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HIERARCHY WITHOUT A HEAD: OBSERVATIONS ON CHANGES IN THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION OF SOME AFROAMERICAN RELIGIONS IN THE UNITED STATES, 1959-1999 WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SANTERIA

Introduction

In recent years a number of studies have been published examining the ritual practices and ideology of Santeria. Rather than addressing issues of ritual context or ideological emphases, this paper is concerned mainly with the social organization of Santeria, as well as some related Afro-American religions, as observed largely on the eastern coast of the United States. Although I focus my attention on Santeria itself, I recognize three major and somewhat divergent strains of it in the United States: Santeria, Orisha-Voodoo and Santerismo. Each strain has its own continuum of internal variability and each enters into different types of interactions with other religions, Afro-American or not. Because the field research on which this discussion rests has spanned twenty years and ranged from New York through Pennsylvania and Washington, D.C., through South Carolina and Georgia, into Florida (and with outliers in California) such variability is hardly unexpected.

I further specify several levels of context and therefore of analysis: local, regional, national, and international. Through time, and given especially the complex immigration and internal migration histories of these areas, we are of necessity dealing not only with shifting membership of these groups (as viewed internally), but also with changing neighbors, with whom ideas and practices may or may not be exchanged. Such features of changing context are particularly important for the analysis of social organization, itself a principal way in which groups adapt to environments inevitably including other groups and differential access to economic and political power. At various levels of inclusion, these environments serve as the contexts in which groups form, recruit members, train and initiate devotees and priests and – sometimes – create, reform, dissolve, lose or merge identities. To summarize briefly at this point, I have found that Santeria is most profitably understood as a

reticulate network that overlaps at times with some other religious groups. Paradoxically, Santería is strongly hierarchical at the local level, yet largely acephalous at levels more inclusive than the local. The data presented here indicate how and why such a structure is significant in the constitution and maintenance of this religious system; how the structure has changed and grown over time; and the direction in which it seems to be evolving, with differing rates of change and involvement in movement-like activities.

The basic unit in Cuban Santería was the house [*casa*] or *ile*. The term *casa* was actually used to indicate two different scales of organization, which I feel it is necessary to distinguish as ‘*la casa pequeña*’ and ‘*la casa grande*’ (i.e., the ‘little house’ and the ‘big house’). The little house is based on dyadic links between individual devotees and a specific priest/ess. This link is acquired through an initiation ceremony performed by the priest and culminates in the presentation of a set of bead necklaces to the devotee. Even though the color patterns of these necklaces – called *collares* or *elekes* – represent the major *orisha* and are fairly standard throughout the entire Santería community, there may be slight variations peculiar to a particular *casa*; some *casas* give an additional necklace if the saint with whom their *casa* has been traditionally associated (the “house saint”) is not one of the major *orisha*. This is the lowest level of initiation and membership in the *casa*.

An idiom of ritual kinship links the *santero/a* and the devotee in a relationship of *madrina/padrino* to *ahijado/a*, terminology derived from the Catholic Church and its institution of *compadrazgo*. This idiom of ritual kinship extends outward laterally to include *ahijado/as* of the same godparent and extends vertically through the godparent back through time in a series of links to previous generations of priests reckoned in a line of initiations via specific priest/esses. This ritual genealogy is frequently recited since these past *santeros*, be they dead or alive, must be invoked during libations, initiations and all the major ceremonies the *santero/a* performs. The little house, then, is focused on a single *santero* who has initiated one or more devotees at the level of *collares* and is entitled to advise and assist them and guide their development up to and beyond initiation into the priesthood.

Godparents exert control over where god children go and whom they see within the Santería community and the older devotees I have talked to often mention being fined by a godparent for infractions of traditional religious etiquette or rules peculiar to their house. In general, devotees go to their godparents to get the religious services they need. The godparents, in turn, may refer the godchild to other members of the priesthood for particular situations or rituals. If possible the godparent tries to refer the devotee to someone in their own *casa* or, failing that, a closely related one, making sure, in the latter case, that devotees clearly identify themselves as belonging to *casa* of the godparent. Wherever the devotee goes for services – whether within the *casa* or outside of it – they will have to bring money. The *orisha* do nothing without an offering or a fee. This relationship is expected to be lifelong. And if, for whatever reason, the relationship is definitively broken, the devotee may persist in wearing the necklaces presented to them until they affiliate with another house at which point they will usually be asked to go through the ritual again and receive another set of necklaces which will replace the previous ones.

The ‘big house’ extends beyond the direct dyadic links between a devotee and godparent to include the house that the priest/esses initiated by the godparent, have established. The ‘big house’, then, is a house composed of the house of the

focal priest and all the 'little houses' that have descended from it. The existence of a big house depends on the ability of the focal priest/ess to exercise control and authority over the priest/esses they have initiated, and, through them, over those priest's god children. The big house is structurally isomorphic to the *fundamento* (SP. 'foundation'). There is a preference for aspirants to the priesthood to initiate from within the *fundamento*, for consultation with diviners from within the *fundamento* if at all possible. After the death of a godparent, devotees get a specific healing rite done for them, which must be done by a santera/o outside the house/*fundamento*. This makes sense because, ritually and spiritually, everyone within the *fundamento* is considered to be in the same vulnerable position whereas outsiders not affected by the death are not.

Some of the 'big houses' of Cuba were named and went back several generations; these houses approximate the older institution of the Afro-Catholic *cabildos* and probably descend from them. A few are remembered in New York (such as Casa Funche, or the House of the Manilla Shawl associated with wealth) so that some people in 'little houses' in New York can trace their lineage back to 'big houses' in Cuba. As mentioned before, within the Santeria community, these two levels of organization are not distinguished terminologically. The term *casa* is applied to both and this sometimes leads to disagreement about what is being referred to. I once heard a santero say that he had forty houses, only to get disagreement from a priestess who objected by saying that he only had one. They were both right but were not referring to the same thing. The priest was referring to the forty 'little houses' as individual entities, while the priestess was referring to the 'big house' since, if the priest could state that he possessed them, they constituted a single large unit under his control¹.

Beyond the house, two other forms of organization, one larger and one smaller, seem to have been relevant to the Cuban context but are not particularly important for the U.S. One of these is *la Sociedad de San Lazaro* [a house of *babalawos*] who, if they had not been initiated into any other orisha's service also, would not have a house of their own. Some houses in NYC used *Sociedad de San Lazaro*'s reading of the year for their own at least into the early 1980's. The other occurs within the biological family in which Santeria practice is essentially a family tradition, passed down family lines without any real connection to the *cabildos* or the kinds of houses described earlier. This is a tradition in which people provide rituals and services primarily for themselves and their families rather than for non family members and approximates an earlier stage in Santeria's development, the stage I have called Lucumi Religion (Brandon, 1993).

¹ See BRANDON (1983) for a more extensive and detailed description of the *casa* as a social organizational unit; also GOMEZ ABREU (1982), GONZALEZ (1968); BRANDON (1993) on ritual kinship and MURPHY (1988) for other perspectives.

Developments since 1959 – ideological developments in New York

Santeria differentiated into three divergent trends after arriving in the United States. New York, Miami and Los Angeles emerged as major centers. After a short period of abeyance, participation in Cuban Santeria slowly began to increase². Gradually participation in Santeria expanded beyond the Cuban exile community. African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and other Hispanic groups began entering in small numbers during the 1960's and 1970s while immigrants from the Dominican Republic, as well as increasing numbers of more recent Cuban exiles swelled the ranks in the 1980s and 1990s.

