

A Study of Divination within Santería, an Afro-Cuban Religion,  
as a Psychotherapeutic System

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Abstract

This paper is an ethnographic study of divination as a form of folk psychotherapy used in Santería, an Afro-Cuban religion practiced widely in Miami, New York, and other areas in which there have been Cuban immigrants. This paper reviews the psychological literature on Santería, and examines the need and importance of participant observation research in psychology.

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This paper is an ethnographic study, done not only from a clinical psychology perspective, but from a participant observation perspective. It also supports the viewpoint that the reliance on quantitative analysis represents a cultural artifact of Western mainstream culture, and that narrative, and experience are often times the best way to engage in and understand minority cultures, and culture in general (Sue & Sue, 1990).

There exists in the cross cultural psychology literature, feminist psychology literature, and gay and lesbian psychology literature a discussion on the issue of how to collect data from subjects. Feminist psychology, gay and lesbian psychology, and some cross cultural research converge in opinion on this issue saying that conventional methods of surveys, questionnaires, and theory based interviewing are culturally biased, and tend to filter out important data because the theoretical model behind such methods conceptualizes the world, and therefore human beings and human experience as something which can be reduced to discrete and finite categories. Because of this, important information about the experience of participants in some study might be lost since narrative data cannot always be neatly quantified.

This literature argues that the need to reduce data to discrete quantifiable, and statistically analyzable units is not due strictly to conforming with the rigors of scientific method, but is in fact an artifact of the values of the majority Western Culture. Therefore, to study some ethnic or disenfranchised group, the argument goes, one must employ a research methodology appropriate to the values of that group.

It has been argued that Western Culture seeks to find universals, that is universal

principles which can be applied to all members of some group, or to all of humanity. Classic examples of that are the quest to find a unified field theory in physics, or more close to home in the humanities, the dialogue between the etic and the emic. Other examples from two very different camps are Freud's view that his theories, in particular the Oedipal conflict were being universal to all human beings, and the behaviorist's view that all behavior can be explained merely by understanding the history of contingencies, or that all treatment can be manualized. In a similar sense, Marxism seeks to understand all societies and societal conflict from the same economic, class-conflict point of view, whether or not that perspective applies to the society in question (Le Riverend, 1979; Navarro, 1998).

The cross cultural researcher would argue that although Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Radical Behaviorism appear to be radically opposed to each other, they all originate from the same European gestalt and therefore represent variations on a Western/European way of thinking.

In another sense, the DSM-IV is an example of the effort to reduce human experience to finite discrete categories. There have been numerous complaints in the cross cultural psychology literature that DSM-IV categories are inadequate to describe all varieties of human psychological suffering. DSM-IV sought to remedy that over the previous issue by including a list of culturally determined disorders without providing them with a numerical notation, like it does for other diagnoses (American Psychiatric Association, 1994).

This is not meant to be a polemic against diagnosis, or diagnostic categories. It is only meant to offer a rationalization for the decision to have engaged in participant observation research, and for the overt decision to not use surveys, or other quantitative methods.

Reproduceability and falsifiability, the two criteria for scientific research, are not the

intentions of this research. The purpose of this paper is to, in part merely describe semi-charted territory, to explain why quantitative research would not work with this population, and to describe, present and share the experience of an indigenous psychotherapeutic system as through the perspective of someone trained as a clinical psychologist. It is in effect, a single case study. It must be remembered that description, too, is science.

There is another reason to engage in participant observation research, and it has less to do with the results the psychologist finds, but the experience itself of immersing himself<sup>1</sup> in culture alien from his own. This experience of culture shock due to experiencing another culture is like learning a new language. There is a period in which the new language or culture is strange, confusing, and looked down upon because of its difference. Then, at some point, there is, as if all of a sudden, the clarity that comes when one discovers that he can understand the new language. Then upon returning home, the knowledge of the new language or culture can provide insights into one's native culture and language. This was the experience I had learning and experiencing Santería and learning Spanish. It was an experience of learning about an other, in this case culture instead of an other person, and through that process have the experience of being able to step outside my own experience and go beyond the boundaries of my own cultural encapsulation. Conducting participant observation research is transformative in and of itself, regardless of the statistical data one retrieves from the research. One becomes a better therapist, and a better cross cultural therapist by experiencing more and learning about cultures other than one's own.

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<sup>1</sup>For the sake of convenience, the masculine 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun is being used. It should be understood that unless otherwise specified, he, himself and the masculine Santero include both genders.

### Method

In psychodynamic therapy, in particular self psychology, the major tool used by the therapist is the therapist himself or herself (White & Weiner, 1986). More specifically, the tool of the therapist is empathy and his or her own empathic responses to the patient, called mirroring. Depending on the school of psychodynamic therapy, more attention is given to interpretation, or working through defenses, but the concept of the central importance of using one's own countertransferential experience in order to understand the patient is present in all forms of modern analytic thought.

Empathy can be variously defined, and perhaps the warmth as experienced from the therapist by the client can be measured on some Likert scale, but, essentially, empathy in the psychoanalytic context is the result of training and experience. It is not meant to be an external objective observational phenomena. It is a subjective, experiential phenomena that comes into being in the context of a relationship between two people, the therapist and the client.

In the same way, the core of this paper is based upon the assumption, previously outlined, that the clinical psychologist is a specially trained observer, trained to observe things different from the anthropologist, and because of this has something to offer in engaging in ethnographic fieldwork. Part of the method of this research, therefore, was to experience Santería as an insider, and then to write about the experience from the point of view of someone who has experienced it.

This leads to several methodological problems. The first of which is that the training of the author is in clinical psychology and not anthropology, so there was no prior training in anthropological method, nor in how to take field notes. Therefore, for this project, no field

notes, as such, exist. The hand written notes which the author compiled were for himself as a participant in Santería, and not written to serve as ethnographic field notes. That means, that in some sense, the information on the way the religion is practiced as a form of ethno-psychology is somewhat autobiographical and personal. From a cross cultural methodology perspective, a personal account is appropriate because it mirrors the way in which human beings experience the world and present in therapy.

Santi (1997) in his dissertation on Santería as a psychotherapeutic system constructed a survey, and distributed it to various clients, and believers in Santería. He also conducted one in depth interview with a Santera. I am not questioning the knowledge nor legitimacy of his informant, but, some of the information Santi provides about Santería, its rituals, and theology is inaccurate. He based his knowledge of Santería on one informant, and on the literature, both academic and popular written on the subject.

