

*UNIFICAR, ENSEÑAR, Y LIMPIAR LA IMAGEN:*

PUBLIC REPRESENTATION AND RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY IN SANTERÍA

AND THE HISTORY OF *LUKUMI V. HIALEAH*

by

BRICE A. BONGIOVANNI

(Under the Direction of Reinaldo Román)

The 1993 United States Supreme Court case *Lukumi v. Hialeah*, in which practitioners of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería successfully challenged laws banning religious animal sacrifice, has often been described by observers as an unprecedented and uncharacteristic public reaction by santeros against negative legal treatment and media representation in Miami during the 1980s. In fact, the clash between the negative public image of Santería and the public activities of Santería organizations in *Lukumi* was derived from historical precedents: The representation of Afro-Cuban religions as witchcraft in Republican Cuba and the counter-representation offered by Afro-Cuban religious organizations, *cabildos*, of their practices as a legitimate religion. In representing Santería as a legitimate religion in Miami, public Santería organizations sought to recreate the *cabildo* model of religious community and authority in a transnational context. This led to significant intra-religious conflict in Santería in the United States, which now can begin to be positioned within the larger history of Santería.

INDEX WORDS: Santería, African-Derived Religions, Cuba, Afro-Cubans, Cuban Immigrants, Miami, *Lukumi v. Hialeah*, *Cabildos*, Witchcraft, Animal Sacrifice, Transnational Religion, Diasporic Religion.

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## DEDICATION

For Mom and Dad, who knew exactly what I was getting into, and never let me give up.

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## INTRODUCTION:

*LUKUMI V. HIALEAH, TWENTY YEARS AFTER*

The scene at the June 9, 1987, meeting of the City Council of Hialeah, Florida, was angry and chaotic. Outside the Hialeah City Hall, a crowd of around 100 protestors held signs in English and Spanish reading “no satanic church in my Hialeah” and “Hialeah for Christ”; within the building, Hialeah mayor Raul Martinez and members of the City Council faced some 300 angry residents, members of local animal welfare organizations, and clergy, all with similar condemnations. The target of this outrage was the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé (CLBA), an organization of priests and adherents of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería, which in April 1987 had announced plans to build a dedicated permanent church building in Hialeah, just two blocks from City Hall.<sup>1</sup> The CLBA had also stated its intention to perform animal sacrifices at its planned location, inspiring widespread hostility from Hialeah residents. After three hours of angry debate, Mayor Martinez and members of the City Council adopted a resolution condemning the actions of “certain religions [that] may propose to engage in practices which are inconsistent with public morals, peace or safety” and an ordinance enforcing Florida’s state animal cruelty statute as a local law.<sup>2</sup>

The June 9 meeting began a legal process that reached the U.S. Supreme Court. In response to the passage of several other ordinances intended to prevent animal sacrifice in

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1. A note on terminology: Santería is also historically known as Lucumí/Lukumi religion [or *la religion Lucumí*], after the Afro-Cuban ethnic group from which it originated; this is the preferred terminology of a number of contemporary groups, including the CLBA. However, in the interest of clarity, I use “Santería” and “santeros” for the religion and its practitioners in the modern United States, “Lucumí religion/practitioners” for late Colonial/Republican Cuba, and “Lukumi” for the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* case.

2. Carlos Harrison, “Hialeah Move to Block Santería Sacrifices,” *Miami Herald*, June 10, 1987; City of Hialeah, Florida, Resolution No. 87-66 and Ordinance No. 87-40, June 9, 1987.

September 1987, the CLBA sued Hialeah for unlawful discrimination and the infringement of its constitutional right to Free Exercise of religion. Although the CLBA lost its initial trial in Federal District Court and its first appeal, the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously reversed those rulings and found the Hialeah ordinances unconstitutional in 1993's *Lukumi v. Hialeah* (508 U.S. 520, 1993). Justice Anthony M. Kennedy specifically noted the animus displayed against Santería in Hialeah, and the fact that the Hialeah ordinances targeted animal sacrifice while exempting other forms of slaughter, in ruling that the ordinances were neither religiously neutral nor generally applicable and thus unlawfully targeted Santería; the ruling protected religious animal sacrifice from being targeted as such by State and Federal government.<sup>3</sup>

From the perspective of any casual observer in Miami, the *Lukumi* decision represented a complete reversal of fortune for Santería. The religion, which had arrived in Miami with exiles from Revolutionary Cuba after 1959, was consistently the subject of negative press in Miami during the 1980s: it was linked variously to drug crime, the discovery of animal remains, and, as at the June 9 meeting in Hialeah, “satanic” and “cult” activities. Santeros themselves had almost no public presence, as most practiced discretely and privately. CLBA spokesman Ernesto Pichardo and the CLBA had been an exception to this secrecy, promoting Santería as a legitimate religious practice for much of the 1980s. Not surprisingly, then, Pichardo, who had developed the idea for the Hialeah project, hailed the verdict as an epochal shift for Santería: “Once and for all, for the first time in 500 years, Cubans and Afro-Cubans can come out and breathe fresh air... we can now worship God and be part of mainstream society.”<sup>4</sup>

Legal observers were more circumspect in their statements on the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* decision. *Lukumi* had come to national attention because of its relationship to Free Exercise

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3. *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé v. City of Hialeah*, 508 U.S. 520 (1993), 540-542.

4. Paul Anderson, Rachel L. Swarns, and Betty Cortina, “A Triumph for Santería: High Court Lifts Ban on Animal Sacrifices,” *Miami Herald*, June 12, 1993.

rights, and therefore to the controversial precedent set by 1990's *Employment Division v. Smith* (494 U.S. 876, 1990). *Smith* held that a law restricting Free Exercise need only be “generally applicable” and “religiously neutral” to stand as constitutional, weakening Free Exercise protections and making it far more difficult for minority religious groups to gain religious exemptions for their practices.<sup>5</sup> Many civil-liberties advocacy organizations hoped that *Lukumi* would lead to the reversal of *Smith*; in fact, *Lukumi* was judged under *Smith* and reinforced it as precedent. *Lukumi*'s failure to overturn *Smith* led to a decidedly mixed appraisal of *Lukumi*, with the majority of legal observers praising the substance of the ruling but criticizing the use of the *Smith* precedent to reach it.<sup>6</sup>

But most legal observers agreed that *Lukumi* was significant in granting legal recognition to Santería, consistently described as a “secretive” religion with a history of persecution. In a 1994 legal review otherwise critical of the *Lukumi* decision and the *Smith* precedent, Kenneth Karst suggested that this was the crux of the case: Hialeah acted not to restrict animal sacrifice, which was ongoing in Miami throughout the 1980s, but as a “group dominance” reaction against the CLBA's representation of Santería as a legitimate religion that had sparked the case with a role to play in the public sphere. Regardless of continued threats to animal sacrifice under the *Smith* precedent, Karst argued, the fact that the *Lukumi* ruling noted and condemned the animus displayed by Hialeah confirmed and validated this representation of Santería as a legitimate religion.<sup>7</sup>

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5. *Smith* involved two Oregonian members of the Native American Church who sued after being denied unemployment benefits because they were fired as a result of their religious peyote use. The *Smith* decision reversed the precedent set by *Sherbert v. Verner* (374 U.S. 398, 1963), which held that the state must demonstrate a “compelling government interest” before restricting free exercise and employ the “least restrictive means” in doing so; see *Employment Division, Department of Human Resources of Oregon v. Smith*, 494 U.S. 872 (1990), 876-890.

6. For a representative example of this kind of review, see “The Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye, Inc. v. City of Hialeah: Still Sacrificing Free Exercise,” *Baylor Law Review* 46 (1994): 259-280.

7. Kenneth L. Karst, “Religious Freedom and Equal Citizenship: Reflections on *Lukumi*,” *Tulane Law Review* 69 (1994): 344-346, 354-355.

Karst's assessment, and most of the legal and news coverage of *Lukumi v. Hialeah*, contained two assumptions: that secrecy and avoidance of the public sphere was the norm for Santería, and that the CLBA's representation of Santería as a legitimate religion was a legal strategy, meant to resist the negative representation of Santería and the legal repression that it engendered—repression other santeros avoided by practicing privately. German anthropologist Stephan Palmié, however, who conducted extensive ethnographic research with the CLBA and Ernesto Pichardo during the 1980s, suggested something else at work in the CLBA's activities before and during the *Lukumi* case.<sup>8</sup> In a 1996 review of the case, Palmié agreed that the CLBA's representation of Santería had secured it legal and cultural validation, and that it constituted a break with the secrecy that characterized most Santería practice in Miami.<sup>9</sup>

Palmié observed that the CLBA itself did not stand for a generalized "Santería," but rather a specific version of the religion antagonistic to other forms; Pichardo frequently criticized other santeros for what he saw as improper ritual practice or unethical behavior. Victory in *Lukumi* and the media attention the case had attracted gave Pichardo a position as public spokesman for Santería, which he could use to defend the religion against future threats—but which he could also use to exert religious authority over other santeros. Palmié predicted that *Lukumi* would lead to more santeros adopting the public organization and representation of the CLBA, if only to avoid being marginalized by the centralization of the CLBA's specific vision of Santería. He also briefly noted the establishment in 1988 of a group calling itself the Cabildo

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8. Palmié's work with the CLBA during the 1980s comprises one of the few full-length treatments of Santería in Miami; see Stephan Palmié, *Das Exil der Götter: Geschichte und Vorstellungswelt einer afrokubanischen Religion* ["The Gods in Exile: the History and Belief System of an Afro-Cuban Religion"] (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991); however, it remains published only in German.

9. Stephan Palmié, "Which Centre, Whose Margin? Notes Towards an Archaeology of U.S. Supreme Court Case 91-948, 1993," in *Inside and Outside the Law: Anthropological Studies of Authority and Ambiguity*, ed. Olivia Harris (New York: Routledge, 1996), 198-200.

Yoruba Omo Orisha, by Miami santero Miguel “Willie” Ramos, as evidence that this process had already begun prior to the final *Lukumi* decision.<sup>10</sup>

Palmié suggested a way of moving the history surrounding the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* decision beyond the legal case itself, by linking the CLBA’s public representation of Santería to the structure of the religious community of santeros in Miami. But in the twenty years since the *Lukumi* decision, few works have examined the history of *Lukumi* directly, and those that have consider it almost solely in legal terms.<sup>11</sup> David M. O’Brien’s 2004 *Animal Sacrifice and Religious Freedom*, the only full-length legal history of *Lukumi*, is primarily a legal work that touches on Pichardo’s friction with other santeros, but only as they related directly to the *Lukumi* case.<sup>12</sup> Paul Christopher Johnson puts *Lukumi* in a global and transnational context, in a 2005 article comparing the case to other forms of legal activism by African-derived religionists, but this context also remains primarily legal: Johnson suggests that African-derived religions are “predisposed to conflict with the state-based culture of legality,” and describes the CLBA’s public representation of Santería as a purely legal strategy of “simulation” of the State and dominant society, in contrast to Santería’s normal state of secrecy and avoidance of the state.<sup>13</sup>

This study seeks to expand the history to *Lukumi v. Hialeah* beyond the purely legal by exploring the relationship between public representation and religious community suggested by Palmié. It examines events before, during, and after the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* case, with an eye

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10. *Ibid.*, 202-205.

11. This criticism of course excludes the dozens of legal reviews of *Lukumi v. Hialeah*, which still comprise the vast majority of research on the case. The relatively recent date of *Lukumi* explains some of the lack of historical attention to the case, but it is still somewhat egregious that a work such as Mercedes Cros Sandoval’s *Worldview, the Orichas, and Santería*, published in 2006 and devoting an entire chapter to the recent history of Santería in Miami, still relegates *Lukumi* to a single paragraph and footnote; see Mercedes Cros Sandoval, *Worldview, the Orichas, and Santería: Africa to Cuba and Beyond* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 345, 380n1.

12. David M. O’Brien, *Animal Sacrifice and Religious Freedom: Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé v. City of Hialeah* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 29-32, 153-156.

13. Paul Christopher Johnson, “Three Paths to Legal Legitimacy: African Diaspora Religions and the State,” *Culture and Religion* 6 (2005): 85-89.

towards placing those events within the larger history of Santería's development in Cuba and establishment in the United States. What emerges from this examination is that the public representation of Santería engaged in by the CLBA, and a number of other publically active santeros and Santería organizations, was not simply a response to negative representations or legal repression of Santería. In representing Santería as a "legitimate" religion, these groups also advanced a model of Santería organization and religious community to santeros in Miami—a model drawn from a Cuban antecedent, the *cabildos* established in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by Lucumí Afro-Cubans, the religious forebears of modern santeros.<sup>14</sup>

The title of this study comes from the "mission statement" of the Cabildo Yoruba Omo Orisha, the same organization that Palmié noted briefly in 1996. In the first issue of *Eleda*, a monthly newsletter published by the Cabildo Yoruba's small staff, Willie Ramos summarized the Cabildo Yoruba's goals as to "unify, teach, and cleanse the image" of Santería in the United States.<sup>15</sup> This message of change and reform was a response to the recent "distinct disturbances involving animal sacrifice": the Hialeah ordinances and the ongoing lawsuit of the CLBA. But it was also a response to what Ramos described as the degradation of religious knowledge and the sense of communal "brotherhood" among santeros in the United States. The solution, according to Ramos, was to recapitulate the role played by Lucumí cabildos in Republican Cuba—the protection of what would become Santería practice against serious repression and negative representation in Republican Cuba and the establishment of the proper forms of Santería practice and community organization. These two processes, the public representation of Santería against

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14. Cabildo originally referred to the *cabildos de nación*, societies organized by the Spanish Catholic Church to catechize newly arrived slaves of different "nations"; during the mid-nineteenth century it was adopted as a term for private organizations made up of members of those nations and their descendents, such as the Lucumí.

15. "Unificar, enseñar, y limpiar la imagen de esta religión tan intrigante que llamamos Santería"; see "Editorial," *Eleda*, (November 1988), 1.

outside forces and the organization of Santería's beliefs and practices, became one and the same in the *cabildo* model.<sup>16</sup>

The existence of groups like the *Cabildo Yoruba*, the Church of the *Lukumi*, and other Santería organizations and santeros who engaged with the *cabildo* model in Miami at the time of *Lukumi v. Hialeah* demonstrates clearly that the public representation these groups engaged in had deeper religious and communal meaning than “merely” a strategy for fighting negative representations or legal repression. But Ramos' articulation of the *cabildo* model raises a number of questions. First, Ramos' historicization of the situation faced by santeros in Miami as akin to that faced by the *Lucumí* *cabildos* in Republican Cuba would seem to compare two drastically different periods. The Hialeah ordinances were the worst form of repression faced by santeros in Miami, while Afro-Cuban religions were subject to frequent police harassment, arrests, and even lynchings, all based on fears of Afro-Cuban *brujería* [witchcraft].<sup>17</sup> Second, Ramos also characterized the *cabildo* model as a kind of ideal transnational or diasporic religious formation that would allow santeros to function in American society but also to maintain and protect their *Lucumí* religious heritage and practice—fulfilling what Thomas Tweed calls the two principle active roles of religion, “making home” for practitioners in the present, but “crossing boundaries” to chronologically or geographically distant homelands.<sup>18</sup> Yet in the same editorial Ramos asserted the need for the *cabildo* model to reform the dysfunctional community dynamics

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16. *Ibid.*, 1-2.

17. While the actual incidence of legal action against *brujería* was low in terms of arrests and convictions, since the 1990s the fear of *brujería* has been understood by historians to be connected to larger fears of Afro-Cuban rebellion and racially motivated violence present in late Colonial and early Republican Cuba, and contributing to the disenfranchisement and extrajudicial killing of Afro-Cubans; see Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1866-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 108-116, 238-239.

18. Tweed bases his theory of religion on the idea that the religious experience can be understood in terms of a conceptual—and physical—home, to which the practitioner is always in a state of movement, separation, or return; this theory was informed partially by his study of Cuban Catholics among the Cuban exiles in Miami; see Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 1-8, 80-89.

and poor transmission of traditions in the Miami Santería community—itsself a product of the diaspora of Cubans to the United States after the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Unaddressed in Ramos’ editorial was why a form of community organization as fundamental to the history of Santería, and as functional in a diasporic environment as the *cabildo* model, was apparently lost to *santeros* in the United States prior to the 1980s.

Finally, despite Ramos’ boosterism for the *cabildo* model in *Eleda*, his establishment and operation of the *Cabildo Yoruba*, and the activities of Ernesto Pichardo and the CLBA, the fact remains that the public representation and community reformation of Santería suggested by these groups and others never became truly popular among *santeros* in Miami during the 1980s. The *Cabildo Yoruba* itself collapsed after only two years of activity, due to lack of funds and support. Although the majority of *santeros* in Miami did not directly criticize the CLBA or other public Santería organizations during the 1980s—certainly not openly—Palmié observed that many were skeptical of the public representation of Santería and resented what they saw as an attempt on the part of public *santeros* like Pichardo to assert religious authority over others.<sup>19</sup> The victory of the CLBA in *Lukumi v. Hialeah* was thus not only a reversal of the fortunes of Santería in the Miami press or before the law; it was also a reversal of the fortunes of the CLBA in its struggle over the form of the Santería community. In 1996, Palmié could only speculate on the possible impact of this reversal; twenty years after *Lukumi*, it is possible to explore its effects in greater detail.

Each of the following chapters engages a different aspect of these open questions on the history surrounding *Lukumi v. Hialeah*. Together, they examine a range of examples of public representations of Santería, varying with each chapter—principally examples from the news media, but including popular culture, academic and educational materials, and communications and information disseminated over the Internet. Likewise, each chapter draws on a selection of

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19. Palmié, “Which Centre?” 202-203.

scholarly references specific to its subject matter, though there is an overall emphasis on recent work that examines how African-derived religions are conceptualized in society and the specific historical roles played by practitioners of those religions in shaping those conceptions. What connects these chapters methodologically is their shared emphasis on historicizing the events surrounding *Lukumi v. Hialeah* and considering them in the context of the transnational motion of both representations and religious practitioners from Cuba to the United States.

Chapter one considers the history of the negative representation of Santería, attempting to historicize more rigorously the relationship between press and official depictions of brujería in Republican Cuba and the terms used to describe Santería in Miami during the 1980s. These two historical periods are linked by what Kristina Wirtz terms a shared “metacultural frame of suspicion” against African-derived religions.<sup>20</sup> In both Cuba and Miami, this suspicion manifested in representations of African-derived practices as a generalized witchcraft. In turn, this representation of witchcraft contributed, in both Cuba and Miami, to an environment of “moral panic” against African-derived religious practices—the displacing of contemporary societal anxieties onto these marginalized religions.<sup>21</sup> The specific representational terms and social causes of moral panic differed in historically and culturally specific ways between Cuba and Miami—and the scale and severity of the panic was drastically worse in Cuba—but in both cases the panic was driven by the tendency of the press to sensationalize the supposed barbarity and racial “otherness” of African-derived religions and their practitioners and fears of religiously

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20. Wirtz described this suspicion as a preemptive assumption that African practices are potential sources of violence, arising from the fears of white slaveholders, in Kristina Wirtz, “Santería in Cuban National Consciousness: A Religious Case of the Doble Moral,” *The Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 9 (2008): 415-416.

21. The concept of moral panic was originally developed by Stanley S. Cohen to describe the excessive response of the British media and government to youth crime during the 1960s, but it has since been applied to other historical cases; see Stanley Cohen, introduction to the 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), xv.

motivated violence; fears of child sacrifice by Afro-Cuban *brujos* in Cuba were mirrored by fears of satanic cultists in Miami.

Chapter two retraces the same period of history as the first chapter, but considers the development of the *cabildo* model and its role in shaping the public representation of Lucumí religion and Santería in Cuba and the United States. The analysis of the *cabildo* model here relies largely on David H. Brown's observation that the Lucumí *cabildos* indeed played a formative role in codifying Lucumí religion and Afro-Cuban identity, but that this formative process was also characterized by controversy and internal conflict from the beginning, which led to an environment of conflict between *cabildos*.<sup>22</sup> This conflict, magnified by social and cultural changes in Cuba and the experience of diaspora after 1959, produced the private, autonomous, and mutually competitive form of religious community decried by Ramos in *Eleda*. The attempt by the *Cabildo Yoruba*, the CLBA, and other *santeros* to create a more institutionalized, unified *cabildo* model in the United States led to a conflict between two organizational models; both derive, historically and transnationally from the "original" Lucumí *cabildos*.

Chapter three turns to developments following the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* decision and explores both the social and legal position of Santería in United States over the past twenty years and Palmié's suggestion that the CLBA's victory would lead to increased public representation and organization as a means of contesting authority in the Santería community. Though negative representations of Santería continue to appear, and it continues to come under police scrutiny in some high-profile cases, the status of Santería generally improved during the 1990s and 2000s. This improvement was a result of the *Lukumi* decision, but also of the increased public exposure

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22. Brown describes this formative role, and the conflict it engendered, in terms of the development and advancement of a "Creole taste" that preserved African practices but presented them through Cuban cultural media; much of the conflict over Santería in the United States hinges on the relative utility and appropriateness of this Creole imagery in the present. See David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 62-112, 276-286.

granted to the CLBA and Ernesto Pichardo. As Palmié predicted, the increased public profile of Pichardo, Ramos, and a number of other public santeros has led to intensified and increasingly public conflict over religious authority, a conflict increasingly conducted via the Internet. The most recent development in this conflict has been a battle over conceptions of Santería practice and religious identity as “African” or “Afro-Cuban,” leading to significant divisions in the Santería community in Miami and in the United States.

This study does not exhaustively explore the nature of public representation and religious community in Santería in the United States. It focuses on events and representations linked to the historical context of the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* decision, privileging events in Miami or connected to the Miami Santería community. Similarly, as an examination of *public* representation, this study focuses on the activities of a relatively small number of public figures within Santería in the United States; the discussion of “religious community” herein is still cast in relation to the activities of these major figures. The conclusion to this study suggests a number of ways forward from this situation: the exploration of public representations in locations where Santería is being established for the first time; the ethnographic study of emergent Santería organizations and their understandings of public representation and the state of the Santería religious community; and the systematic study of online communication by santeros, which has become the primary space for public representation and the organization of religious community in Santería in the twenty-first century.