In pursuit of an appropriate religious ideology and cultural base from which to launch their wider political aims, Black cultural nationalists in New York adopted Santeria and during the late 1950s and the early 1960s were initiated into the Santeria priesthood in both Cuba and in the United States³. By the end of the 1960s, however, they had already diverged enough from the mainstream of Santeria ideology and practice since serious disagreements were to arise over politics, ritual symbolism and racial issues; Orisha-Voodoo, as this trend was to be called, separated from Santeria and developed a distinct trajectory of its own which proved to be influential beyond their own group.

The third trend, which I have dubbed Santerismo, was first identified among Puerto Ricans in New York in the 1970s but now appears to have spread to other Hispanic groups as well. The term Santerismo denotes a form of spiritualist practice that incorporates elements of Santeria. The adepts and leaders have not been initiated as priests or priestesses in Santeria and their practice is not regarded as Santeria by either santeros or Orisha-Voodooists but it is sometimes regarded as Santeria by other spiritualists and some lay people⁴.

Santerismo has not developed any distinctive form of social organization. It follows the pre-existing forms commonly found in most spiritist centros and, although some adepts try to adopt casa-like practices such as the giving of bead necklaces, their followings remain episodic. The major differences from older

² Mercedes Sandoval observed a process of polarization along class and color lines among Santeria houses in Florida (SANDOVAL, 1977). Lighter-skinned higher status Cubans tended to have a style of practice that was much more Catholic-oriented than darker-skinned people much lower down in the class ladder. Sandoval quite explicitly predicted that the lighter-skinned Catholic oriented groups of higher class white Cubans would probably develop in the direction of parochial community churches (SANDOVAL, 1977).

³ Orisha-Voodoo's founders had contacts early on with Haitian and Guyanese African based religious forms. The contacts with the Cuban Santeria priests, then, were not their first. [James Smalls, 1999, personal communication.] After the schism with Santeria, contacts with Nigerian and Benin Yoruba adepts became much more important. One of the key causes for dispute was Orisha-Voodoo's rejection of Santeria's Catholic influences. Further input came from African Americans involved in studying and reviving the teachings of the Egyptian mystery schools (See BRANDON, 1993).

⁴ A variant of this trend appears to have developed among Dominican immigrants in New York City. They call it La Santeria Dominicana (Dominican Santeria). Santeria is not indigenous to the Dominican Republic and this variant most likely evolved in New York. It is most probable that it has developed in opposition to Santerismo which has been identified with the Puerto Ricans and which the Dominicans have come to regard as a form of Santeria. From the descriptions I have been given it resembles Santerismo and can be provisionally regarded as a Dominican variant of it.

Puerto Rican spiritist practices include the Seven African Powers borrowed from Santeria into their hierarchy of spiritual beings, dance as part of the ritual of some groups, and charging fees for services (see Brandon, 1993, pp. 107-125; Perez y Mena, 1982.)

Developments in social organization

Local Public Temples

New York City Orisha-Voodoo's Shango Temple [Date: 1959] collapsed quickly and was followed by the Yoruba Temple which chartered with New York State as a formal public religious organization, the African Theological Archministry, Inc. in 1960. The Yoruba Temple was not really a casa in either of the senses we have described and on any given night a good portion of the people present were transients drawn by curiosity or the sound of drumming. Furthermore, while the Yoruba Temple held open weekly drum dances, dispensed African names, provided counseling through divination and assisted aspirants for the priesthood, its founder, Osejeman Adefunmi Efuntole I, initiated no priests himself. The strategy of pursuing a formal State charter as an African religious institution served as an example for some other African American priests to follow and under Adefunmi's guidance a second temple affiliated with the African Theological Archministry was established in Gary, Indiana in 1962⁵. The Yoruba Temple closed in 1969 but since then a number of other organizations have been formally chartered, even if they do not have the open public worship services one might associate with a temple.

Churches

These became more common among the Cubans and Puerto Ricans in the 1980's. Some santeras in New York, who were also spiritists, attempted to start Santeria churches modeled on Catholic and/or spiritualist churches in the early 1980s but they were not successful. One idea, once again, was to obtain a State charter as part of a push for legitimacy. But no church associations evolved in a way similar to the spiritualist church associations established in the US and Puerto Rico.

The best known of these is undoubtedly the Church of the Lukumi Babaluaiye in Hialeah, Fla. Founded in 1974 by three Cuban exiles, one of whom had a long career as a spiritist before being initiated as a santera, the Church of the Lukumi Babaluaiye did not open as a community church with a really physical location

⁵ For more on the Yoruba Temple during this period see BRANDON (1993) CLAPP (1966), COHN (1973) and HUNT (1979). Roberto Boluffer claims to have founded the first Yoruba temple in Puerto Rico at Santurce during the 1960s. He subsequently moved to Guayanabo, a suburb of San Juan, to start his present institution, the Templo Yoruba Omo Orisha (COBAS and DAUNY, 1997, pp. 99-100).

until 1987. The Church's first ordination to Babalwaiye was performed under the aegis of the African Theological Archministry, Inc. at Oyotunji Village around 1978. In the interim it had undertaken a long public information campaign including publications, conferences at local universities and colleges, and workshops with law enforcement officers, hospitals, mental health professionals and cultural organizations.

The Church of the Lukumi Babalwaiye gained a great deal of notoriety in 1993 when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the ordinances, which the city of Hialeah had made against the Church, were unconstitutional and discriminatory, and that the religious sacrifice of animals was constitutionally protected. In 1995 forty priests were officially certified as clergy through the church's charter and in 1997 began performing marriages and naming ceremonies. Starting out, perhaps, as the joint project of three godparents leading their houses, the Church of the Lukumi Babalwaiye now views itself as a "centralized union of clergy members and faithful representing various Afro-Cuban Lukumi/Ayoba lineages" (Church of the Lukumi Babalwaiye).

Town organization

Oyotunji Village, South Carolina was founded in 1970 and represents an extension of the African Theological Archministry's original mission. ATA moved from promoting a religious ideology linked to Black nationalism in New York City to possession of an actual land base in the rural South. It was attempted to create a model Yoruba village where to practice Yoruba religion as well as aspects of Yoruba cultural and social life. The result is a model Yoruba village with its own specialized shrines and cult groups, political system, cooperative work arrangements, and polygamous marriage based mostly on traditional Yoruba precedents⁶. Yoruba is the only spoken language before noon each day, and visitors and tourists are treated as if they had left the United States and journeyed to a foreign country. The village population has been fluctuating between 100 and 200 people, it is almost entirely composed of African Americans, with occasional African and Afro-Caribbean residents and initiates.

Oyotunji Village has become an important center for pilgrimage, initiation and study for African Americans and others who share or want to investigate its vision of Yoruba religion. Oyotunji Village favours tourism, presents public programs in nearby towns, and celebrates several annual festivals that are open to tourists and the general public. The village is noteworthy for its Egungun Society since theirs is the only one in the Western Hemisphere except for the two sites in Brazil⁷. Because of its explicit mission, the ideological preservation, adaptation and devel-

⁶ See HUNT (1979), for more on village social organization in the 1970s. Recent research carried out by Kamara Clark of Yale University promises to illuminate developments in Oyotunji Village from the 1970s to the 1990s.

