieth century has played an important role in the economic success of the first waves of Cuban immigrants in the US. American expansionists interest remolded Cuba's internal social and economic structures. Thus, some Cubans had been pre-socialized to the American way long before the onset of the ongoing political exodus that began in 1959 (Portes and Rumbaut 273).

Prior to 1959, class membership in Cuba was ascriptive (Pedraza 5). In the US, social mobility is the result of acquired economic power (Mancini 236). Many

⁴³ Amendment I of The Bill of Rights states: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances." A different law provides protection against: "...discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, national origin,...."

members of the Cuban middle and lower classes who fled the country between 1960 and 1973 possessed technical trades,⁴⁴ which are relatively lucrative in the United States. As a result, many of these immigrants acquired a new social status. Some of these immigrants did practice Afro-Cuban religions in Cuba, albeit in secrecy for fear of being negatively stigmatized. In 1980, during the Mariel Boat Lift, over 120,000 Cubans, with a large representation from the lower strata, fled the island. A large number of *Paleros* and *Santeros* were among the new arrivals, who settled mostly in New York City, New Jersey, and Miami. Once in the US, their newly acquired social position, and the protection against religious discrimination provided for by the laws of the land, helped bring their religious practices into the open (Pedraza, *This Too Shall Pass* 32-3).

To date no study of Cuban exile economics takes into account the impact of *botánicas* or related businesses. The self-employed in the Miami area are grouped into four industrial sectors: retail trade, businesses and repair services, professional services, and construction (Portes, *Latin Journey* 205). In Appendix 8, a map of Dade-County divided into block groups shows the relationship that exists between Cuban population and the location of *botánicas*. *Botánicas* in Little Haiti are included in the map even though the case of Haitians is not discussed in this study, as mentioned before, yet their stores serve the same purpose. We have found that *botánicas*⁴⁵ have

⁴⁴ “...the construction industry in Miami is particularly well-integrated in the Cuban enclave. In 1977, Cuban-owned construction firms in the Miami metropolitan area grossed more than \$43 million” (Portes, *Latin Journey* 205).

⁴⁵ *Botánicas* first advertised in the telephone white pages by alphabetical order under the subtitle “*Botánicas*.” The quality of the microfilm available was very poor, so some *botánicas* may have been missed.

proliferated in the Miami-Dade metropolitan area in direct proportion to Cuban population growth.

During the 1960s and early 1970s many stores advertised in both the yellow and white pages, for license under which they operated varied throughout the years, as discussed below. For example, this is the case of *Botanica La Africana*. Although Father Juan Sosa (Personal interview. 16 Jan. 2001), notes that in the 1970s there were more than 70 *botánicas* advertising in the telephone pages, our search does not show such high numbers for the years in question, but does indicate a steady proliferation of *botánicas* from the year in which they first appear in the telephone directory up until now, which correlates with Cuban population growth per quinquenium (Lammoglia 16-7). The 1990 Dade County census⁴⁶ does not separate Hispanics by ethnic origin, however it is clear that Cubans have had the strongest representation. A large Nicaraguan community has appeared in Miami since the fall of Anastacio Somoza, in 1979, and some Nicaraguans have become members of the ARC, as holds true for other immigrant groups in Miami. Still the majority of practitioners remain Cuban immigrants. The growth of this population and correlated proliferation of *botánicas* is illustrated in the following table:

⁴⁶ Census counts are done every ten years, the census uses projections for the half mark between one count and the next.

Year	Hispanic Population**	Cubans in Dade County*	Botanicas
1950	20,000		0
1955	35,000		1
1960	50,000	29,500	2
1965	173,000		2
1970	297,000	224,000	3
1975	467,000		7
1980	581,000	407,000	11
1985	768,000		29
1990	949,000	561,868	43
1995	1,026,000		45

* Source: US bureau of the Census.

** Source: Population Projections, Race & Hispanic Origin. Dade County, Florida, 1980-2000.

Ethnic Neighborhoods:

González-Wippler notes that, after the appearance of the first *botánica* in New York City, many others sprouted in the same neighborhood: “By now, other enterprising individuals had begun to notice the great potential of the *botánicas*. Very soon a host of competitors appeared all over El Barrio” (284).

The nature of ethnic neighborhoods like the one described by González-Wippler has been the subject of much scholarly discussion. Upon arrival in foreign land, immigrants usually settle in neighborhoods already populated by members of their own ethnic group. These city sections are called “immigrant neighborhoods,” and tend to generate small businesses that serve the specialized needs of their customers. Immigrant neighborhoods provide newcomers with the immediate support required to overcome the initial hostilities encountered in a foreign land. Enclaves, on the other hand, are characterized by possessing a highly differentiated entrepreneurial class and, as a result, an extensive division of labor. Ethnic neighborhoods have been the norm in the early adaptation patterns of most immigrant minorities; the formation

of ethnic enclaves has been, by and large, the exception (Portes, Latin Journey 204-5). It is in one of these immigrant neighborhoods, located in Miami's North East Downtown area, that the first *botánica* opened its doors to customers from Cuba, The West Indies, and the US Deep South (Pichardo, E. 10 Jun. 1999). The proliferation of *botánicas* in Miami; and elsewhere can be further explained in terms of the following: "The principle of ethnic solidarity, utilized by successful entrepreneurs, also prescribes the promotion of members of the same minority and the support of their economic activities. Skills and contacts acquired in established firms furnish the basis for frequent moves into self-employment" (Portes, Latin Journey 204).