## CHAPTER 1

### REPRESENTATIONS OF WITCHCRAFT IN CUBA AND MIAMI

On October 12, 1982, the *Miami Herald* reported a strange discovery at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> Street and Drexel Avenue in Miami Beach, near the site of the proposed new headquarters for the Miami Beach Police Department. Two plastic bags found at the intersection contained parts from a goat, a chicken, and an unspecified bird, along with pennies, candy, and corn. Assistant Medical Examiner Charles Wetli identified the remains as “symbolic of the Santería religion” and observed “something or somebody over here is being cursed tonight for whatever reason.” A local resident, Dave Schiener, suggested that the target of the curse was the proposed police headquarters, and cast suspicion on Cubans who had settled in the neighborhood after the Mariel Boatlift in 1980: “We’ve heard that these Mariel refugees don’t want police in this neighborhood. Tonight they put a curse on this building to make sure police don’t move in.”<sup>1</sup>

In a follow-up article on October 14, the *Herald* reported that the Miami Beach Police Department was unconcerned with any threat of a “curse” on its new location and would close investigations into the remains. In the neighborhood, however, the incident had become a source for worry and the subject of grisly rumors. An anonymous resident insisted to the *Herald* reporter “I saw the police going through the bags . . . a goat don’t have no human hands or baby head. I know what I saw.”<sup>2</sup>

The discovery of animal remains in situations similar to the incident in Miami Beach was characteristic of the type of news story that focused attention on Santería in the Miami area

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1. Michael H. Cottman, “Signs of Santería Seen as Curse on Police Site,” *Miami Herald*, October 12, 1982.  
 2. Laura Owens, “Animal Remains Won’t Stop Discussion,” *Miami Herald*, October 14, 1982.

during the 1980s. Over the decade there were dozens of reports, and likely more unreported or unrecorded cases, of animal sacrifices interrupted by police or of animal remains and ritual objects discovered in public places. Media treatments of these discoveries recorded and reproduced certain conceptions of Santería from the authorities and the public. As in the 1982 Miami Beach case, Santería was commonly linked to the region's explosive crime rate, and both were associated with the Mariel exiles or Marielitos, whose 1980 exodus from Cuba to South Florida was popularly linked with the increase in both drug crime and instances of animal sacrifice. Other cases focused on the potential threat posed by Santería to animal welfare and public health, through the disposal of sacrificial remains and allegations of grave robbery. All the incidents became cause for increased official scrutiny of the religion's practices and practitioners during the 1980s, climaxing in the city of Hialeah's ban on animal sacrifice in 1987.

Although anxieties over Santería during the 1980s were connected to contemporary social and civil problems, the rumor of infant sacrifice in the Miami Beach case suggests a deeper role played by cultural representations of African-derived religions in shaping attitudes towards Santería in Miami. Santería and other African-derived religions that developed in the slave societies of the Americas have historically been subject to what Kristina Wirtz terms a "metacultural frame of suspicion" that classified "African" beliefs and practices in opposition to "modern," European civilization.<sup>3</sup> The Miami press reproduced this suspicion directly, referring to Santería as a form of "voodoo" or as a "cult," terms that carried connotations of dangerous superstition and ritual violence. Indirectly, reports that focused on aspects of Santería in contexts of criminal activity or violence, and on the most sensational or bizarre incidents of animal

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3. Kristina Wirtz, "Santería in Cuban National Consciousness: A Religious Case of the Doble Moral," *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 9 (2008): 416.

sacrifice and other ritual activity, represented Santería at best as primitive and incomprehensible and at worst as barbaric and threatening.

Official efforts to restrict Santería practice in the Miami area during the 1980s can thus be seen as following a pattern of past legal suppression of African-derived religions, including the suppression of Santería in early twentieth-century Cuba. Many of the negative representations of Santería seen during the 1980s, such as its alleged connection with criminality, resembled the representations of Santería in Cuba, and were even directly derived from Cuban representations of Santería as *brujería*—sorcery or witchcraft—rather than legitimate religion. This image of witchcraft remained the key factor in the treatment of Santería in Miami, but in a distinctly U.S. form, shaped by social concerns over the drug trade and animal welfare, and even by a contrasting image of witchcraft, represented by allegations of Satanism, that swept the entire United States during the decade.

#### Caribbean Moral Panics and the Frame of Suspicion

The frame of suspicion towards Santería described by Wirtz was an aspect of the basal fear among slave-owners and Euroamerican colonials that African practices would be used to harm whites, or to organize rebellion against the colonial slave system.<sup>4</sup> In Cuba, this dynamic was illustrated by the Colonial treatment of the *cabildos de nacion*, the organizations established by the Spanish Catholic Church to control and Christianize African slaves of different ethnicities (*naciones*). Whites relied on the *cabildos de nacion* as a means of social control, and even as objects of entertainment, the *cabildos* were never free of the suspicion directed at all black social gatherings. As the Cuban slave population increased dramatically along with the boom in sugar production at the end of the eighteenth century, this suspicion came to outweigh the social role of the *cabildos de nacion*. White fears of black organization and potential uprising led to a series of

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4. Wirtz, “Santería,” 416.

municipal and colony-wide laws in nineteenth-century Cuba that restricted the Afro-Cubans' ability to meet and publicly assemble, particularly during the Ten Years' War (1868-1878), the first Cuban independence struggle. The suppression of the *cabildos de nacion* culminated with an 1884 law that banned the groups from meeting and eliminated their ecclesiastical status.<sup>5</sup>

The most important expression of this suspicion for the history of modern Santería, however, came after the abolition of slavery in Cuba (1886), during the decades following Cuban independence in 1902. During the 1900s and 1910s, and as late as the early 1940s, Republican Cuba saw repeated accusations that practitioners of African *brujería* had kidnapped and murdered children, almost always white, for ritual purposes. The most infamous cases were the murders of the 20-month old *niña Zoila* in Havana in 1904, which ended in the execution of Domingo Bocourt and Victor Molina, and 3-year old *niña Cecilia* in Matanzas in 1919, which led to the lynching of the accused by prison guards attempting to head off a riot of outraged citizens.<sup>6</sup> Cuban police also frequently raided Afro-Cuban religious sites, harassing adherents and confiscating ritual objects.

In his 1991 study of the *niña Cecilia* case, Ernesto Chávez Alvarez suggested that accusations of *brujería* proliferated during this time because of predominantly white Cuban fears of growing black civic and social power, thanks to universal male suffrage and increased immigration from elsewhere in the Caribbean.<sup>7</sup> Aline Helg expands on this observation, noting that while the government of Republican Cuba publicly denounced racial discrimination, Cuban elites remained suspicious of any overtly African social or political organizations as

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5 David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 44-56.

6. For a breakdown of the *niña Zoila* and *niña Cecilia* cases, see Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 107-115.

7. Ernesto Chavez Alvarez, *El Crimen de la Niña Cecilia: La Brujería en Cuba Como Fenómeno Social* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1991), 26-27.

manifestations of black primitivism or animosity toward whites that might threaten the stability and ongoing modernization of the Cuban state. Accusations of brujería were part of a larger crackdown on black Cuban organizations and institutions seen as overly African or otherwise threatening to the Cuban government, most infamously the Cuban “race war” of 1912. The Partido Independiente de Color (PIC), a political party made up largely of black veterans of the independence conflict, was banned from elections for its alleged racism; in response, members of the PIC staged an armed protest in Oriente province, which was suppressed by the Cuban military with significant loss of life among black Cubans in the region.<sup>8</sup>

In this political context, child killings blamed on brujería were played up by some Cuban public figures, particularly newspaper editors and intellectuals, in order to delegitimize Afro-Cuban activism with ostensible proof of black barbarism. But accusations of brujería were more than the work of an elite, anti-black conspiracy; they were also the product of real anxiety about potential black violence by both the white Cuban populace at large and the same elites who promoted the outcry over brujería. In fact, the fear of brujería was more real than the actual crimes alleged to have been committed by brujos, most of which were ultimately dismissed for lack of evidence. In this sense, the treatment of brujos closely resembled Stanley Cohen’s model of moral panic, a process in which social anxieties become focused on actions associated with a marginalized or “deviant” group. A panic may be sparked by actual events—the brujería panics were based on actual child murders—but the blame assigned to the targeted group is either disproportionate to its involvement or entirely fictive. Cohen observed that the “panic” resulted from an excessive and often sensationalized media and official response to the foundational

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8. Helg, *Our Rightful Share*, 195-226.

event, which generated more public anxiety and in turn even more excessive response to future events.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most useful aspects of Cohen's theory of moral panic is the concept of a media "inventory," a body of images and narratives repeated in the media coverage of events linked to a panic, which are exaggerated and distorted to the point of creating the impression that even disparate events represent the same threatening phenomenon.<sup>10</sup> The presence of such an inventory was a key factor in the brujería panics of Republican Cuba. Reinaldo Román describes brujería child murder cases as forming a "genre" of newspaper reporting, with the same roles and narrative arc repeating again and again in the coverage of different cases, both actual killings and alleged attempts at kidnapping. The elements of this inventory were based largely on the 1904 niña Zoila case, the first high-profile brujería crime: the victims or near-victims were primarily white girls; the accused were blacks allegedly acting in small groups, mostly men with some women, who required white flesh and especially blood for some form of ritual healing; additional accusations of sexual violence and cannibalism were present in some cases.<sup>11</sup> This representational inventory developed in spite of the fact that there was no law against brujería as such, and that the majority of brujería cases were dismissed for lack of evidence; the mere presence or event the suggestion of images associated with brujería was enough to support the panic.<sup>12</sup>

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9. Cohen conceived of moral panic as intrinsically connected to late modern mass media, particularly large newspapers with regional or national circulations. However, scholars have expanded the concept to include cases involving early print media or even orally-transmitted complexes of rumor and folklore ("rumor panic"), allowing the incorporation of early modern European witchcraft trials and medieval blood libel cases under the rubric of moral panic; see Stanley Cohen, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 11-13.

10. *Ibid.*, 16-34.

11. Reinaldo Román, *Governing Spirits: Religion, Miracles, and Spectacles in Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1898-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 86-93.

12. Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 53-59.

Press representations of brujería further developed through another form of media representation, the work of public intellectuals. The earliest systematic ethnography of Afro-Cuban religious practices, Fernando Ortiz's 1906 *Hampa afro-cubana: Los negros brujos* was, as the title suggests, an attempt to classify and explain the phenomenon of brujería in the aftermath of the niña Zoila case. Relying extensively on the descriptions of the case made by the press and police, Ortiz argued that Afro-Cuban practices were atavistic holdovers from more primitive, violent African society, preserved by the black criminal underground (the *hampa*) which continued to operate according to primitive social norms. He compared African practices to historical European witchcraft and magic, and suggested that brujería threatened Cuban whites not only directly, but also by popularizing superstition and witchcraft among the Cuban population in general, a threat Ortiz described in medical terms as a matter of national moral hygiene.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, the work of Ortiz and fellow criminologist Israel Castellanos became effective manuals for the police in investigating allegations of brujería, and provided an authoritative source on to reporters as to what did or did not qualify as a brujería crime.<sup>14</sup> The irony of Ortiz's work is that, while he was among the first to study Afro-Cuban religion systematically, his reliance on the representations of Afro-Cuban practice presented the press and law enforcement ultimately reinforced that model of brujería.

Taken together, the terms used by the Cuban press and by scholars like Ortiz to describe African-derived practices codified and disseminated a new version of the old category of evil magic or witchcraft. *Brujería*, *hechicería*, and *fetichismo* were terms that flowed freely between European practices considered heretical or pagan and African and indigenous American practices

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13. Fernando Ortiz, *Hampa afro-cubana: Los negros brujos* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1973), 117-179, 221-253.

14. Román draws attention to a 1923 case in which a black Cuban girl named Justina was repeatedly harmed by her family members for ritual healing purposes, a fact corroborated by court testimony. Despite apparent confirmation that an actual "ritual" crime had taken place, Castellanos did not ascribe the term "brujo" to Justina's tormentors: she was black and had not been murdered, and so did not fit the model of a brujería victim; see Román, 90-91.

during the Colonial era, reconfigured variously as legal or scientific terms to suit the needs of Colonial powers.<sup>15</sup> Nor was this process limited to Cuba; moral panic and legal suppression of practices characterized as “obeah” or “voodoo,” involving accusations of sacrifice and cannibalism, were present throughout the Caribbean during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Lara Putnam connects the spread of these fears and the resultant anti-witchcraft laws to the increased capacity of Afro-Caribbeans to travel and interact transnationally during the late nineteenth century, spreading and sharing both African-derived religious practices and popular images of magic and the occult brought from nineteenth-century Europe. Like Ortiz in Cuba, white authorities across the Caribbean feared that black social organization and interaction would lead to both criminal and moral threats to white-dominated society; as in Cuba, accusations of human sacrifice were the ultimate expression of this fear.<sup>16</sup>

The fear of black political and economic power was a constant behind moral panics over African-derived religion even when the inventory at work varied considerably. The United States saw an episode of moral panic directed at Haitian Vodou in New Orleans during the late Reconstruction and post-Reconstruction period of the 1870s and 1880s. This panic was grounded in the same fear of black political power as the Cuban *brujería* panics. In New Orleans, however, the representation of Vodou as witchcraft focused on the barbaric *sexual* activities of its practitioners, who unlike the Cuban *brujos* were largely women. The New Orleans press represented Vodou performances as “barbaric orgies” that presented both a moral threat to whites from sexualized women practitioners and also a physical threat from the sex-crazed men

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15. Roger Sansi, “Sorcery and Fetishism in the Modern Atlantic,” in *Sorcery in the Black Atlantic*, ed. Luis Nicolau Parés and Roger Sansi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 21-37.

16. Lara Putnam, “Rites of Power and Rumors of Race: The Circulation of Supernatural Knowledge in the Greater Caribbean, 1890-1940,” in *Obeah and Other Powers: The Politics of Caribbean Religion and Healing*, ed. Diana Paton and Maarit Forde (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 247-262.

they controlled.<sup>17</sup> In a broader sense, rape and sexual violence played the central representational role in the United States that sacrifice did in the Caribbean. Helg notes that the figure of the black rapist in the post-Reconstruction United States fulfilled the same role as the black brujo or obeah-man in providing a rationale for the restriction of blacks during this period, but in a way particular to the racial politics of the region. Intimations of black sexual violence justified the blanket repression of black in a region, the United States South, with little history of free black political activity; in contrast, the image of the brujo limited repression only to Afro-Cubans who engaged in unacceptably “African” practices.<sup>18</sup>

### *Representation beyond Panic*

The image of brujería in early twentieth-century Cuba penetrated the popular and official understandings of Afro-Cuban religion so thoroughly that it continued to have an effect, even as incidents of moral panic waned and popular attitudes began to change. By the early 1920s in Cuba, artists and intellectuals in Cuba had begun to reconceptualize Afro-Cuban cultural and religious practices as a legitimate part of the heritage of all Cubans, the basis for a Cuban form of *mestizaje* that was articulated against ongoing political, economic, and cultural domination by the United States. The cultural movement that arose from this reconceptualization, *afrocubanismo*, attracted the involvement of anthropologists and folklorists, including Fernando Ortiz, who had come to moderate his views on African-derived religious practices. From the 1920s to the 1950s, these scholars—principally Ortiz, Romulo Lachatañeré, and Lydia Cabrera—greatly furthered the ethnographic study of African-derived religions in Cuba and

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17. Michelle Y. Gordon, “‘Midnight Scenes and Orgies’: Public Narratives of Voodoo in New Orleans and Nineteenth-Century Discourses of White Supremacy,” *American Quarterly* 64 (2012): 776-780.

18. Aline Helg, “Black Men, Racial Stereotyping, and Violence in the U.S. South and Cuba at the Turn of the Century,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42 (July 2000): 477-489.

promoted the public performance of African dance and music, which gave practitioners of these religions the opportunity to practice openly with some degree of official acceptance.<sup>19</sup>

Wirtz describes the work of these scholars and other supporters of afrocubanismo as developing a new “folkloric” stance towards African-derived religions, but notes that while this folkloric stance accepted some of the “sacred” frame of reference of Afro-Cuban religionists themselves, it nevertheless remained bounded by the frame of suspicion. The folkloric stance valorized the art and mythology of African-derived religions as culturally important, but continued to deride ritual practices as superstition.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, not all African-derived religions in Cuba were equally acceptable under the folkloric frame. The orishas of Lucumí religion were easily compared to the pantheons of Western mythology or to Catholic saints—the common use of saints’ images as analogues to the orishas in Lucumí practice influenced Lachateñeré’s use of the term “Santería.”<sup>21</sup> In contrast, the Congo-derived practices known as Palo, which focused on the dead and employed distinctive cauldrons called *ngangas* as its ritual objects, were more easily classified as witchcraft and remained subject to suspicion.<sup>22</sup>

The representation of “voodoo” elsewhere in the Caribbean and in the United States underwent a somewhat similar shift during the 1920s and 1930s, in conjunction with the U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915-1934). While U.S. marines officially suppressed Vodou practice, U.S. observers produced bestselling accounts of Haitian religion and culture for popular audiences. Many of these, such as William Seabrook’s *The Magic Island* (1929), played up the traditional negative images of cannibalism and human sacrifice, but for entertainment value rather than to

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19. Wirtz, “Santería,” 416-417.

20. *Ibid.*, 424.

21. For a discussion of Lachateñeré’s approach to the name Santería, see Eugenio Matibag, *Afro-Cuban Religious Experience: Cultural Reflections in Narrative* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 113-119.

22. Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 189-200.

spark racist outrage—*The Magic Island*, for example, inspired the first film depiction of zombies, *White Zombie* (1932). Kate Ramsey observes that even more sympathetic accounts, such as Marine Faustin Wirkus’ *The White King of La Gonave* (1931) and Zora Neale Hurston’s *Tell My Horse* (1938), which was intended as a folkloric study that would counteract negative depictions of Vodou from whites, fed into the public appetite for images of the “primitive” and “bizarre,” often highly sexualized.<sup>23</sup> If a metacultural frame could be said to exist for African-derived religion in the United States, it would be one of “spectacle,” derived from suspicion and employing the same negative representations but inspiring titillation more so than panic.

The afrocubanismo movement made Santería acceptable in Cuba in opposition to the negative image of brujería, while voodoo became a pop-cultural trope in the United States *because* of its association with witchcraft and exotic ritual. Both cases, however, demonstrate the survival of the inventory behind moral panic long after the incident of panic was over. When Santería began to be transported from Cuba to the United States, first by Cuban travelers during the 1940s and 1950s and subsequently by Cuban exiles in the aftermath of the 1959 Cuban Revolution, it entered an environment in which the cultural memory African-derived religion as witchcraft—whether brujería or voodoo—was the only widespread cultural representation of African-derived religion. During the 1960s and 1970s this image of witchcraft would largely remain in the realm of popular culture, but events in the 1980s would return it to the fore as part of a new period of suspicion and moral panic.

#### Building an Inventory of Suspicion in Miami

Although Santería was practiced by significant numbers of adherents in the United States in the years following the Cuban Revolution, during the 1960s and 1970s it lacked visibility as a

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23. Kate Ramsey, *The Spirits and the Law: Vodou and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 158-176.

distinctive religion. Santería received relatively little publicity in South Florida and the Miami area. Despite the impact of afrocubanismo in Cuban society during the preceding decades, and the presence of such noted afrocubanist figures as Lydia Cabrera among the Exile, the largely white exile community that formed in Miami became characterized by anti-communism and Catholicism. Catholicism in particular was over-represented in Miami compared to Cuba due to the relatively large percentage of Catholic exiles and the adoption of Catholicism as a symbol of opposition to Castro. Given this unfriendly environment, the practitioners of Santería and Palo among the Exile population practiced privately and avoided public attention.<sup>24</sup> When Santería in Miami was the subject of reporting, it appeared as a curiosity in human-interest articles, or as a passing subject in discussions of other topics, such as a 1975 *Newsweek* report that discussed “Afro-Cuban Santería cults” only as difficulties for the Catholic Archdiocese of Miami.<sup>25</sup>

Santería had a somewhat greater public presence in New York, where a more diverse community, including Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and African Americans, practiced it. Here, too, however, publicly accessible information on Santería was limited and often highly generalized, and colored by the prevalent metacultural frame of spectacle. Non-academic works on Santería available during the 1970s tended towards the present it in terms of New Age spiritualism and magic.<sup>26</sup> The simple lack of exposure of Santería in the broader culture actually relieved the religion of some of the suspicion previously directed towards it. A 1979 profile of Santería in the *New York Times*, written by Edward Tivnan, was probably the best possible representation of Santería during this period precisely because Tivnan approached the subject with little previous

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24. For a complete discussion of the role Catholicism among the Cuban exile population in Miami, see Thomas Tweed, *Our Lady of Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 43-55, 83-97.

25. Susan Cheever Cowley and William Schmidt, “Miami’s Angry Cubans,” *Newsweek*, September 1, 1975.

26. An example is the work of the Puerto Rican author Migene González-Wippler, whose presentation of Santería was accurate but also slanted toward providing practical instructions on magic spells and divination.

exposure to the religion; he was diligent in trying to present accurate facts and adherents' own views on their religions, and even made a point of arguing against the suspicion of African-derived religions as witchcraft or "a ghetto weapon for hurting people."<sup>27</sup>

As Tivnan's argument in favor of Santería suggests, however, the frame of suspicion towards Santería was still present. In Miami, there were a number of cases in which the press represented Santería as witchcraft in the context of sensational crimes. The earliest such case during the period was the 1973 Miami murder of Juan Olivier Hernandez. Roberto Domeq killed Hernandez, a 36-year old Cuban, after Hernandez allegedly threatened to kill Domeq and use his head for ritual purposes. One headline invoked the image of a "mysterious voodoo cult," and described other unusual activity associated with Santería in the city, including the discovery of a flayed dog, bowls of blood, and the heads of goats, chickens, and other animals. A later case, from 1979, described the discovery of a human skull, dismembered animals, and religious accoutrements on a small farm near Miami, after a dispute between the landowner and one of his tenants.<sup>28</sup>

Following the Mariel boatlift, which lasted from April 15 to October 31, 1980, stories of this kind—dealing with the relationship of Santería to crime and the practice of animal sacrifice and the use of animal remains by Santeros—became commonplace in the Miami-area press. The sudden influx of thousands of Cuban refugees led both to increased social tension in Miami and to increased public visibility for Santería, based on the sheer increase in the number of Santeros in the region. In the years following the boatlift, the alleged association between Santería and crime and the practice of animal sacrifice came to preoccupy Miami-area law enforcement, and

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27. Cowley and Schmidt, "Miami's Angry Cubans"; Edward Tivnan, "The Voodoo that New Yorkers Do," *New York Times*, December 2, 1979.

28. "Miami Slaying Sparks Probe of Mysterious Voodoo Cult," *St. Petersburg (FL) Times*, October 16, 1973; "Whose Skull Did Voodoo Cult Use?" *St. Petersburg (FL) Evening Independent*, March 23, 1979.

through coverage of police investigations and activities, the press representation of Santería. Criminality and animal sacrifice became the key parts of a new representational inventory of Santería that drew on the legacy of witchcraft, but also differed according to the unique social conditions of Miami at the time.

### *Criminality*

Allegations of criminality among the Marielitos became the subject of public concern and outcry almost immediately. Most of the over 124,000 Cubans who left Mariel harbor in Cuba for Floridian ports were relatives of previous exiles, and many settled with family in South Florida and the Miami area. But the Cuban government also expelled many “undesirables” along with the voluntary Mariel exiles, including petty criminals and the mentally ill; these forced exiles had few or no personal connections in the Miami area, and were more likely to be unemployed or institutionalized as a result. Furthermore, even among the voluntary exiles there was a higher proportion of younger, non-white, and uneducated men relative to the established Miami Cuban population, who suffered greater difficulty in finding employment and engaged in higher rates of criminal activity as a result.<sup>29</sup>

Criminal activity among the Marielitos was compounded by a vast increase in drug crime in the Miami region in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The expansion of the cocaine trade through Miami led to the development of a criminal stereotype around Hispanics in the region generally, a stereotype that extended to the Mariel exiles as well. The Miami drug trade was already reliant on connections in the pre-Mariel Cuban community, and some Marielitos who either were unable to find work or had criminal backgrounds became involved in the ongoing

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29. For a complete discussion of the criminal stereotype of the Marielitos, see Gastón A. Fernández, “Race, Gender, and Class in the Persistence of the Mariel Stigma Twenty Years after the Exodus from Cuba,” *International Migration Review* 41, no. 3 (2007): 602–622.

drug violence.<sup>30</sup> In a 1981 case, a group of former Cuban convicts perpetrated a series of armed robberies and murders while disguised as police officers, taking drugs off the hands of other criminals. Although crime statistics available at the time suggested that the Marielitos were not primarily involved in crime or involved with the drug trade, a stigma against the Marielitos as criminal, indigent, and possibly violent took root in the region.<sup>31</sup>

As crime increased in Miami during the early 1980s, so too did police encounters with aspects of Santería. The vast majority of such encounters were the discovery of “ritual” objects in the course of other police activity, such as the discovery of Santería paraphernalia during a drug raid. In a few cases, ritual finds appeared to be targeted at law enforcement directly, including the discovery of an “apple impaled by a cross” outside the chambers of a Miami judge in April 1982, and the incident at the future Miami Beach police headquarters in October of the same year.<sup>32</sup> Of greater concern to police were human remains discovered in various ritual contexts around Miami. The press had noted the discovery of human skulls and other remains in 1979 and early 1980, even prior to the full impact of the Mariel boatlift, but they became increasingly common; in 1983, the *Miami Herald* ran four separate articles on cases in which human remains were discovered or stolen from gravesites. Because any human remains indicated the possibility of murder, these cases were heavily scrutinized by the medical examiner. Charles Wetli, who had served as a deputy medical examiner for Dade County since 1977 and had educated himself on African-derived religions, became the principle interpreter of African-

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30. James Kelly, “Trouble in Paradise,” *Time*, November 23, 1981.