It is not apparent whether the informant was misinformed, gave Santi inaccurate information in the same vein as Mead's teenage adolescent informants, or whether he simply misunderstood what he was told. In effect, the participant observer is both interviewer and informant. While that can lead to a greater understanding of the subject matter, it can also lead to the sort of accusations leveled at Carlos CasteCeda (Fikes, 1993). CasteCeda also engaged in participant observation. As documented in the popular books written by him, the first of which formed the basis of his dissertation for his doctorate in anthropology. He claims to have undergone training as a shaman under tutelage of the Yaqui Indian Don Juan.

Reviewers of CasteCeda's work observed that his descriptions of Don Juan do not conform to actual Yaqui practices, and that there are many other similar inconsistencies in his

work. When asked to provide his field notes, a request in anthropology equivalent to asking to see the raw data in quantitative psychological research, Castañeda was unable to do so (Fikes, 1993).

It is important in this sort of research, participant observation, that the researcher be able to provide enough evidence of the veracity of his or her experience in order to discharge criticisms of fabrication.

I was initiated into Santería in Havana, Cuba on February 29, 1996. As is the custom, I stayed under the throne for 7 days, and upon returning to the United States, I followed the custom of the iyawo<sup>2</sup>. The period of that year, called the iyaworaje is described with some accuracy in Cabrera (1974), Matibag (1996), and Brandon (1993).

Some of the rituals of that year include wearing white, covering one's head for the first three months, avoiding crowds and fairs and market places. At the end of the year period, I held a party celebrating the completion of my year, and was then permitted to wear colored clothes and go out at night.

During that year I was "presented to the room," and "presented to the drums." The former is the ritual in which one's godparent formally brings the initiate to the initiation of someone else, and confers upon them the right to work in rituals. The second is the formal introduction to the drums, and gives permission to attend ritual drummings, called Bembes.

Training in Santería is not formal, but occurs by working in rituals and observing and participating. At the time of the writing of this paper, the author had 5 years of initiation, and

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<sup>2</sup> Iyawo is Yoruba for wife. It is also the word used for a novitiate in Santería. The novitiate is symbolically married to the Orisha as well as being the child of the Orisha.

had worked 6 other initiations.

In this same vein, I should describe my psychological training. At the time of the conceptualization of this paper, and during its writing, the author had completed course work towards the degree of Psy.D., that is the doctorate in clinical psychology. The majority of his training had been in psychodynamic and psychoanalytic courses, and he had completed 2 required practica and one elective practica treating patients both in long term psychodynamic therapy, group therapy and short term modalities.

Because this is a descriptive study, methodology involves a literature review, a description of the Misa Espiritual<sup>3</sup>, Merindilogun<sup>4</sup> or Cowry Divination session.

The description of divination are based upon the author's own experience rather than what is described in the literature. That means that there will be some variation between this description and that found in literature. This lends itself to another issue.

Santería is still a mostly oral tradition. Most of the literature on Santería comes from Cuban anthropologists, American scholars not initiated in the religion, a few American graduate students who have been initiated in Santería before conducting their research, and popular writers, some of whom had limited access to the religion (Gonzales-Whippler, 1983), and initiates with various levels of knowledge.

Because of the scarcity of written material on Santería, some researchers have relied

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<sup>3</sup> Misa Espiritual refers to a spiritual mass, or what could be called in English, a Seance. Seances became popular in Latin America during the 1850s and 1860's in parallel to the spiritist movement started by the Fox sisters of New York, in the United States. Allan Kardec, a French spiritist developed a system of seance that became adopted and syncretized as part of Santería.

<sup>4</sup> Merindilogun is the Yoruba word for the number 16. It refers to the 16 cowry shells used in divination.

heavily on inaccurate sources. Because these sources are quoted so often, in part because of the scarcity of the material on Santería, and in part because some researchers were not participants in the religion, and therefore could not verify the accuracy of the data in the literature, misinformation continues to be cited (Flynn, 1986; Santi, 1997)

This is similar to the situation in psychiatric charts where instead of verifying biographical data, a clinical copies previously entered data which had been in error.

This is another argument for engaging in Participant Observation. If having some understanding of the clients culture helps to facilitate rapport, then having an faulty understanding of that culture based upon faulty ethnographic data would serve to alienate the client.

### What is Santería

Santería is the popular name for the Afro-Cuban religion more formally known as Regla de Ocha or Regla Lukumi. It evolved from the religions practiced by Yoruba people, from what is now Nigeria, taken to Cuba as slaves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ekunfeo, 1994).

This religion is widely practiced in Havana, Matanzas and many other Cuban cities. It also is widely practiced in Puerto Rico, and among Cubans and Puerto Ricans in Miami, New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia. There are also practitioners in other Latin American countries, including Panama and Venezuela and Mexico. It is also practiced in those areas of the United States where there has been Cuban and Puerto Rican migration. In addition, many non-Cuban, non-Puerto Rican Hispanics have also embraced Santería. Some African-Americans, have embraced Santería and Orisha religion from Nigeria in an effort to reclaim lost ethnic identity. And, it has also been embraced by many Latin homosexuals (Matibag, 1996).

Because of a history of persecution by the Catholic church in Cuba, prejudice in the United States, and its secret initiatory nature, it has been difficult to get accurate data on how many adherents of Santería exist in the United States. Also, because many of those who might use the services of a Santero as folk therapist identify themselves as Catholic and do not identify themselves as being part of the religion of Santería, it would be difficult to get accurate data on how many people actually practice the religion.

In addition, there are many levels of affiliation to Santeria. Someone might be initiated, or might simply have undergone the ceremony to receive what are called collares (beads), or Warriors. Some people are merely clients, who go to the santero for divination when a crisis arises in their lives, and have no interest in Santeria as a religion. These people do not identify as being part of Santeria, and are most likely to identify as being catholic.

Regla de Ocha means, Rule of the Orisha, and Regla Lukumi, means Rule of the Lukumi. Ocha is a Cubanization of the Yoruba word Orisha, the collective names for the Yoruba divinities. Theories on the origin of the word Lukumi or Lucumi vary. Some sources say that it is the phrase, “Hello friend,” in one Yoruba dialect. Other sources refer to early maps which show the word Lucumi as referring to an area inhabited by one particular region of Yoruba people. The term Lukumi was used in the mid to late 1800’s to refer to slaves born in what is now present day Nigeria to distinguish them from blacks born in Cuba and those who claimed descent from Kongolese or other African ethnic groups. (Barnet, 1994)

The term Yoruba is one applied by the British during the colonial period to describe the people living in what is now Nigeria. The Yoruba people are made up of various related ethnic groups speaking dialects some of which are mutually unintelligible. Prior to invasions by the

Muslim Fulani from the North, and the British, the Yoruba civilization consisted of a network of villages and small cities interconnected by trade, feudal obligations between lesser chiefs and greater chiefs in vassal relationships. The Yoruba were an urbanized people before British colonialism, and they had a great cultural influence on neighboring peoples, including those of Benin, who share certain elements of style in their art and religious system.