Psychology of Migration:

Migrants tend to experience great psychological stress during the first years in their new countries, and thus develop strategies for acculturation or ethnic insularity. These strategies can be of two types: maintenance or rejection of their ethnic culture. In either case, ethnic reaffirmation is linked to positive self-esteem, and serves as a coping strategy for the immigrant. (Nesdale 570-1).

Religion also plays an important role in the ethnic reaffirmation of immigrants. As George Brandon notes: "Social groups help individuals remember," and religion usually plays a key role in this (132). A good example is the congregation at the *Iglesia Lucumí de Babalú Ayé*. Located in the city of Hialeah, the church represents the first attempt at institutionalizing the Afro-Cuban Religions in Miami. The development of the *Iglesia* and the proliferation of *botánicas* in the area reflect R. Stephen Warner's finding that "migrants and their offspring's adapt to their religious institutions to American conditions, and in the process they often interact with

religious communities already established here. The religious institutions they build, adapt, remodel, and adopt, become worlds unto themselves...” (3).

The proliferation of *botánicas* in the United States is also explained by the attraction of African-based religions for native minorities, especially as a way of reaffirming their own African roots. The ethnic composition of Miami is very diverse, and hence representation of other immigrant groups are increasingly visible at ARC rituals. However, numerically speaking, Cubans remain both the largest ethnic group in the area, and make up the majority of Miami’s ARC members.

During a 1999 visit to the *Iglesia Lucumí de Babalú Ayé*, I had the opportunity to observe the multiethnic composition of its members. A Colombian *iyawo* and a Nicaraguan preparing for initiation commented on how they had been attracted to the church by their Cuban fiancées. Yet another case was that of an Argentinian, who, having been terminally ill, and following the suggestion of a Cuban neighbor, had sought help in the church and found out that the *orishas* required her initiation as a prerequisite for her recovery.

Afro-Cuban religions allow for the incorporation of certain elements of other religions and cults, further explaining their growth. This dynamic has two folds; Afro-Cuban religions deal with practical personal issues, and promise solutions in this world (Pedraza 15-6). This characteristic of Afro-Cuban religions puts them in the category of popular or folk religions, and as such they tend to attract adherents from marginalized classes. In the case of Miami, that attraction is greatest for members of immigrant groups struggling to adjust to life in the United States. The similarities between Afro-Cuban religions and the popular Catholicism practiced by many Latin

American and Caribbean people who live in the Miami area, tend to facilitate the “crossover” from one belief system to the other.

Operational License:

Obá Ernesto Pichardo explained that during the 1960s most *botánicas* in the Miami area operated with “gift shop” permits. By the 1970s many *botánicas* operated as “pet shops” as previously stated. Many of these stores advertise today as *botánicas* and pet shops. Why pet shops? According to Pichardo, this was a way to provide worshipers with some of the small animals used in Afro-Cuban religions rituals. The larger animals, as Pichardo noted, especially the four-legged ones, are purchased in auctions by North Florida farmers from sellers from Georgia. These farmers bring these animals to Southern Florida by request. By the 1970’s many *botánicas* in the Miami had already begun to operate under a “religious goods store” license, which remains the most common license under which *botánicas* operate today (Personal interview. 15 Jul. 1999).

Transculturation Revisited:

In the last three years, while doing field-work in *botánicas* in the Miami area, I have had the opportunity to listen to many conversations between *botánica* employees and their customers. Some customers speak broken Spanish. There are two explanations for this phenomena. First, these customers are second and third generation Cuban-Americans whose Spanish has perhaps begun to show the effects of immersion into the dominant culture; this, however, is unlikely in Miami, where a large portion of the population speaks Spanish. Second, transculturation of the Afro-

Cuban religious complex has begun to occur between Cubans and Anglos.⁴⁷ This is a more plausible explanation. Some black, as well as a few white, Americans have gone so far as to travel to Cuba for their initiation, but this is not the rule (Brandon 107).

Language has also started to play its part in this process of transculturation. The incense powder and several aerosolized essences have their names both in English and Spanish. Others, especially some aerosols, only advertise the product in English. During the formative years of the Afro-Cuban religions in Cuba, many African terms were incorporated into the language spoken by the new members. Today, many Anglo adherents have also learned Afro-Cuban terms in the process of integration into the religion. Indeed, there is much that linguistic analysis could tell us about the nature and dynamics of the growth of the ARC and the accompanying proliferation of *botánicas*.⁴⁸

New Adaptations:

More recent fieldwork has provided new information on the ways in which Afro-Cuban religions continue to adapt to the US open market. A new type of business has been developed to provide all of the clothing needed by the *iyawo*. Clothing stores for the *iyawo* are of two types: the first is a store front business, the second is based in private homes from which the merchandise is supplied to customers on request (see Appendix III). Many of these retail stores are located next to *botánicas*, but have different owners. The choice of white clothing is sold in all varieties and sizes. The stores also offer a reduced inventory of checkered skirts for

⁴⁷ Evidence of this are several conversations overheard during my fieldwork. Two of these conversations are reproduced in Appendix IX, IX-A.