31. Heather Dewar, “Gang Posed as Police to Rob, Kill, Prosecutor Says,” *Miami News*, April 15, 1982; “Mariel Gang Dressed Like Cops During Rampage,” UPI, April 23, 1982; Guillermo Martinez, “‘Criminal’ Repute of Mariel Arrivals False, Study Finds,” *Miami Herald*, May 26, 1982.

32. Morton Lucoff and Luisa Yanez, “Hexed? Apple on Cross Left for Judge Rainwater,” *Miami News*, April 28, 1982.

derived ritual objects for both the Miami-area police and the press—he began commenting publicly on Santería during the early days of the Mariel boatlift.<sup>33</sup>

Wetli was relatively sophisticated and nuanced in his approach to ritual finds of all kinds. He was likely the first official observer to recognize a distinction not only between Santería and the generalized stereotype of voodoo, but also between Santería and Palo, accurately identifying the use of human remains as indicative of Palo practice. However, he also held to a simplistic distinction between Santería and Palo on moral grounds. He identified Santería primarily with beneficent “white magic” and Palo with negative “black magic,” a distinction he made freely to the press when commenting on cases.<sup>34</sup> This moral distinction was made most evident in a short 1983 paper Wetli published with anthropologist Rafael Martinez, entitled “Brujería: Manifestations of Palo Mayombe in South Florida.”<sup>35</sup> The paper covered multiple case studies of Palo-related discoveries made by the Miami police, including complete *nagger* cauldrons, but included no testimony from Palo adherents. Furthermore, Wetli and Martinez relied uncritically on Ortiz’s concept of *brujería* as a tool of criminals, only shifting the term from African-derived religions generally to Palo specifically.<sup>36</sup>

Like Ortiz, Wetli codified an understanding of African-derived religion, but his distinction between Santería and Palo was relatively less successful than Ortiz’s model of *brujería*. As early as October 1983, the *Miami Herald* profiled the activities of a number of Coral Gables police who had begun to study and catalogue Palo-related finds after Wetli’s example.

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33. Heather Dewar, “Human Bones, Animal Remains: Signs of Santería,” *Miami News*, June 24, 1980.

34. Skulls or other human bones, called *nfumbe* (lit. “dead one”), are critical components of the *nganga* cauldrons that are the primary ritual objects of Palo. Palo adherents in Cuba have traditionally preferred removing remains from graves themselves, in order to fulfill ritual obligations to the deceased whose bones are used; see Ochoa, 158-165.

35. At the time, Martinez was a consultant for the Miami-Dade County Police Department on Santería and Afro-Cuban culture, and continues to conduct educational seminars on Santería for local police; David Ovalle, “Police Get Lessons on Exotic Religions,” *Miami Herald*, April 16, 2003.

36. Charles Wetli and Rafael Martinez, “Brujería: Manifestations of Palo Mayombe in South Florida,” *Journal of the Florida Medical Association* 70 (1983): 629–634.

The officers involved clearly viewed their research in terms of preventing crimes and protecting themselves from a large body of criminals who shared an idiosyncratic and amoral belief system. Mike Arwood, one of the Coral Gables police involved in studying Palo, observed, “We find Palo Mayombe is very prevalent among persons in the drug trade. And it’s right here in Coral Gables. It could be your neighbors.”<sup>37</sup> But Wetli’s already problematic attempt to distinguish Palo as the only threatening form of Afro-Cuban religion was largely lost on the press; the 1983 *Miami Herald* article identified it as the “black magic side of Santería,” and the majority of other reports simply referred to any unusual ritual practice associated with Cubans as Santería, without qualifier. In the context of a crime wave already blamed on Hispanics and particularly on Cubans, statements such as Wetli’s and Arwood’s, which suggested the pervasive, hidden presence of Palo in the Cuban-American community, simply reinforced the generalized image of a form of witchcraft employed by a criminal underground—Ortiz’s *hampa Afrocubana* re-racialized as Cuban rather than African.

#### *Animal Sacrifice and Sacrificial Remains*

Cases involving animal sacrifice and the disposal of sacrificial remains also surged after the Mariel boatlift. This was largely a factor of the sheer increase in the number of Santeros who came with the influx of Cubans to the Miami area, although an early *Newsweek* article covering post-boatlift issues over sacrifice also attributed the increase to Haitian refugees who settled in the region during the same period.<sup>38</sup> Practitioners of Santería and Vodou among these new arrivals faced the logistical challenge of reestablishing their religious practices in urban U.S. surroundings. Wirtz observes that, though sacrificial practices were still restricted in some regard by the revolutionary government, santeros in Cuba could assume a degree of cultural

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37. Elizabeth Morgan, “Drug Gangs Use Skull, Symbols to ‘Hex’ Police,” *Miami Herald*, October 29, 1983.

38. Michael Reese and Vincent Coppola, “A Cuban Ritual Disturbs Miami,” *Newsweek*, June 22, 1981.

understanding by authorities for the act of sacrifice and the disposal of sacrificial remains in religiously preferred locations, such as cemeteries or rivers.<sup>39</sup> Without this cultural understanding, and given the relatively sudden increase in the number of sacrifices being performed, animal sacrifice in Miami was met with incredulity, revulsion, and public outcry. The regular discovery of sacrificial remains in the Miami River became particularly symbolic of the issue.<sup>40</sup>

The disposal of sacrificial remains inspired general dislike among the Miami population for a number of reasons. Animal remains were disconcerting by themselves and, when disposed of in a purposefully ritual form along with other objects, such as coins or candies, were easily construed as attempts to curse or hex individuals. Animal remains overlapped with the body of ritual finds that came to the attention of police, sometimes in conjunction with human remains or in the context of drug crime, but also alone, as in the Miami Beach police headquarters case in 1982. The *Miami Herald* report on that case, which involved only animal remains, included the only direct mention of human sacrifice to appear in the Miami press during the early 1980s; that the mention was taken from a rumor circulated in the neighborhood of the find suggests that animal sacrifice was popularly interpreted according to the more threatening representations of Santería. There were also more practical objections to sacrifice, principally on ground of aesthetics or public health. Miami residents saw remains as an eyesore and worried about the potential for decomposing sacrifices to attract pests or spread disease—reports in 1984 and 1985

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39. Wirtz, "Hazardous Waste," 483-488, 490-493.

40. Fred Grimm, "Ritual Sacrifices Turn Miami River Red," *Miami Herald*, May 30, 1981; Reese and Coppola, "Cuban Ritual Disturbs Miami."

covered complaints from different neighborhoods over the sight and smell of sacrificial remains.<sup>41</sup>

The most organized opposition to any Santería practice, however, was against the act of animal sacrifice itself. Animal sacrifice had already come to the attention of animal welfare organizations at a national level, even before the full effect of the Mariel boatlift was felt. The next year, in New York, police and the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) began to crack down on the practice of animal sacrifice by African-derived religions, raiding Santeros in the Bronx on May 24 and June 7, 1980. The ASPCA spokesman in the case was relatively neutral towards Santería, describing it only as a “cult [that] originated in Africa, was brought to Cuba and then to this country.” The press was less circumspect in its analysis; the *St. Petersburg Times* headlined its coverage of the June 7 raid as a “rescue” of animals from a “blood cult.”<sup>42</sup>

Organized anti-sacrifice efforts took time to develop in the Miami area after the Mariel boatlift, but when they took shape they became among the first public condemnations of Santería to receive dedicated coverage in the press. In February 1983, two organizations, the National Wildlife Rescue team and the Humane Society of Florida, announced a \$2,000 reward for information “leading to the arrest and conviction of persons who kill animals in the practice of Santería.” According to spokespersons for both groups, the rewards scheme was devised in response to a December 1982 memo from Florida Attorney General Janet Reno to animal welfare groups, indicating her willingness to fully prosecute animal cruelty cases, including those involving religious practices. The organizations planned to use the tips they received to

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41. “Neighbors Cry Foul About Rotting Fowl,” *Miami Herald*, February 21, 1984; “Carcasses from Rites Nauseate Residents,” *Miami Herald*, April 25, 1985.

42. Robert D. McFadden, “Ritual Slaughter Halted in Bronx by Police Raid,” *New York Times*, May 24, 1980; “Police Seize Animals Prepared for Sacrifice by Cult in the Bronx,” *New York Times*, June 7, 1980; “New York Police Save 62 Animals From Blood Cult,” *St. Petersburg (FL) Evening Independent*, June 7, 1980.

break up sacrifices as they occurred, an attack on the sanctity and ritual secrecy of Santería practices that provoked a rare public outcry from a number of Santeros.<sup>43</sup>

Opposition to animal sacrifice presented the greatest threat to Santería practice in Miami from organizations or official sources. Whereas Miami law enforcement paid attention to Santería and other African-derived religions to the extent that they were indicative of criminal activity, animal welfare organizations sought to criminalize Santería practice itself. Criminalizing Santería in this way was contingent on denying the protections of religious free exercise to animal sacrifice. Animal welfare advocates lamented that they had been prevented from targeting sacrifice by free exercise protections in the past, and following Reno's suggestion, they pursued animal cruelty charges as a means to circumvent free exercise. But National Wildlife Rescue Team spokesman Jack Kassewitz, Jr., made a telling remark in a follow-up article on the controversy surrounding his group's actions; he justified pursuing Santería sacrifice because "we're getting voodoo and the devil worshipers, too"—with the implication that, as something akin to voodoo or devil worship, Santería was not a legitimate religion and had no expectation of religious protections to begin with.<sup>44</sup>

#### Intersecting Witchcrafts: Santería and the Satanic Panic

There was a clear similarity in the representation of Santería in Miami during the 1980s and the representation of brujería in Republican Cuba, but there was a significant difference in the intensity of the inventories in each historical case. Despite the environment of suspicion the supposed criminal and barbaric practices of Santería in Miami during the 1980s, the worst aspects of the witchcraft model, actual violence and human sacrifice, were only implied. Rumors of human sacrifice shadowed animal sacrifice and were sometimes voiced, as in the 1973 Miami

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43. Suzanne Spring, "Rewards Offered to Stop Santería Animal Sacrifices," *Miami Herald*, February 16, 1983.

44. Ana Veciana-Suarez, "Cult, Animal Protection Groups Clashing," *Miami Herald*, March 3, 1983.

Beach case, but never in official sources. Overall, the public fear of Santería in Miami, while present, was far less intense than the fear of brujería in Cuba. One factor in this difference in intensity may have been the effect of the frame of “spectacle” common to depictions of African-derived religion in U.S. popular culture, which rapidly transformed objects of social revulsion into objects of entertainment. The image of santeros involved in the drug trade or other criminal activities became a stock trope for crime dramas such as *Miami Vice*.<sup>45</sup>

A more substantive reason for the lesser intensity of suspicion and lesser incidence of moral panic in Miami compared to Cuba is that while in Miami Santería was seen as dangerous and morally objectionable, and associated with a negative racial stereotype of Cubans, it was not associated with the fear of large-scale racial violence that motivated the brujería panics, linked as they were to white fears of black enfranchisement. As a result, despite incidents like the bounty offered on Santería sacrifice in 1983, the Miami press and authorities were far less likely to invent baseless claims against santeros or ignore their religious rights. Miami-area police never speculated on the possibility of human sacrifice, even in cases involving the discovery of human remains, and the press never suggested it as a possibility beyond referencing rumors or stereotypes.

Human sacrifice *was* a frequent subject in the U.S. media during the 1980s, however, as part of a process of moral panic that occurred at a nationwide level. Between the early 1980s and 1990s, there were multiple legal cases and incidents in which “Satanism” and “satanic cults” were accused of ritual sexual abuse and murder, primarily of children or young women.

Accusations of satanic abuse and killings figured into a large number of high-profile criminal cases, the most famous being the 1984-1990 trial of the owners of the McMartin Preschool in

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45. In its 1985-1986 season, *Miami Vice* ran episodes featuring both criminal santeros (“Whatever Works”) and Vodou practitioners (“Tale of the Goat”); the Marielitos as a group received a similarly swift pop culture treatment in Brian de Palma’s 1983 film *Scarface*.

Manhattan Beach, California, which became among the longest and most expensive in U.S. history.<sup>46</sup> Beyond legal cases, Jeremy S. Victor observes that rumors of Satanism led to multiple incidents of panic and mass action in small towns and cities across the United States: families keeping children home from school, police and armed citizens patrolling streets, all in response to rumors that satanic cultists planned to kidnap and sacrifice women or children.<sup>47</sup> Critically, virtually all such allegations of satanic cult activity were unsubstantiated and have since been dismissed as false; Cohen went so far as to describe the satanic panic as “one of the most pure cases of moral panic” because of its totally fictive subject.<sup>48</sup>

Multiple social concerns were at work in the development of the satanic panic. The 1970s and early 1980s saw a growing awareness of childhood sexual abuse among social workers and psychiatrists, and the growing public visibility of new religious movements derided as “cults,” such as the Unification Church, Hare Krishnas, and Scientology, all of which were accused of sexual and emotional abuse of members. Finally, the late 1970s saw the rise of Evangelical Christianity to political and cultural prominence in the United States, through Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority and a host of other organizations. Evangelical Christians as a group were predisposed to concerns about cult groups and witchcraft, as they both believed in Satan as a supernatural force and tended to interpret non-Christian religious practices as satanic in nature. The combination of concerns over these social developments made claims of a widespread but secret satanic cult that abused and sacrificed children more acceptable in the public eye.

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46. The owners and several staff members of the McMartin Preschool were accused of sexually abusing many of the students at their school in a number of bizarre ways, including in hidden underground tunnels beneath the school and in orgies involving famous celebrities; Ray Buckley, one of the accused, was described as flying through the air and possessing supernatural powers. These accusations originated with the mentally ill mother of one student, but were uncritically accepted by prosecution, therapists, and the press. *Los Angeles Times* reporter David Shaw won the 1991 Pulitzer Prize for Criticism for his 1990 series on the role of the press in the McMartin case.

47. Jeremy S. Victor, *Satanic Panic: The Creation of a Contemporary Legend* (Chicago: Open Court, 1993), 27-78.

48. Cohen, xvii-xviii.

Like the Cuban brujería panics, the representational terms of satanic panic were codified and disseminated by the press and scholarly authorities. The satanic panic began with reports from therapists and psychiatrists of patients claiming to have recovered memories of satanic abuse; the now-discredited *Michelle Remembers* (1980) is often credited with starting the panic. The professional authority of therapists and psychiatrists involved in the panic validated the worst fears associated with sexual abuse and cult activity, leading to greater credibility of even the most improbably claims of satanic abuse.<sup>49</sup> Although there was almost never physical evidence to corroborate the testimony of satanic abuse victims, accusations of satanic abuse and killings were taken seriously enough to draw the attention of both the legal system and the national media. In another parallel with the brujería panics, syndicated talk show hosts Geraldo Rivera and Sally Jesse Raphael both ran a number of episodes on satanic abuse in 1988 and 1989, which repeated claims that satanic cultists kidnapped or bred infants for human sacrifice.<sup>50</sup>

#### *Satanism in Miami and the Matamoros Killings*

The satanic panic and the Cuban brujería panics were nationwide phenomena that were spread by sensationalistic reporting in the media and inspired significant action from law enforcement, despite the lack of hard evidence linking the subjects of the panic to their alleged crimes; both also focused on crimes against children, particularly young girls. At the cultural level, both panics relied on the same inventory of witchcraft imagery of human sacrifice, infant sacrifice, cannibalism, and spiritual violence. Satanism in the United States represented a pure, entirely fictive, adaptation of the same traditional European conception of witchcraft that had

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49. The reason that patients made claims of satanic abuse, including highly implausible or impossible allegations, is generally agreed to be improper or methodologically questionable forms of suggestion from therapists or interrogators, compounded in later years from the cultural representations of satanic abuse already present. Many of the alleged victims were young children at the time of their testimony; see Victor, 7-24, 79-101.

50. For a summary of these episodes, see Victor, 82-85.

been altered to characterize African-derived religions as brujería, obeah, or voodoo in the Caribbean during the colonial period and the early twentieth century.<sup>51</sup>

Despite this fundamental similarity, however, the degree to which the satanic panic influenced or overlapped with representations of Santería in Miami is difficult to say. In one of the first ritual sex abuse cases in Miami, 35-year-old Cuban immigrant Frank Fuster and his wife Ilena were arrested in August 1984 on charges that he had sexually abused children at the daycare that Ilena ran out of their home in the Country Walk neighborhood.<sup>52</sup> Some of the accusations resembled claims of satanic ritual abuse, including that Fuster used frightening masks, costumes and spells, and hypnosis and strange drugs to control the children. The term “Satanism” was never used in case, however; instead, the Dade County Attorney’s Office asked Mercedes Cros Sandoval, a noted scholar of Santería from Miami-Dade College, to consult on Fuster’s actions. The *Miami Herald* article on Cros Sandoval’s appointment speculated that the use of herbal remedies or potions in Santería was a possible basis for the mind-altering “demon slime” some children claimed to have consumed.<sup>53</sup> The fact that Santería was mentioned in the case based solely on Fuster’s ethnicity suggests that, for Miami law enforcement at least, Santería was seen as similar enough to Satanism to take its place in the ritual abuse narrative, but also as culturally and racially distinct, due to its particular association with Cubans. Ultimately,

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51. Phillips Stevens, Jr., “The Demonology of Satanism: an Anthropological View,” in *The Satanism Scare*, ed. James T. Richardson, Joel Best, and David G. Bromley (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991), 24-29.

52. Jane Daugherty and Joan Fleishman, “Children Tell of Abuse at Day-Care Center,” *Miami Herald*, August 10, 1984.

53. Jane Daugherty and Joan Fleishman, “Santería Expert Joins Probe in S. Dade Sex Abuse Case,” *Miami Herald*, August 29, 1984.

however, the ritual component of the Country Walk case was dropped prior to Fuster's eventual conviction.<sup>54</sup>

The appearance of Satanism in the run-up to the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* case itself presents a similar racialized distinction between Santería and Satanism, but in the opposite way. The protestors at the June 9, 1987, meeting of the Hialeah City Council, at which local residents raised complaints over the planned CLBA church referred to the CLBA invariably as a “satanic church” and Santería practices as Satanism. The protests had a distinctly Christian character, however; protestors carried placards reading “Hialeah for Christ,” and protest leader Reinaldo Medina suggested that if Hialeah allowed a “Satan-worshiping church, the city that prospers may not be so prosperous anymore.”<sup>55</sup> Within the meeting itself, members of the Ecclesiastical Board of Hialeah, an interdenominational Christian group, and even the chaplain of the Hialeah Police Department, variously referred to Santería as “black magic, a cult” and “an abomination to the Lord,”<sup>56</sup> While the conflation of Santería and Satanism is clear in this case, it is difficult to tell whether the Hialeah protestors were influenced by the satanic panic nationwide or were acting out of their own religious beliefs. The large number of Cubans among the protestors—and among the Hialeah City Council members who responded to the protests by banning animal sacrifice—suggests one possibility: the protestors specifically represented Santería as Satanism as a way of disavowing any relationship between Santería and the Cuban community at large.<sup>57</sup>

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54. Fuster was convicted based on testimony from his wife and a positive test for gonorrhea from his own son, one of the alleged abuse victims. His conviction has been challenged, but he remains one of the few individuals accused of ritual abuse to remain imprisoned; Michael Kirk, “Did Daddy Do It?” *Frontline*, PBS (2002), <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/fuster/etc/script.html>.

55. Carlos Harrison, “Hialeah Moves to Block Santería Sacrifices,” *Miami Herald*, June 10, 1987.

56. David M. O’Brien, *Animal Sacrifice and Religious Freedom: Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé v. City of Hialeah* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 35; Stephan Palmié, “Which Centre? Whose Margin? Notes Towards an Archaeology of U.S. Supreme Court Case 91-948, 1993,” in *Inside and Outside the Law: Anthropological Studies of Authority and Ambiguity*, ed. Olivia Harris (New York: Routledge, 1996), 188-189.

57. Conversely, the instance of appearances of Satanism in the Miami press peaked in 1989, suggesting that the Hialeah protestors may have been at the beginning of an upswing in concern over Satanism in the region.

The most dramatic conflation of Santería and Satanism came in the infamous 1989 killings in Matamoros, Mexico. In April 1989, Mexican police discovered the remains of over a dozen people, including a University of Texas student missing since the previous month, on a ranch outside Matamoros. The killings were the work of a drug gang and religious group led by Adolfo de Jesus Constanzo, a 26-year-old Cuban American from Miami. Constanzo had lived in Mexico since 1984, attracting followers and support from both authorities and drug traffickers with his reputation as a healer and psychic. Constanzo conducted the killings as human sacrifices, and as a source of human blood, bones, and organs for other ritual use. After police in Matamoros arrested several of the gang's members, Constanzo fled to Mexico City with his closest confidants, including Sara Maria Aldrete, a 24-year-old Mexican college student who would ultimately stand trial for the killings. Constanzo himself was killed by one of his followers on his own orders, when Mexican police discovered their Mexico City apartment on May 6.<sup>58</sup>

Newspapers and media outlets worldwide reported the Matamoros killings, and the coverage of the case followed a distinct progression in how Constanzo's practices were described. Initial reports of the case described the killings as satanic or as the work of a generic "cult"; as more information about Constanzo's background became available, however, and more expert sources were consulted, "voodoo," "Santería," and ultimately "Palo Mayombe" became the common descriptors for the beliefs behind the killings.<sup>59</sup> The *Miami Herald*, however, broke with this pattern and immediately declared the killings the work of a "Santería cult," and because of its proximity to his relatives, it was the first paper to describe in detail

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58. "Human Sacrifice Horrors Blamed on Santería Cult," *Miami Herald*, April 13, 1989; David Hancock and Sydney Freedberg, "Fugitive Drug-Gang Leader Lived in Miami Area till '84," *Miami Herald*, April 13, 1989; Guy Gugliotta, "Drug Trade Came First, Killings Followed, Police Say," *Miami Herald*, April 14, 1989; "Leader in Cult Slayings Ordered Own Death, Two Companions Say," *New York Times*, May 8, 1989.