⁷ Oyotunji Village's Egungun was brought to the U.S. from Ouidah in Benin where it was made. Initiates into the Orisha-Voodoo priesthood in Oyotunji can have an Egungun made for them as part of the initiation. This is separate, however, from establishing an Egungun Society, a much lengthier undertaking, although apparently a second Egungun Society has been established under ATA's direction somewhere in the Midwest.

opment of Yoruba religion, Oyotunji Village is a major US center for the promotion of an African-oriented Yoruba religion free from Christian influence. Despite its outsider's position, Oyotunji Village and its activities have nonetheless affected the mainstream practice of Santeria.

Egbes

Egbe is a Yoruba term denoting a guild, club or society. In New York, *egbes* are voluntary associations of priest/esses of the same orisha. In other parts of the country *egbe* seems to be synonymous with a temple, and some temples have this term as part of their name. Several *egbes* exist in New York. Their main functions are sharing and accumulating knowledge among members of the same priesthood, and promoting public religious and cultural activities including conferences and public observances, such as the annual Yemaya service at the seaside which takes place every September. Nowadays, there are at least four *egbes*: the *Egbe Oshun* founded in 1987, the *Egbe Obatala* founded in 1989 and the *Shango and Yemaya egbes*, which were founded shortly thereafter. Although they are rather multiethnic and multiracial, most of their members are African Americans. A similar organization is the *Ijo Orunmila Igbo Mimo*, an *egbe* of African American *babalawos*⁸.

These organizations have an unacknowledged predecessor in the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, an organization that sponsored a Santeria-based conference in 1980 at Columbia University's Teachers' College⁹. This association was founded by two African American santeros and was affiliated with the African Theological Archministry. The name *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* was taken from a still earlier organization that existed in Nigeria and designates all the children of *Oduduwa*, which are essentially all Yorubas, as members of a single society¹⁰.

All these forms – temple, church, town and *egbe* – coexist with the *casa*. Indeed, the *casa* remains the dominant and most widespread form of organization for Santeria and Yoruba religion at the local level.

⁸ G. E. Simpson who was in turn conveying information given to him by Fela Sowande mentions a Nigerian organization having this same name. The *Ijo Orunmila Mimo* and the organizations from which it descended were made up of Yoruba Christians who had turned away from Christianity and were attempting to reestablish direct contact with traditional Yoruba religions. "In 1934, Mr. A.O. Oshiga, a former Christian, founded the *Ijo Orunmila Adulawo*...*Ijo Orunmila Adulawo* had hymn-books, a prayer book, and a collection of the stanzas of *Ifa* from which lessons were read and texts taken for sermons. All were part of a framework usually associated with Christian worship... *Ijo Orunmila*, with its typical nativistic ideology, soon split with *Ijo Orunmila Ato* and *Ijo Orunmila Mimo*, breaking away from the original body. With the subsequent separation of *Ijo Orunmila Ilupesin* from *Ijo Orunmila Ato*, there were four *Ijo Orunmilas*: the *Aduwalo*, the *Ato*, the *Ilupesin*, and the *Mimo*" (SIMPSON, 1980, pp. 148). The typical social organization of these groups was the church. The groups lasted at least up to the late 1950s but Simpson didn't find any trace of them in Ibadan or in the villages where he did fieldwork in 1964 (SIMPSON, 1980, pp. 149). Perhaps the Nigerian *Ijo Orunmila Mimo* still exists. It should be noted that at least one, and possibly more, of the African American *babalawos* in the American association using this name was initiated as an *Ifa* priest in Nigeria.

⁹ This conference, the International Conference on the Unity of Science and Spirituality, was sponsored by the *Egbe Oduduwa* of the African Theological Archministry of New York under the auspices of the New York Chapter of the American Folklore Society, and was held on October 18-19, 1980.

¹⁰ E. B. Idowu writes of the *Egbe Oduduwa* in Nigeria. "In Yorubaland there is a cultural organization, known as *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, which has considerable influence in the country. The organization represents the whole race and has given fresh emphasis to the importance of *Ile-Ife* as the holy city of the Yoruba" (IDOWU, 1962, p. 15).

Interreligious Interaction

Over the years, I observed quite a few instances of interaction among members of different Afro-American religions as well as between organizations related to them. This takes several forms among which the most common and informal are visiting at each other's main public ceremonies. Informal interactions between santeros and spiritists are quite common, especially since many santeros and santeras have been trained as spiritists and/or continue to have a spiritist practice in addition to their Santeria clientele. Attendance, which does not necessarily imply intention of initiation or membership, may go no farther than a kind of occasional visit to someone seen as a kindred spirit, friend, relative or colleague on a different spiritual path. This type of visits seems much less common between Santeria and Voodoo practitioners – though I observed some spiritists and santeras at Haitian Voodoo ceremonies in New York – and even less so with Trinidad Orisha, although I encountered Trinidad Orisha worshippers at Santeria ceremonies too.

It should be remembered that in Cuba some Santeria houses considered spiritism as a stage of training and development toward eventual initiation into the Santeria priesthood and, as a result, either had spiritist mediums who worked with them or, being spiritist mediums themselves, integrated spiritist sessions into the routine activities of their houses. These same houses often treated involvement with Palo Mayombe or Palo Monte in the same way, that is, as part of a developmental path intended to culminate in initiation into the Santeria priesthood. Some of the older Orisha-Voodoo houses continue this same developmental tradition¹¹. In either case, what occurred here was often a closer and more formal kind of interaction: dual, or even triple, initiation. While this kind of triple initiation yielding the spiritist-trained santero-palero is common, it is by no means the rule. I also encountered two spiritists who, after having been initiated into the Santeria priesthood, were initiated as Voodoo priests as well. This is certainly uncommon, especially given the negative attitudes of many spiritists, and even of some Cuban santeras toward Voodoo. Nevertheless, it occurred.

Ogboni Societies

Two related Ogboni groups have been established in New York. The Ogboni society is independent of Ifa, Santeria and Orisha Voodoo and all the other religious institutions described so far. It is also separate from the casa and church organizations. Ogboni represents the recent transplantation of a Nigerian institution to the U.S. by Nigerian members themselves.

Oluweri Shrine, the first one, grew out of the shrine of a Nigerian initiate from Oshogbo, Nigeria – Apena Taiwo Ogunade – in the late 1980s early 1990s and is still functioning. Oluweri Shrine was composed of a small group of Africans and African Americans but has recently [1999] budded off another shrine group headed by an Afro-Cuban babalawo and herbalist who has also taken initiations in Nigeria. This latter group includes Hispanics and Blacks.

¹¹ In the 1960s in New York, the Yoruba Temple functioned this way by using the services of a Puerto Rican spiritist medium that was also a santera.

The Ogboni Society is at one and the same time a religious institution, a political-judicial institution and a secret society. As a religious institution, it is a cult group devoted to the earth deity Onile, and has its own specialized initiations, ritual, etiquette and code of secrecy. The Ogboni Society played also an important role in the political and judicial systems of the old Yoruba city-states. In the 19th century, for example, the Ogboni Society complemented the Oyo Mesi, a cadre of court officials serving as a council of elders to the king, who could call for his resignation or suicide. In the transition between the death of one king and the coronation of the next, the Ogboni played a crucial political and ritual role¹². Its other roles as a religious institution, secret society and social fraternity are best expressed in the U.S. by its total separation from the political system¹³. Ogboni admits both males and females and has an elaborate internal hierarchy of statuses. Meetings serve primarily for religious instruction, prayer, chanting and divination. Small early morning prayer meetings occur every five days, and full group meetings monthly.