After Columbus' discovery of the New World, Native Indians were used as slaves in Cuba. The harshness and severity of the treatment of the indigenous inhabitants of the Caribbean has been described in length elsewhere. Suffice to say for this paper, the Spanish, Portuguese, English and other colonial powers discovered a source of cheap labor by taking Africans as slaves for use working sugar cane and tobacco plantations in Cuba and other places in the New World (Brandon, 1993; Ekunfeo, 1994).

The need for cheap labor also coincided with Fulani invasions into traditional Yoruba land, and various internecine conflicts among the Yoruba themselves, including the fall of the Kingdom of Oyo.

The Africans taken to Cuba as slaves came from many ethnic groups, including Kongo, Calibiri, Yoruba, Arara, Dahomey. But, the majority during the 19<sup>th</sup> century were Yoruba. And, for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the majority of people in Cuba were of African descent.

Catholicism's encounter with the cultures of the African slaves was different than that of the Protestant Christianity of the United States. While both in the United States, the Caribbean, Brazil and other parts of Latin America, the culture and religion and language of the Africans was systematically attacked Catholicism also tended to allow for a greater degree of syncretism than did North American Protestantism. For that reason, African religion tended to survive,

albeit in variously modified forms in Brazil as Candomble, in Haiti as Vodou (Voodoo), Trinidad as Shango, and in Cuba as Santería (Ekunfeo, 1994; Mason, 1992).

In the United States, African religion has survived in less recognizable forms as Hoodoo, and as the various spiritist churches, and in New Orleans Voodoo. These preservations in the United States do not represent some anomaly but actually are indicative of a certain preservation of African culture and spiritual thought that still permeates African-American religion, and psychology (Herskovits, 1937).

In Cuba, as an attempt to control the African slaves, the Catholic church organized them into Cabildos, or societies based upon their ethnic groups. In order to preserve their religion, various Orisha began to be associated with various Catholic Saints. That way, the African could continue to venerate their deities behind the mask of Catholic symbolism. Festivals and public performances in honor of various Orisha were moved to be on the same date as the feast day of popular saints. So, Sango, because he was represented by the color red and carried a wooden ax and was a king became associated with Santa Barbara whose iconography included a sword, a red robe, and a castle. Similar correspondences were made with other Orisha. It was because of the syncertising tendencies of both Catholicism and the African religions, and because of the domination of a single ethnic group, the Yoruba, among the many African slaves in Cuba, that the Yoruba religion was able to survive in Cuba (Mason, 1992).

Today, Africanisms permeate Cuba culture. The popular music (rhumba), many folk expressions, and the food reflect this (okra, rice, certain beans). Today, in Cuba, Santería is still a powerful cultural force, and Santeros still serve the function they served in Africa, that of counselors, therapists, and diviners.

### A Short History of Santería in the United States

There seems to have been Santeros in the United States as early as the 1930 and 40s in various Florida cities where there were communities of Cubans. Botanicas<sup>5</sup> in New York City and Santeros from Puerto Rico (Puerto Rico had once been part of Cuba and has a similar ethnic composition to Cuba) since the 1960s, but the great upsurge in the presence of Santería in the United States occurred after the Mariel Boatlift in the early 1980's.

The previous large immigration of Cubans occurred in the early 1960's as a result of Castro's Revolution and his subsequent embrace of Marxist policies. That group of immigrants tended to be middle class, white and Catholic. The immigrants who arrived left Cuba as a result of the Mariel boatlift tended to be poor, and Afro-Cuban. Santería was more widely practiced among that population than among the middle class immigrants of the early sixties. It was as a result of this that there was an increase in the practice and presence of Santería in the United States.

### A Review of the Psychological Literature on Santeria

The literature written on Santería can be organized into several categories: the academic literature; texts written for participants in the religion by initiates; and, texts written for a popular audience. The academic literature can then be further sub-divided into that written by academics who have had participatory relationship with Santería, initiation, or having received what are called "Warriors," and those who were not initiated. The texts written by initiates include compilations of personal notes on the religion, anonymously circulated collections of divinatory

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<sup>5</sup>A botanica is a store in which herbs, plants, candles, palm oil, white clothes, live animals and other items used in Santería are sold. Often spiritual readings and divination are done in Botanicas, also.

poems, often copies of photocopies of manually typed texts, and pamphlets (less than 24 pages) sold in botanicas. These texts are written in Spanish, often in colloquial Cuban Spanish.

Another class of literature on Santería is written by initiates in English for a popular audience. Often these texts are written to express the author's point of view, gather godchildren, or for self aggrandizement, therefore, like the popular works written by those not initiated in Santería are of limited value in obtaining accurate data about Santería, but are useful in understanding the degree of prevalence of Santería in the popular mind.

The difficulty occurs when a naïve researcher fails to differentiate between the types of available literature, and relies on inaccurate texts, citing them in their own research. This argues towards the principle of not relying on texts to understand the cross cultural patient, that printed material published about some aspect of some ethnic group may not be accurate, and to work with the cross cultural patient, experience, in part derived from listening to the client, as opposed to arriving with predetermined assumptions based upon published materia, is essential.

The academic literature on Santería as a mental health or psychological system is limited. A search of the e-psyche database of psychology journals produced no articles when searched with the keyword Santería. ERIC, a database of articles and papers primarily on education, linguistics and language, produced 5 articles discussing Santería, two of which are directly related to therapy and psychology, the others related to sociology. Of the discussing the role of Santería to psychotherapy of Cuban patients, one was published in 1983, and the other 1977.

A search of Medline revealed 4 articles, one of which directly addressed Santería and ideas on health and healing, and one of which discussed the use of folk therapy by AIDS patients. Neither was published in a psychology journal. A search in a sociology database produced 3

articles, all related to similar issues. A search in a Sociology Abstracts database produced 19 citations.

A search of recent (past two years) master's and doctoral dissertations, on the Pro-Quest database produced only three results, all in sociology or anthropology.

Despite its importance to understanding Cuban folk culture and an aspect of ethnopsychology, and the recognition of its importance by the fields of related clinical disciplines, nursing and social work, clinical psychology in particular has neglected to study Santería.

A chance discovery after looking through unpublished dissertations stored in a conference room at Nova Southeastern University lead to finding a doctoral dissertation written in 1986 (Flynn, 1986) examining locus of control among practitioners of Santería. Pro-Quest maintains a list of dissertations only for the past two years. In an earlier search I found a doctoral dissertation analyzing Santería as a psychological system (Santi, 1997). Both papers will be critiqued below.

Despite the paucity of psychological and cross-cultural therapy research on Santería, there is a rich body of literature written by anthropologists.