59. Thomas A. Green, "Accusations of Satanism and Racial Tensions in the Matamoros Cult Murders," in *The Satanism Scare*, ed. James T. Richardson, Joel Best, and David G. Bromley (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1991), 242–243.

Constanzo's religious upbringing. The paper reported complaints from the family's neighbors that they had found decapitated animals and parts of animals on doorsteps and around the neighborhood, some after arguments with Constanzo's mother.<sup>60</sup> The speed with which Miami reporters associated Constanzo's practices with Santería—before there was any systematic investigation into the killings—reinforces the similarity between Santería and Satanism as models of witchcraft, but also the distinctive racialization of Santería in the United States as Cuban.<sup>61</sup>

The reality of Constanzo's religious beliefs was, in fact, a combination of actual Afro-Cuban religion and its negative representations as witchcraft. Constanzo did have an involvement from childhood with Santería and Palo, and employed *nganga* cauldrons in his practice. Constanzo's actions embodied the supposed amorality of Palo, instrumentally using the remains and spiritual power of others for criminal ends. But members of Constanzo's group indicated that his choice to begin actual human sacrifices was at least in part inspired by the 1987 John Schlesinger film, *The Believers*, which portrayed Santería practice as involving child sacrifice.<sup>62</sup> Thus, even this actual case of human sacrifice prompted by African-derived religion was influenced by the prevalent negative representation of those religions.

### Conclusion

The treatment of Santería in Miami during the 1980s never reached the level of racially charged invective or repression that characterized the *brujería* panics of early Republican Cuba, nor did it generate the same degree of police and press scrutiny as the satanic panic in the United

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60. Hancock and Freedberg, "Fugitive Drug-Gang Leader"; David Hancock and Sydney Freedberg, "Murder Gang Suspect Followed Odd Rituals as Dade Teenager," *Miami Herald*, April 14, 1989.

61. One exception to this was the coverage of *El Nuevo Herald*, the *Miami Herald*'s Spanish-language auxiliary, which reprinted translated versions of the *Miami Herald*'s articles on the case, but used the terms "narcosatanicos" or "banda satanica" instead of "Santería cult" in its headlines. This likely reflects Mexican and Texan use of the term, which has since become the default descriptor for Constanzo in Spanish-language media and popular culture.

62. "Suspects in Ritual Murders Say They Were Influenced by Cult Film," *Miami Herald*, April 16, 1989; Green, "Accusations of Satanism," 242–243.

States during the same period. But the negative representation of Santería by the press and law enforcement nevertheless placed a burden on adherents of the religion in Miami. The association of Santería with criminality engendered fear in the public at large, while opposition to animal sacrifice threatened Santería practice directly; both reinforced the tendency among many santeros to practice entirely in secret and avoid any public identification with the religion. This treatment of Santería relied on the representation of Santería as witchcraft, a practice undeserving of religious protections and too primitive, barbaric, and dangerous to play a role in “modern” society. This representation of Santería led to multiple instances of repression in Miami during the 1980s—skepticism about granting a young Santería adherent a religious excuse from school in 1984, the arrest of over a dozen priests during a sacrifice in 1985, and ultimately the City of Hialeah’s attempt to ban sacrifice outright in 1987.<sup>63</sup>

The events in Hialeah, however, also demonstrated the possibility that Santería could move beyond the marginal position imposed on it by the press and authorities. Unlike the phantasmal satanic cultists who were the target of the satanic panic, Santería was an actual religion, with adherents who could put forth their own representations of their beliefs to counteract defamation or ignorance from the press and authorities. The satanic panic ultimately wound down after 1989, both in Florida and nationwide, as the lack of evidence for satanic ritual abuse and cult activity began to strain the credulity of most psychiatrists, social workers, and others who had driven the panic initially. In Miami, by contrast, the years following the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé’s attempt to incorporate in Hialeah saw an increase in efforts to represent Santería publicly and to form a new model of religious community in the United States.

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63. Cathy Shaw and Patricia Duarte, “Santería Study Excuses Absence; Board Attorney: OK for 1st Grader to Miss Month of School,” *Miami Herald*, December 7, 1984; Yves Colon, “Police Raid Santería Service, Arrest 15,” *Miami Herald*, July 11, 1985.

## CHAPTER 2

### PUBLIC REPRESENTATION AND REMAKING THE CABILDO

In November 1988, the first issue of a newsletter titled *Eleda*, published by a group calling itself the Cabildo Yoruba Omo Orisha, appeared in botánicas around Miami. Befitting a first issue, one article began a series on the origins of Santería, starting with the emergence of Yoruba culture and their creation myths. Another article paid tribute to Pancho Mora and Mercedes Noble, the first Santería priest in the United States and the first to perform an initiation on U.S. soil, respectively. On the front page, an editorial by the Cabildo Yoruba's president, Miguel "Willie" Ramos, described the origins of the organization. According to the full-page editorial, the Cabildo Yoruba was the product of a meeting of Santería priests and initiates earlier in that year, all of whom were concerned with the fate of the religion in the United States. The assembled adherents feared that the "various disturbances happening because of animal sacrifice" would threaten their ability to practice their faith. Even more, they lamented the loss of religious knowledge and tradition occurring with the deaths of senior priests. The Cabildo Yoruba was their solution, a non-profit organization that would "unify, teach, and cleanse the image of this intriguing religion we call Santería."<sup>1</sup>

The "various disturbances" over animal sacrifice referred most immediately to the conflict between the City of Hialeah, Florida, and the CLBA Babalu Ayé. At the time the Cabildo Yoruba formed, the CLBA's lawsuit against Hialeah, protesting the city's laws that banned animal sacrifice, was still awaiting hearing in Federal District Court. The Hialeah ordinances and the CLBA's willingness to challenge them appear to have galvanized like-

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1. Willie Ramos, "Editorial," *Eleda*, November 1988, 1.

mindful adherents to organize publicly, and not only the Cabildo Yoruba; another priest, Rigoberto Zamora, announced plans to establish a church for his Afro-Cuban Lucumí Association in July 1987 and offered support to the CLBA.<sup>2</sup> Although Santería adherents had suffered from police harassment, negative representation in the media, and sporadic attempts to limit their religious practice in Miami during the 1980s, the Hialeah ordinances were the most serious legal threat to Santería to appear in the United States. The formation of the Cabildo Yoruba, with its institutional title and dedicated press organ, was in part an attempt by Santería adherents to fight the ordinances with their own public speech and public media.

The pages of *Eleda*, however, indicate that defending the practice of Santería in Miami was as much a process of inward-looking religious reform as outward activism. In two years, the newsletter ran only eight articles that dealt directly with the negative image or legal status of Santería. Most of the articles in each issue were directed towards daily community needs— notices of events, birthdays, and deaths—or were intended to educate readers in elements of Santería belief and practice. The Cabildo Yoruba’s members saw improving the religious conduct of santeros in the United States as a critical component of improving the religion’s public image; they opposed to the independent, secretive, and often-competitive form of most contemporary Santería practice in Miami, which they saw as contributing to improper practices, immoral behavior, and a general lack of communal solidarity among santeros. Ramos compared typical Santería organization unfavorably to the communities of “other religious groups” in the United States, in which “everyone cooperates without expecting anything in return for their labor.”<sup>3</sup> The goal of the Cabildo Yoruba, promoted through *Eleda*, was to transform Santería in the United States into such a cohesive religious group, one that would ensure fidelity to tradition

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2. Carlos Harrison, “Rituals Comply with State Law, Santero Says,” *Miami Herald*, July 16, 1987.

3. Willie Ramos, “Editorial,” *Eleda*, November 1988, 1.

and mutual assistance among its adherents. In this way, santeros could secure what Ramos argued they had failed to achieve in the United States, “the respect, as priests of a religion, that [the United States] gives to any religious belief.”<sup>4</sup>

The *Cabildo Yoruba*, the CLBA, and a handful of similar organizational projects active in the 1980s all strove to improve the public image of Santería in the United States through the creation of a visible, institutionalized religious community. The adherents involved in these Santería organizations all shared the ideal of Santería as a religion recognized as such by the state and society; they reference, directly or indirectly, the Afro-Cuban religious organizations known as *cabildos*, which served to create a community and religion among Afro-Cubans in the hostile environment of Colonial and Republican Cuba. As its name indicates, the *Cabildo Yoruba* sought to recapitulate the formative role of the Cuban *cabildos* in the difficult religious environment of 1980s Miami. But this attempt to remake a specific version of the *cabildo* model in the United States clashed with the decentralized style of community that had developed among the santeros in diaspora in the United States since the mid-twentieth century—itsself derived from a different interpretation of the *cabildo* model. The clash between these models of community organization complicated, and ultimately doomed the *Cabildo Yoruba*’s project, at least in the short-term period of the late 1980s.

#### Lucumí Representation and the Cabildo Model

Although Willie Ramos had the *cabildos* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in mind in naming the *Cabildo Yoruba*, those organizations in turn referenced the older ecclesiastical *cabildos de nación*, and this earlier historical reference demonstrates the importance of the *cabildo* model to Afro-Cuban self-representation. The *cabildos de nación* were initially organized to control and Christianize African slaves, but became the spaces in which

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4. Ibid.

slaves could engage in what Paul Christopher Johnson calls the “re-membering” of culture and religion: the expression and preservation of memories of homeland religious practices, but also the reassembly of those practices under the conditions of diaspora.<sup>5</sup> The *cabildos de nación* allowed Africans to recreate religious practices through the medium of Catholic festivals and processions, part of their State-sanctioned duties; they were also able to recreate systems of social authority through the *cabildo* leadership structures.<sup>6</sup> Colonial authorities tapped into this communal function, using the *cabildos* to limit social strife among Afro-Cubans and giving *cabildo* leaders a degree of real, if highly circumscribed, political power. This same political power ultimately brought the *cabildos de nación* under the overarching frame of white suspicion of black activities described by Kristina Wirtz, and as the slave population in Cuba increased dramatically during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, growing white fears of slave uprising led to the gradual legal restriction of the *cabildos*. By this time, however, the *cabildo de nación* had been established as the preeminent Afro-Cuban social and political institution.<sup>7</sup>

It is unsurprising, then, that even before the *cabildos de nación* were completely suppressed in 1884, new groups calling themselves *cabildos* emerged among Afro-Cubans. These groups were part of a surge in Afro-Cuban social and political organization that occurred during the first Cuban independence conflict, the Ten Year’s War (1868-1878), and after the ultimate abolition of slavery in Cuba in 1886. Some of the new organizations were secular, pan-African organizations whose members shared the liberal, modernist, political vision of the Cuban

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5. Paul Christopher Johnson, *Diasporic Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 46-48.

6. For a complete discussion of the social position of the *cabildos de nación* in the early nineteenth century, see David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 25-54.

7. Kristina Wirtz, “Santería in Cuban National Consciousness: A Religious Case of the *Doble Moral*,” *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 9 (2008): 416.

independence movement and advocated for black political participation and legal rights.<sup>8</sup> Other groups were derived from or direct continuations of older *cabildos de nación* and were dedicated to both the religious and social needs of their specific *naciones*, which continued to be critical aspects of their identity. Yet, as Melinda Pappademos has observed, these new *cabildos* sought the same public social and political presence as their secular counterparts; they were legally established and public organizations, despite the continued threat of legal sanction against *cabildo*-like organizations and continued suspicion from Cuban whites in the decades after abolition. The members of these new *cabildos* sought to bridge their African descent and cultural practices and their desire for recognition as Cuban citizens—to become Afro-Cuban—and they relied on the *cabildos de nación* as an established model.<sup>9</sup>

The importance of the *cabildo* model is particularly apparent in the *cabildos* established by the *nación* known as *Lucumí*.<sup>10</sup> The *Lucumí* made up the largest proportion of slaves to arrive in Cuba during the early nineteenth century, but they arrived when the suppression of the *cabildos de nación* had already begun, and operated relatively few *cabildos* compared to other *naciones*.<sup>11</sup> *Lucumí* Afro-Cubans nevertheless established numerous independent *cabildos* in the mid- to late-nineteenth century. These *cabildos* had a formative effect on modern *Santería*. As David H. Brown has shown, virtually all of the founders of extant *ramas* [“branches”] of *Santería*, the lineages of initiation by which the religion is transmitted, were the heads or important members of *cabildos* in Havana or Matanzas from the 1870s onwards. Important priests could be associated with multiple *cabildos* at once. The most powerful Havana *cabildos*,

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8. Philip Howard, *Changing History: The Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 148-187.

9. Melinda Pappademos, “From *Cabildos* to *Continuadora* Societies: Political Community in the Black Cuban Imaginary,” *Negritud 2* (2008): 180-182.

10. *Lucumí* was one Cuban colonial term for a number of ethnic and political groups from the Yoruba-speaking Oyo Empire, in what is now Benin and Western Nigeria; *Mina* and *Arará* were other terms used for slaves from Oyo and neighboring Dahomey by the Spanish and Portuguese.

11. Brown, 62-63, 74.

the Cabildo de Regla and the Cabildo Africano Lucumí, brought together many of these foundational priests; the Cabildo Africano Lucumí's 1900 roster included the founding members of multiple ramas, representing the leadership of multiple other cabildos around the city.<sup>12</sup>

The Lucumí cabildos and ramas emerged during this time period out of a new process of “re-membering” in the post-Emancipation era. As first-generation Africans died out, it became increasingly necessary for Afro-Cubans to mark and codify their ethnic identities and particularly their cultural practices, so that they could continue to be transmitted in Cuba. For the Lucumí, this marking transformed “Lucumí” from a demonym for those from a specific African background to a system of practices and beliefs, making it possible for Afro-Cuban creoles, mulattoes, and even whites to become “culturally Lucumí.”<sup>13</sup> In Havana, this process was carried out most notably by the *iyalocha* Nã Rosalia Efuche, who earned the title “*la reformista de la religión*” for establishing the standards of proper initiation in the 1870s and 1880s.<sup>14</sup> In Matanzas, Lucumí cabildos formed alliances with the cabildos of the related Arará nacion and merged their already similar practices; in contrast, Lucumí practitioners kept at arm's length the religious practices of Congo Afro-Cubans, the Reglas de Congo or Palo, often practicing both traditions, but generally making a distinction between them.<sup>15</sup>

The Lucumí cabildos functioned both as the sites where Lucumí religion was codified and where the standards of the religion were enforced, a process visible in the organizations' *reglamientos* [“charters”]; for example, the 1900 reglamento of the Cabildo Africano Lucumí

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12. The Cabildo Africano Lucumí was considered by its membership to be the continuation of the Lucumí cabildo Chango Tedún; see Brown, 70.

13. Brown, 68.

14. Efuche was a leader of the Cabildo San Jose Ochenta, its name referring to its street address. She is credited with popularizing the *kariocha* style of advanced initiation and developing the *pinaldo* ritual used to “confirm” earlier initiations that might be in doubt, a common problem in late nineteenth-century Cuba; see Brown, 109-111.

15. Miguel Willie Ramos, “La Division de La Habana: Territorial Conflict and Cultural Hegemony in the Followers of Oyo Lukumi Religion, 1850s-1920s,” *Cuban Studies* 34 (2003): 58-61; see also Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 189-200.

allowed only Lucumí rhythms to be played at formal drumming rituals.<sup>16</sup> Attempts to enforce such religious standards, however, gave rise to disagreements and divisions between individual practitioners and cabildos. Divisions formed between the cabildos of Havana and Matanzas, and between members of the two main priesthoods in Lucumí practice, *Ifa* and *Ocha*, over the relative religious authority of their respective priests.<sup>17</sup> Disaffected priests often started their own cabildos to compete with their institutional rivals. Brown has described the majority of Lucumí cabildos as rapidly developing into what are known today as *casa-templos*, the metaphorical and often physical house of initiates and clients, practicing the specific traditions of a single rama.<sup>18</sup> But these establishments continued to claim the term “cabildo,” and their members continued to put the cabildo model into practice as an organizing principle for Lucumí religion as a whole, albeit in a dispersed form. The competition and mutual criticism between cabildos allowed for relatively small religious disagreements to pass, while preserving religious community at a broader level.<sup>19</sup>

### *Public Representation and Afrocubanismo*

While the Lucumí cabildos faced internal change and disagreement, during the early twentieth century, they also faced extreme external pressure, in the form of the brujería panics of the 1900s and 1910s. The representation of brujería posed a clear threat to the cabildos, as it linked Afro-Cuban religious practices with barbarism and criminality, a position backed up by the weight of the Cuban press and contemporary social scientists. But the brujería panics also

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16. Brown, 70-72.

17. Ifa is the specific priesthood associated with the orisha Orunmila and the Ifa divination technique, while Osha refers to the priesthoods of other orishas. Ifa was the most respected form of divination in Lucumí practice, and *babalawos*, Ifa practitioners, held the highest religious authority in Cuba; part of Efucho's reforms involved the popularization of the role of *oba oriaté* [lit. “king of the divining mat,” a “master of ceremonies”], a form of Ocha priesthood that many in Ifa lineages saw as a challenge to the *babalawos*' preeminence; see *Ibid.*, 107-111.

18. *Ibid.*, 74-75.

19. *Ibid.*, 68-72; see also Wirtz's analysis of this form of intra-religious critique in modern Cuban Santería in Kristina Wirtz, *Ritual, Discourse, and Community in Cuban Santería: Speaking a Sacred World* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007), 169-197.

created conflict within the larger realm of Afro-Cuban social and political organizations. Secular Afro-Cuban organizations such as Havana's Club Atenas decried government repression and mob violence directed against Afro-Cubans, including accused brujos, but many accepted the fundamental image of brujería; the Club Atenas members and other Afro-Cuban intellectuals embraced the scientific modernism of the Cuban state, and saw eliminating African "superstitions" as an essential step in securing the Afro-Cuban social position.<sup>20</sup> The negative representation of brujería thus put the cabildos in the difficult situation of being denied the status of legitimate religious organizations by Cuban society at large, and the capacity to engage with the larger Afro-Cuban social and political movement.

The Lucumí cabildo responded to this denial of the fundamental religious character of their practice by actively representing Lukumi religion as such. Wirtz describes this as an articulation of the implicit metacultural frame of "the sacred," through which the Lucumí viewed their own religion, into terms and images that would convey that sacredness to Cuban society at large.<sup>21</sup> A key aspect to this sacred frame was the assertion that Lucumí religion had moral status equivalent to white Cuban and European traditions such as Christianity or Spiritism, or at least distinct from amoral or immoral brujería; Román notes that in some cases individuals accused of brujería asserted that they instead practiced "*religion lucumí*" as a defense.<sup>22</sup> In contrast, because of the importance of the dead and human remains to Palo practice and its pragmatic view of interactions with the supernatural, so close to the representations of brujería at work in Cuban society, Lucumí practitioners tended to displace any potentially unacceptable aspects of their

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20. Alejandra Bronfman, *Measures of Equality: Social Science, Citizenship, and Race in Cuba, 1902-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 95-104; see also Aline Helg, *Our Rightful Share: The Afro-Cuban Struggle for Equality, 1886-1912* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 242-244.

21. Wirtz, "Santería," 415-416.

22. Reinaldo Román, *Governing Spirits: Religion, Miracles, and Spectacles in Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1898-1956* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 105.

religion onto the Congo tradition, despite the fact that both religions were often practiced by the same individuals.<sup>23</sup>

This moral representation of Lucumí religion was matched by the physical representation of Lucumí religious objects and spaces. The use of Catholic imagery by Lucumí practitioners in the early twentieth century, principally the icons and attributes of Catholic saints associated with particular orishas, derived from the ecclesiastical *cabildos de nación* and was extensively employed by the cabildos in the 1870s to skirt laws restricting the use of African ethnic names or terms by Afro-Cuban organizations.<sup>24</sup> But Brown suggests that beyond this superficial use of Catholic imagery to protect the cabildos from police suppression, Catholic imagery also provided a way of visually coding Lucumí practice as akin to European beliefs, and thus moral.<sup>25</sup> This visual use of European religious imagery extended to decorative arts and styles more generally, creating what Brown calls the “Creole taste,” which influenced all aspects of Lucumí religious paraphernalia; the overall effect was to represent the status attached to Lucumí religious artifacts and practices—the divine kingship invested in priests, or the attributes of the orishas—through a lens that made them explicable and palatable to Cuban society.<sup>26</sup>

This representation of Lucumí religion as moral and Creole was widespread among the Lucumí cabildos, but it was also essentially passive and implicit, and thus had a limited effect on Cuban observers in the short term. Harassment from the police continued, and those white Cubans who paid attention to Afro-Cuban organizations were liable to dismiss the cabildos out of hand; in 1906, Ortiz went so far as to describe the cabildos of the time as mere “degenerations

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23. For an interesting discussion of the moral link between Christianity and Lucumí traditions in contrast to Palo, see Todd Ramon Ochoa, *Society of the Dead: Quita Manaquita and Palo Praise in Cuba* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 206-207; see also Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*, 189-196.

24. Howard, 178.

25. Brown, 288-289.

26. *Ibid.*, 225-225, 288.

of the old witchcraft brotherhoods.”<sup>27</sup> In a handful of cases, however, cabildo leaders engaged the press and the State directly. The most notable examples of this kind of action were Sylvestre Erice, a Cabildo Africano Lucumí member and head of his own cabildo, and his student and assistant Fernando Guerra. Erice and Guerra authored a number of broadsides in 1913 criticizing the continuing accusations of brujería and the treatment of Afro-Cubans in general. Even more significantly, in 1911 Guerra established a correspondence with Fernando Ortiz and convinced the criminologist to attend several services at Erice’s cabildo.<sup>28</sup> However, Guerra’s relationship with Ortiz also demonstrates the divisions between the Lucumí cabildos. While Guerra advocated for Lucumí religion in general, he did so in part to advance the status of Erice’s cabildo, which had a large number of white members. Guerra was interested in Europeanizing some aspects of Lucumí practice, and sought to use Ortiz’s knowledge and status to support his position.<sup>29</sup>

Public representation of the kind that Guerra and Erice engaged in became more common with the emergence of the *afrocubanismo* cultural movement in the 1920s onwards—Guerra’s interactions with Ortiz may even have contributed to the latter’s shift towards afrocubanismo. Afrocubanist intellectuals relied on the cabildos to provide folkloric performances and objects—Afro-Cuban music, dance, art, and formal rituals—providing a socially sanctioned outlet for public Lucumí practice.<sup>30</sup> Some Lucumí practitioners became involved themselves in the process of classifying and codifying Lucumí traditions as folklore. Wirtz and Brown both point to the example of oriaté Nicolás Angarica, who authored several popular texts on Lucumí practices in the 1950s. Angarica’s *Lucumí al alcance de todos* (n.d., c. 1950) and *Manual del Orihate* (n.d.,

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27. Fernando Ortiz, *Hampa Afro-Cubana: Los Negros Brujos* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1973), 64-65.

28. Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*, 248-256; see also Bronfman, 94-95.

29. Guerra specifically asked for advice on the design of his *panderetas lucumís*, variations on the traditional *batá* drums with European modifications; see Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*, 253-254; see also Brown, 70, 72.