⁴⁸ An incident I witnessed in *Botánica Nena* illustrates this point and is provided in Appendix IX-A.

the use of *madrinas*, or female godparent in initiation rites. This latest adaptation of the Afro-Cuban religions to the US market can be explained in terms of Portes's arguments: "Ethnic enclaves are a distinctive economic formation, characterized by the spatial concentration of immigrants who organize a variety of enterprises to serve their own ethnic market and the general population" (Portes, *Latin Journey* 202). The success of ethnic markets depends on two factors: the small scale reproduction of the dominant class market, and the perpetuation of the culture they serve. In turn, the latter relies on a constant influx of members of the group in question. Portes explains it in the following manner:

Entrepreneurial activities can thrive in this situation because they are able to reproduce, on a local scale, some of the features of monopolistic control that account for successful firms in the wider economy. For example, subsequent mass arrivals from the home country provide immigrant entrepreneurs with privileged access to a source of low-wage labor and new consumer markets (Portes, *Latin Journey* 203).

The adaptation of the Afro-Cuban religious complex to the North American market has manifested in other forms. An example of this is the development of "orchestras" that offer their services for the variety of rituals that require live music. A compact disc sold in many Latin music record stores, *Oriki Ara Oko Francisco Aguabella y sus Tambores Batá: Afro-Cuban Religious Music*, offers a selection of *toques* for the different *orishas*. Each *orisha* is summoned by the drumming of a different rhythm. Many of these orchestras also advertise in stores that provide all the related materials for Afro-Cuban rituals.

Another lucrative business that has evolved in the United States out of Afro-Cuban initiation rites is that of religious interior decorator. Many *botánicas* in Miami recommend religious interior decorators to their customers preparing for initiation. Such designers, usually men, possess an inventory of drapes and other materials employed in the arrangement of the *iyawo*'s throne room, where the new initiate will live during the initiation process. Located in a room reserved solely for that purpose within the godparent's home, it must be decorated in accordance to the color of the *iyawo*'s main *orisha*.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the ARC was repressed by colonial Cuba's Spanish government and members of the island's dominant class until 1870. From their formation in the early seventeenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, the relationship that existed between Afro-Cuban religions and Cuba's ruling and dominant classes were characterized by conflict and resistance. The development of religious goods stores for ARC practitioners under such circumstances was thus impeded.

In 1959 an event occurred that resulted in a somewhat favorable change in these relation. Fidel Castro's political platform was based in part on the elimination of racism in Cuba. However, the island's government was also determined to eliminate all types of religious beliefs that could create any type of solidarity that might threaten the regime's stability. As a result, the ARC did not fare better in the early Castro years. However, in 1975 the ARC was recognized as part of Cuba's African heritage and was included under its folkloric cultural expressions. This

change served only to turn the ARC into an instrument of Cuba's tourist industry. By emphasizing the ARC's allure of secrecy and exoticism, the Cuban government's promotion in fact demeaned the religions even more.

The ARC, in my opinion, is a belief system of immigrants characterized by its ability to adapt. Lidia Cabrera offers an excellent account of the adaptation techniques employed by African, and later by the belief system to survive in different and changing environments both in Cuba and in the United States: 1) whereas in Africa, in the absence of medical science, the religion went hand in hand with the work of healers, in Cuba, after the development of institutionalized medicine, the role of the priest as doctor was limited to the treatment of spiritual ailments. 2) In Cuba, the religion of the slaves also got rid of those aspects of its rituals that were deemed amoral by the dominant society; in turn, the religion gained adherents from many sectors of Cuban society. 3) As a result, the ARC became an integral part of Cuban religiosity. 4) The immigrant adaptations of the African based religions to Cuban society in effect prepared them for the crossing of the Florida Straits. Originally the religion of African slaves uprooted from their homeland, it became, in the United States, the religion of Cubans in their exodus from their's (Sandoval 269-70).

Upon crossing the Florida Strait, Afro-Cuban religions began a new process of adaptation. The Afro-Cuban religions, unlike many other Cuban institutions, have not disappeared as a result of acculturation. There are several reasons for this: 1) The majority of Cuban exiles came from the Havana province's lower classes, and the Afro-Cuban religions were most popular among Cubans of the lower class. 2) Social climbing in the United States works along economic lines, and many members of

Cuba's lower classes have attained an economic position they would have not been able to attain in the island. 3) US laws against discrimination along religious lines, which has allowed the surfacing of the ARC practices. 4) Smaller religious groups like those found in Santeria families provide immigrants with the moral support they need to face the trials of acculturation. 5) The fact that Afro-Cuban religions, unlike their Christian counterparts, offer remedies for the here and now. 6) Cubans' lack of orthodoxy in religious matters and their way of accommodating Catholic beliefs to their own needs. 7) And finally, the fact that with the emergence of new esoteric beliefs, many Cubans and their descendants have opted for practices familiar to them for their Cuban origins (Cabrera 270-72). To the above I would add that the last decade of the twentieth century saw a renaissance of Cuban culture in the United States. After decades of economic embargo, many scholars, as well as the general population, have become curious about Cuba and its people. This has been fueled by the Cuban State earlier policy of closed doors against foreigners. Responding to attempts in the United States to highlight its own black culture, the US population is being indoctrinated by the media on the idea that Cuban culture is solely composed of African elements. Nothing is further from the truth, but it will not be discussed here. I wish to stress that all of the previous statements have helped develop in the United States a curiosity about everything related to Afro-Cuban religions. As a result, it is no surprise that *botánicas* continue to proliferate in North America.