The National African Religion Congress (NARC)

The recently formed (1999) National African Religion Congress which is based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania represents an equally interesting situation at the local and regional levels. The leader and founder is a Black American, Gros Mambo Angela Novanyon Idizol, who was initiated a Voodoo priestess in Haiti. She had previously studied African dance and had also been involved with two other African-based religious groups in Philadelphia, one of them founded by Nana Okomfohene Oparabea, a priestess of the religion of the Akan people of Ghana, who emigrated to the United States in the 1960s. The local base for NARC is Novanyon Idizol's own Voodoo temple, Le Peristyle Haitian Sanctuary, which has regular public services. She continues to interact with the Akan group in Philadelphia and with a Cuban santero whose church is in southern New Jersey¹⁴.

NARC seeks to embrace all New World religions of Sub-Saharan African origin. Representative groups appearing at their conferences and ceremonies include Cuban Santeria, Orisha-Voodoo, Haitian Voodoo, Akan devotees, African Spiritualists such as a New Orleans spiritualist church influenced by Voodoo and occasional representatives from Brazil and even a Spanish Ifa priest. At one conference the group recognized an African American Hoodoo practitioner as one of their own. The Nation of Islam, however, was forcibly excluded from participation, as would be any other form of Islam.

NARC focusses on the organization, the promotion of public information campaigns, encouraging priest/esses to declare themselves openly as such, and the compilation of a directory of certified priesthood. It also cultivates links with scholars sympathetic to these efforts at local colleges and universities. Their conferences include academic presentations but the emphasis is clearly on worship, on a 'cere-

¹² See MORTON-WILLIAMS (1967).

¹³ See MORTON-WILLIAMS (1960), and BASCOM (1944).

¹⁴ Le Peristyle Haitian Sanctuary has a multiracial American membership as well as a West African member from Benin.

mony of ceremonies' where members of Novanyon Idizol's temple, Akan devotees and Santeria or Orisha-Voodoo groups direct drum-dances in turn with the sponsoring Voodoo congregation both beginning and ending the proceedings. This sometimes leads to situations where priests and priestesses from one (or more) group(s) are still possessed during the presentation of the next groups. The Akan and Voodoo drum ensembles usually play together at some point during the ceremonies; but the rather hermetic and self-contained nature of the music performed for Santeria's bata ensemble seems to inhibit this kind of interaction; therefore, the bata ensemble usually plays alone.

NARC articulates at different levels: at the local level in Philadelphia, with Orisha and other non-Voodoo African sects; at the national level, with the African Theological Archministry; at the regional level in New York City, with Akan groups; internationally, through Orisha World and a recent visit to Candomble *terreiros* in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil.

It is unclear to me how this temple relates to the rest of the Voodoo community in Philadelphia or elsewhere. Formal organizational interreligious interaction between Afro-American religions through international forums has taken place through participation in conferences at New York's Caribbean Cultural Center as well as at Orisha World. These will be discussed in a later section of this paper.

National

The Yoruba Revitalization Movement

In the United States this movement is the outgrowth of the work of Oba Osejiman and African Theological Archministry. It includes priests/esses Oba Osejiman Adefunmi Efuntola has initiated in Oyotunji Village, but also those initiated in turn by the formers, and those who were initiated by santeros or santeras but who came to share his orientation, attitudes and style of practice. Those in this movement who are critical of Afro-Catholic syncretism, generally exclude whites from their houses, and emphasize African tradition, ancestor veneration and Egungun. The central core of their ideology is a Black cultural nationalist political stance including advocacy of Yoruba theology and ritual as components of a larger embrace of traditional Yoruba cultural, political and social practices. African dress is a significant cultural symbol, as are Oyo scarification marks on the cheeks, and acknowledgment of Oba Osejiman as leader, founder and king¹⁵.

There is a network of at least nineteen centers affiliated with the movement throughout the northeast, the south and the Midwest with possibly as many as 10,000 members. The movement has links to Nigeria and Benin; prints books and a newsletter; and some members have developed school and youth programs, including rites of passage for African American youth and adolescents. Participants are primarily U.S. born African Americans and are predominantly female.

¹⁵ See HUNT (1979), for a description of the movement and its ideology in the 1960s and 1970s.

Over the years the African Theological Archministry has shown a concern with gender roles and especially with the roles of women in the context of an African structure adapting to the situation of African Americans in the U.S. In some cases this has led to a greater degree of gender equality and to an extension of roles to women which they would not have been eligible to assume within Santeria. An important innovation of this kind in the U.S. context is the initiation and instruction of women into Ifa divination. This is not done by the Santeria priesthood, which excluded women from full initiation into Ifa. Once it was learned that women could be initiated into Ifa in Nigeria and in Benin, Adedfunmi began to encourage and implement it, including taking some priestesses to Benin for initiation. The roles of *iyanifa* or *apetebi*, new or being defined in the U.S. context, have become matters of controversy and contention between women and babalawos within the Yoruba revitalization movement as well as between Cuban babalawos and santeras.

The African Theological Archministry has served as a model for other organizations and these organizations share some but not necessarily all of ATA's orientation and practices. Usually the other groups do not attempt to coalesce Yoruba religion and Yoruba sociopolitical practices into a total lifestyle. They share an orientation toward Africa rather than Cuba as their reference point for tradition. Many of them received their first contacts and initiations through Cuban Santeria but later journeyed to Nigeria for further training, often as Ifa diviners. Often without any explicit political orientation, the groups may or may not exclude whites, and usually do not have Egungun or a well-developed ancestor cult. Examples are: the Oluwo Ile Orunmila Oshun of Oakland, California; the Yoruba Theological Archministry of Brooklyn, New York; and Ile Tawo Lona, East Orange, New Jersey, known outside of their immediate environs mainly through the publications of their founders (Awo Fa'lokun Fatunmbi, John Mason and Baba Ifa Karade respectively).

International

Caribbean Cultural Center

New York's Caribbean Cultural Center (formerly Visual Arts Resource Center Relating to the Caribbean) recently held its 5th International Orisha Conference. The CCC has brought individual mae de santos from Brazil in recent years in order to have a significant representation from Candomble terreiros at this meeting. Though the Center regularly invites representatives from Cuba to its conferences, they have trouble getting into the U.S. because of State Department restrictions. Representatives from Puerto Rico and other Latin American regions frequently appear, sometimes Trinidadians and Haitians as well. African, African American, Hispanic and Euroamerican scholars speak at these sessions and besides occasional conferences, the Caribbean Cultural Center organizes workshops, musical performances, lectures and art exhibitions as well as a newsletter and occasional publications. The director, Marta Moreno Vega, is an academic as well as an initiated

Santeria priestess. As a director she was particularly interested in serving as a bridge between the Hispanic and African-American communities in New York.

Vega attended the initial meeting of Orisha World in Ife, Nigeria in 1981, and through her the Caribbean Cultural Center may have had an affiliation with the Nigerian organization. The CCC's first international conference, held in 1986, was actually billed as the Third International Conference on Orisha Culture and Tradition. This was a large-scale event but it is unclear whether or not this meeting was cosponsored with Orisha World; the succeeding conferences, much smaller events, certainly were not.