30. Brown, 83-85.

c.1955) followed the folkloric style, but were also among the first works to be intended as guidebooks for Lucumí practice, directed at both current practitioners and the Cuban populace more generally; Angarica attempted to use the popularity of afrocubanismo to put Lucumí religion “within reach of all” in the manner of other religions.<sup>31</sup>

Afrocubanismo did not, however, benefit all Lucumí practitioners equally. The afrocubanist image of Lucumí religion—“Santería,” a term inspired by the Creole religious imagery used by the Lucumí cabildos—still left many of the less acceptable Lucumí practices, such as sacrifice and ritual healing, subject to suspicion and exclusion from public display; this was even more true for Palo and non-Lucumí Afro-Cuban practices.<sup>32</sup> The benefits of afrocubanismo also led to conflict between cabildos, with different organizations trying to claim the best or most prestigious public platform. Ultimately, afrocubanismo represented a compromise: the majority of Lucumí practitioners in late Republican Cuba and into the Revolutionary era continued to practice in small, private casa-templos, but they gained a means of participating openly in Cuban society and civic life, if circumscribed by the standards of the intellectual elite.

#### Reconsidering the Cabildo in Diaspora

It was during height of afrocubanismo’s popularity in Republican Cuba that babalawo Francisco “Pancho” Mora immigrated to New York in 1946, establishing the first permanent practice of what was now commonly called Santería in the country. By establishing themselves permanently in New York, Mora and a number of priests and santeros who immigrated to the United States at this time had crossed a new diasporic horizon, forcing them to construct a new

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31. Wirtz, “Santería,” 424-428.

32. This had implications for both white and non-white Lucumí practitioners; many whites remained fearful of being associated with stigmatized “African” practices by their peers, while most Afro-Cubans were too poor and poorly connected to afford to engage in high-profile folkloric events; see *ibid.*, 425-426.

relationship to Cuba as their homeland. The key difference, however, between the African diaspora in the Americas through the slave trade and the “second diaspora” in the United States was the relative ease with which santeros could move between diaspora and homeland.<sup>33</sup> Frequent travels to Cuba were a large part of Santería practice in New York during the 1940s and 1950s out of ritual necessity: the critical ritual objects and knowledge needed to perform initiations remained in control of senior lineage members in Cuba, who closely controlled their use, meaning that santeros in New York had to return to their cabildos and casa-templos of origin for the most important ritual acts.<sup>34</sup>

This close connection between santeros in New York and the Cuba cabildos probably prevented the nascent Santería community in New York from developing its own independent cabildos—it existed as an adjunct of the Cuban community.<sup>35</sup> The success of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and its aftermath changed this dynamic significantly, but not completely. The influx of exiles during the 1960s included a significant number of practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions, and along with the more general exile population they largely settled in Miami, Tampa Bay, and other South Florida cities, creating a new center for Santería in the United States. The exiles brought with them many of the ritual objects previously missing in the United States, but at the same time they were now effectively cut off from the religious community in Cuba. Though it was never impossible for santeros in the United States to return to Cuba, and travel between the two countries was restored in the 1970s, the separation forced santeros in the United

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33. For a discussion of this dynamic of travel between diaspora and homeland, see Johnson, 99-101.

34. Thus, for example, Mora could not initiate new babalawos because the necessary ritual object, the *olofin*, remained in the hands of his powerful rama leader, Quintín Lombillo; Lombillo counted Carlos Socarrás, Cuban president from 1948-1952, among his clients; see Brown, 84-85.

35. *Ibid.*, 92-93.

States to develop their own ritual and community structure—to replicate Cuban activities and institutions as best they could in their new environment.<sup>36</sup>

The conditions of the Exile and the United States in general during the 1960s were not, however, conducive to the development of new public cabildos. Santeros in the Miami area, in fact, avoided forming public institutions during the 1960s and 1970s. The exile community was on average politically more conservative and more Catholic than the Cuban norm, with correspondingly negative views of Santería. This made it difficult for santeros to conduct religious practices in any public consciousness, and still remain part of the larger exile community. Miami santeros thus tended to publically mark their Cubanness, while continuing to practice discreetly in small, private casa-templos, or in the context of Catholic worship and events.<sup>37</sup> The New York Santería community was visible, but there, too, santeros continued the process of affiliating Santería with concepts of religion popular in the larger society, in this case Cuban and Puerto Rican immigrants. For example, some santeros in New York incorporated their practice into the Spiritism popular among the Puerto Rican community in the city, a practice derided as “Santerismo” by santeros and Spiritists who saw it as a crass attempt to gain more clients and thus more income.<sup>38</sup>

A much more radical reconfiguration of Santería organization arose from the involvement of African Americans with Santería in New York. This was principally the work of Osejiman Adefunmi (1928-2005), born Walter Serge King, a black nationalist who became involved with Santería and Vodou in the 1950s but who became dissatisfied with the use of

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36. Ibid.

37 . Thomas Tweed notes that there was an awareness and tension between santeros and Catholics in Miami, particularly over the occasional, surreptitious use of Catholic church grounds or events by santeros for minor ritual functions; see Thomas Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 45-55.

38. Brandon, 111-113.

European cultural and religious elements in these religions. Having taken a Yoruba name, Adefunmi began to argue for a return to “traditional” Yoruba religious practice in African-derived religions, and to promote Yoruba religion to African Americans.<sup>39</sup> As part of this project, Adefunmi worked to establish a public religious organization; from 1960 to 1965 he operated the Yoruba Temple in New York, which attracted a significant following of African Americans. Adefunmi’s public activism, however, along with his Black Nationalism and open disregard for Cuban religious authorities, led to conflict between Adefunmi and New York santeros and the closure of his organization. In 1970, Adefunmi and his followers established a model Yoruba community in coastal South Carolina, Oyotunji African Village, and Adefunmi travelled to Nigeria to be re-initiated and invested as *oba* (“king”) Osejiman Adefunmi I—symbolically placing himself above any authority figure in Santería.<sup>40</sup>

#### *Yoruba Reversionism and the Church of the Lukumi*

Adefunmi himself remained a fringe figure for most santeros throughout his religious career, but his reestablishment of a direct religious connection with Africa became attractive to some santeros in the United States, including white santeros in Miami. Many U.S. santeros were dissatisfied with their continued dependence on Cuba, even after travel between the two countries became easier in the 1970s. Going to Cuba forced U.S. santeros to deal with Cuban cabildos and rama leaders, who were not always forthcoming with religious knowledge; Africa presented an alternative source of religious authority. In 1975, Miguel Gómez, a U.S. babalawo who had been snubbed by the Ifá establishment in Cuba, travelled to Nigeria and was invested

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39. The centrality of the Yoruba to Adefunmi derived from his personal beliefs, but also from his study of early Pan-African thinkers and anthropologists such as Melville Herskovits, who considered the Yoruba to be the most important cultural influence on Africans in the Americas, and generally ignored groups such as the Congo; see Tracey E. Hucks, *Yoruba Traditions and African American Religious Nationalism* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2012), 132-134.

40. *Ibid.*, 147-155; Brandon, 114-120

with the *olofin* by a Yoruba babalawo—a dramatic gesture, given the importance of the Ifá priesthood in both the United States and Cuba.<sup>41</sup> Gómez and other santeros who were initiated in Nigeria, under various circumstances, took up Adefunmi’s argument that Yoruba practice was the original, authentic form of what had become Santería in Cuba, and thus endowed with superior religious authority. This position became known as Yoruba traditionalism or “reversionism.”

One santero who became interested in Yoruba reversionism during the 1970s was Miami *oriaté* Ernesto Pichardo. Pichardo had grown up in the exile community of Hialeah, Florida, in a family of santeros; his mother Carmen Plá, stepfather Raoul Rodriguez, and brother Fernando Pichardo were all initiates, and his involvement with Yoruba reversionism and Santería organization had deeply personal roots. When Pichardo completed his initiation 1971, he received a divination that he interpreted as instructing him to establish Santería as a public religion in the United States. Pichardo concluded that for Santería to be recognized as a religion, it would have to be clearly associated with its own distinctive culture and history—the traditions of the Yoruba, as practiced by the Cuban Lucumí. Consequently, the reversion Pichardo imagined was partial. He viewed the incorporation of Catholic elements into Santería practice, and even the term “Santería” itself, as perpetuating the image of Lucumí religion as an inauthentic or non-religious form of magic or witchcraft, and thus the tendency of practitioners to keep their religion private and hidden. But at the same time, Pichardo continued to characterize Lucumí practice as essentially Afro-Cuban, rather than purely African.<sup>42</sup> In essence,

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41. Brown, 93-94.

42. David M. O’Brien, *Animal Sacrifice and Religious Freedom: Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé v. City of Hialeah* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 29-33; for Pichardo’s own statements on the subject, see “Rule or Diplomacy?” and “Syncretism: An Opinion from Within,” *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé*, <http://www.church-of-the-lukumi.org> (accessed March 22, 2012).

Pichardo sought to recapitulate the development of Lucumí identity in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Cuba in the United States.

In 1974, Pichardo and his family began working towards his religious vision by establishing the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé, named for the *orisha* of sickness and healing.<sup>43</sup> As the senior initiate in the group, Carmen Plá took on the role of ritual head of the CLBA, but Pichardo, as spokesman, directed its position on public religious matters. Beyond its advocacy for Yoruba reversionism, the CLBA also proposed measures that would restrict or regulate santeros, such as the formal certification or even licensing of Santería priests in the manner of ordained clergy, and universal ethical guidelines for priestly conduct.<sup>44</sup> In contrast to the network of independent, competitive *casa-templos* that made up the Santería community in Miami and the United States, Pichardo imagined Santería as a religious denomination with a formal institutional structure, an image invoked in his formal use of the term “Church” rather than *cabildo*. But Pichardo also kept aspects of the Cuban *cabildos* in mind in developing the CLBA’s structure; a later statement described its organizational model as based on the study of both “pre-colonial Yoruba” organization and “Cabildos established during colonial Cuba,” and called for the religious governance of the Church, and Santería as a whole, to be shared between lineages.<sup>45</sup>

In 1974, however, the CLBA existed as little more than another *casa-templo*, with no significant public presence and no articulation of its religious goals. It was not until 1978 that Pichardo, the primary theological force behind the CLBA, chose to take the group public.

Pichardo and the other Church members travelled to Oyotunji African Village, where they

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43. Babalu Ayé, associated with smallpox and in more recent years with AIDS, is commonly associated with Saint Lazarus, a popular saint among both santeros and Catholics in Cuba.

44. “Declaration on the Matters of Individualism and the Life of Priests” and “Purpose Statement,” *CLBA* (accessed March 22, 2012).

45. “CLBA Structure,” *CLBA* (accessed March 22, 2012).

consecrated the village's first shrine to Babalu Ayé.<sup>46</sup> Pichardo's choice of Oyotunji was notable because, though the two groups shared an emphasis on the Africanness of their religious practices, the CLBA did not embrace Oyotunji's form of Yoruba Traditional Religion, or full Yoruba reversionism: the Church's members were all white, "culturally Lucumí" Cubans, and maintained the cultural distinctiveness of the Lucumí, including those Creole cultural elements not linked directly to Catholicism. At the time, Oyotunji was among the only location where African religion was practiced publicly in the United States, and by associating with Oyotunji, Pichardo made clear the CLBA's intention to break with the status quo of Santería in the United States. The relationship between the two groups was a careful exchange of religious power: the CLBA offered the religious knowledge of its members in exchange for Oyotunji's public profile.<sup>47</sup>

Pichardo also sought to build the CLBA's public profile by appealing to an entirely different group, academia. He reached out initially to Oscar Dathorne, a Guyanese novelist who was at the time the head of the University of Miami's African American studies program. With Dathorne's help, Pichardo organized a three-day seminar on Santería at the University of Miami, from June 1 to June 3, 1978. Entitled "Does the Afro-Cuban Religion of Santería Conflict with Christianity?" the seminar was a relatively small affair, running for only two hours each day in the University student union.<sup>48</sup> Arranging a public event with help from a major university, and funding from the State of Florida, was major coup for Pichardo. Reaching out to academia gave the CLBA both a platform to express its religious beliefs and also the weight of academic

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46. O'Brien, 24-25.

47. This relationship lasted well into the 1980s; for an analysis of a later joint project between the two groups, see Stephan Palmié, "Against Syncretism: 'Africanizing' and 'Cubanizing' Discourses in North American Orisa Worship," in *Counterworks: Managing the Diversity of Knowledge*, ed. Richard Fardon (London: Routledge, 1995), 88-91.

48. "FEH Awards \$45,095 to Nine Florida Groups," *Newsletter of the Florida Endowment of the Humanities* (Spring 1978), 1, 3.

knowledge to back up its position on the form that Santería should take. In this regard, Pichardo's strategy was similar to those of Guerra or Angarica—engaging with and participating in the process of knowledge production in order to represent a *specific* image of Santería to society at large.

### The Cabildo and Community Mobilization in Miami

The 1980 Mariel Boatlift and its aftermath tested the capacity of the nascent CLBA to represent Santería against a new wave of official suspicion and moral panic. The extensive press coverage of animal sacrifice, sacrificial remains, and criminal activity related to Santería during the early 1980s made presenting a positive image of the religion simultaneously more difficult and more urgently necessary. This urgency was compounded by increased police action against Santería, primarily the breaking up of sacrifices in-progress and investigation into sacrificial remains, which actively threatened Santería practice and the formation of any kind of public Santería community. At the same time, the arrival of the Marielitos led to friction in Miami's Cuban community, including the Santería community. Santeros among the post-Revolutionary exile population feared that the stigma that quickly became attached to the Marielitos would draw negative attention to the discrete religious community they had created in diaspora. For their part, the Marielito santeros perceived many of their exile co-religionists as elitists and excessively materialistic. The larger percentage of black Cubans among the Marielitos added a racial component to this tension.<sup>49</sup>

Pichardo avoided public commentary on animal sacrifice and sacrificial remains during the early 1980s. In part, this was because he opposed “improper” forms of sacrifice or the disposal of ritual objects, and hoped that sacrifice could eventually be regulated in the manner of

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49. Mercedes Cros Sandoval, *Worldview, the Orichas, and Santería: From Africa to Cuba and Beyond* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2006), 334-335.

kosher slaughter.<sup>50</sup> Pichardo also shared the skepticism—or, indeed, the suspicion—of the Marielitos held by other Exile santeros, and was likely concerned that involvement with what was seen as a Marielito issue would hurt the CLBA’s nascent reputation.<sup>51</sup> The first santero to speak out in defense of sacrifice in the mainstream Miami press—against a 1983 plan by two animal welfare organizations to offer a cash reward for information on animal sacrifice—was in fact a recently arrived Mariel exile and babalawo named Rigoberto Zamora. Zamora’s goals and methods were similar to Pichardo’s in many respects. He identified himself as the head of an organization, the Afro-Cuban Lucumí Association; in a March 5 *Miami Herald* article, he argued that while santeros should not “break the law and sacrifice in the middle of the street,” they should have the legal right to practice “in our churches and homes”; and he and his supporters distributed educational pamphlets to the public during their media appearances.<sup>52</sup> As a Marielito, Zamora experienced far greater pressure from the press and police attention directed at sacrifice, and also likely felt a more urgent need to establish a public presence in Miami for his own institutional project, leading him to a more confrontational approach than Pichardo.

Rather than engaging with the press and authorities immediately, during the early 1980s Pichardo chose to strengthen the CLBA’s ties with academia. In 1983, Pichardo became part of the University of Miami’s Institute for New World Studies, another project developed by O. R. Dathorne, and participated in a project titled “New Religions in South Florida: Santería.”<sup>53</sup> In

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50. One of the CLBA's initial arguments in its controversy with Hialeah and the first stages of the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* case was that animal sacrifice was protected under the ritual slaughter exemption of the Federal Human Slaughter Act; *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé v. City of Hialeah*, 1723 F.Supp 1467 (1989), 1484.

51. Palmié quotes Pichardo as describing the Marielitos as “antisocial scum from the black barrios of Havana,” and associating the Marielitos with the increased incidence of “amoral” Palo practice in Miami; however, Palmié notes that Pichardo also accused Hialeah Mayor Raul Martinez of employing Palo against the CLBA in 1987; Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*, 198-199.

52. Suzanne Spring, “Rewards Offered to Stop Santería Animal Sacrifices,” *Miami Herald*, February 16, 1983; Ana Veciana-Suarez, “Santería Cult, Wildlife Agencies Prepare for Battle,” *Miami Herald*, March 5, 1983.

53. The project received \$1,150 from the Florida Endowment for the Humanities; “FEH Funds 24 Projects for \$126,133,” *Newsletter of the Florida Endowment for the Humanities* (1983), 2.

this capacity, Pichardo made his first comments on the social and legal status of Santería to the press, on a 1984 case involving a first-grade student who had missed four weeks of school as part of a Santería initiation. Several Dade County School Board officials expressed their skepticism of the legitimacy of a religious exemption for Santería, with Chairman Paul Cejas calling the religion a “cult”; a December 1984 *Miami Herald* article on the case quoted Pichardo as an expert alongside Miami Dade College scholar Mercedes Cros Sandoval, both defending Santería’s religious status.<sup>54</sup> During this period, Pichardo also became an important informant for German anthropologist Stephan Palmié, who Pichardo designated the “official” historical observer for the CLBA’s project.

As the 1980s progressed, Pichardo became more willing to speak out on the issue of animal sacrifice, often seeking to bridge the gap between santeros and police. In 1985 he mediated between Miami-Dade police and a number of babalawos charged with animal cruelty over a large-scale sacrifice, ultimately securing the dismissal of all charges.<sup>55</sup> The following year, while teaching at Miami Dade College, Pichardo participated in a training course on Santería conducted by the Miami-Dade Metropolitan Police Department. The course was intended to prevent misunderstandings between adherents and police officers, and notably also to educate officers that, according to the interpretation of the Department itself, animal sacrifice was protected under Florida law. The program received criticism from some members of the public for offering a degree of legitimacy to Santería, but it also attracted positive interest from local law enforcement agencies.<sup>56</sup>

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54. Cathy Shaw and Patricia Duarte, “Santería Study Excuses Absence; Board Attorney: OK for 1st Grader to Miss Month of School,” *Miami Herald*, December 7, 1984.

55. This may have been the case reported by Yves Colon in the *Miami Herald* on June 11, 1985; although 15 were arrested in that case, it was the only case involving a similar number of arrests from 1984 or 1985; see O'Brien, 26.

56. “Class on Cult Gets Sergeant in Hot Water,” *Miami Herald*, May 30, 1986.

Emboldened by Pichardo's success in public outreach, the CLBA's leadership took the step of acquiring property for a dedicated physical location in April 1987. Opening an official church building in south-central Hialeah, Florida, was both the most forceful assertion of the CLBA's institutional presence as a *cabildo* and the most forceful act of self-representation against negative depictions of *Santería*, largely because the CLBA was entirely open about plans to perform animal sacrifices on the site. Pichardo and the other Church leaders hoped that opening a public location would help normalize the religion and demonstrate to Miami *santeros* that public practice was a viable option.<sup>57</sup> However, the Church was able to respond quickly when public and official opinion turned decisively against it during the summer of 1987, and used the controversy to further its representational goals. Pichardo challenged the actions of the Hialeah City Council both at the fateful June 9 Council meeting and in a June 22 debate with councilman Julio Martinez on the major Miami English-language radio station WIOD-AM. In both cases, Pichardo braved serious verbal abuse from his audience to make his claim to religious free exercise.<sup>58</sup> The controversy represented a complete reversal of the CLBA's hope to normalize *Santería*'s presence in Miami, but it secured the kind of public awareness of *Santería* that the Church had sought for the past decade.

#### *Mobilizing Santeros after Hialeah*

The controversy over the CLBA's proposed Church in Hialeah, and the publicity generated by the Hialeah ordinances and the Church's ultimate decision to challenge them in court attracted a degree of public support for the Pichardo and his organization—but not necessarily the support they needed. Pichardo's connections in media and academia helped ensure that the CLBA received legal support. The CLBA's lawyer, Jorge Duarte, was the brother

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57. O'Brien, 33-34.

58. Carlos Harrison, "Hialeah Move to Block *Santería* Sacrifices," *Miami Herald*, June 10, 1987; Carlos Harrison, "Santería Heats Talk-Show Tempers," *Miami Herald*, June 25, 1987.

of *Miami Herald* reporter Patricia Duarte, who had reported on the Church repeatedly, and the Church also enjoyed the support of the ACLU.<sup>59</sup> But among the CLBA's hoped-for constituents, Miami santeros, the response was more mixed. Those santeros who disliked the CLBA's reformist agenda offered no help, and even members and clients of the Church who had pledged money toward its building project were driven away by the negative attention, something that both Ernesto Pichardo and other Church leaders complained about bitterly to the press. Ultimately the lack of funds led the CLBA's landlord to evict the Church from its location for failure to pay rent; the Church relocated to a Hialeah storefront several blocks away.<sup>60</sup>

But the controversy over the CLBA was recognized as a critical moment by a number of other santeros who shared Pichardo's advocacy for public Santería practice. Of these santeros, only Rigoberto Zamora had any public profile as a spokesman for Santería. The others who became prominent after the Hialeah ordinances were announced were Willie Ramos, then working as a travel agent, who established the Cabildo Yoruba Omo Orisha and *Eleda* in 1988, and Jose Montoya, a Mariel exile and Palero who began organizing with other santeros around 1990.<sup>61</sup> None of these organizational leaders had any direct affiliation with the CLBA or Pichardo, and their organizations differed from the CLBA in specific matters of religious observance and identity, but all shared the goal of representing Santería publicly as a religion and defeating the Hialeah ordinances.

Of these Santería organizations, only the Cabildo Yoruba approached the CLBA's level of public activity. The Cabildo Yoruba was similar to the CLBA, in that both organizations

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59. O'Brien, 34, 47-48.

60. "Santería Priest Accuses City of Harassment," *Miami Herald*, June 6, 1987; Carlos Harrison, "Santería Church's Woes Increase as Donations Dry Up," *Miami Herald*, June 7, 1987; Frank Burgos, "Landlord Ousts Santerías from Hialeah Church," *Miami Herald*, February 4, 1988.

61. This information comes from the history of Montoya's current project, the Templo de Ministros Shangó Eyife; see "Reglas," last modified December 3, 2012, *Templo de Ministros Shangó Eyife*, <http://www.obaife.homestead.com/Reglas-y-mandamientos.htm> (accessed March 23, 2013).

supported a public presence and a stronger organizational structure for Santería, and both referenced the Lucumí cabildos of Republican Cuba. The two groups differed, however, in their methodology and approach to community. The CLBA acted as a single institution, intended as a focal point for both santeros and the attention of society at large. In contrast, the Cabildo Yoruba acted primarily as a clearinghouse for information on Santería practice and the community, rather than a site for practice itself. Although the Cabildo Yoruba maintained an office in Little Havana, it was used primarily as educational space, rather than ritual space; the Cabildo's central activity was the publication of *Eleda*, which served to disseminate educational materials on Santería mythology and proper ritual conduct, and also to advise readers of events and occurrences of interest to santeros. Recurring features included notifications of births and deaths, monthly discussions of different orishas and their attributes, and “antiguos remedios de los abuelos” by Delma Rodriguez, on traditional herbal remedies and healing.