Of course, the Afro-Cuban religious practices have also undergone adaptive changes in the United States. Some of these changes have met with the disapproval of the "orthodox" branch of the ARC priesthood. *Botánicas* in particular have come

under attack for doing away with the aspects of the religion that tended to form strong bonds between the *padrinos* and their *ahijados* (Castellanos, et al. 146). Many other adaptations have been forced by the pace and urban oriented nature of American society. For instance, in Cuba tureens were made out of baked clay, and colored by the neophyte's godparent, whereas in the United States they are imported. The original method was itself elemental to ritual, as well as the construction of the *ilekes*, which also contributed to the formation of special bonds between those involved. The issue is discussed at length by Lidia Cabrera (Yemayá y Ochún 122-3).

At present, the magico-medicinal properties of herbs continue to be at the core of many Afro-Cuban rituals in the United States. However, the climate differences between Cuba and the US have resulted in the loss of some traditions. In Cuba, herbs, bushes, and trees had to be cut before 6:00 p.m. (Pablo. Personal interview. 20 Jul. 1999). In the United States most of these materials are imported from the Caribbean and hence are cut days or weeks prior to their appearance in stores.

The absence of *botánicas* in Cuba until the 1990s can be explained in terms of several factors: climatic conditions, class struggle, and ideologic struggle. Climatic conditions in Cuba favored the growth of all the herbs, bushes and trees employed in Afro-Cuban religious rituals. The difference in climate between Cuba and the US has played an important role in the development of *botánicas*, but the rationale for their proliferation cannot be reduced to this alone. Class struggle on the island along racial lines began with the slave trade in the fifteenth century yet ethnic conflict developed when the Catholic Church grouped Africans and their descendants into *cabildos* by nation. The differences between the religious ideologies of the Africans and the

Spanish Catholics were also a strong source of struggle. Attempts by Catholicism to evangelize Africans were met with a form of resistance that many scholars have called syncretism, symbiosis, or masking. All these processes stigmatized the practices of Afro-Cuban rituals to the point where they were forced underground. Indirectly, this social stigma prevented the development of *botánicas* in the Island.

Cubans who settled in US territory between 1901 and 1960 did not transmit this concept of *botánicas* to the island. I suspect that materials for the Afro-Cuban religions practices were obtained from different venues in Cuban society between the onset of slavery and the triumph of the Castro's Revolution of 1959. This thesis may be important because it explains an unwritten chapter in the history of the ARC by elucidating the dynamics that impeded the development of *botánicas* in Cuba. After the Revolution, the Castro regime's persecution of institutionalized religion did affect the Afro-Cuban religious systems but to a lesser extent than Christianity. ARC rites continued to be performed in secrecy and no public demonstration of their beliefs was allowed. As a result, the development of *botánicas* in the island continued to be prevented.

The incorporation into the religion of new adherents had also affected the way in which *botánicas* operate, the merchandise they carry, and the names under which they advertise. An ongoing process of change and re-structuration is happening in the United States: "...*Santería* takes on the coloration of subcategories of ethnic groups which, in the context of ethnic, ideological, and economic competition, makes decisions affecting the content of their religious ideology and practice" (Brandon 107). As mentioned in Chapter 2, *botánicas* have sprouted in many cities with large

Hispanic populations. The stores themselves are undergoing a syncretic process of their own. There are, for example some stores in Texas where Mexican pre-Columbian beliefs are being incorporated to Afro-Cuban ones (Sosa, J. Personal interview. 16 Jan. 2001).

The struggle between Catholicism and African based beliefs that began in Cuba over four hundred years ago has continued in every part of the world where Cubans have migrated. Thomas A. Tweed provides convincing proof of this in an interview with Bishop Agustín Román. Román mentions that the Catholic Church is attempting to turn nominal Catholics into practicing ones. At the same time, some Afro-Cuban groups accuse the Catholic Church of trying to eliminate them altogether (Tweed 43-55). Father Sosa, when asked about the importance of Afro-Cuban religions in their role as mediators in the process of Cuban acculturation to the US, recognized this importance but added: “Many adherents also become disillusioned with them [the Afro-Cuban religions] and turn to the church [the Catholic one] in search for the answers they could not find” (Sosa, J. Personal interview. 16 Jan. 2001). Cabrera disagrees with Father Sosa:

Changes brought about by the Catholic Church in the last fifteen years have resulted in the loss of many of its Cuban adherents. The Church put in doubt the hagiography of some Catholic Saint popular among Cubans such as Saints Barbara and Lazarus, even removing some from its calendar. As a result, many Catholics joined the ARC where the devotion for these Saints has continued. Also during the last decades, the Church has eliminated many old rites well liked by Cubans.