International Conferences on Orisha Culture and Tradition

International Conferences on Orisha Culture and Tradition, also known as Orisha World are based in Nigeria. A key figure in the organizing body of Orisha World is Wande Abimbola, a noted babalawo and writer on Ifa who was formerly chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University at Ile Ife in Nigeria. Accordingly, the first of these meetings occurred at Ile Ife in 1981 and hosted Santeria and Orisha-Voodoo delegations from the United States as well as delegations from other countries possessing Yoruba-based religious traditions. The Orisha World meets every two years and the place of the conference shifts between Nigeria and some non-African location. Past conference locations outside Africa included Cuba and Brazil. The sixth International Conference was held in July 1997, in the United States in San Francisco, California, and the 7th in Port of Spain, Trinidad, in August 1999¹⁶.

The conferences, usually one week in duration, focus on presentations by scholars and priests, daily religious services in the styles of Orisha worshippers from different countries, and a miscellany of performances, craft vendors, exhibitions and booksellers displaying much recent literature from Nigerian, Brazilian and American Ifa priests. Proceedings stress academic, ritual and philosophical discussion rather than activism or organization building.

Participants in the 6th Congress included delegations representing Haitian Voodoo, Santeria, Orisha-Voodoo, Candomble, Trinidad Orisha, Nigeria Orisha (especially Ifa groups), Bini priests and an Ifa delegation from Argentina¹⁷. The Araba of Ile-Ife and his entourage attended as well as the Iyaoshun of Lagos. All the representative delegations as well as all congress registrants were able to participate in the general assemblies and vote on resolutions. Internal dissension at the 6th Congress itself and subsequent handling of the resolutions voted upon reveal a weak organizational structure with poor implementation heavily dominated by a hierarchy of Nigerian Ifa priests.

¹⁶ After the 1997 meetings the administrative offices of Orisha World have been relocated to San Francisco but its ideological, religious and spiritual center remains at Ile-Ife. Abimbola now resides in the US, teaching at Colgate University while providing private classes in Ifa divination and philosophy in Boston and New York.

¹⁷ Once again the US State Department prevented the Cuban delegation from attending.

The Internet

The orisha have colonized cyberspace. Despite the fact that, theoretically, the Internet is accessible to anyone anywhere in the world, the majority of Internet usage actually occurs in the developed industrialized economies of the West and, among these, mostly in the United States. Accordingly, orisha-oriented content on the Internet, generally appearing in English, originates from and is directed toward people in the United States. Like the Internet as a whole, the amount of orisha-related content on the Internet sites and the number of orisha-related sites grew explosively during the 1990s. Search engines often categorize Santeria under Voodoo; Yoruba and Yoruba religion also yield hits¹⁸.

The many sites vary greatly in quality and organization. There are commercial sites set up by religious goods manufacturers, book dealers and authors, and the organizational sites of associations of orisha priests and priestesses¹⁹. Churches and temples have created a presence for their own use on the Internet; featuring guest books and discussion groups as well as their individual credos, mission statements, histories and manifestos. There are library-like sites, which are simply collections of introductory information on Santeria and other African-based New World religions, along with reading lists and archives of images, photographs and drawings all of which may be downloaded. These often appear to be the work of cultural enthusiasts who are not themselves devotees. Academic researchers and teachers of religion have set up their own websites through their colleges and universities. In addition, there are the personal sites of individual santera/os who, eager to establish a reputation both in and out of cyberspace, use them as recruitment vehicles for broadcasting their views and abilities, soliciting god children and clients, and dispensing advice. Finally there are the personal sites of *dévotes*, separated from their godparents. Residing in locations where there are few other orisha worshippers, they use the Internet for soliciting communication and companionship by projecting pictures of themselves – often in front of their altars – out into cyberspace, hoping for a response from an anonymous, amorphous and far-flung virtual community of fellow believers.

Most discussions on the websites concern ideological and ritual matters as well as political issues and private spiritual counseling kept secret through the use of special passwords. Yet, some discussions, where actual identities are masked by pseudonyms, reveal indirectly some of the fault lines and strains of the social organization of a religious transmission that was primarily an oral tradition learned by direct apprenticeship to an elder (Brandon, 2000.) On the Internet one finds continuing debates within the priesthood about whether the Internet should be solely for discussion and advice, or whether it might also be used to transmit religious instruction. Concurrently, discussions at some of these websites also show the strain, distrust and fragility that sometimes develop in the godparent/godchild's relationship as well as the conflict between the intense individualism of American

¹⁸ Mainly Americans but also some sites and correspondence from coreligionists in Europe, Argentina, Venezuela and Brazil as well as sites run by Africans on the continent and by African immigrants to the US. Several important ones include a site originating in Ile Ife Nigeria on behalf of the Araba – Ifa oriented; also OrishaNet, a portal to many other Santeria sites; Church of Babaluaiye.

¹⁹ It is difficult to tell whether the organizational sites actually represent a functioning group or not; whether that organization is known from some other source or not.

culture and the conservative communal tendencies inherent in Santeria's dependence on elders, tradition and apprenticeship.

In some ways, the Internet is quite consonant with Santeria's social organization: it is decentralized, acephalous, a vast reticulate network of hyperlinks. But in other ways it is just the opposite: non-hierarchical, propulsively innovative, nonselective, offering abundant opportunities for fantasy and concept to drift far away from any practice, any real and specific identity, and from any group control or responsibility. As a result it is not surprising to find on the Internet a number of cyber-syncretist alternatives fashioned by neo-pagan, New Age groups who have included the orisha and the santos into their polyglot potpourri of images of spiritual beings and goddesses. Some even declare themselves members of an imaginary Santeria priesthood which exists only in their discussions with each other and into which individual pagan devotees have initiated themselves (see Capone, 1999).

Social organizational characteristics

We can now summarize our observations up to this point before beginning our analysis and discussion of them.

Taking the basic collective unit of Santeria as the *casa* or *ile*, the other units can be seen simply as gradual increases of scale which have proliferated along the lines of fission evident since the 1960' and 1970's. If we look at it in terms of local, regional, national and transnational level, it is clear that the *casa* is the dominant unit at the local level. Temples and churches may either subsume the *casa* or operate outside or totally independent of it; in some cases the *casa* and the temple or church may even be identical with the *casa* and then recruit new members who already have an *ocha* family to which they belong and remain loyal. Egbes cut across *casas* and supplement the knowledge and extend the activities of their members, even if the houses into which individual priests or priestesses were first initiated are uninvolved with them. As a result some egbes have a potential as regional organizations and may draw members from beyond the immediate local area and stretch into nearby cities. The events of the Caribbean Cultural Center are advertised and draw a following from across the tri-state area of northeastern New Jersey, New York and Connecticut and their international conferences provide a forum for dialogue, presentation and exchange between devotees from different countries and traditions of which the Yoruba based New World religions are especially prominent. NARC quite explicitly projects itself as a national organization embracing all forms of African and neo-African religions in the US; and the African Theological Archministry, via Oyotunji Village, has spearheaded a Yoruba revitalization movement whose influence among African Americans is already nationwide, even though focusing on Yoruba religion alone. The more recent incursions of Nigerians, whether as immigrants who come and set up their own shrines or groups, or as internationally activist organizers, have added another layer to this complex, whether at the local level through transplanting their institutions at the local level or transnationally through Orisha World.