#### A Short Overview of the Anthropological Literature on Santería

An underlying premise of this paper is that despite slavery in America, the forced Christianization of the African slaves, and the systematic stripping away of their culture through various laws, e.g. making the manufacture and playing of drums illegal<sup>6</sup>, African religion and

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<sup>6</sup> Drums and drumming are an essential part of the religion and cultures of most African peoples, and are of particular importance and are central to Santería, Yoruba religion, and the cultures of West-Africa. Without drumming, a part of the religion dies out.

African thought survived in America. It survived in ways which may not be initially obvious to the observer from the majority culture, but survive they did in the religious expression, food, social customs, and therefore also the psychology of African-Americans.

One of the difficulties clinical psychology has encountered is assuming that just because the African-American has lost his forebears language, religion and other obvious aspects of African culture, that he or she is Western and can be treated therapeutically in the same way as all other Americans. The first anthropologist to recognize that African culture and religious forms survived in North America, and in particular the United States, was Melville Herskovits (1933).

Any study of Santería must include some discussion of him and three other important anthropologists. Although none of them was concerned with West-African religion as a healing system per se, they are each important to the study of Santería, and African cultural preservations in America. The two who were important in showing the degree of African culture which survived the United States are, Melville Herskovits (1933), who was one of the first anthropologists to show that African culture and, important to this paper, African ways of thinking had survived in an influential way in the United States, and Zora Neale Hurston (1983) who wrote about Hoodoo, the transmuted form of African religion which survived in the southern parts of the United States.

Like their American counterparts, Fernando Ortiz (1991; 1994) and Lydia Cabrera (1974) were anthropologists who were not concerned with African religion as healing systems, but were concerned recording the mythology, music, and history of the Africans who were brought to Cuba. Although they do not have a direct impact on psychology they should be mentioned because of their importance in the study of African religion and culture in the New World and in

particular Cuba.

#### Psychology's and the Health Science's Interest in Santería

The first article discussing Santería as a form of folk therapy seems to have been written in 1977. Harwood (1977) wrote about the use of the Kardec seance, or what is called Misa Espiritual, or Mesa Blanca as a form of psychotherapy among Puerto Ricans in New York City. The Misa Espiritual is not strictly speaking a part of Santería, but is widely practiced by Santeros. A more in depth discussion of the Misa follows below.

Harwood's research is important not only because it is the first example of Santería being spotted on the radar screen of the mental health field, but because he makes the observations of the relationship of the use of alternative healing systems among lower socio-economic groups, its predominant use by women, and the importance of spirituality in psychological healing.

Lefly and Bestman (1977) and Perez y Mena (1977) although not strictly examining Santería, but the semi-syncretized practice of the Misa Espiritual among Puerto Ricans in New York, recognized that the mainstream clinician must understand the role of alternative ethnic mental health systems.

It is not until Sandoval (1979) that Santería itself, and not Spiritualism becomes the focus of interest. Her important conclusions are that Santeros make use of conventional health care systems and that they do not see Santería as an alternative to medical treatment but as a compliment to it.

As mentioned before, African religion in the United States did entirely become extinct. It transmuted and was preserved within both the African-American Church, Fundamentalist Churches which served both whites and blacks, and in the black Spiritualist Churches of New

Orleans, and the surrounding areas of Louisiana (Jacobs, 1990). In examining the role of healing and prophecy in black Spiritual churches, Jacobs makes passing reference to Santería, but more importantly, he uses participant-observation methods and ethnohistory methods to obtain information for understanding the psychological and mental healing functions of black Spiritual churches.

Pasquali (1994) studied Santería as a means of decreasing uncertainty and stress by providing a meaning to one's illness. Even though the illness might still be treated medically, Santería functions to give meaning to the causes of the illness. That is, the medical scientific reasons for illness are not denied. The question Santería seeks to answer is why does this person succumb to this microbe at this time. If the microbe is in the environment, why should one person become ill and not another. The spiritual explanation given sees the microbe as the means or device of a spiritual force. Once the spiritual or malignant supernatural is cleaned or once balance is reinstated, then the medications become more effective. Santería, then is a complimentary therapy used by practitioners alongside standard conventional medicine.

Paulino (1995) discusses the importance of in social work of understanding the various Afro-New World, and Hispanic religious systems and indigenous healing. She examines Spiritism, Santería, Brujería, and Voodoo, and but stresses the importance of understanding these systems from the point of view of a social worker working with Caribbean people.

For the most part, Santería has been ignored by psychology in general and clinical psychology in particular as being of any interest in terms of cross cultural research. Two notable exception are two doctoral dissertations for the degree of Psy.D., doctor of psychology, one written in 1985 and the other written in 1997.

Both Flynn (1985) and Santi (1997) were in graduate school in South Florida, Flynn at Nova University, and Santi at the Miami Institute of Psychology. Both used a similar method of collecting data, that is, constructing a survey and distributing it to people they identified as either practitioner of Santería, or clients of Santeros, and analyzing the responses. Flynn used a quantitative analysis on his data, while Santi augmented his data with an interview of an informant, a Santera, and used a qualitative approach to the survey responses. Neither Flynn nor Santi were initiated in Santería, nor were participants in the religion, although Santi did attend several Misas Espiritual in order to observe the process first hand.

Flynn (1985) investigated locus of control as an aspect of personality among practitioners of the Afro-Cuban religion Santería. Flynn's study is more interesting in terms of his methodological findings than his results his findings on locus of control. His research involved distributing the Rotter Locus of Control Scale, and Knowledge of Santería Questionnaire to parishioners in four parishes, and to various contacts of his involved in Santería. Flynn was a Roman Catholic Priest, and had the assistance of the auxiliary bishop and vicar for Hispanic ministries (1985, P 82) and was able to have the surveys distributed at the end of Sunday mass in churches with predominantly Cuban populations. He also had personal contacts who were Santeros, and the owner of a botanica take the surveys to distribute.

A total of 158 people returned the surveys. He obtained 143 completed surveys from parishioners, of whom 134 had no involvement with Santería, and 9 of whom had some involvement with Santería as well as with Roman Catholicism. He also was able to obtain 15 completed surveys through his Santero contacts.

Flynn reports that he had expected at least 30 responses from Santería practitioner group and

in his preface writes: "The overall effect of the study tends to emphasize the particular difficulties encountered in attempts to study secret, socially 'marginal' religious forms, particularly when adherents are unwilling to acknowledge participation or membership." (Flynn, 1986, p. xii)

He reiterates the same thought in his discussion of his findings, "Perhaps most significantly, the present study clearly illustrates the difficulties encountered in attempts to investigate religious forms which are, at best, culturally and socially marginally accepted." (Flynn, 1986, p. 128).