Obviously many Cubans were not prepared to assimilate such drastic changes as the elimination of some Saints, relics, and elaborate rites. This reduction of symbols was interpreted by many Cubans as an approximation to the more ascetic Protestant denominations. At that point, many Cubans began to identify with the ARC's complex and strict rituals, as well as with the observance of its taboos (Cabrera 272).⁴⁹

Whether Cabrera or Sosa is correct remains to be proven. It is evident in any case that many *botánicas* in the Miami area have been in business for over two decades, and that even though some quickly fail, their numbers keep up growing in direct proportion to Cuban population growth in Miami. By looking at this correspondence, it is obvious that the number of adherents to this religion continues to grow.⁵⁰ As such, we may expect *botánicas* to become increasingly visible in Miami and throughout the urban United States.

The last decade (1990s) saw the development of a government-operated *botánica* in Havana. The store is geared towards European tourists. The same ministry, through Cubatur, its agency for foreign tourism, has launched an effective advertising campaign in Europe based on the sexual powers of the black and mulatto Cubans and on the mysterious sensuality of their religions. Even the State press

⁴⁹ Translated from the original text.

⁵⁰ The racial composition of ARC adherents has changed dramatically. In Cuba, most adherents were of African ancestry. As guest to many ARC rituals in Miami, I have noticed that most participants are at least of white phenotype. I suspect that the "whitening" of the ARC in the United States has also played an important role in attracting adherents from other ethnic groups, Anglos included, especially since the issue of race occupies a prevalent place in American society. A study of this phenomena is in progress at present.

agency, *Prensa Latina*, included five articles about the Afro-Cuban religions on its web page, while only one article dealt with the Papal visit to Cuba in 1997. This, I argue, is enough evidence to conclude that Afro-Cuban religions in the island have served as a tool of the State to lure tourists and the much-needed foreign currency, especially after the fall of the Soviet Bloc. Foreign tourists seldom visit other Cuban cities, they are usually placed in foreign operated hotels in resorts scattered about Cuba, but do not venture out of them. However, even this official recognition of the Afro-Cuban religions has not triggered a proliferation of *botánicas* in the rest of the island.

The development of *botánicas* in Cuba after 1990 can be partially credited to Cuban government attempts to increase revenue from foreign tourism, especially after Cuba lost its subsidy from the now extinct Soviet Union. However, I believe that the concept of *botánicas* as they exist in the United States was also taken back to Cuba by those exiles that have traveled back and forth from the island since 1979. The island had been closed to both Cuban diaspora and foreign visitors until 1979, from that year on large amounts of Cuban exiles have returned to the island at least once a year, mostly to visit relatives still living there. The concept of *botánicas* has begun to flourish in Cuba since the early 1990s to satisfy the demands of foreigners and Cuban citizens. Important to this study is the transplantation of the concept to the island where the religion they serve originated and from where these stores were absent until the last ten years of the twentieth century. The ARC arrived in the United States from Cuba, where it had been mostly the religion of the lower classes. The ARC character of adaptation allowed it to flourish and change in its host society. *Botánicas* are one

result of the ARC ability to incorporate change readily. With time, this new concept within the ARC has been taken back to Cuba, land of their birth.

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Appendix I


Botánicas' Business Cards

PALERO 
TATA TATANDI
Limpiezas - Despojos
Astrología - Cartas - Tarot

Trabajos Garantizados


Tel: (305) 207-6294
Cel: (786) 395-9205
Beep: (305) 268-3294



 TEL: 305-649-8078

BOTANICA *Nena*

EFFECTOS RELIGIOSOS • ARTICULOS DE ILLAWO
YERBAS Y ARTICULOS DE REGALO



902 N.W. 27th Avenue • Miami, FL. 33125


Lazaro Menendez
Tel: 667-2214
Beeper: 290-6511

Botanica
Azojano y Chango Olbadina
Flores, Articulos Religiosos
y Animales



6530 Coral Way
Miami, FL 33155-1844

(305) 225-7735
Hours: 9 am-5 pm
Lunes a Sabado



BOTANICA LA LUZ
Consultas • Con Cartas Espanolas
Caracoles • Limpiezas Espirituales
de Casas

10506 West Flagler St.
Miami, FL. 33174

Tata Inquisa Palero

Appendix II

Questionnaire

- 1.- Age, gender, race, and place of birth (city and country).
- 2.- Place of permanent residency.
- 3.- Years of formal education.
- 4.- What does the word “botánica” means to you?

The Afro-Cuban Religious Complex is referred to as ARC. It consists of Santeria, Palo Monte and Spritism.

- 5.- Are you familiar with the ARC, and if so, in what capacity?
- 6.- Did you or someone you know ever visited a spiritist or a santero? Please explain.

Botanicas in the United States are stores that sell the material for ARC rites. Among the most important are soup turrens, necklaces, iron cauldrons, cleansing baths, and candles.

- 7.- Do you recall having seen a botánica in Cuba before 1959?
- 8.- Have you recently seen one of these stores in the island?
- 9.- If the answer to question 7 is “no”, can you remember how w the material previously described was obtained?
- 10.- Do you remember seeing a cubicle in the market offering some of these items?
- 11.- Did you ever frequent a house that sold toureens, cauldrons, and Santeria necklaces? If so, explain.

Appendix III

Related Businesses



La Maison Yoruba

Costura

Confecciones Textiles Religiosas
"Trajes de Santo"
Ropa para Yaborage
Tronos, etc.