The Cabildo Yoruba also organized events, publicized in *Eleda*, principally educational seminars on proper ritual conduct, divination, and Santería theology. The Cabildo Yoruba's own educational events were offered only intermittently and somewhat informally—all the Cabildo staff had fulltime jobs elsewhere—but the Cabildo did engage in more formal projects as well, in a manner similar to the CLBA. From June 6 to June 8, 1989, Ramos participated in a symposium on Santería arts and music organized by Mercedes Cros Sandoval at Miami-Dade College, alongside venerable Puerto Rican babalawo Roberto Boluffer.<sup>62</sup> Further, Ramos used *Eleda* to draw attention on multiple occasions to the activities of other santeros, both in Miami and nationwide, including Ernesto Pichardo, Rigoberto Zamora—who advertised his services as a

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62. “Simposio,” *Eleda* (July 1989), 6.

babalawo in several issues of *Eleda*—and the Los Angeles-based santero Ysamur Flores.<sup>63</sup>

Ramos also formed connections with Candomblé practitioners in Salvador and Brazil and brought a delegation of Miami santeros to participate in Salvador’s feast of Yemanjá on February 2, 1990.<sup>64</sup>

Publishing educational materials and building working relationships with other santeros and Afro-Cuban religionists were the Cabildo Yoruba’s chief means of advancing its ideal form of religious practice. In his writings and editorial decisions in *Eleda*, Ramos struck a balance between reformism and attempts to accommodate the multiple views within the Santería community. Like the CLBA, the Cabildo Yoruba advocated a degree of Yoruba reversionism that elevated the African origins of Santería and downplayed Christian or European elements. Ramos, like Pichardo, disliked the term “Santería” and was skeptical of any significant syncretism between African and European practices, while maintaining the distinctiveness of the different forms of Yoruba religion in the Americas, including Cuban Lucumí.<sup>65</sup> But Ramos’s opposition to syncretic imagery was tempered by his goal of fostering greater communal involvement among Miami santeros at large, including those who continued to employ Catholic ritual objects, images, and terminology. Thus, *Eleda* ran a monthly series on different saints syncretized with orishas, and frequently reprinted Catholic devotional imagery. An October 1989 article by Delma Rodríguez summed up the Cabildo Yoruba’s view on syncretism: even where apparently syncretic elements exist in Santería practice, they should not be interpreted as a “simple caricature of Christianity.”<sup>66</sup>

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63. In 1988 Flores spoke out against a proposed ban on animal sacrifice in Los Angeles, modeled on the Hialeah ban; see Scott Harris, “Religious Groups Fear Animal Protection Law Would Stifle Rituals,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 8, 1988.

64. “Viaje a Bahía de Todos los Santos, Brasil,” *Eleda* (December 1989), 5-6.

65. “Santería o Yoruba?” *Eleda* (November 1990), 2.

66. “Concepta de Magia y Religión,” *Eleda* (October 1989), 5-6.

Ramos was particularly concerned with such negative depictions of Santería, particularly those linking it to witchcraft or satanism. Like Pichardo, he argued that the perception of Santería as a syncretic mixture of Catholicism and African practices, the most common description of the religion given in the mainstream press, was what allowed for Santería to be dismissed as witchcraft or Satanism, instead of a religion, by portraying Santería as a deviant or corrupted form of Catholicism. As early as January 1989, in *Eleda*'s second issue, Ramos vociferously denied any connection between Santería and the rumors of satanic ritual abuse then common nationwide. Ramos accepted the possible existence of satanic cultists, but argued that “the Yoruba have no concept of ‘God and the Devil,’” and that Satanism was an evil derived from the Christian tradition itself.<sup>67</sup> Against the negative image, Ramos argued that Santería must be represented as a religion with its own cultural history and community—a representation that would have to be carried out by all santeros to be truly effective.

The Cabildo Yoruba built on its educational and community-building activities in its efforts to fight negative representations of Santería. Ramos organized or was involved with a number of public cultural events meant to educate an outside audience, similar to the processions conducted by the Lucumí cabildos in Cuba or the *cabildos de nación*. In fact, one of the events staged by the Cabildo Yoruba that received coverage in the Miami press was a procession through Coconut Grove on September 17, 1989, modeled on the historic processions of Havana's Cabildo de Regla.<sup>68</sup> The Cabildo Yoruba also embraced some of the folkloric treatments of Santería, to connect better with a public audience; on March 31, 1990, the Cabildo staged a choreographed version of a possession-performance/dance, titled *Wemilere* [meaning a festival

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67. “En Defensa Propia,” *Eleda* (January 1989), 5-7, 9.

68. Ivan Roman, “Santería Putting its Beliefs on Display in Grove,” *Miami Herald*, September 17, 1989; “Cabildo de Regla,” *Eleda* (August 1989), 3.

for the *orishas*], at the Teatro Marti in Miami. The performance was held in honor of the influential afrocubanist and folklorist Lydia Cabrera, then in her 90s.<sup>69</sup>

At the same time as it employed an educational approach, the Cabildo Yoruba also confronted the negative image of Santería directly. This was the case in the Cabildo's first publicized action, after the murders committed by Adolfo Constanzo and his followers in Matamoros, Mexico, came to light in March 1989. The Matamoros killings, which combined elements of Palo with the worst pop-cultural depictions of human sacrifice and Santería-as-satanic cult, presented a serious public relations threat. Ramos and Maria Rodríguez, the Cabildo Yoruba's vice-president, took the extreme measure of inviting the press to view a sacrifice performed at Rodríguez's home in April 1989 to demonstrate Santería's legitimate religious nature and humane sacrificial practices. From a public-relations standpoint, the sacrifice was a success; Liz Balmaseda's April 21 *Miami Herald* article was both the most complete and the most sympathetic piece on animal sacrifice to come out of the Miami media.<sup>70</sup>

By deliberately breaching ritual etiquette, the Cabildo Yoruba challenged other santeros in Miami to mobilize and assist public organizations in representing Santería. In the April 1989 issue of *Eleda*, Ramos argued against santeros who were content to hide in white society whenever Santería was subject to negative attention. He warned that if Santería adherents were unwilling to stand up for themselves and organize, "they [the media] will wipe the floor with us." Another article in the same issue, credited to "una amiga de los Brujos," chastised white Cuban adherents directly for distancing themselves from Santería's history of persecution, reminding them of the Cuban saying that "he who has no Congo, has some Carabalí"—that no white

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69. Laurie Horn, "Ritual Dance is Fascinating," *Miami Herald*, April 10, 1990; "Wemilere: Fiesta a los Orishas," *Eleda* (April 1990), 1-2.

70. Liz Balmaseda, "A Sacrifice of Secrecy: Santeros Open up a Private Ritual to Try to Wash the Stain from Santería Reputation," *Miami Herald*, April 21, 1989.

Cubans are free from African influences, or association with the history of persecution and brujería.<sup>71</sup> The implication was clear: refusal to stand up publicly and declare one's involvement with Santería was the same as acceptance of brujo as a label.

The Matamoros case was not the only occasion that Ramos called out other santeros for failure to represent their religion publicly or to support those who did. He challenged Miami santeros again in several *Eleda* articles written in the months following the CLBA's initial loss in Federal District Court on October 5, 1989. One factor that led presiding Judge Eugene Spellman to decide in favor of Hialeah was Pichardo's own admission that the CLBA could not guarantee humane slaughter practices or the proper disposal of sacrificial waste by santeros outside of its organization, thereby necessitating Hialeah's blanket ban on animal sacrifice.<sup>72</sup> Ramos criticized this state of affairs in a December 1989 editorial on the outcome of the trial, noting that the number of santeros in Dade County alone would have a significant political voice if they acted in unison.<sup>73</sup> In the February 1990 issue of *Eleda*, he also made a specific accusation against Cuban American journalists and officials who "secretly go to 'Hialeah' to visit their [Santería] godparents," only to describe the religion negatively or incorrectly in their work. Ramos signed the latter article with his religious name, Ilari Oba—an implicit suggestion to any of the individuals he accused that their failure to support Santería would have consequences in the religious community.<sup>74</sup>

### Conclusion

Ramos' criticism of Miami santeros who hid or otherwise failed to represent their religious beliefs indicates the chilling effect that the moral panic over Santería in Miami during

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71. "Editorial," *Eleda* (April 1989); "Santería o Brujos Anónimos?" *Eleda* (April 1989).

72. *CLBA Babalu Ayé v. City of Hialeah*, 723 F. Supp. 1467 (1989), in LexisNexis Academic, <http://www.lexisnexus.com/us/lnacademic/> (accessed February 16, 2012).

73. "En Defensa de la Santería," *Eleda* (December 1989), 1.

74. "Los Desentendidos," *Eleda* (February 1990), 7-8.

the 1980s had on most santeros. But it also indicates the profound difficulty faced by organizations like the Cabildo Yoruba and the CLBA in advocating their version of the cabildo model to the Santería community. Ramos, Pichardo, and their allies saw in the cabildo model, following the example of the Lucumí cabildos, a means of improving the social circumstances of Santería and gaining meaningful religious freedom and respect. But the techniques they saw as necessary to achieve this change—institutionalization and regulation, and the mobilization of santeros for public representation—clashed with the model of the cabildo-as-casa-templo embraced by the majority of santeros in Miami, who were either skeptical of the institutionalization of their religion or who saw no need to risk themselves through public representation. Both reformists and non-reformist santeros drew on versions of the cabildo model that were rooted in the history of the Lucumí cabildos, but offered different forms of communal organization and religious practice, making the broad-based mobilization of santeros envisioned by Ramos difficult to achieve.

This difficulty in mobilizing santeros ultimately undid the Cabildo Yoruba. *Eleda* ceased publication suddenly after its December 1990 issue, which was devoted to the orisha Shango and contained no mention of the ongoing controversy over Santería or the CLBA; Ramos and the handful of other contributors could no longer support the costs in time and money needed to produce a monthly newsletter. The members of the Cabildo Yoruba remained active supporters of the public practice and institutionalization of Santería, but the Cabildo itself faded out of existence as a legally inscribed organization. The dissolution of the Cabildo Yoruba after only two years of activity may be taken as a sign of the overall failure of Santería organizations in Miami to effect their desired reforms in the Santería community. But the short-term activity of the Cabildo Yoruba and related santeros and Santería organizations played a key role in

representing Santería publicly during a critical period for the religion's legal and social status in the United States. Without the activity of these organizations, it is doubtful that the CLBA and Ernesto Pichardo would have received the public attention and support that allowed *Lukumi v. Hialeah* to reach the U.S. Supreme Court, and to win their case. And as events following the 1993 *Lukumi* decision demonstrate, though they failed in the short term, the Santería organizations of the late 1980s had a significant, formative impact on the Santería community in the following decades.

CHAPTER 3  
REPRESENTATION AND RELIGIOUS AUTHORITY AFTER  
*LUKUMI V. HIALEAH*

When the United States Supreme Court ruled on June 11, 1993, that the ordinances passed by Hialeah, Florida, banning the ritual slaughter of animals were unconstitutional, it represented a dramatic change of fortune for Ernesto Pichardo and the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé. Prior to the 1993 decision, the CLBA had lost at every stage of the judicial process in the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* case; the initial Federal District Court ruling that the State had a compelling interest in preventing animal sacrifice was compounded by the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals' ruling on June 11, 1991, that even in the absence of a compelling interest, the State could restrict animal sacrifice with a religiously neutral, generally applicable law under the standard set by *Employment Division v. Smith* (494 U.S. 872, 1990).<sup>1</sup> While the Supreme Court did not strike down the *Smith* precedent, Justice Anthony M. Kennedy's opinion strongly improved the legal position of Santería in the United States, both by recognizing Santería practices as religious without qualification and by specifically criticizing the role played by negative representations of Santería in creating the animus that led to the Hialeah ordinances.<sup>2</sup>

The resolution of *Lukumi v. Hialeah* represented the end of the period of enhanced suspicion and moral panic directed at Santería in Miami during the 1980s; the late 1980s and early 1990s also saw the peak and subsequent recession of violent crime in Miami and the satanic panic in the United States as a whole, both of which had contributed to the moral panic

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1. See *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé v. City of Hialeah*, 1723 F.Supp.1467 (1989); the Appeals Court ruling was a single paragraph, never published.

2. *Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé v. City of Hialeah*, 508 U.S. 520 (1993), 540-542.

over Santería. Negative depictions of Santería in the local and national press, however, did not end, nor did police scrutiny of Santería practices or ritual objects. Ignorance of Santería and the stigma of its association with criminality and witchcraft continued to characterize press coverage and official attitudes towards Santería into the 1990s and 2000s. But the public exposure of Santería gained through the *Lukumi* trial, and the ruling in the case itself, changed the relationship between the press and authorities and santeros to some extent. While journalists continued to reference Santería primarily in sensationalized accounts of crime or bizarre incidents, they also became more likely to seek out the testimony of santeros on such stories. Similarly, law enforcement continued to scrutinize Santería activity, but with much more care given to the religious rights of practitioners.

Success in the case significantly strengthened the position of Ernesto Pichardo and the CLBA, both within the Santería community and in society at large, despite continued issues of representation and legal status in the aftermath of *Lukumi v. Hialeah*. In Stephan Palmié's terms, the CLBA moved from a marginalized position relative to the state to the "center" of the discourse on the position of Santería in U.S. society; Pichardo, in particular, became recognized as a public spokesman for Santería by authorities and the press, a role that also increased his influence in the Santería community.<sup>3</sup> The role of Pichardo and other reformist santeros like Willie Ramos, however, would continue to be a subject of controversy in the Santería community. Pichardo used his position as spokesman to argue for the legal rights of santeros, but also to assert power and religious authority within the Santería community, critiquing some santeros and supporting others. In the late 1990s and 2000s, the rise of the Internet as a means of communication and community organization and the increase in the popularity, and the

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3. Stephan Palmié, "Which Centre, Whose Margin? Notes Towards an Archaeology of U.S. Supreme Court Case 91-948, 1993" in *Inside and Outside the Law: Anthropological Studies of Authority and Ambiguity*, ed. Olivia Harris (New York: Routledge, 1996), 198-200.

development of new trends in African-derived religions nationwide—particularly the expansion of Yoruba Traditional Religion—led to new public representation and activity from new organizations that challenged the influence of the CLBA, Pichardo, and their allies.

#### Spokesmanship and Controversy: the Zamora Affair

The complexities of both Santería’s representational and legal situation and its community dynamics in Miami after *Lukumi v. Hialeah* were demonstrated by an incident that took place only two weeks after the *Lukumi* decision was announced.<sup>4</sup> Rigoberto Zamora, the babalawo who had made the first public statements in support of the legality of animal sacrifice in 1983, and who had engaged in his own institutional project and activism against the Hialeah ordinances, invited the press to view a sacrifice conducted at his Miami Beach apartment on June 26, 1993. He described the proposed event as “an act of demonstration and jubilee” directed at “those people who said it was cruelty to animals. We want those who don’t understand to understand.”<sup>5</sup> Zamora may have been following the example set by Willie Ramos, who publicized a sacrifice in an attempt to counteract the negative effects of the Matamoros killings in April 1989. Regardless of his inspiration or motivations, Zamora’s timing in announcing his public sacrifice guaranteed attention from the press, and from advocates of the Hialeah ordinances concerned about the future effects of the *Lukumi* decision.

Given Zamora’s stated public-relations goal and the amount of attention he attracted, his sacrifice was a fiasco. Unlike Ramos’ public sacrifice, which went smoothly and was described sympathetically by the Miami Herald’s reporter, Zamora’s sacrifice displayed the more visceral and off-putting aspects of ritual slaughter to the press: Zamora was forced to switch out a dull

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4. Zamora’s sacrifice and the subsequent dispute were first examined by David M. O’Brien, who noted the role of race and religious authority in the dispute, but primarily analyzed the case in terms its implications for Santería’s legal status post-*Lukumi*; David M. O’Brien, *Animal Sacrifice and Religious Freedom: Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé v. City of Hialeah* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2004), 153-156.

5. Aminda Marques, “Scope of Santería Ruling Still Uncertain,” *Miami Herald*, June 24, 1993.

knife while cutting the throat of a goat, and struck the heads of sacrificial chickens against the floor to stun them.<sup>6</sup> Zamora faced an immediate outcry from animal welfare activists and Miami Beach residents, which inspired an attempt by members of the Miami Beach City Council to change zoning laws to restrict “slaughter.”<sup>7</sup> Zamora also faced personal repercussions for his public display. Less than a month after the incident, he was evicted from his apartment, and while Dade County initially declined to charge him with a crime, likely due to the legal confusion following the *Lukumi* decision, Zamora was eventually arrested in 1995 on animal cruelty charges. Ultimately he reached a plea bargain with prosecutors and served 400 hours of community service.<sup>8</sup>

Ernesto Pichardo was among the critics of Zamora’s public sacrifice, both at the time it was announced and in the aftermath of the event. In response to Zamora’s announcement, Pichardo questioned the utility of performing a public sacrifice and argued, accurately, “When people are exposed [to sacrifice] suddenly, a lot will show displeasure.”<sup>9</sup> In response to the outcry over Zamora’s actions, Pichardo took the drastic step of publicly condemning Zamora. Interviewed as part of news coverage of the sacrifice, Pichardo asserted that Zamora’s sacrifice “offends the sensibility of the [Santería] community at large” and announced an investigation of Zamora’s religious credentials; in short order, Pichardo announced to the press on June 29, 1993, that Zamora had been “expelled from the religious community nationwide.”<sup>10</sup> Pichardo’s condemnation had no binding effect on Zamora, who was not a CLBA member, and less than a week later Pichardo himself was publicly castigated by another priest, Jose Montoya. Montoya

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6. Aminda Marques, “Protestors, Santeros Rap Unusual Public Animal Sacrifices,” *Miami Herald*, June 27, 1993; “‘We’re a Religion, Just Like Any Other’: Santería Priest Holds Sacrifices in Public,” *USA Today*, June 28, 1993.

7. Aminda Marques, “Beach Law May Limit Animal Sacrifices,” *Miami Herald*, June 30, 1993.

8. David Hancock, “Santería Priest Gets Eviction Papers,” *Miami Herald*, July 20, 1993; Cynthia Corzo, “Santería Priest OKs Deal with Prosecutors,” *Miami Herald*, July 31, 1996.

9. Marques, “Scope of Santería Ruling.”

10. Marques, “Protestors, Santeros Rap Sacrifices”; “Santería Leaders Expel Priest,” *St. Petersburg Times (Florida)*, June 30, 1993.

agreed with Pichardo's criticism of Zamora's public sacrifice as ill timed and counterproductive, but he condemned Pichardo for overreaching his religious authority and demanded an apology.<sup>11</sup> This exchange led to a feud, with Pichardo and the CLBA on one side and Montoya and Zamora on the other, which lasted through the next decade.

The results of the "Zamora affair" demonstrated several issues that would characterize Santería in the coming decades. Most apparent were the uncertainties surrounding Santería's legal status, even after the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* decision. Pichardo and the CLBA leadership had already begun to reconsider the degree to which rituals should be publicized, in light of the extreme negative reaction that led the Hialeah ordinances; in December 1992, the CLBA repudiated public sacrifice of the kind performed by Willie Ramos, likely to avoid further worsening the Church's public image while the *Lukumi* case was entering its final phase.<sup>12</sup> In the aftermath of the *Lukumi* decision, Pichardo's legal team would have advised him that animal sacrifice could still be restricted by laws written broadly enough to be considered generally applicable and religiously neutral—including, potentially, the zoning changes proposed in Miami Beach in response to Zamora's sacrifice. Additionally, the CLBA's inability to hold santeros outside of its organization to legally recognized standards of slaughter when performing sacrifices was an important factor in the Church's loss in the 1989 Federal District Court trial.<sup>13</sup> By condemning Zamora, Pichardo sought to solidify the CLBA's position against inevitable future controversy.

Pichardo's "excommunication" of Zamora and subsequent dispute with Montoya also raised the issue of religious authority in a way specific to the Santería community. On the surface, the conflict was a battle between the reformist, unifying, organizational structure

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11. "Santería Group Wants Apology from Priest," *Miami Herald*, 6 July 1993.

12. O'Brien, 49, 153.

13. 723 F.Supp.1467 (1989), 1486-1487.

advocated by the CLBA and the traditionalist, independent structure favored by many Miami santeros. But Montoya and Zamora were both engaged in their own organizational projects and generally supported the same structured, institutionalized form of Santería practice as Pichardo. Instead, their opposition was to what they perceived as Pichardo's attempt to monopolize religious authority for himself and his organization. And despite his reformist position, Pichardo relied on the traditional terms of religious initiation and community consensus in his critiques. In a 1998 *Miami New Times* reflecting on the feud, Pichardo called Zamora's credentials into question: "Babalawos who have spoken with [Zamora], questioned him, say he is a complete impostor . . . people get off the plane from Cuba, set up in an apartment somewhere, and claim they are babalawos. They cheat people. This is why we need certification, why we need an institution—to weed these people out."<sup>14</sup> He also claimed to have had broad-based support from over 300 babalawos in expelling Zamora, himself a babalawo, from Santería practice; fittingly, Montoya claimed support from 200 santeros in demanding an apology from Pichardo.<sup>15</sup>

The dispute between the priests involved in the Zamora affair resembled the kind of community relations described by Kristina Wirtz in her ethnography of Santería communities in Cuba. Wirtz observed that mutual criticism between members of different ramas, cabildos, and casa-templos played a critical role in maintaining the larger Santería community, exerting pressure on santeros to conform to communal moral standards but also allowing santeros to assert the distinctiveness of their own lineage and practice. The style of critique Wirtz observed

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14. John Lantigua, "Holy Wars, Inc.," *Miami New Times*, April 9, 1998; see also O'Brien, 82, 154-155.

15. These numbers are feasible, given the number of babalawos and santeros initiated in Miami after 1959, but the exact number and nature of the individuals involved varies. Lantigua's 1998 article mentions 350 babalawos, while O'Brien (154) gives "about 300 santeros," and in a 2006 forum comment, Pichardo, posting as Obairawo, his religious name, mentioned in passing over 400 "credited" babalawos, suggesting some exaggeration for rhetorical effect; see Obairawo, 4 August 2006 (5:04), comment on "Fidel Castro gives power to his brother temporarily," *Diaspora Orisha Network*, <http://diasporaorishanetwork.yuku.com> (accessed April 5, 2012).

was confined to ritual spaces and generally cloaked in interpersonal gossip.<sup>16</sup> In contrast, the dispute in Miami was public and direct; Pichardo, Montoya, and Zamora actively employed the Miami press to disseminate their critiques in the public sphere, and they argued over issues of religious authority and community organization explicitly.

Race and class also played a role in the dispute, especially between Pichardo and Zamora. The CLBA had largely avoided race as an issue during the 1980s—its membership and audience were largely white “culturally Lucumí” Cubans of the post-Revolutionary exile era, and even the Church’s involvement with Yoruba reversionism was focused on Cuban Lucumí identity rather than directly African identity. But Pichardo’s assertion that Zamora, a black Cuban and Marielito, was an impostor “off the plane” from Cuba, and his interest in regulating the conduct of santeros more generally, seemed to reference the stigma of the Marielitos as unscrupulous and undisciplined, if not barbaric. Zamora saw Pichardo’s condemnation as an attack on the position of the Marielitos and more recent Cuban immigrants within the Miami Santería community. In the 1998 *Miami New Times* article, Zamora held up his blackness against Pichardo’s criticisms, arguing, “Anyway, the only people who really understand this religion are black people like me. It comes from Africa. It is in my blood. Pichardo is white. It isn’t in his blood. The whites are trying to steal our religion because of the money in it.”<sup>17</sup>

Stephan Palmié, considering the possible consequences of the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* decision in 1996, anticipated this escalation of the scope and intensity of dispute within the Miami Santería community. Although he did not consider the Zamora affair itself, Palmié noted that increasingly public conflict was a consequence of Pichardo’s own efforts to promote public practice and public organization through the CLBA. The CLBA’s public conflict with Hialeah

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16. Kristina Wirtz, *Ritual, Discourse, and Community in Cuban Santería: Speaking a Sacred World* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2007), 193-195.