I suggest that we look at these organizational units, regardless of their scales, as, under certain conditions, constituting a single phenomenon, a phenomenon which is itself both a process and a specific mode of organization dependent upon an active relationship between units involved in a joint commitment beyond the level of the *casa*, whether large or small. What might that commitment be?

A Puerto Rican santera once told me that the main reasons people entered the Santeria priesthood were two: sickness and a career. That was in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since then, other reasons have emerged from my interviews and informal discussion with devotees: a quest for cultural identity with a consequent vindication of Yoruba religion as a world religion with a standing equal to Christianity, Islam or Judaism; rejection of a racist and oppressively political, cultural and economic system; the filling of a religious or spiritual void created by a secularized world; the search for a more corporeal, earth-centered spirituality, feminine empowerment and the goddess. These have all been added to the list, so that in the present day the earlier motivations of sickness and personal achievement have become enclosed within a broader framework of personal transformation and, for some people, social and cultural transformation as well.

What I am suggesting is that we view the different social organizational forms I have been describing as an emerged or emerging transnational religious movement and that as such it follows the basic social organizational structure seen in other movements for personal transformation and social change. That social organizational structure, as has been described by Gerlach and Hine, is a segmentary acephalous reticulation of key individual networks²⁰.

Segmentation

Each 'little house' or *casa pequena* fits Gerlach and Hine's description of a movement cell and is 'an independent entity, each is politically autonomous and economically self-supporting' (Gerlach and Hine, 1970, p. 389.) Each has an inherent tendency to divide as the priests initiated within the *casa* establish houses of their own, even as they continue to be linked via the idiom of ritual kinship and the need to continue the transmission of religious tradition. Counterbalancing this tendency to fission into a plethora of 'little' houses, then, is the exercise of authority and dependence upon a senior godparent over them all to fuse all of them into single large multigenerational houses linked through a genealogy of initiations. The linchpin of both the fission and fusion tendencies in this structure is the acceptance

²⁰ GERLACH & HINE (1970a, 1970b) draw on data from their studies of Pentecostalism and Neo-Pentecostalism in Haiti, Colombia, Jamaica, Mexico and the USA, the Black Power Movement in USA, and the American grassroots movement concerned with ecology. They hypothesize that the basic social organizational structure for these movements of personal transformation and/or social change is one which is segmentary, politically decentralized, and reticulate, and that more centralized movements are a special case developed through modification of this form (1970a, pp. 387-388). Gerlach and Hine define a movement of personal transformation or social change as "a group or collectivity of individuals who are organized and ideologically motivated for and committed to the purpose of implementing fundamental change and/or condemning present conditions, who are actively recruiting new participants, and whose influence is in perceived opposition to the established order within which it exists" (GERLACH and HINE, 1970a, p. 385).

of an ideology of personal power and, through initiation into the priesthood, direct access to the sources from which personal power derives.

Beyond the level of the house, the pre-existing cleavages along racial and ethnic lines, ritual symbolism, economic and class, factional and personal animosities have been brought into the overall movement process. This only increases the tendencies toward fission as does the competition among *casas*, temples or churches for economic and political advantage, social status, and the more intangible psychological prizes of prestige, self-esteem and wish fulfillment. The possibilities for segmentation and fission are not exhausted by old conflicts and cleavages but also arise over new ideological clashes, as is the case with the new roles for women introduced from the Nigerians.

Decentralization

One way of looking at the segments of a movement is as the personal networks of leaders. When we turn to look at the mode of organizational relations obtaining among segment leaders, we can see that even an influential *santera/o*, Orisha-Voodoo or Yoruba priest/ess has authority only over his own segment of the movement, in this case his or her own house whether it is a *casa pequena* or a *casa grande* at the largest extent. There is no leader who can speak for the movement as a whole, no leader who can determine objectively who is or is not in the movement. Lacking any objective test of membership – beyond possibly the possession of *elekes* and some past or present affiliation with a *casa* – no leader even knows all of the other houses or other groups who consider themselves part of the movement, not to mention possessing a roster of them. Furthermore, leaders frequently disagree among themselves; none of them has the power to regulate the movement and no decision made by any one priest or priestess is binding on all or even the majority of *Santeria*, Orisha-Voodoo or Yoruba devotees. Leadership within the *casa* is centralized and hierarchical; leadership within the movement is dispersed and decentralized; leadership of the movement as a whole is acephalous.

Reticulation

If this is so, the question that remains is how a segmentary acephalous organization can be held to constitute an entity at all. The proposal here is that such cohesiveness as the structure possesses comes from the varied linkages between *casas*. The linkages are the basic ideological and ritual themes, interpersonal relations, individuals whose activities link distant groups, and collective activities.

– Ideology and Ritual: The religious cosmology and fundamental ritual attitudes shared by all the Yoruba-based groups, the names and attributes of the most prominent and widespread deities, the interrelated complex of music, dance and spirit possession as vehicles for worship provide basic themes which have been subject to a variety of interpretations and adaptations throughout the Yoruba Diaspora. Just as the variety of ideological and ritual adaptations provides a basis for organizational fission and factionalism – as between *Santeria* and Orisha-Voodoo –

the few basic themes, beliefs and practices provide the ideological and ritual means that allow opposed factions to consider themselves still part of the same movement.

– Interpersonal Relations: Kinship ties, whether in terms of blood relations and the biologically based family or through the ritual kinship ties established by initiation into a casa can foster close associations between members of different social and religious groups, as can participation of individuals in multiple religious groups such as we described above in terms of interreligious visiting and double or triple initiation.

– Itinerants. The personal kinship and/or friendship relationships among priests or priestesses sometimes extend beyond the local community and link independent groups in other cities. But perhaps more important are the ritual specialists who criss-cross the country, form living links between distant groups, and by this means reticulate the networks. A cadre of specialized diviners such as *italeros*, *orihates* and *babalawos* travels up and down the eastern coast of the US states from Florida through Washington, Philadelphia, New York and into Boston providing ritual services as well as instruction in their craft to local groups which sometimes cross casas in the local area as well across cities. A smaller number of Nigerian *babalawos* travel regularly between West Africa and the United States performing the same kinds of activities for African Americans, African immigrant communities and often have some contacts with Hispanic Santeria devotees as well.

– Collective Activities: Regional or national conferences and meetings serve as an ‘in-gathering’ of the scattered dispersed segments. The movement gains strength and support when its various segments come together and the participation in conference activities cuts across many lines of division. As a result various ‘communities’ despite their organizational fragmentation or distance, can join in a display of purposive unity. Often there are provisions that allow people who are linked to the movement but not ritually affiliated to any casa to participate in the activities, thus creating and strengthening extra-movement linkages.

– Extra-movement Linkages: Despite the fact that all the African based religions in the US are minority subcultures and marginalized as bizarre or exotic, if not demonic religions in relationship to the central established dominant religions with Christianity, Catholicism and Protestantism, some Yoruba and Voodoo groups have gained support from links to individuals in established White American society. Among these are academics and scholars at colleges and universities, individuals within mainstream and multicultural cultural centers, social service and health agencies and the legal profession. These linkages are usually between the groups and a specific individual in an institution who lends support and resource, participates in the more public activities rather than the religious ceremonies, usually is not ritually affiliated with any house within the movement.