Juana Larralde
Maria Dámara

Phone (305) 207-1070
Bpr (305) 738-5555

Iyawo White on White

Anne and Eddie



305-262-0906
Email: iyawo@bellsouth.net
6107 S.W. 8 St.
Miami, FL 33144

Grupo Pataki Chango Delé

Eddie

Tocamos todo tipo
de fiestas religiosas

305-262-0906
305-401-6184

Appendix IV

List of *Botánica* Merchandise and Prices

Item ⁵¹	US dollars
<i>Ilekes</i>	2.00
Ifá Divination Trays:	
Small	20.00
Medium	40.00-60.00
Large	60.00-100.00
Culdrons:	
Aluminum regular	12.00
Aluminum medium	25.00
Aluminum large	50.00
Soup Tureens:	
Medium plain	45.00
Large plain	65.00
Large with painted images	75.00-100.00
Catholic images:	
11 inches high	65.00
22 inches high	120.00
Car Statues	3.50
Cards of Saints	1.50
Waters:	
Holy Water from local church 8 ounce bottle	4.50
Lavender Water 8 ounce bottle	4.50
Florida Water 7.5 ounce bottle	4.50
Baths 8 ounce bottle	2.50
House Cleansing Kit	25.00

⁵¹ Item prices were obtained from Miami *botánicas* during the participant observation part of the research. Prices vary very little if any from one store to the next. For reasons of brevity only a few items and their prices are provided here.

Appendix V

Orishas-Saints-Colors-Numbers

<u>Orisha</u>	<u>Catholic Saint</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Color</u>
Babalú Ayé	Lazarus	13, 17	black, light blue
Elegguá	Nino de Atocha	3	red & black
Ibeji	Sts. Cosmus & Damien	2	yellow, red, white
Obatalá	Our Lady of Mercy	8	white
Osain	St. Joseph	3	green
Oshún	Our Lady of Charity	5	yellow
Shangó	St. Barbara	4 or 6	red & white
<u>Yemayá</u>	<u>Our Lady of Regla</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>blue & white</u>

(Murphy 42, and Brandon 77)

Appendix VI

Ilekes or Elekes

The following is a description of the basis *ilekes*, as mentioned in the text:

<i>Orisha</i>	<i>Ileke</i>
Obatalá:	Symmetrical, working both ways from one large clear bead to a large white one, followed by 4 clear beads, 4 whites, 4 more clears, then 24 whites.
Elegguá:	Beads arranged in a sequence of 3 reds followed by 3 blacks, and so forth for the entire length.
Yemayá:	Symmetrical pattern beginning with a large red bead, 3 blues, 3 crystals, 3 blues, then 7 crystals, 7 blues, and 7 crystals.
Changó:	Alternating red and white beads one at a time, or six at a time.
Oshún:	One regular size red bead, one clear, one red, followed by 25 gold ones, then the whole sequence is repeated. Another variation is one red bead alternating with five yellow.

(Murphy 81-2, and González-Wippler 165).⁵²

⁵² *Orishas* have different paths. The path represented is signified by the color combination seen in the *ileke* (Ibid 165).

Appendix VII

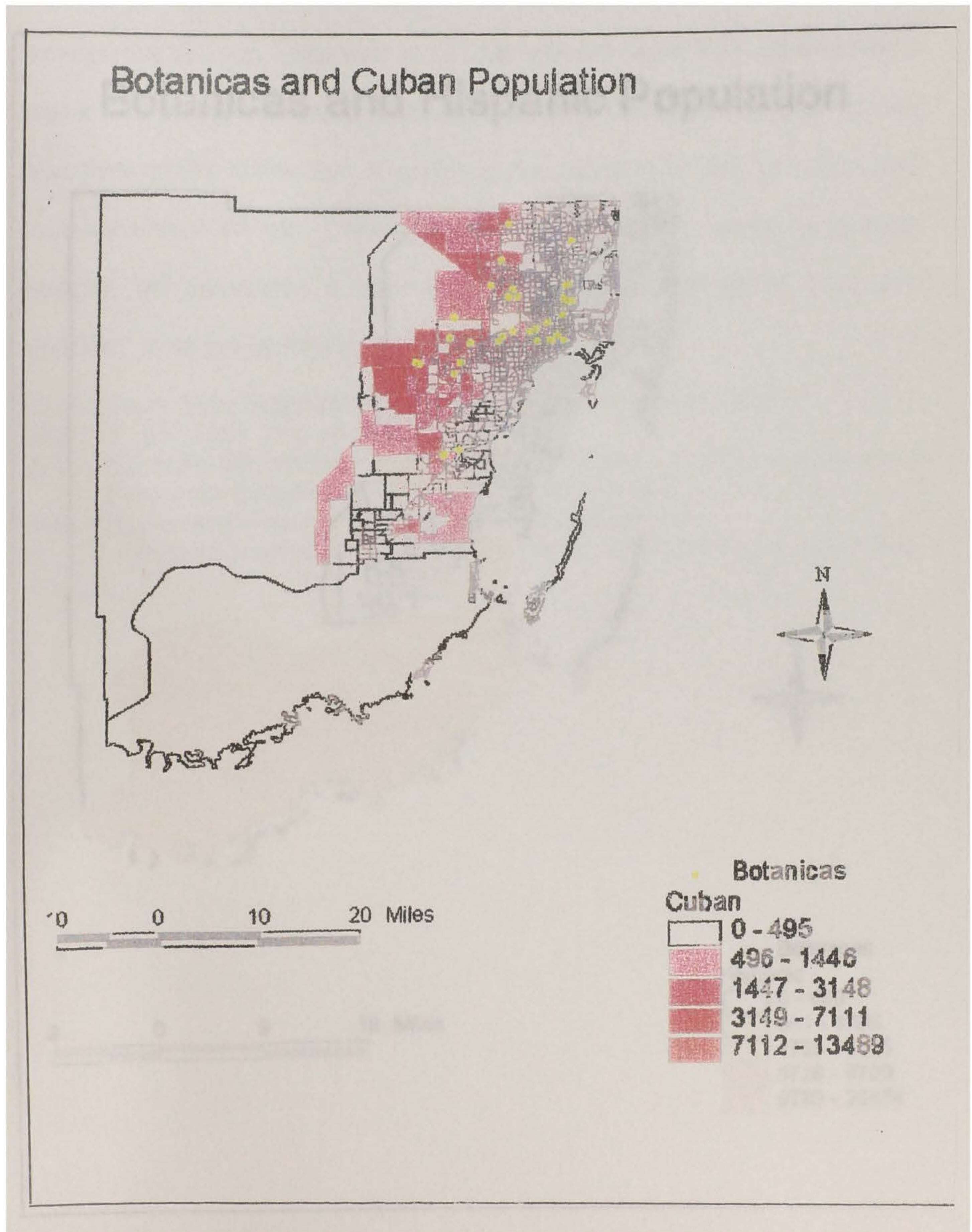
English Meaning of Some Powders and Sprays