17. Lantigua, “Holy Wars, Inc.”

had opened the door to public organization among Miami santeros, even if the resulting organizations were short lived or limited in their appeal. There was no guarantee that new Santería organizations in Miami would support the CLBA, as they had after 1987; Palmié suggested that Pichardo's established status as media spokesman for Santería meant that any santeros opposing the CLBA would be obliged to organize publicly to avoid being marginalized by the Church's influence, and would receive far greater media attention when they did so.<sup>18</sup> This assertion would prove to be prescient, as Pichardo's role as media spokesman became the key factor in how the CLBA related to the Santería community in Miami and the United States during the 1990s and 2000s—both in the Church's activism for Santería practice, and in its disputes with other groups in the community.

#### Representation and Community in the Internet Age

The years following the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* decision saw new a new phase in the development of Santería organizational structure and related public activities in Miami. After the events of 1987 to 1993, the CLBA was the only Santería organization with a significant public presence in Miami, and the costly legal battle led Ernesto Pichardo and the rest of the Church leadership to engage in a period of rebuilding. The CLBA focused on developing its religious functions and membership, and in 1995 licensed its first group of 40 official clergy, made up of already-initiated priests and priestesses.<sup>19</sup> Jose Montoya and Rigoberto Zamora were involved in a series of organizations during this period. In 1994, both were part of an attempt to create a Pan-Afro-Cuban religious organization in Miami; in December 1996, Montoya, with Zamora's involvement, organized a meeting of santeros to promote a "Yoruba-Catholic Church" for the significant number of santeros who continued to employ syncretic images and rituals in their

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18. Palmié, "Which Centre?" 201-205.

19. "CLBA History," CLBA, <http://www.church-of-the-lukumi.org> (accessed June 4, 2012).

practice.<sup>20</sup> Montoya also opened his own church, the Templo de Ministros Shango Eyeife, in a Hialeah storefront in 1995. Unlike the uproar over the CLBA eight years prior, Montoya's organization received only slight notice from local residents, but he did make clear to reporters and Hialeah authorities that no sacrifices would be performed at the site.<sup>21</sup>

The CLBA itself slowly abandoned the idea of a designated public location for Santería practice as the organization retrenched during the 1990s. The project that had begun the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* case, the original CLBA building that sparked controversy with its opening in 1987, was razed by the property's owners during the mid-1990s; the Church had never reoccupied the structure after being forced out in 1988.<sup>22</sup> The CLBA continued to operate in two storefront locations in downtown Hialeah, but the expense of keeping up a permanent location, and the continuing concerns of Church members over public exposure to city authorities led the Church leadership to finally close its offices in 1999. According to Pichardo, the decision was made in response to divination that suggested the Church should “reevaluate the concept, disconnect, and begin to measure what is obsolete, what needs to be reshaped, and how to actualize it.”<sup>23</sup> Subsequently, the CLBA returned to holding meeting and rituals in the homes of members, in the classic casa-templo style.

The reduction of the CLBA's physical public presence did not, however, mean a retreat from public representation in other areas. Pichardo's role as a spokesman was not confined to the press. The *Lukumi v. Hialeah* decision, and public exposure from the decision, had greatly increased Pichardo's status as an informant and historical figure in U.S. Santería, strengthening Pichardo's position in academia. Pichardo continued to educate during the 2000s, becoming an

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20. Ana Santiago, “Afro-Cuban Religious Groups Plan to Unify,” *Miami Herald*, July 29, 1994; Armando Correa, “Santería Leaders Plan New Direction for Their Faith,” *Miami Herald*, December 7, 1996.

21. Aminda Marques, “Santería Still Shrouded in Secrecy,” *Miami Herald*, June 11, 1995.

22. O'Brien, 161.

23. *Ibid.*

honorary fellow of Florida International University's African-New World Studies program, and in Fall 2007 teaching a course entitled "Santería" at FIU's Biscayne Bay campus that focused on the significance of Lucumí identity.<sup>24</sup> Willie Ramos went even farther than Pichardo in his academic involvement by pursuing academic credentials. In 2000, Ramos earned a Master's degree from FIU, and subsequently published articles in several journals and edited volumes; he is currently a Ph.D. candidate in history at FIU.<sup>25</sup>

The most significant action of the CLBA during the 1990s and 2000s, however, was its expansion into a new sphere, the Internet. The CLBA established its first website in 1997, and after the closure of its physical location the website became the nexus of communication for Church members and affiliates. The move to the Internet offered several advantages to the CLBA. Beyond the relatively low expenses of operating a website, an online platform allowed the Church to publish and disseminate information and educational materials without the expense of printing or the difficulty of negotiating with television or radio broadcasters. The explosive growth of the Internet after the turn of the twenty-first century only increased the utility of online communications for reaching santeros: in 2002 Ernesto Pichardo began moderating an online message board for the CLBA, called Diaspora Orisha Network; almost a decade later, in 2011, he began producing podcasts with New Age online broadcasters KDCL Media and the H2O Network. These examples represent only two of a wider range of online collaborations that the CLBA engaged in on an intermittent basis after adopting an online platform.

The CLBA's move to an online platform was part of a trend that emerged among practitioners of many minority religions during the late 1990s, including among santeros and

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24. Erika Beras, "Florida International's Santería Class Gets Praise," *Miami Herald*, 28 December 2007; for the course syllabus, see Obairawo, August 6, 2007 (11:45 a.m.), comment on "FIU Miami-Santería Course," *Diaspora Orisha Network*, <http://diasporaorishanetwork.yuku.com/> (accessed June 6, 2012).

25. Ramos' master's thesis was "The Empire Beats On: Oyo, Bata Drums and Hegemony in Nineteenth-Century Cuba" (M.A. thesis, Florida International University, 2000).

other African-derived religionists. For organizations engaged in public representation, the swift and inexpensive dissemination of information and publicity materials made internet use mandatory; even the insular Oyotunji African Village developed a website during this period. But for individual santeros, Vodou practitioners, and others in African-derived and African religious communities, the ease of online communication also began to change the nature of participation in a diasporic religious community. As Internet service became more prevalent worldwide during the 2000s, it became an increasingly important tool for diasporic religious groups. While local communities remained important, practitioners from different communities and different traditions were increasingly able to interact easily across the diasporic horizon.<sup>26</sup>

The ease of communication via the Internet, however, had several consequences for religious community and authority. Text-based, and by the mid-2000s image-based, online communication transformed ephemeral gossip used to critique other practitioners, or oral teaching and advice between a priest and initiate, into documents that could be distributed and criticized for years after an actual exchange.<sup>27</sup> More troubling to Santería leaders, any individual could establish a website offering religious information or ritual services, regardless of level of initiation or the opinions of their religious elders, and compromising the ability of priests to rein in out-of-line practitioners or to prevent the spread of misinformation.<sup>28</sup> This threat prompted Willie Ramos to reestablish *Eleda* as a website in 2001, to “contribute to the growing body of reputable Internet literature on this often misunderstood and purposely stigmatized religion” and

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26. For an examination of the use of the Internet by African-derived religionists, see Joseph M. Murphy, “Orisa Traditions and the Internet Diaspora,” in *Orisa Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yoruba Religious Culture*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona et. al. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 472-479; see also

27. Such online exchanges occur primarily in English or Spanish, but also include the use of Lucumí and Yoruba in formalized greetings, responses, and exclamations; Wirtz observes that Lucumí language, while unintelligible to most santeros, plays a key role in establishing the speaker as a member of the religious community, a process repeated in the online realm; see Kristina Wirtz, *Ritual, Discourse, and Community in Cuban Santería: Speaking a Sacred World* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007), 46-48, 158.

28. George Brandon, “From Oral to Digital: Rethinking the Transmission of Tradition in Yoruba Religion,” in *Òrìṣá Devotion*, 463-468; Murphy, 479-480.

to counteract the “increasing number of questionable websites, their mercenary nature, and the level of misinformation that some of these sites are spreading.”<sup>29</sup>

### *Spokesmanship and Animal Sacrifice*

Moving to the Internet significantly altered how the CLBA and other Santería organizations engaged in public representation and legal activism for Santería. The greater volume and the speed of communication between widely dispersed community members led to greater awareness of small incidents involving negative representations or official scrutiny of Santería—events that would have been private gossip in the past. Much of the CLBA’s activity directed toward the representation and legal status of Santería during the 1990s and 2000s involved such small issues, as opposed to the major activism of the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* case. The Diaspora Orisha Network forum contains reports, mainly posted by Ernesto Pichardo from local and national news stories, on arrests and legal cases related to Santería from as early as 2002. The most common types of cases discussed by forum users were on police scrutiny for the disposal of sacrificial remains and for animal cruelty, but child custody cases in which one parent was a Santería practitioner were prevalent enough to warrant a special statement on the CLBA’s website.<sup>30</sup>

Pichardo’s stance on animal sacrifice and sacrificial remains during the late 1990s and 2000s was a careful balancing act between asserting the right of santeros to sacrifice and working to minimize controversy over sacrificial activities. Pichardo and other Church members and allies never shied away from characterizing the *Lukumi* decision, somewhat inaccurately, as granting a constitutional protection to sacrifice or a “right to sacrifice.” But Pichardo consistently condemned crimes tangential to sacrifice, particularly illegal dumping, as “lazy” and

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29. “A Founder’s Note,” *Eleda*, <http://www.eleda.org> (accessed April 16, 2012).

30. “Child Custody,” *CLBA* (accessed June 4, 2012).

“irresponsible” acts that jeopardize the reputation of the religion—a milder version of his criticism of Rigoberto Zamora.<sup>31</sup> Generally, Pichardo, Ramos, and other priests concerned about Santería’s public image tried to manage the sacrificial practices and conduct of santeros within the community, via their religious authority—working through ritual and online interactions to avoid public controversy.

A contributing factor to the relative lack of activity on animal sacrifice from the CLBA and other santeros during the 1990s and 2000s was the decline of some of the societal fears that had contributed to the suspicion of Santería in Miami during the 1980s. Following a nationwide trend, and owing in part to the efforts of the United States to combat cocaine trafficking during the 1980s, the rates of murder and other violent crimes in Miami dropped steadily throughout the 1990s; murders peaked in the city at over 200 in 1989 and 1990, whereas by 2000 this number, and the numbers for robbery and violent crime overall, had fallen by half.<sup>32</sup> Also, by the mid-1990s the moral panic over Satanic cult activity and ritual abuse had begun to wane. Some high-profile satanic cases did occur as late as the mid-1990s: the 1994 conviction of three Arkansas teenagers, the “West Memphis Three,” for the alleged ritual murder of three young boys is the most infamous case, widely publicized by the 1996 HBO documentary *Paradise Lost*.<sup>33</sup> But the acquittal of accused satanic abusers in major cases, such as the McMartin Preschool trial in 1990, led to criticism of the methods used to obtain testimony in satanic abuse cases, and a consensus

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31. Obariawo, November 1, 2007 (9:47 a.m.), comment on “Why are people so inconsiderate” and May 8, 2008 (6:25 a.m.), comment on “Decapitated Goat Found,” *Diaspora Orisha Network* (accessed April 5, 2012).

32. Based on information from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Unified Crime Reporting Statistics Data Tool, <http://www.ucrdatatool.gov/> (accessed May 15, 2013).

33. HBO produced two more documentaries on the case, *Paradise Lost 2: Revelations* (2000) and *Paradise Lost 3: Purgatory* (2011), the latter dealing with the ultimately successful efforts to secure the release of the West Memphis Three in 2011.

among therapists, scholars, and legal observers that satanic ritual abuse claims were baseless.<sup>34</sup>

During the mid-2000s, there were two notable cases in which Pichardo was forced to leverage his recognition as a public spokesman for Santería in defense of Santería sacrifice. Pichardo was engaged in one case from the beginning, as it involved members of the CLBA. On June 8, 2007, police responding to a complaint raided a house owned by CLBA member Noriel Batista in Coral Gables, Florida, just south of Hialeah. The police interrupted a sacrifice in progress at the house, and the resulting confusion led to the involvement of SWAT teams and the detention of the practitioners involved in the sacrifice for several hours, although no arrests were made. The incident seems to have been a simple overreaction from police unfamiliar with Santería sacrificial practices, and the Coral Gables police chief apologized for interruption of the ritual. Coral Gables Mayor Don Slesnick, however, stated that he was “appalled that there might have been a case of animal cruelty in the Gables,” and expressed doubt as to the legality of the sacrifice.<sup>35</sup>

Regardless of the intentions of the Coral Gables police, the extreme level of force deployed against santeros in this incident and the comment from Slesnick were reminiscent of the Hialeah battle two decades prior. Pichardo was concerned enough to make a public stand against Coral Gables, including legal action to head off the possibility of a new repression of Santería sacrifice. In a June 27, 2007, forum post, Pichardo described a list of demands presented to the Coral Gables police and city government, including an apology from mayor Don Slesnick, an investigation into Slesnick and the police department, access to all records related to the

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34. Deborah Davis and Elizabeth F. Loftus, “The Scientific Status of ‘Repressed’ and ‘Recovered’ Memories of Sexual Abuse,” in *Psychological Science in the Courtroom: Consensus and Controversy*, ed. Jennifer L. Skeem, Kevin S. Douglas, and Scott O. Lilienfeld (New York: Guildford Press, 2009), 70-74.

35. Tamara Lush, “Death in the City Beautiful,” *Miami New Times*, 12 July 2007.

incident, and the establishment of an educational program for police on Afro-Cuban religions.<sup>36</sup> Subsequently, on July 3, 2008, the CLBA sued Coral Gables, demanding a writ of mandamus to direct the city to turn over all relevant records on the case to the Church.<sup>37</sup> The CLBA ultimately won this lawsuit against Coral Gables in July 2009 and received the desired records, but the other demands made in 2007 were not answered.<sup>38</sup>

The Coral Gables case demonstrated at once the ongoing vulnerabilities of Santería practice in Miami and the real capacity gained by the CLBA, and Ernesto Pichardo specifically, to effect actual change in the behavior of local authorities through public speech and activism. Santería practices remained unusual enough attract police attention and to cause a significant overreaction by police officers confronted with an ongoing sacrifice. The stigma attached to Santería was still enough for a public figure like Slesnick to openly suggest investigating Santería practice as potentially criminal—a real risk to santeros, as they remained subject to generally applicable animal cruelty and zoning laws. Yet the fact that the CLBA members involved in the original incident received an immediate apology from the Coral Gables police, and the fact that a Miami-Dade County Judge found the Church to have standing in its lawsuit over the case demonstrated the power of the Church's reputation among Miami authorities. Equally illustrative was the fact that the reporting on the Coral Gables incident and the subsequent lawsuit in the Miami press was sympathetic to the santeros involved, and avoided sensationalizing the case; a 2009 article on a number of scandals in Coral Gables over the

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36. Obairawo, June 27, 2007 (5:51 p.m.), "Oba Pichardo, Standoff with Gables Government," *Diaspora Orisha Network* (accessed April 8, 2012).

37. "Freedom of Religion Defended on Independence Day: David Aelion Files Against City of Coral Gables On Behalf of Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye," July 3, 2008, *Diaspora Orisha Network* (accessed 8 April 2012); Elaine De Valle, "Santería Church Sues Gables over Visit from Police," *Miami Herald*, 8 July 2008.

38. Obairawo, July 3, 2009 (9:46 p.m.) comment on "Oba Pichardo, Standoff with Gables Government," *Diaspora Orisha Network* (accessed April 8, 2012).

previous year avoided the “easy” mention of Santería entirely.<sup>39</sup> If Santería still had a somewhat ambiguous status in Miami, it was clear that the CLBA had successfully established itself as a legitimate public organization.

The greater degree of connectivity between santeros across the United States by the 2000s allowed the CLBA to become involved in a second, far higher-profile case in Euless, Texas, part of the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area. The Euless case began in May 2006, when Puerto Rican *oriaté* Jose Merced was ordered by police to stop sacrificing animals in his home, under a law that forbade animal slaughter within Euless city limits. After several unsuccessful attempts to convince the city to allow him to sacrifice, Merced filed a free exercise lawsuit against Euless on December 27, 2006. Ernesto Pichardo became aware of the suit almost immediately, rallying support for Merced on the Diaspora Orisha Network forum.<sup>40</sup> Pichardo was also sought out by Dallas-area reporters who observed the similarities of the Euless case to *Lukumi v. Hialeah*; weighing in on the case publicly in the *Dallas Morning News* on January 6, 2007, Pichardo argued, “It appears that [Euless] officials are either deliberately defying the Supreme Court justices on this ruling or they’re simply confused.”<sup>41</sup>

There were a number of parallels between the Euless case, which became known as *Merced v. Kasson*, and *Lukumi v. Hialeah*, both in legal terms and between the santeros involved in both cases. While he practiced privately out of his home, Jose Merced was also the head of a U.S. branch of a Puerto Rican Santería organization, the Templo Yoruba Omo Orisha.<sup>42</sup> Roberto Bolufer, one of the first babalawos initiated in Miami, founded the Templo Yoruba in the 1970s.

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39. Elaine De Valle and Andres Viglucci, “Sex, Drugs, and Coral Gables: Spotlight on the City,” *Miami Herald*, March 14, 2009.

40. Obairawo, 28 December 2006 (9:15 a.m.), “Urgent Support—Texas Santería Lawsuit,” Diaspora Orisha Network (accessed April 5, 2012).

41. Michael Grabell, “Santería Leader Fights Euless Ban,” *Dallas Morning News*, 5 January 2007.

42. No connection to the Cabildo Yoruba Omo Orisha founded by Willie Ramos in 1988.

In many ways, the Templo Yoruba was a forerunner to groups like the CLBA or the Cabildo Yoruba; it unified members from multiple lineages into one organization, and adopted a similar Lucumí-centric, anti-syncretic model to the later Miami organization, though it also incorporated some Spiritist elements common in Puerto Rico.<sup>43</sup> Merced himself did not support the goal of standardizing and regulating Santería practice to the same degree as Pichardo, but his organizational goals were otherwise largely similar; like Pichardo, Merced was a strong believer in improving and expanding the public profile of Santería, and like Pichardo, he considered this to be a religious calling.<sup>44</sup>

Although Merced was in a personal situation somewhat similar to Pichardo in 1987, there was a critical difference between the laws at work in *Merced v. Kasson* and the Hialeah ordinances in *Lukumi v. Hialeah*. The Eules ordinances that Merced challenged had not been written in response to any action taken by Merced—he had sacrificed in Eules since 1990 without realizing he was in violation of the law and without attracting police attention. In addition, the Eules ordinances constituted a blanket prohibition on animal slaughter within Eules city limits, with exceptions for pest control, and contained none of the disputed language regarding “sacrifice” and “ritual” found in the Hialeah ordinances.<sup>45</sup> Yet while the Eules ordinances lacked the elements that led the Hialeah ordinances to be declared unconstitutional, Eules was subject to the Texas Religious Freedom Restoration Act (TRFRA). The TRFRA, adopted in 1999, was one of a number of state laws passed to reverse the precedent set by *Employment Division v. Smith*; An earlier Federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA),

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43. “Ancestors,” *Templo Yoruba Omo Orisha*, <http://www.wallice.com/yoruba/antepasados2.html> (accessed April 22, 2012); for a brief discussion of Roberto Bolufer, see Brown, 92-93.

44. “History” and “Ethics, Rules, etc.,” Templo Yoruba (accessed April 22, 2012); Kimberly Thorpe, “A Court Case Forced a Santería Priest to Reveal Some of his Religion’s Secrets: Its ritual of animal sacrifice, he revealed on his own,” *Dallas Observer*, 22 October 2009.

45. *Merced v. Kasson*, 577 F. 3<sup>rd</sup> 578 (2009), 581-585.

passed in 1993, was ruled unconstitutional in application to the states in 1997's *Boerne v. Flores*.<sup>46</sup> The TRFRA restored the test established in *Sherbert v. Verner* to Texas law, requiring the government to demonstrate a compelling state interest and to use the least restrictive means in limiting free exercise.<sup>47</sup>

In light of the TRFRA, Jose Merced had a strong chance of winning his suit against Euless, as the city's blanket prohibition of animal slaughter could not easily be considered "least restrictive means." In fact, the District Court ruled in favor of Euless. The trial judge argued that Merced's free exercise rights had not been unduly burdened because Merced had not specifically stated that the *orishas* required him to sacrifice in his home; in theory, he could have avoided violating the law by going outside of city limits to sacrifice. The 5th Circuit Court of Appeals decisively overturned this ruling on July 31, 2009, citing the violation of the TRFRA above any other legal consideration in the case.<sup>48</sup> The rulings in *Merced v. Kasson* again demonstrated the dual situation of ongoing risk and greater institutional status that characterized Santería in the United States after the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* decision. The initial District Court ruling displayed the continuing problem of ignorance or misunderstanding of Santería practice, in much the same way as Judge Eugene Spellman's ruling in the first phase of *Lukumi*. In contrast, the Appeals Court ruling, in addition to accepting Santería as a religion without qualification, also specifically noted that Merced was deserving of a religious exemption because of his stated willingness to comply with all public health and animal welfare laws—the same types of laws Spellman had suggested santeros as a group would not heed.<sup>49</sup>

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46. *Boerne* was the result of a suit brought by the Catholic Archbishop of San Antonio against the historic preservation laws of Boerne, Texas, which prevented the alteration of a local Catholic church; the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that the RFRA exceeded Congress' remedial and protective powers under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment; *City of Boerne v. Flores*, 521 U.S. 507 (1997), 530-536.

47. Tex. Civ. Prac. & Rem. Code § 110 (2005).

48. 577 F. 3<sup>rd</sup> 578 (2009) 586, 592-595.

49. *Ibid.*, 593.

There was a final parallel between *Merced v. Kasson* and *Lukumi v. Hialeah*, involving public animal sacrifice. In October 2009, as a gesture of trust in the aftermath of his case, Merced invited members of the Dallas-area press to view a sacrifice at his home. Unlike Rigoberto Zamora's 1993 sacrifice, Merced's public sacrifice was not met with a public outcry; instead, like Willie Ramos' 1989 sacrifice, Merced's act was considered in a lengthy piece that presented the full history of the legal conflict and cast Merced in a friendly, even heroic, light.<sup>50</sup> This sympathetic treatment of Merced was a consequence of the media environment in Texas. There was no atmosphere of moral panic over Santería in the Dallas area, and the case overall had received less intensive media attention. Likely as a result, Merced's sacrifice received no condemnation from Ernesto Pichardo, who had no reason to fear a threat to his religious practice or religious authority, and this in turn prevented any public controversy from developing over Merced's sacrifice—what had been an insult and a threat to santeros in 1993 was not a legitimate tool of public representation once again.

#### Religious Authority and the Bounds of Community

The Coral Gables and Eules cases firmly established the role of public Santería organizations in the representation and, increasingly, the communal structure of Santería in the United States in the decades following *Lukumi v. Hialeah*. The efforts of Jose Montoya and Rigoberto Zamora during the 1990s, the reappearance of *Eleda*, and the spread of the Templo Yoruba were part of a general trend towards greater involvement in Santería organizations, with the CLBA as the most visible example. Again, the use of the Internet was a contributing factor: online connections between santeros allowed for connection and communication between members of an organization who might otherwise continue to practice in small, private groups, and the anonymity of the Internet allayed the fears of personal exposure that kept some santeros

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50. Thorpe, "Court Case."

from involvement with larger organizations.<sup>51</sup> But it was also thanks to the widespread adoption of the Internet that during the mid- and late-2000s, new organizations emerged that not only criticized Pichardo, Ramos, and other reformist santeros, but presented an entire competing vision of religious authority and community—similar in organizational and representational strategy to the CLBA, but with an opposing religious identity.