One aspect of conducting cross cultural psychological research is to gain sensitivity for minority viewpoints and to learn how to be able to conduct therapy in a way to gain the acceptance and trust of members of marginal and minority religious groups. Flynn describes Santería as a cult, and inaccurately describes various Santería rituals. For example, he describes Santería as "the product of on-going syncretism, or blending, of the Yoruba religion of Black African Slaves and the Roman Catholicism of the Spanish slave owners." (P. 3) In fact, there is no theological syncretization between Catholicism and Santería, and the process of syncretization is actually reversing itself, with many adherents shedding the use of Catholic elements.

Flynn makes errors in describing Santería ritual. He makes the statement that receiving collares involves rituals that "require several months of ritual preparation." (p. 30). Receiving collares or the set of four beaded necklaces takes only a few hours, and certainly no more than a day. He also writes that "the rogacion de cabeza is designed to send away and exorcize anything evil and /or intruding spirits." (p. 32) He claims that it is a ritual that lasts three days, and that the person undergoing this ritual is cloistered for several days. The rogación de la cabeza takes no more than about an hour, and its purpose is to feed the "head," it being the belief in Santería that the seat of the soul is the head, and therefore to strengthen the Orisha that lives in the head of

every human, it must be fed a mixture of grated coconut, honey, and cocoa butter. This mixture is placed on the head and then covered by a white hat or kerchief. It certainly never takes three days.

He describes "hacer santo" as being "a ritual associated with solemn oaths of secrecy" (p. 32) and that the animals are presented to the new initiate to "absorb the sins of the initiate." (p. 33). Flynn also describe initiation a being a month long ceremony. I have undergone the "hacer santo" and have worked several initiation and at no time was any one required to make any "solemn oaths of secrecy." And, the initiation takes a week, not a month.

One reason for conducting ethnopsychological research is to gain greater understanding and sensitivity in order to conduct more effective psychotherapy with minority groups. Part of understanding some ethnic group is being able to obtain accurate data about the group under study. Flynn's errors would be obvious to anyone with even the most basic exposure to Santería. This puts into question the validity of his research, and the usefulness of his research for clinical psychology. It also lends support to the importance of participant observation research in ethnopsychological studies.

Santi (1997) in his study of Santería compared to psychology as a mental health care system observes that "cultural insensitivity is almost a guarantee of failure and thus mental health professional should acquaint themselves with the background of their clients prior to starting a relationship." (Santi, 1997, p. 9) He also makes the statement that "Santería is a mixture of African beliefs (Yoruba) and Catholic ones." (Santi, 1997, p. 9) He also quotes Sandoval (1979, p. 145) who writes "Santería saints can be controlled and catered to with offerings and presents: they respond to you."

Both are a critical misunderstanding of Santería. There is no mixing of Catholic beliefs, only a use of Catholic symbolism to mask the African religious, as a protective camouflage. And, Santería Saints, more properly called Orisha can be propitiated, but never controlled. If, as Santi writes, that "it is the responsibility of the mental health professional to learn more about this particular group so that the treatment can be tailored to their needs" (p. 15) then it should also be the responsibility of the mental health professional to obtain accurate data about the group. If gaining trust and credibility is important in working with some ethnic group, that fragile trust can be lost if the mental health professional is seen as not understanding the sub culture because of relying on inaccurate data.

Santi's (1997) did attend several Misas Espirituales and did obtain interesting data on the reasons why individuals see a Santero. He gave his survey to 10 people who were participating in a Misa Espiritual. All ten had also at some point seen a psychologist. There reasons for seeing a psychologist were for adjustment problems, depression, problems at work, marital problems, seeking guidance, help with family problems other than marital and help controlling anger. The reasons for seeking the help of a Santero had some overlap with those for seeing a psychologist. They include help with protection against evil, to get rid of an evil hex, consultation about the future, help for problems at work, help for problems at school, marital problems, adjustment problems to a particular situation, seeking guidance, and for various religio-spiritual services. (Santi, 1997, p. 57)

Although the Misa is widely practiced by Santeros, it is less important to the Santería religion than is cowrie shell divination. This sort of divination is actually central to Santería, yet Santi does not describe this activity, mentioning it only in passing. But, he does make several

observations that are of interest. For example, his informant tells him that Santeros "do not always rely on spiritual means to help their clients. Sometimes they use common sense and their past experience when helping a client." (p. 61) She also tells him that when a problem is "purely psychological" she refers them to a psychologist, and that part of her effectiveness is the faith her clients put in her (Santi, 1997, p. 64). That is, the culturally, or subculturally sanctioned role is an element in creating a therapeutic frame.

He also observes that "In Santería, as well as in psychology, there is not just one particular treatment modality. Treatment is left up to the Santero who will decide what to do and when to do it. However some of the techniques used by Santeros resembled techniques used in psychology, such as active listening, confrontation, homework assignments, interpretation and support giving." (p. 68) Santi observes that certain elements of the Misa Espiritual resemble Gestalt therapy techniques. He asked several Santeros "if they used psychological techniques in their work they said no." (p. 70) But, observed that the techniques they used "resembled established psychological practices."

#### The Basis of Divination and the Misa Espiritual

The word Santería is a somewhat inaccurate term. It means a worship of Saints, and the religion was so called because it appeared involve a worship of Catholic saints. It is more accurately called Regla de Ocha, or Rule of the Orisha. Orisha are not gods, per se, but are divinities, that is, spiritual beings who are intermediaries between man and God. Each Orisha has a function and a personality. The function of each is not as defined and territorial as the better known Greek-Roman Pantheon. That is, there is an overlapping of function and personality characteristics between various Orisha. In Jungian terms, each can be thought of as

an archetypal personality. An omniscient, omnipresent god does exist in Yoruba thought, and this deity is given the name Olodumare, but is thought of as being otiose and remote, and far removed from the daily activities of mankind.

The Orisha are closer, and therefore more immediate and accessible. The relationship between Orisha and Santero can be thought of as filial, or that of vassal. Communication with Orisha is done through trance at drummings, and through divination.

Santería is not only a religion in which Orisha are venerated, but it is also a religion of ancestor worship. Ancestor worship and the importance of propitiation the dead is a wide spread practice in Africa, and also among other ethnic groups. Ancestor worship in the form of the Egungun cult seems to have also been brought over by the Yoruba taken as slaves to Cuba.

In Africa, the Egungun society served as a community superego, and regulated the moral behavior of a community in the name of ancestors. The Egungun society and its rituals died out in Cuba, and seems to have been replaced with the Misa Espiritual or Kardec Seance.