Siete Potencias Africanas:	Essence. "Seven African Powers." Refers to the seven major deities of the ARC pantheon.
Amanza Guapos:	Insence. "Tame Agressiveness." Causes a calming effect on aggressive people.
Ven a mi:	Essence. "Come to me." Serves as an afrodisiac.
Bendicion de dinero al hogar:	Essence. "Blessings of money for the home." Believed to cause capital gain.
Arraza con todo:	Incense. "Destroy everything." Employed to clean up evil vibrations and enemies.
La mano poderosa:	Incense. "The powerful hand." Implores God's protection.

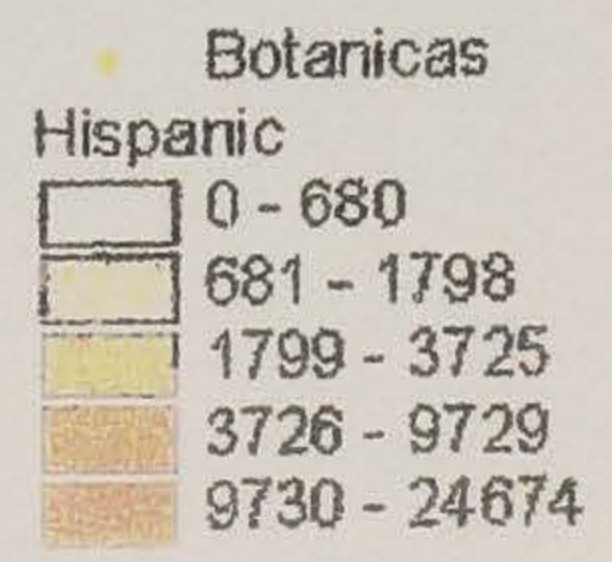
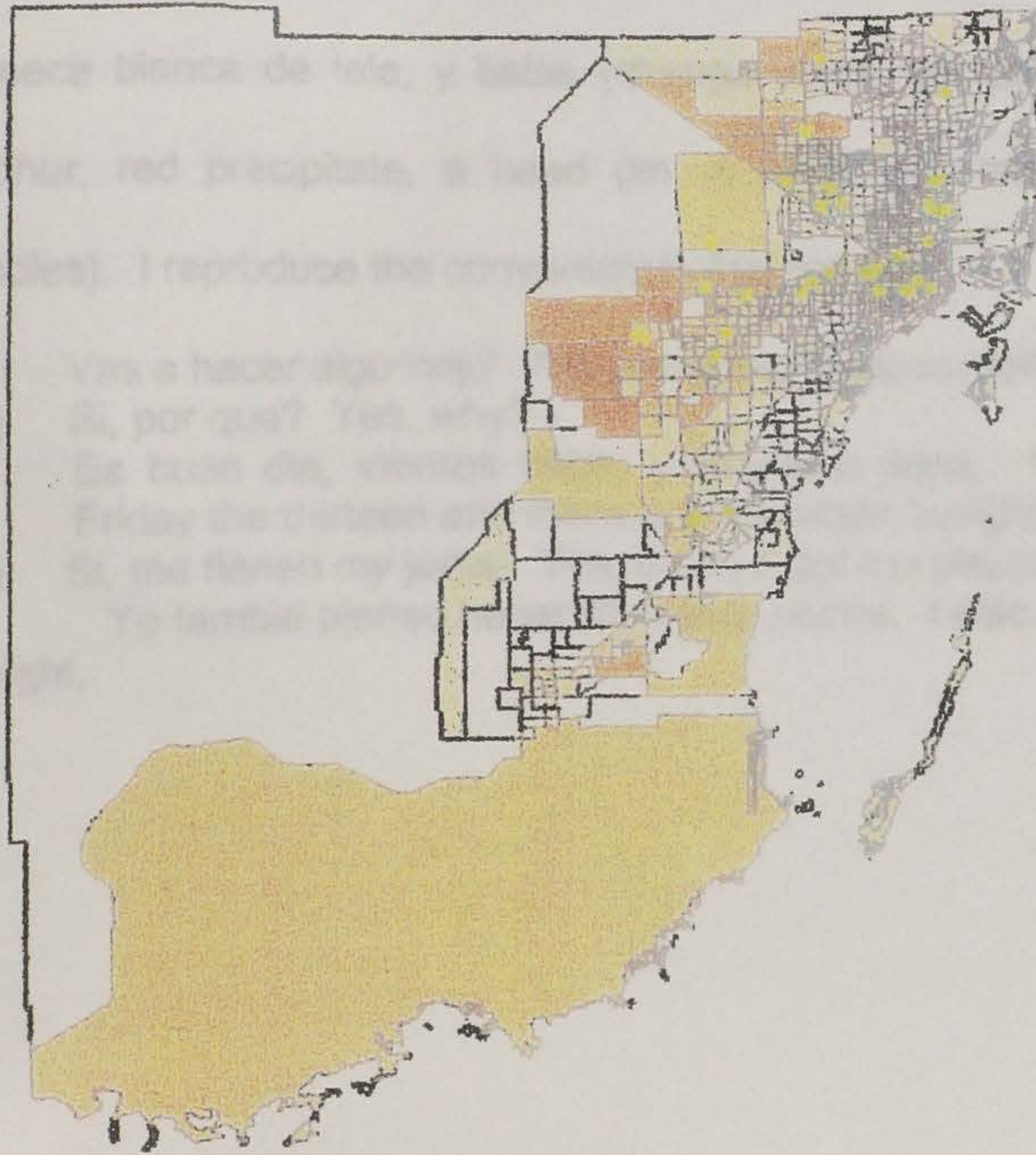
Note: Essences are sprayed around the house, usually during a cleansing rites, and involve at times prayers and songs. Incense is usually burned without rites. As stated in a footnote, some cleansings are referred to as *despojos*.