One of the first instances of this conflict involved Pichardo's engagement with academia. In a January 8, 2008, meeting, Pichardo and Florida International University faculty presented two copies of the *Book of Diagnosis in Ifa Divination*, a compilation of Ifa texts produced in the 1940s that may have been used by Nicolas Angarica in his writings. Pichardo presented the books as model sacred texts for Santería, "so that the study of the religion can be now taken to another level."<sup>52</sup> But the public presentation of the book bothered some babalawos and members of Ifa-centric lineages active on the Diaspora Orisha Network Forums; they argued that the study of a text containing detailed information on the Ifa divination process should be the prerogative of those initiated into the Ifa branch of Santería, as opposed to Pichardo, an oriaté.<sup>53</sup> The criticism of Pichardo in this case was a direct result of the spread of the Internet. Online publication made it easier than ever before for santeros to use academic knowledge, but it also allowed for more members of the Santería community at large to observe, comment on, and criticize these kinds of academic activities. The academic connections Pichardo and Ramos have used to bolster their unpopular positions during the 1980s—and that Angarica had used before them—no longer put them above the complexities of the community.

The friction between Ocha and Ifa practitioners dated back to the Lucumí cabildos of late

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51. Murphy, "Internet Diaspora," 478.

52. Catherine Kaiman, "African New World Studies: Yoruba Leaders Reveal Written Canon," *The Beacon* (Florida International University), January 22, 2008.

53. Multiple comments from November 6, 2008, "Lukumí Ifa Book Unveiled and Authenticated," *Diaspora Orisha Network* (accessed June 6, 2012).

Colonial and Republican Cuba, but it was enhanced as part of a much larger dispute between the CLBA and other Miami santeros, and the Church's onetime allies: practitioners of Yoruba Traditional Religion (YTR). YTR practice grew significantly in the United States during the 1990s and 2000s. There were a number of factors behind this growth, including increasing immigration from Nigeria to the United States and the adoption of YTR by some African Americans, which had begun with Adefunmi's work in the 1960s. By the mid- to late 2000s, the YTR movement and Yoruba reversionism had grown, from a relatively fringe position relative to the rest of the Santería community in Miami or the United States as a whole, into a popular movement.

Paul Christopher Johnson notes that "Yoruba" increased in popularity as a religious identifier as part of another process of diaspora—and that it was precipitated by the relative success of Santería in New York and Miami. Established Santería casa-templos served Nigerian immigrants, African American adherents, and African-derived religionists from different Caribbean immigrant groups who lacked a developed religious community in the United States. In the process of adapting to their new diasporic environment, many of these Caribbean practitioners were attracted by the practical appeal of the Santería community, and influenced by the wealth of scholarly and popular religious texts, available online, that emphasized the Yoruba as the most important cultural forebears of African-derived religions. This led to what Johnson calls "Yoruba-Santería hegemony" among African-derived religionists, particularly Afro-Caribbeans; he observes that many of these new Caribbeans came to elevate the Yoruba over their old religious identifiers.<sup>54</sup>

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54. Johnson notes specifically the Honduran Garifuna, whose religion has no clear connection to Yoruba practice but who have increasingly aligned with the YTR movement in the U.S.; see Paul Christopher Johnson, *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 209-212, 215-219.

In one sense, the elevation of Yoruba as a shared ethnic frame of reference by practitioners of African-derived religions was the furthest step yet taken towards a unified religious community of those practitioners, including santeros, towards which Pichardo, Ramos, and other reformist santeros in Miami had worked since the 1980s. Participants in the new YTR movement were also far more publicly active and open about their religion than in earlier decades, using the Internet extensively, holding public events and meetings, and engaging with academia. But the YTR movement conflicted deeply with Miami's reformist santeros on the fundamental issues of religious authority and identity. Though Johnson described it as Yoruba-Santería hegemony, the YTR movement strongly promoted Yoruba reversionism, advocating a return to "pure" Yoruba religious forms and disparaging the Creole style common in much of Santería practice. By itself, this position had many supporters in Miami, Pichardo being one of the most important, but YTR practitioners also privileged Yoruba ritual forms over what they considered to be innovations of the diaspora, including Pichardo's priestly rank of *oriaté*. This often extended to the assumption or even explicit assertion that Cuban santeros, and particularly white culturally Lucumí santeros, should defer to the religious authority of black or African priests. Pichardo and other santeros who shared a strong emphasis on their Cuban Lucumí identity interpreted such claims as an attack on their religious authority and heritage.<sup>55</sup>

The first public conflict between YTR practitioners and Lucumí-centric santeros came in February 2009, when Ifafunke Olagbaju, the *Yeye Osun* (chief priestess of Osun/Ochun) of

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55. For an examination of some of the YTR claims against Lucumí practice, see Brown, 276-286; Lucumí-centric santeros have pushed back against this claim, arguing that the ritual practices YTR proponents describe as Cuban innovations have African origins, and that "traditional" Yoruba practices developed after the Lucumí arrived in Cuba; Ramos in particular has argued that the key religious reforms of the Lucumí *cabildos* had antecedents in the eighteenth-century Oyo Empire; Miguel W. Ramos, "'La Division de la Habana': Territorial Conflict and Cultural Hegemony in the Followers of Oyo Lukumi Religion, 1850-1920," *Cuban Studies* 34 (2003): 51-53.

Lagos, Nigeria, visited Miami to participate in local Black History Month events.<sup>56</sup> While in Miami she also presided over an initiation ritual that was attended by several santeros. Two of these santeros subsequently received new initiations from the Yeye Osun—not the reconfirmation of a former initiation, as in the Lucumí *pinaldo* ritual, but the seating of entirely new “head” orishas. News of the event took time to filter through the Santería community, but it was not well received. Willie Ramos called the re-initiations a “vile and offensive ridicule of the Lukumí Orisha tradition,” not primarily because they differed in ritual style from Santería initiations but because re-initiation implied, intentionally or not, that the original initiations and the religious lineage they came from were illegitimate.<sup>57</sup>

While the controversy over the reinitiations was still simmering, another incident involving the legal status of Santería and Ernesto Pichardo’s spokesman role occurred that added to the tension. On March 10, 2010, a YTR priest, Charles Stewart, was arrested for illegally bringing a number of giant African land snails into Miami and subsequently performing a ritual involving the consumption of snail mucus that caused several participants to become ill. Stewart argued that the snails, highly destructive agricultural pests, were necessary for his religious practice. When reporters asked Pichardo for his opinion on the case, he suggested that Stewart’s ritual use of snails was unknown and illegitimate in Santería practice.<sup>58</sup> Pichardo was forced to defend his speech by several supporters of Stewart on the Diaspora Orisha Network forums, where he implicitly compared the incident Zamora affair in 1993:

Also, understand that if I need to throw some person [bad apple] under the bus for their stupid actions, in order to save the village, I will deliberately do it in a very clear

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56. Specifically, a presentation entitled “The Evolution of Orisha Worship in Diaspora” on February 21, 2009; see Black History Month 2009: Countywide Celebrations,” *Blogging Black Miami*, <http://www.bloggingblackmiami.com/2009/01/miami-black-history-month-2009-countywide-celebrations.html> (accessed June 6, 2012).

57. Willie Ramos, November 19, 2009, “The Four-Legged Dog Can Only Take One Path at a Time,” *Eleda* (accessed April 25, 2012).

58. “Hialeah Man Investigated Over Feeding Giant African Snails to Followers,” *Miami Herald*, March 10, 2010.

and ferocious manner as long as I live. Stupidity cannot rule, degrade, dishonor, or shame the Diaspora legacy of progress. Furthermore, I will not accept stupidity or ideologies that place our legal and public victories in jeopardy.<sup>59</sup>

As his comment indicates, Pichardo's refusal to support Stewart was in part a shrewd legal decision; the threat posed by the snails to agriculture was clear grounds for a "compelling government interest" to ban their importation. But Pichardo's invocation of the "diaspora legacy of progress," and his denigration of Stewart's religious practice, makes clear that this case involved a conflict of religious authority and communal identity.<sup>60</sup>

The fallout from the re-initiations eventually led to more decisive public action by both sides. Several priests, including Jose Montoya, organized a one-day Ifa Orisa Conference was organized by, on May 22, 2010, to discuss "how we can move forward honoring each others' right to exist as well as educating ourselves with regards to differences in ritual and theology and respecting those variations"; the attendees suggested establishing a neutral committee to referee religious disputes in the city.<sup>61</sup> Only a few weeks later, however, on June 9, a group of santeros led by Willie Ramos and Ernesto Pichardo, and priests from across the United States, such as Jose Merced, presented the "Agreement of the Oba Oriates of South Florida," which asserted the distinctiveness of Lucumí religion and identity and condemned re-initiation and other Yoruba traditionalist "encroachment." The 54 signatories of the Agreement announced that they would no longer allow YTR practitioners to participate in "private" Lucumí rituals, and that "any and all persons that convert to the Traditional Yoruba practices will lose any and all rights in our tradition. These persons cannot participate in any of our rites or

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59. Obariawo, March 22, 2010 (4:13 p.m.), comment on "Snails as Medicine," CLBA (accessed April 26, 2012).

60. The giant African land snail became something of a fixture in the conflict between YTR proponents and Lucumí-centric santeros; Ramos created a page devoted to criticisms of snail use, and a supporter of Stewart using the name Osun Dare' established a blog, Traditional Ifa, originally to criticize Pichardo's treatment of Stewart; see "Giant African Land Snails," *Eleda* (accessed April 25, 2012); Osun Dare', March 30, 2010, "Religious Snail Drinking?????" Traditional Ifa, <http://www.traditionalifa.wordpress.com> (accessed April 25, 2012).

61. Daniel Shoer Roth, "Babalawos quieren aclarar polemica," *El Nuevo Herald*, May 21, 2010; Roth, "Santeros deciden crear comité de eticas para regular prácticas," *El Nuevo Herald*, May 25, 2010.

ceremonies, regardless of the ceremony and/or hierarchical level of the individual or ritual.”<sup>62</sup>

The signing of the Agreement led to an acrimonious online debate between Willie Ramos and Yoruba reversionist priest Christian Carrazana. Carrazana argued that the attempt to separate Lucumí and YTR practices was a desperate stopgap measure—a vain attempt to stop the “inevitable” drift of santeros towards more authentic and authoritative YTR practice. Carrazana, a white Cuban himself, endorsed the view that Yoruba priests and Yoruba structures of religious authority should take precedence over structures developed in the Americas. Carrazana specifically identified the position of oriaté as an innovation of the Cuban Lucumí that should not be considered equivalent to the babalawo priesthood, with its direct roots in Africa. He also asserted, using language similar to Rigoberto Zamora’s during the 1990s, that the oriatés involved in the Agreement were attempting to preserve the “economic” benefits of their religious authority.<sup>63</sup> Ramos replied by turning the same accusations back on Carrazana, suggesting that members of Santería groups who also accepted Yoruba initiation were effectively stealing time and resources from the Santería community.<sup>64</sup> Throughout the debate, both priests referred to their personal connections in the Miami Santería community, including many of the same individuals, but it was apparent that they had already divided the community into camps: Lucumí on one side, proponents of YTR on the other.

### Conclusion

It remains too soon to determine the exact effects that the 2010 controversy over reinitiation and the ensuing conflict between YTR proponents and Lucumí-centric santeros in Miami will have on the Santería community in Miami and the United States as a whole. The

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62. “Agreement of the Oba Oriates of South Florida,” *Eleda* (accessed April 25, 2012).

63. “Christian Carrazana’s Commentaries,” *Eleda* (accessed April 25, 2012); “Christian Carrazana’s Rejection,” *Eleda* (accessed April 25, 2012);

64. “Willie Ramos’ Rebuttal,” *Eleda* (accessed 25 April 2012).

administrator of the large Orishanet forum dismissed the conflict as a “power struggle between two or three people” with no real importance to the majority of santeros or African-derived religionists.<sup>65</sup> But apart from the involvement of figures like Ernesto Pichardo and Willie Ramos, with significant public profiles and religious clout, the blog posts and comments surrounding the conflict show that santeros and YTR practitioners with no prior involvement in public representation or religious debate were closely engaged with the conflict as it developed. And the disagreements that sparked the conflict involved some of the fundamental issues that appeared when Lucumí religion was first codified in the Lucumí cabildos—the preeminence of Ifa or Ocha, the proper structure of religious organization and authority, and the religious meanings of “African,” “Afro-Cuban,” and “Lucumí” itself as markers of identity and community membership. It can be assumed, then, that whatever effect the conflict between Lucumí-centric santeros and YTR proponents on santeros at large, it will be significant.

The degree of organization and public speech devoted to the 2010 conflict, physically and especially in the online realm, demonstrates conclusively Palmié’s prediction that the victory of the CLBA in the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* case would lead to an escalation in the means and terms of religious dialogue and representation within Santería in the United States. To the extent that this escalation has intensified old and new conflicts, it represents the shortcomings of the CLBA and allied organization’s goal of unifying and standardizing Santería practice; nevertheless, it is also a product of the CLBA’s larger success in representing Santería in Miami and the United States. The willingness of santeros and YTR practitioners to organize and speak publicly in favor of their religious positions rests on the improved, though not entirely positive, press and official treatment of Santería in the aftermath of the *Lukumi* decision, combined with the widespread

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65. Ochun Kofa De, July 13, 2010 (7:23 p.m.), comment on “The ‘Accord’ of Miami Oriateses [*sic*],” *Orishanet* (accessed April 26, 2012).

adoption of academic knowledge and new media. That fundamental issues of religious identity should be raised in this new, publicized, religious discourse suggests that the representational goals of the CLBA have become widely accepted in the Santería community.

## CONCLUSION:

### REPRESENTATION AND COMMUNITY IN FLUX

Ernesto Pichardo and Church of the Lukumi Babalu Ayé, and the other religious leaders and organizations of santeros examined here, had and *have* two interlocking goals: to publicly represent their religious beliefs and practices as legitimate in United States society, and to develop a form of religious community that would embody and further represent what they considered to be the truly legitimate or authentic form of those beliefs and practices. As argued, both of these goals were situated within the process of remaking religious, ethnic, and communal identity in transition—both between Cuba and the United States, and between Africa and the Americas. As part of a process, then, it cannot be said that the CLBA or other groups or organizational projects have simply “succeeded” or “failed” in their goals. But what is clear is that the *Lukumi v. Hialeah* decision, though critically important, was hardly definitive; while it seemingly resolved some issues of public representation and religious community organization present in Santería during the 1980s, it also laid the groundwork for new issues to arise in the 1990s and 2000s.

In the decades after *Lukumi v. Hialeah*, the public representation of Santería in the United States—and its legal treatment—has been characterized by improvement, but also ongoing uncertainty. The victory of the CLBA in *Lukumi* increased awareness of Santería in the United States, and on the whole led to increased sensitivity towards Santería practice; the instances of outright moral panic over Santería seen in Miami during the 1980s have not reappeared on any comparable scale. But animal sacrifice and sacrificial remains still fall under the metacultural

frame of suspicion for many observers. As the Coral Gables case and *Merced v. Kasson* demonstrate, santeros continue to face the real possibility of restriction of their religious practices based on the misconceptions of authorities. And though both of those cases also demonstrate the capacity of santeros to push back successfully against legal restriction, this still requires difficult and time-consuming acts of public representation and activism.

Similarly, the 2010 clash in Miami between Lucumí-centric Santeros and proponents of Yoruba Traditional Religion clearly illustrates the contentious nature of visions of religious authority, identity, and community organization in Santería in the United States. This conflict and controversy was not itself a product of *Lukumi v. Hialeah*. Nor did the fact that Pichardo, Willie Ramos, and other santeros at challenged the norm of the Miami Santería community through their public representations during the 1980s cause the marginalization of other santeros, or the loss of Santería's capacity to resist the State. But as the relatively swift adoption of the CLBA's methods by its own religious rivals demonstrates, *Lukumi v. Hialeah* did result in the escalation of religious representation and religious conflict within Santería. This escalation allowed religious disputes with their origins in the Lucumí cabildos a century prior to move from the realm of ritual interactions and private argument, into an arena of globally accessible and near-instantaneous public argument and counter-argument.

What *Lukumi v. Hialeah* and the history surrounding it *did* change in a decisive way was how the issues of public representation and religious community in Santería, and other African-derived and African religions as well, are understood in U.S. society at large and by practitioners themselves. The presence of Ernesto Pichardo and Willie Ramos, or Rigoberto Zamora and Jose Montoya, in newspaper articles, at public events, through academic activities and even in court had a significant impact. If these figures and their organizations failed to normalize Santería

practice in the way they had hoped, their presence was far more successful in normalizing the representation of Santería as a religion, with leaders and institutions and a civil presence. The success of Pichardo is the most profoundly indicative of this normalization, as in addition to his public and academic activities, he has also become a local fixture in Miami; a profile of Pichardo on November 24, 2011, in the *Miami New Times* mentioned Pichardo's role in *Lukumi v. Hialeah*, but focused on his work with local police departments and officials, and his childhood in Hialeah—effectively claiming the former threat to public morality as a valued citizen.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, though they may have escalated the level of conflict within the Santería community by publicizing issues of religious identity, morality, and community organization itself, Pichardo, Ramos, and others also raised the level of consciousness among santeros. The guides to Lucumí tradition and ritual practice printed by Ramos in *Eleda*, the educational seminars and events organized by the Cabildo Yoruba and the CLBA, and the recent dissemination of the same educational information through the internet— all contributed to an environment of greater critical reflection and willingness to engage in religious debate among individual santeros. This increased level of critical awareness is visible in the amount of attention focused on events and conflicts, such as the 2010 clash over Yoruba reinitiations, by large numbers of online commentators, many from outside Miami or outside the United States. The efforts of Pichardo and others to represent Santería publicly have led to more and more complex public representation and dialogue among santeros at large.

This latter assertion, however, raises an important question in the face of the history explored in the preceding chapters: if *Lukumi v. Hialeah* has contributed to greater public activity of santeros, and to a broadening and deepening of religious debate within Santería, why does so much of the detailed consideration of Santería in the United States—including this

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1. Liz Tracey, "Ernesto Pichardo: Spirit Guide," *Miami New Times*, November 24, 2011.

study—continue to focus on a small number of high-profile public figures like Ernesto Pichardo? The easy answer is that spokesmen like Pichardo and Ramos remain at the forefront of the public representation of Santería, thanks to their established connections and leadership of institutions such as the CLBA or *Eleda*. It is also the case that newer organizations and forms of representation and community interaction in Santería, such as online communication, are still too new, and still developing and changing too quickly, to make sense of their historical role and significance besides the broad historicization engaged in here. But by focusing too closely on figures like Pichardo or groups like the CLBA, observers and scholars run the risk of unintentionally inflicting the kind of marginalization described by Stephan Palmié onto emerging voices and actors in the Santería community.

Two final examples from recent events suggest the kinds of research and examination into public representation and religious community in Santería in the coming years. The first involves the infrequent but continued appearance of Satanism in the contexts of animal sacrifice and sacrificial remains. Although the Satanism as a real societal threat has been discredited, the link between the term and Santería through the overarching representation still exists. Some of these appearances have occurred in South Florida—a 2006 *St. Petersburg Times* article on a rash of animal remains found in Spring Hill, Florida, mentioned local residents' fears that the finds were evidence of “devil worship,” but also quoted police and academic sources who cautioned against linking the remains to any religious practice.<sup>2</sup> The late 2000s saw reports similar to those in Miami during the 1980s appear in locations such as the largely Hispanic Feltonville

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2. Jonathan Abel, “Residents Scratch Heads over Headless Animals,” *St. Petersburg Times (Florida)*, October 30, 2006.

neighborhoods of Philadelphia or Bridgeport, Connecticut, where police investigating animal remains uncritically linked Santería, drug crime, and Satanism in their statements to the press.<sup>3</sup>

The spread of such reports illustrates the pervasiveness and longevity of the representation of Santería as witchcraft, but also the spread of santeros—and public representations of and by santeros—from New York and Miami into new areas. This suggests the grounds for a systematic study of Satanism as a cultural construct, and the conflation of Satanism and Santería in areas with newly established populations of santeros or other African-derived religionists. Such a study would also allow for investigation into just how deeply the counter-representation of Santería as a legitimate religion has penetrated beyond locales with established Santería communities. While the *Merced v. Kasson* case demonstrated the tension and legal conflict that can be caused when public Santería practice is established in a new area, the Philadelphia and Bridgeport examples above involve presumed cases of Santería sacrifice, with the actual santeros involved, if any, absent from police and press accounts. Thus, these cases also suggest the grounds for an ethnographic study of those santeros who choose to remain private in their religious practice.

The second example involves the establishment in 2012 of the Santería Church of the Orishas, a Los Angeles-based Santería organization that demonstrates emergent attitudes towards public representation and religious community. The most notable feature of the Santería Church is that while it operates out of a private home, in the classic casa-templo fashion, it is also affiliated with a small interfaith Spiritist denomination, the Missionary Independent Spiritual

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3. Kristin E. Holmes, “Animal Sacrifice Suspected in Feltonville House,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 29, 2009; Michael P. Mayko, “Drug Raid Uncovers Skull, Blood,” *Connecticut Post*, June 9, 2009; “Cops: Rooster Burned in Apparent Satanic Ritual,” *Connecticut Post*, November 6, 2012.

Church.<sup>4</sup> Despite engaging in Spiritist practices, however, the Santería Church expresses a view of religious practice similar to that put forth by Lucumí-centric Santeros in Miami. The Santería Church's highly active web presence is largely devoted to criticizing what lead *olorisha* “Rev. Dr.” Ekun Dayo [his religious name] deems to be misconceptions of Santería and improper combinations of Santería with other religious practices—including African-derived religions from other parts of the Americas, such as Haitian Vodou and Brazilian Candomblé, and also Cuban Palo, commonly practiced alongside Santería by many santeros, including Ernesto Pichardo.<sup>5</sup>

The Santería Church of the Orishas presents one form of emergent Santería organization that combines a number of features of older organizations in a distinct way, employing both extensive public representation and relatively private religious organization, and a concern for the religio-ethnic distinctiveness of Santería practices while engaging in other, seemingly “syncretic” ritual acts and affiliations. An ethnographic study of such emergent organizations would help move the history of Santería in the United States beyond the activities of a limited number of public figures and a limited number of key events. Similarly, a systematic study of the kinds of representations put forth by new groups like the Santería Church, particularly online activity, would provide a more representative picture of how santeros in the United States have come to understand public activity, religious authority, and community organization—in effect, it would help link the representations of community put forth by organizations and individual santeros to their own sense of belonging and participation in the Santería community.

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4. “Our Church,” *Santería Church of the Orishas*, <http://Santeriachurch.org> (accessed May 23, 2013); the Missionary Independent Spiritual Church is hosted at <http://missionary-independent.org>.

5. Ekun Daro, February 28, 2013, “What’s the Difference between Elegua, Legba, Eshu, and Exu?” *Santería Church of the Orishas* (accessed May 23, 2013); Ekun Daro, January 6, 2013, “SAFE alert—Mixture of Santería and Palo Practices,” *Santería Church of the Orishas* (accessed May 23, 2013).

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