Many researchers call Santería a syncretic cult of Yoruba and Catholic elements, and copy charts of correspondences of Orisha to Catholic Saints as evidence. It seems as if researchers copied the same chart from Gonzales-Whippler (1983) without investigating actual practice.

In fact, except to call Ochun<sup>7</sup>, Yemaya, Shango, and Babaluaye by the names Caridad del Cobre, La Virgen de Regla, Santa Barbara, and San Lazaro, camouflage names are almost never

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<sup>7</sup>Ochun, variously spelled Oshun, and in Brazil Oxun, is the Orisha of gold, love, and an Orisha of Divination. Yemaya lives in the Ocean, and is thought of as being the mother of all life. Shango is the archetypal gallant king who learned humility and modesty after destroying his capitol city in an act of arrogance and impulsivity. Babaluaye is actually a Dahomeyan divinity. Even Babaluaye is not his real name. His real name is not to be spoken since that would invoke him, and he is the divinity who rules plagues, in particular small pox, which was greater feared in Africa. It is because of his association with plagues that he became the Orisha propitiated by gay men with AIDS who became involved in Santería in New York.

used for the other Orisha. I can safely say that there is no use of Catholic symbolism, theology, catechism or prayers in the initiation or other more secret rituals of Santería. The syncretism in Santería has not been with Catholicism, but has been with other Afro-Cuban religions such as Palo Monte (religion from the Kongo) and in particular with Kardec Spiritism. Even the term syncretism is not accurate, since it implies a blending. Actually, there is a parallel practice of Palo, Santería, and Spiritism among Santeros.

### The Misa Espiritual

Jacobs (1990) in a study of Healing in Black Spiritual Churches, provides a short history of Kardec Spiritism. He writes that the origins of Spiritualism and Espiritismo are diverse, that during the 1800's various European writers "attempted to codify" Spiritism<sup>8</sup>. The most important of them was Leon Denizarth Hippolyte Rivail (1804-1869). He wrote using the nom de plume of Allan Kardec. Espiritismo became widespread in Latin America, and spread throughout the Hispanic world. Jacobs (1990) calls Espiritismo a "periodic crisis cult within Catholicism, but outside of the organized church.(p 354)" While it is a part of common Santería practice, it has been adequately discussed by Santi (1997) and Jacobs (1990) in terms of its psychotherapeutic function.

### Divination

The central religio-counseling activity of the Santero is divination. All cultures have some form of divination. And, divination is wide spread throughout Africa, and is an essential tool of

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<sup>8</sup>In the United States Spiritualism developed in the 1840's. The most famous of whom were the Fox sisters of Western New York who began their careers by holding seances in which disembodied spirits would engage in table rapping. Another influential spiritist was Arthur Conan Doyle, of Sherlock Holmes fame. His friend, Harry Houdini spent the latter part of his career attempting to disprove and discredit Spiritism.

the African Priest-Shaman-Indigenous psychotherapist. Examples of divination used to find answers to personal problems vary from the Delphic Oracles of classical Greece, to Tarot cards, and I-Ching.

I-Ching, a Chinese system of divination using three coins, or a collection of straw like sticks generates a total of 64 possible patterns.<sup>9</sup> Each pattern is associated with a poem which is then applied to the question at hand. While it would appear to even a casual student of statistics that it is probability rather than some divine agency that determine which pattern arises, I-Ching was of sufficient psychological interest to Jung that he studied I-Ching and wrote a preface to the I-Ching which appears in an English translation of that work (Baynes & Wilhelm, 1967) .

The process of divination in Santería and Orisha religion in Africa has been described in Angarica (1955), Bascom (1991,1993), Cortez (1980), Bolivar-Aróstegui (1994), Hing (1971), Gleason (1973), and in a variety of anonymous, independently printed pamphlets in Spanish, sold in Botánicas, and written with other practitioners as the intended audience.

As discussed earlier, one of the difficulties in studying Santería is that informants are reticent in disclosing information to academics. Academics are seen with some suspicion as exploiters or misinterpreters of the religion. In addition, the religion is still seen as a secret and initiatory, and for that reason also, unless an academic has been engaging in participant observation, field data's accuracy is dependant on the knowledge of the informant.

It is important to observe that Bascom (1991; 1992), Bolivar-Aróstegui (1990) and Gleason (1973) are academics who had been initiated into one form or another of this religion. Bascom, an anthropologist whose work focused on Yoruba religion in both Africa and the New World was

initiated in Africa as a Babalawo. Bolívar-Arósetegui, a Cuban academic anthropologist, was a student of the famed Cuban folklorist Lydia Cabrera and is an initiate of Santería. Gleason, who is initiated to Oya received her doctorate in comparative literature.

Angarica (1955) and Hing (1971) are initiates of the religion who wrote books in Spanish intended to be used by other initiates. They offer no analysis of the Odu corpus, but simply provide the poems, the divinatory meanings of various signs, and the mechanics of divination.

Bascom (1991; 1992), and more so Gleason (1973), true to her discipline, treat the Odu as cultural and poetic works, to be analyzed as portals to understanding how African culture survives in the New World and how African oral religious poetry can stand in comparison to other great religious-poetic systems. Gleason (1973) tends to write from a participant observation perspective, describing and using her own experience. While Bascom (1991; 1992) writes from a more detached traditional anthropological point of view.

It is important to note the is the absence of a description of the process of Santería divination in the works of Matibag (1996), Brandon (1993), and Murphy (1989). Murphy is a professor of religion, is not initiated, but did undergo a ritual receive Elegua, Ogun, Osun, Ochosi, Orisha known collectively as warriors. Matibag (1996) and Brandon (1993) who wrote their doctoral dissertations on Santería, wrote from a an anthropological and sociological perspective, but also have many factual errors in their research, errors obvious to an initiate.

Bascom (1991; 1992), Gleason (1973), and Bolívar-Arósetegui (1990) are not the only academics who became initiated. But, the majority of research and doctoral dissertations on Santería has been done by sociologists, anthropologists, or students of art. The function of the

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<sup>9</sup>Three coins are used. Each coin has two sides. Therefore there are  $2^3$  or 64 possible combinations.