Appendix VIII

Block Groups and *Botánicas* in Dade County



Botanicas and Hispanic Population



Appendix IX

Participant Observation in *Botánica Ochún*: Dialogue

At this point, a white woman in her early thirties and of medium weight, entered the botánica. She took out of her purse a small (4x4) white piece of paper with something written on it, and asked for the following items: cambia vos, tate quieto, precipitado amarillo, azufre, precipitado rojo, un alfiler, una muñeca blanca de tela, y belas (change voice, be quiet, yellow precipitate, sulphur, red precipitate, a head pin, a white doll made out of cloth, and candles). I reproduce the conversation that ensued:

- (I) Vas a hacer algo hoy? Are you going to do something today?
(W) Si, por que? Yes, why?
(I) Es buen dia, viernes trece, y hay luna llena. It is a propitious day, Friday the thirteen and there is a full moon tonight.
(W) Si, me tienen my jodia! Yes, they've got me pissed!
(I) Yo tambie pienso hacer algo esta noche. I also plan to do something tonight.

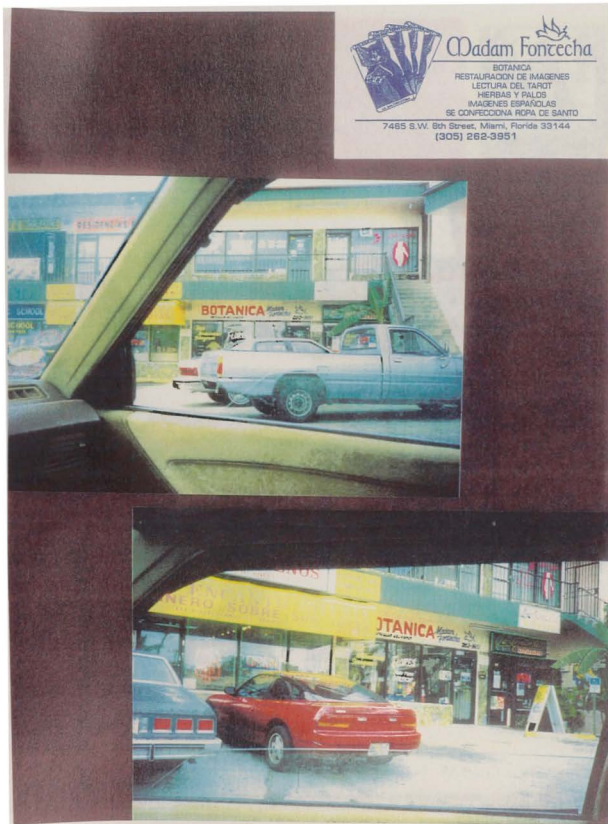
Appendix IX-A

Participant Observation in *Botánica Nena*: Dialogue

A particular interaction that occurred during my time there, best illustrates the dynamics involved in this type of business: a white North American woman, approximately in her thirties, entered the store carrying in her hand a small piece of white paper. In a broken down Spanish, she proceeded to ask for several things. The store personnel was very caring to her needs. After her departure. One of them commented: "*she will learn*", in reference to both the language and the religion's ways. At all times during the photographic session, I took care not to capture in film any client, their privacy deserving my respect.

Appendix X

Pictures



Appendix X-A