The reticulate structure of an entity like this is too broad and indefinite to be analyzed into anything less diffuse than the sum of the personal networks of key individuals. Through the shared ideological and ritual themes which serve as the movement’s template for fission and fusion of segments, the social ritual and kinship ties between individual participants and between casa and segment leaders, collective activities and conferences that bring dispersed segments and factions together (locally, regionally, transnationally), and the links to individuals and insti-

tutions in established society, we have a set of linkages that form a shifting, expanding web whose boundaries and ultimate extent cannot be clearly defined.

The majority of Santeria priest/esses and devotees, however, are not affiliated with social organizational forms other than the house and, while seeing their own house or *fundamento* as organized, they do not see the religion as a whole as organized, even within the local area. Instead, many of the priests and devotees I have spoken to over the years see the factionalism, the competition between priests/esses and the intergenerational schisms within houses as weaknesses, and the ideological and ritual diversity of the religion as inherently divisive. It cannot be said that these people consciously share in the widely popular bias against the kind of segmented reticulate structure we have described as inherently weak; rather, they do not see this manner of organization as constituting a structure at all.

Hierarchy is so pervasive a principle of social relations in Santeria that perhaps it is difficult for many people to see the pervasive functioning of a process seemingly opposed to it as having some positive value, especially as long as one is focused at the level of the *casa*. Hierarchical social relations govern every aspect of behavior within the small *casa*, among related priests and within the large *casa*, but not between one large *casa* and another. At the local level the social organization of Santeria does not eventuate in a hierarchy of distinct houses which anyone is bound to consent to and recognize. Nonetheless, people do not perceive or will not concede the possibility of any other kind of relationship than a hierarchy existing between houses often resist more encompassing forms of organization. They foresee that attempts to promote extra-house organizations along hierarchical lines must inevitably end in a situation that privileges the organizing priest or house, hence the lack of local organizations beyond the house and the lack of regional organizations for which there seems to be only danger and no immediate benefit. All this renders affiliation with larger groupings suspect. And indeed devotees possessing affiliations with more than one of the social organizational forms we have described comprise only a small portion of active priests and devotees, these tending to be, and not by this fact alone, marginal to the mainstream of Santeria or their other representative groups²¹.

Conclusions

The multiple layers of the social and religious phenomenon I have described can only really be appreciated and accounted for in the context of globalization. Globalization as a product of the technologies of telecommunications, mail services

²¹ This observation can be extended to the *Egbes*, which exist in part because of the dissatisfaction of some African American priest/esses with the amount and level of religious knowledge being made available to them from their godparents. Resort to other people who were initiated into the service of the same deity allows them to compare and collaborate in accumulating the religious knowledge they are seeking outside of the houses and despite or beyond the proclivities of the godparent who has to some extent marginalized them. The case of Orisha-Voodoo vis a vis the mainstream Santeria community is another example, and the same can probably be said of *Gros Mambo* Angela Novanyon Idizol in relation to Haitian Voodoo groups in the US the majority of which are headed by Haitians.

and rapid ground, air and sea transportation; globalization as a product of the transmission of commodities such as herbs, foreign currency exchange and remittances, books, sound recordings, videos and films through the informal economy and ordinary commerce in the midst of the continuous ebb and flow of multinational capital; globalization manifested in the interconnection of individuals and groups from far-flung populations and their movements in search of work, displaced by political repression, missionary efforts and the brain drain, and traveling voluntarily to religious centers in West Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean for study and initiation.

Over the course of the past forty years of its exile in the United States, Santeria has evolved in consonance with divergent trends which were evident in Cuba itself and which have become clearer as the Cuban exiled population became more representative of the class and cultural variation of the island. The Afro-Catholic, neo-African and spiritist tendencies within the continuum of Santeria practice in Cuba have been conditioned in exile by the social and cultural exigencies of United States society and by contacts with different ethnic and racial groups in the new context. Some new forms of social organization were created to meet new needs, while Santeria's traditional and fundamental forms of organization continue to exist; new institutions and new roles have been imported from African sources; and the proliferation of increasingly active and far-flung networks of priests and devotees attempting to gain status and respect from established religious and secular institutions while maintaining their own religious values intact is an important feature of the eighth and ninth decades of the twentieth century.

These loose networks of local organizational cells articulate at the level of individual connections with other wide-ranging networks. The degree of external involvement for these cells is highly variable with the majority of devotees having little contact with other cells beyond those to whom they are connected through ritual genealogy, friendship or employment. Others, however, in order to achieve personal and collective political and religious goals, have developed even wider networks of affiliation. These wider networks encompass significant ideological and ritual diversity at the national and international levels and, at the local level, may also involve interaction with other African-based religious systems.

Shifts in Emphasis: Legitimization thrust

The church organization, legal chartering, and public information campaigns I have described are all tactics for persuading and compelling recognition from the wider American society and creating a truer, more valid public face for the Afro-American religions. Through raising their status in public esteem some Orisha-Voodoo, Santeria and Vodun groups strive to erase the stigma, negative stereotyping and false accusations routinely aimed at them over the years by popular misconceptions and the mass media. In effect, the groups are challenging the United States, which proclaims freedom of religion in its Constitution and religious tolerance in its civic values, to live up to its declarations. The thrust toward legitimization – and the belief that this course will not involve any alteration of fundamental African religious values and practices – necessarily implies a faith in

American democratic values and in the validity of religious pluralism for the majority of the American people.

As a parallel to this legitimization thrust, I have seen increasing discussion of ethical issues, particularly standards for the morally correct behavior of the priesthood in their dealings with clients and devotees and also between devotees themselves. In Santeria specifically, it is difficult to show that the religion actually possesses an ethical code²². The closest approximation to an internal source of moral principles in Santeria lies in the verses and myth-texts of the Ifa and *diloggun* oracles. In actual practice, though, diviners emphasize ritual rather than ethical considerations. They are much more concerned about efficacy, power and results than about standards of right and wrong behavior. Outside of the divination systems, appeals can always be made to the Christian ethics taught in Catholicism or the moral dictums of Espiritismo. Shorn of these European ethical influences Santeria appears essentially amoral²³. This allowed some bad things to happen including the sexual and financial exploitation of devotees and clients by members of the priesthood. Attempts to discuss and address these issues have appeared on the Internet and in international and local conferences, as well as a spate of recent publications mainly, but not exclusively, composed by African and African-American Ifa priests and frequently using the texts of Ifa divination as a point of departure²⁴.

If there is one conclusion that can be drawn from all this it is the following: Over the past forty years, the Yoruba-based religions of the United States (i.e., Santeria, Orisha-Voodoo and its derivatives) have taken on the social organizational characteristics of a movement for personal transformation and social change and – in conjunction with other Yoruba-based religions in Africa, the Caribbean and South America with unique histories and motivations of their own – have become participants in an international religious movement.

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²² In my own opinion, ethical principles are not present explicitly in Santeria as such but, rather, are partially embedded in social relations among the priesthood and devotees, and also in the relationships people establish with the orisha. Outside of that, and except for the divination sources noted in the text, they are undeveloped and unrecognized. The idea that ethical systems can be analyzed as embedded in and growing out of social relations is an old one in social science and goes back at least as far as Durkheim. Utilizing this insight need not commit us to an outmoded functionalism and could certainly serve as a point of departure for analyzing this aspect of Santeria. Activist priests and devotees, however, have directed their attention to finding and reviving authoritative textual precedents rather than scrutinizing contemporary social and ritual relations within the religion.