Santería diviner as traditional, indigenous psychotherapist has been largely ignored in the academic literature. The actual efficacy of Santería as a therapy system is not being evaluated here, only its role as a psychotherapeutic system. The fact that people seek out the advice of the Santero, and the reasons that they seek a consultation with a Santero show that it serves the role of a therapy system. As previously discussed, it is difficult to gather systematic data from those who seek out the aid of a Santero. Anecdotally, from those who have contacted the author<sup>10</sup>, and from talking to other Santeros who perform consultations, the author has observed<sup>11</sup> that the most common reason people seek divination from a Santero is because of relationship problems (wanting to keep a boyfriend when the relationship is not progressing, husband suspected of extra marital relations, wanting to get a boyfriend of many years, lack of a boyfriend, wanting husband to return after a separation), business and legal problems (vendors suing the business, going to jail, building manager was threatening not to renew lease because client was gay), and "spiritual problems." This last category really includes those who have a variety of problems with living, including depression and anxiety, but present as if they are "spiritual seekers." This is not unlike the patient who presents to the clinician with vague complaints, but whom after a few sessions

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<sup>10</sup> While it might be interesting future research to actually interview clients of Santeros to ascertain what reasons they seek divination, whether they have access or knowledge of conventional psychological providers, whether they have previously sought the help of psychologists or other mainstream providers, gathering that data would be difficult lower SES people would not be as willing to participate in such research, and middle and higher SES people would be reticent to admit they seek out the aid of a Santero. The religion still has a stigma to it among middle-class Cubans, and it has a tradition of secrecy in part due to first, prejudices by the Catholic church in Cuba, and then persecution by the Communist government in Cuba. There also has been a history of intolerance and persecution of the religion in the United States. Among many white-Catholic Cubans, it is looked down upon, and therefore, those who are clients of the Santero would be hesitant to admit this, and even less willing to participate in a research study.

<sup>11</sup> This data comes from people who have contacted the author for readings, people who have asked the author to refer them to Santeros for readings, and from being told by other Santeros about the clients who have come and seen them.

reveals concrete problems.

Some of those who get readings become initiated. Most do not. Many Santeros report that the reason they became initiated was because they were suffering some sort of physical illness. This would support some cross cultural literature (Sue & Sue, 1990) which suggests that among groups in which direct expression of anger and negative emotions are culturally frowned upon, that patients often somaticize and complaint of physical ailments. Therefore, although many clients of divination have somatic complaints, their problems are more likely psychogenic than medical.

There are several methods of divination used in Santería and the related Ifa cult. Initiates in Ifa are called Babalawos, or Father of Mysteries. This initiatory order is open only to men, and serves an Orisha called Orunmila. Babalawos may not use cowry shells for divination, and instead use a device called an epuele or ekuele. This is a chain on which there are 2 sets four small semi-concave disks made from coconut shell, or the outer shell of a seed pod, separated by a small length of chain.

This epuele is then manipulated so that each of the pieces of coconut shell falls with either concave or convex side up. There are eight shell pieces with two sides, this produces  $2^8$ , or 256 combinations. The 256 patterns are called Ifa, or when done with cowry shells are called Odu. The Spanish literature also calls them lettres.

Babalawos also use a the marble sized seeds of a certain palm tree for divination. These seeds are called ikin, and when manipulated by the babalawo, produced a pattern of one of the 256 Ifa Odu.

There are similarities in the way babalawos and Santeros perform divination. Some sources

say that the method of shells divination used in Cuba is derived from the Babalawo's Ifa system. Bascom (1992) recorded a simple system of shell divination in which only 16 odu were determined. On a previous trip to Cuba, I asked a woman who had been initiation for over 50 years about this, and she confirmed that babalawos are not high priests in Santería but a parallel religious order, but she could not provide any data on the origin of cowry divination as opposed to the method use by Babalawos. This paper will focus on cowry shells divination. In this form, sixteen specially prepared cowerie shells are dropped on a mat. Given that each cowry shell has two sides, a total of 256 patterns, or Odu can result.

Typically, clients find out about a Santero/a who can perform a divination consultation by word of mouth. Among Cubans, even if looked down upon, there is a cultural tradition of using going to Santería as last resort.

After making contact with someone who can read for them, an appointment is made, usually at the house of the Santero. The customary fee for a reading is \$21. The significance of 21 is that it is a multiple of a number considered to be a sign of Elegua, the divinity of divination and destiny.

#### The Mechanics and Frame of Divination

Divination is usually conducted in the house of the Santero, either at a table, or with the client sitting on a chair or stool, and the diviner sitting on a straw mat. The diviner then removes the shells from a small bag, selects 16 from the 21 that are in the bag, and moves them in a circle while saying a prayer called the Moyuba. This prayer is in a liturgical form of Yoruba, called Lukumi. The Santero invokes the aid of his ancestors by calling the name of all the Santeros in his lineage. He also asks for blessings and asks that maleficence be cast away.

The shells are handed to the client who is told to say a prayer to them. They are returned to the diviner who drops them on the mat. He then counts the number of shells which are "mouth" side up. This determines the first leg of the Odu. Each amount of shells, 1 through 16<sup>12</sup>, has a name given to it. For example, 1 is Okana, 2 is Ellioko, 3 is Ogunda, 4 is Iroso, 5 is Oche, 6 is Obara, 7 is Odi, 8 is Eyiogbe, 9 is Osa, 10 is Efun, 11 is Ojuani, 12 is Eyila. One through twelve have special names, 13-16 are called by the Yoruba words for those numbers.

The shells are then dropped a second time. This two number combination is called the Odu, and are called by the name of the patterns which fell. For example, if first 5 and then 6 shells were to fall, this would be called Oche-Obara, or Ochebara. For each odu there are several saying, or refranes which are thought to apply to the crisis or situation at hand. For example, for Ochebara, the saying is: *Una cosa piensa el borracho y otra piensa el bodeguero*. (The drunk thinks one thing and the bartender thinks another.) There are other sayings associated with the Odu, for example, *Su lengua es su desgracia* (Your tongue, meaning talking too much, is your disgrace). And, *Luz de la calle y oscuridad de su casa*. (Light in the street and darkness in your house.) Generally, a diviner knows at least one saying or refrane for each Odu.

Each Odu also has several stories, called *apataki* which go along with it. These vary from short stories about a girl whose curiosity leads her to view something overwhelming (*Ofunmeyí*), to stories about the activities of the Orisha.

After the odu is determined, the client is handed two of four<sup>13</sup> objects called *ibo*. One is

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<sup>12</sup>Theoretically, it is possible for all 16 shells to fall backside up, which would be 0. Only one printed source gives a name for 0 shells. In practice never seen, nor heard of 0 shells falling. I was told that if this occurs, the shells are just gathered up and dropped again.

<sup>13</sup>The standard *ibo* are a long white shell, a black stone, a piece of what is called *cascarilla*, or chalk, and a

designated Yes, and the other No, and the client is instructed to shake them in his two hands, and separate them, placing one, for example the shell, in one hand, and the stone in the other hand.

The diviner then casts the shells a third time. The result indicates which hand to pick. In this way, a series of binary, that is Yes/No questions can be asked to derive the source and cause of the crisis at hand, and determine a resolution.

There is a traditional sequence for asking questions after the Odu is determined. The first question is Iré or Osogbo? Iré means blessings, and Osogbo means negative path. Then, the specifics are determined by sequentially going through a list of both Iré or Osogbo, asking in this binary way, of putting ibo-object in each hand, and then choosing a hand.

Continuing with the example above, after Ochebara was determined, the diviner would ask Iré or Osogbo, and then would cast the shells again. If Osogbo was determined, then it would be asked what sort of Osogbo. The list of traditional Osogbo is Iku (death), Arun (illness), Araye (malice or troubles), Ejo (legal problems), Non (beating), Inya (punishment), Otonuwa (from Heaven), Eleda (one's own head, or guardian angel), Ocha (from the Orisha), Egun (spirits), Oyo (curse), Or In (from one's own behavior). The traditional list of Iré includes Otunowa (Coming from Heaven), AINU (long life), Orisha, Obinrin (a man), Okunrin (a woman), Adajunshe (traditional doctor), Onishegun (Western doctor), Owo (money).

From these lists, it can be seen that while divination involves the belief that a supernatural agency is providing answers, the cause of one's current difficulty or blessings could be from a

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knuckle bone from a goat which had been sacrificed to Elegua. Elegua is the trickster divinity who parallels Mercury in character and function. Some texts say that additional ibo are used, a piece of broken pottery, and a China doll's head. I have only once seen someone use those objects. These additional objects are generally used by Ifa diviners.

natural source, such as one's own actions, or familial discord, or a conventional medical doctor.

After the nature and cause of the current difficulty is determined, the diviner then determines the resolution. Based upon his experience, the story accompanying the Odu which resulted, and the nature of the clients complaint, the diviner will ask the shells in the same Yes/No way about the applicability of what is called an ebo. These too are asked in sequence, typically the simplest is asked first. That is, it might be asked if some fruit can be brought to the Orisha. Or, if the divination determined that the cause of the difficulty is do to a spirit, the client will be told to hold or attend a Misa Espiritual. Then, in increasing complexity from a fresh fruit offering, next a cooked food offering, to some sort of herbal bath, to a sacrifice or cleaning, to receiving beads, Warriors, and then, if the problem is severe enough, or if the client had been coming back many times, it will be asked if the client should undergo initiation. Generally ebos consist of something simple like presenting fresh fruit to an Orisha. Creative diviners will also suggests interventions based upon their own experience, for example, advising to see a lawyer, or buying new clothes, or looking for a new job.

In actual practice, after the Odu is determined, and the client is told the sayings and apataki associated with the Odu a discussion of sorts occurs between the diviner and client. It is in this conversation in which part of the therapy occurs. Even though a specific Odu may have come up, in talking with the client, the diviner might recite sayings and stories associated from other Odu to give examples or to make a point. The entire Odu corpus of refranes and apataki then is used no matter what Odu actually came out.

After some discussion, the diviner then will ask the shells if the session can be closed. If some ebo was prescribed, such as bring fruit to an Orisha, or a bath, an appointment will be made

for the next session. Follow up is the responsibility of the client, and typically for some crisis, there will be two to four such sessions. After the crisis or difficulty resolves itself, the client may not call on the Santero again, until the next crisis.

### Analysis

It is not the purpose of this paper to train the clinical psychologist as a diviner, nor to provide a complete explanation of divination ritual and the various sayings and stories which accompany them. As Santi (1997) and Jacobs (1990) discover, to be able to conduct psychotherapy with a minority client, the therapist must have some familiarity with that client's culture. That may mean consulting with a Catholic priest, talking to a Chassidic Rabbi, or consulting with the Navajo elder. It does not mean becoming initiated in Santería or converting to Judaism to understand some client. But, it could mean understanding the importance of mythology and legends in both understanding a culture and how to use stories and myths in therapy.

It also could mean that to become an effective therapist with clients from a variety of cultures, one must experience some other culture different than one's own, in order to have that experience of difference and of culture shock to bring home. For me, the experience of initiation and of visiting Cuba helped me understand the limits of conventional psychology in treating clients who have different cultural expectations of how psychological and emotional problems should be treated.

In addition, for most people of the world, spirituality takes a far greater role in their daily lives and schema of how causality operates. We cannot force clients to accept scientific method as dogma any more than we can force them to believe in our religion. If causality has a spiritual basis in some subculture, it is important for the cross-cultural psychologist to be able to

differentiate between psychotic logic and culturally appropriate communication with spirits.

The difference between talking to an empty chair, a standard Gestalt technique, writing a letter to a dead parent, a technique used in cognitive therapy, and lighting a candle at a shrine dedicated to one's ancestors while speaking to them, or attending a Misa where one can act out in a socially sanctioned way, within a defined framework aspects of the relationship one has with a dead parent or grandparent is not all that great. The lesson is to understand how to be creative in using ritual, and after all, Gestalt technique is a ritual, too, in order to facilitate appropriate emotional expression.

Divination usually consists of a few sessions, involving diagnosis, conversation, a prescription of some action to take. The beneficial action, for example of telephoning a parent with whom one has had a fight may be couched in the cloak of spirituality, by saying that it is the desire of a dead grandparent that a client engage in rapprochement with her mother. What is apparent is that some clients need to have a specific task or homework assignment given them because in their schema of causality, for change to occur, some action must be taken externally.

Traditionally in psychotherapy, a patient makes contact with the therapist, and series of appointments are scheduled at the same time each week. Therapy continues until the insurance money runs out, the patient achieves the immediate goal for which he or she first contacted the therapist or at some distant time when termination is mutually agreed upon by therapist and patient.

Santería divination offers another other than continued long term therapy, that is, to schedule three or four sessions, not a full hour long, in which the current problem is determined, explored, and some solution discussed. Then the client can return after a period of time to re-evaluate his

progress. This would allow for a continuation of the relationship between therapist and client, which has been shown to be a primary factor in the efficacy of therapy, while allowing the client to explore what he has learned in therapy. It would also allow a client to feel more comfortable to returning to therapy, after a few sessions. In addition, the idea of open ended sessions, continuing with no predetermined termination is not part of the framework of some cultures. What is more important is the continued availability of the healer-therapist when a new difficulty arises. The continuing relationship is also important, and with time the therapist-diviner relies less on the divinatory tools and more on his personal knowledge of the client. While this might not have the intensity of weekly therapy continuing indefinitely, it allows for a therapeutic relationship of its own sort of intensity.

A large part of the divination process is understanding a body of mythology, stories and sayings, and knowing how to creatively apply them to real life situations. Learning a new language, reading the literature and mythology and folk stories of some other culture, even learning more about the art and history and music of one's own culture, whether it is learning more about opera or rereading Shakespeare have value because each of these forms of human expression have encoded within them important information about human relationships and interactions, just as important as clinical theories.

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