²³ See SANDOVAL (1977), on this point.

²⁴ See FATUNMBI (1991), FATUNMBI (1992), KARADE (1994), ABIMBOLA (1997) and KARENGA (1999), as examples. Even some of these, such as the Nigerian Yoruba texts on Ifism by C. Osamoro Ibie (IBIE, 1986), are still heavily influenced by Christian ethics independent of any Catholic influence on Santeria, although the Yoruba ethical concept of *iwa pele*, “sound character,” is prominent in much of this literature.

GLOSSARY

Ahijado/a: (Spanish) Godson/god daughter. The relationship of a male or female Santeria devotee to the priest or priestess of whose casa they are a member.

Babalawo: (Yoruba) A priest of the oracle deity Orunmila and a practitioner of the Ifa system of divination with which Orunmila is associated. This title translates literally as "father who owns the secret."

Cabildos: (Spanish) Afro-Catholic fraternities that were important in spreading Catholicism among slaves and free Blacks in Cuba but also served as an institutional framework supporting the preservation of African religious traditions. In Cuba the Afro-Catholic cabildos were organized on the basis of membership in specific African ethnic groups.

Collares/ elekes: (Spanish/Yoruba) A set of bead necklaces each of which displays the color symbolism appropriate to a Santeria deity or saint. Devotees receive the necklaces in a ceremony done by a Santeria priest or priestess. The necklaces signify participation in Santeria and membership the house of the priest or priestess from whom they were received. Elekes is the synonym for the Spanish term, collares in the variant of the Yoruba language retained in Cuba.

Compadrazgo: (Spanish) The Spanish Catholic institution of godparenthood and its variants as found throughout Latin America and Spanish Caribbean. Santeria has borrowed the terms *ajihado, ajihada, padrino and madrina* from this institution and used them to structure and characterize the relationships between the Santeria priesthood and its devotees.

Dillogun: (Yoruba) A system of divination in Santeria. The divination apparatus consists of sixteen cowrie shells and a small number of other objects. Only members of the priesthood are allowed to practice this form of divination.

Egbe: (Yoruba) A society or club; any kind of voluntary association.

Fundamento: (Spanish) Foundation or basis. Refers to the fundamental traditions of a Santeria casa, the core group of people empowered to possess and pass on those traditions, and also to the items that priests and priestesses receive in the process of initiation and which thereafter compose the core of their personal altars.

Hoodoo. (English) Traditions of magic and sorcery indigenous to North American Blacks. Hoodoo involves invoking the spirits of the dead, as well as fashioning charms and amulets, and is often allied with both divination and herbal medicine.

Italeros: (Spanish) A cowrie shell diviner empowered to perform a specific divination reading, the ita, that occurs during initiation into the priesthood. The ita is a comprehensive divination reading that encompasses the initiate's past, present and future and reveals the taboos under which they will have to function for the rest of their lives.

Iyanifa/apetbi: (Yoruba) A priestess of Orunmila and a female knowledgeable of divination system of Ifa with which Orunmila is associated. Iyanifa translates as "mother of Ifa." The term apetebi refers to the same role but emphasizes the relationship of the Iyanifa to its male counterpart, the babalawo. Apetebi roughly translates as 'consort.'

Madrina/padrino: (Spanish) Godmother/godfather. The relationship holding between the Santeria priest or priestess and the devotee on whom they have bestowed collares.

Mae: (Portuguese) A contraction of Mae de santo, literally, "mother of the saint," this is the Brazilian Candomble equivalent of the madrina (godmother) role in Santeria.

Ocha: (Yoruba) A Hispanicized and abbreviated form of the Yoruba term orisha, referring to the Yoruba deities worshipped in Santeria.

Orihate: (Yoruba) A priest, usually a diviner, who is extremely knowledgeable of the details of Santeria rituals, is capable of leading chants, and able to direct other members of the priesthood in carrying out initiatory and curative rites.

Orisha: (Yoruba) The Yoruba deities worshipped in Santeria. Also referred to as santos (saints).

Santero/a: (Spanish) A priest/priestess of Santeria. Someone whose initiation into the priesthood has empowered them to initiate others.

Terreiro: (Portuguese) A Brazilian Candomble temple or community. A terreiro is usually a permanent structure or a compound comprising several buildings, often with attached land or groves, and a resident population of priesthood and devotees. Some Brazilian terreiros are over a century old.

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the social organization of Santeria, as well as some related Afro-American religions observed on the eastern coast of the United States. The author specifies several levels of context and analysis and, as the result of two decades of fieldwork, is able to provide a description of Santeria social organization at the local, regional, national, and international levels as well as over the course of time. The author finds that the social organization of Santeria is best understood as a reticulate network that overlaps at times with the social organizations of some other religious groups. Paradoxically, Santeria is strongly hierarchical at the local level, yet largely acephalous at higher more inclusive levels than the local. The data presented here indicate how and why such a structure is significant in the constitution and maintenance of this religious system; how the structure has changed and grown over time; and the direction in which it seems to be evolving, and evolution marked by variability, and differing rates of change and involvement in movement-like activities.

Résumé

Cet article s'intéresse à l'organisation sociale de la santeria et autres religions afro-américaines apparentées, présentes sur la côte Est des États-Unis. L'auteur identifie différents contextes et niveaux d'analyses, deux décennies d'enquête de terrain lui permettant d'avoir une vision de l'organisation sociale du mouvement tant aux niveaux local, régional, national et international que sur la durée. Il en ressort que la santeria se présente comme un réseau dont les ramifications débordent parfois ses propres limites et se confondent avec l'organisation d'autres groupes religieux. Très hiérarchisée au plan local, la santeria apparaît en revanche décentralisée et inclusive aux autres niveaux. Les données présentées ici permettent de comprendre pourquoi une telle structure est importante pour la constitution et la perpétuation de ce système religieux ; comment cette structure a évolué et s'est développée avec le temps. Elles nous permettent d'entrevoir aussi la direction des évolutions à venir, des évolutions sujettes à variations, elles-mêmes dépendant des changements susceptibles d'intervenir au sein des activités des mouvements frères.

Resumen

Este artículo se interesa en la organización social de la santería y otras religiones afro-americanas emparentadas, presentes en la costa este de los Estados Unidos. El autor identifica diferentes contextos y niveles de análisis: dos décadas de trabajo de campo le permiten acceder a una visión de la organización social del movimiento, tanto en el nivel local, regional, nacional e internacional como en su duración en el tiempo. Surge de aquí la presentación de la santería como una red cuyas ramificaciones desbordan a veces sus propios límites, y se confunden con la organización de otros grupos religiosos. Muy jerarquizada en el plano local, la santería aparece en cambio descentralizada e inclusiva en los otros niveles. Los datos presentados aquí permiten comprender porqué una estructura similar es importante para la constitución y la perpetuación de este sistema religioso, y la manera en que esta estructura ha evolucionado y se ha desarrollado con el tiempo. Nos permiten también entrever la dirección de las evoluciones futuras, evoluciones sujetas a variaciones, ellas mismas dependientes de los cambios susceptibles de intervenir en el seno de las actividades de los movimientos hermanos.