The Derecho: An Anthropological Approach to Understanding Money Exchange in Santería

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**Part I. Introduction and Literature Review**

**Introduction**

In the spring of 2002, I traveled Cuba with a political science class here at Haverford College to learn more about conditions on the island. In this class, we explored various facets of the Cuban situation. The topics ranged from colonization to present day circumstances. The class culminated with a trip to Habana during spring break of my sophomore year.

This trip provided me with a firsthand account of Cuban culture, society and religion. Cuba has, indeed, undergone a variety of economic, political and social changes since 1959. Tension between the U.S. because of the 41-year old embargo and current policy, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the recent legalization of U.S. dollar in 1993 (dollarization) have affected the nation’s economy and society. All of these changes have greatly impacted the ways in which Santería has been practiced and preserved in Cuba. Sadly, the ban on travel to Cuba for American citizens makes observing the effects of these changes extremely difficult.

Throughout the entire trip, however, I was most drawn to issues surrounding Santería, a now global religion with its roots and beginnings in Cuba. While Santería initially emerged as both a folkloric tradition and Afro-Cuban religion, practitioners can be found in nations as far as Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Spain, Japan, Venezuela, Russia, Canada, Mexico and the United States (Barnet:1997:99; Canizares:1993:4; Murphy:1993:35 Vega:2000:2,158). During my nine-day stay in Habana, I became particularly interested in the economic situation and its peculiar impact on Santería practice in Cuba.

Since that initial trip, my excitement and enthusiasm for the topic has grown immensely. I have had the opportunity to travel to Cuba three times to continue my investigations. The
journeys have been intense, but worthwhile, and each time, I have learned more about the
religion and its practitioners. More significantly, this research has allowed me to document the
mechanisms through which practitioners have continued to practice and preserve Santería despite
less than ideal social and economic conditions.

My early fieldwork during 2002 and 2003 revealed the religion’s importance to the Cuban
national economy. As it gains momentum as both folklore and a religious practice, Santería has,
indeed, become a hallmark of the island’s tourist sector and national economy. Cuba has,
moreover, rapidly become a primary destination for religious tourism. The island has become a
“Mecca” and “Holy Land” for believers and practitioners of Santería from all walks of life as it
is considered an authentic source of religiosity (Hagedorn 2001:220).

This initial 2002 and 2003 fieldwork also revealed the importance of Santería to individual
household economies. Among private residences and families, practitioners of Santería use their
knowledge of and expertise in the tradition to generate extra income. They do this by charging a
derecho, “a fee”, for their services. As more and more foreigners have become involved in the
religion, many practitioners have begun to charge them in U.S. dollars instead of Cuban pesos
and/or inflate the prices for the religious service performed.

Money exchange seemed to be a central component of the religion as it is used as a primary
form of payment for Santería rituals and services. At the same time, however, money and its
exchange was a highly debated issue. Indeed, among practitioners both in Cuba and here in the
United States there was a lot of tension and contention surrounding the amount of money
requested for services. Interactions involving foreigners and U.S. dollars were of particular
controversy. The significance of currency such as U.S. dollars and Cuban pesos to a religion
such as Santería puzzled me. I could not understand how and why money, especially U.S. dollars, had been incorporated into the religion.

By the end of my third trip to Cuba in the winter of 2003, I was certain that I wanted and needed to return to Habana in order to explore the role of money in Santería for my senior thesis paper. To help better prepare myself for this fieldwork, I continued researching Santería. To my dismay, however, the specific topic of monetary exchange in Santería was often overlooked. Preeminent scholars immersed in the study of Santería such as Jospeph Murphy, William Bascom, Lydia Cabrera, Michael Atwood Mason, George Brandon centered their arguments around the ritual, political and/or historical development of the religion in Cuba. In order to adequately explore this topic, I needed to do more fieldwork in Cuba as well as turn to anthropological discourses on monetary exchange within social and religious contexts.

During the winter of 2003-2004, I returned to Cuba for the fourth time. I left in mid-December 2003 and in returned mid-January 2004. In this timeframe, I shadowed a babalawo\(^1\) with twenty-eight years of experience in Santería in addition to a santera that had been involved with the religion for the past forty-three years. This experience allowed me to observe how practitioners interacted and brought up the issue of money with their clients. It also allowed me to witness how these practitioners viewed their work. Finally, this experience helped me document the ways in which money was used in both the spiritual and social realm.

While I spoke informally with a number of individuals about the financial aspects of the religion, I was also able to conduct ten formal interviews with practitioners actively involved in the tradition. These conversations were extremely useful because they provided additional perspectives about the use and significance of money within the religion. During this time, I was also able to attend a press conference concerning the globalization of the religion. While in

\(^1\) Babalawos are the highest ranking male priests within Santería.
Cuba, I also made a point to visit museums and Afro-Cuban cultural centers in order to observe how Santería was presented and marketed to tourists such as myself.

The work presented in this thesis is the culmination of three years of fieldwork. It also represents a climatic ending to extensive research into money and monetary exchange within religious systems. I initially began my inquiry wanting to find out why U.S. dollars were important to the religion. Through my fieldwork, however, I slowly realized that U.S. dollars were not as important as I wanted to think they were. While U.S. dollars were important in helping practitioners purchase materials needed for rituals and their own households, they were not the only currency used. Thus, the true question at hand was not necessarily: Why U.S. dollars? But rather: What purpose and significance does money serve in this religion?

In this thesis, I attempt to offer a comprehensive analysis about the significance of money and its exchange within Santería. Money, as argued throughout the course of this paper, has significance in both the spiritual and social realm and it is a symbol of respect and gratitude. Money is, therefore, a symbolic object given to reciprocate both a practitioner and the orishas, or deities, for their spiritual help and blessings. Moreover, the exchange of money in Santería services must be understood in the context of gift and not commodity based transactions.

**Literature Review**

Theories about tourism shaped my initial inquiry into Santería. The work of Rosalie Schwartz provided a historical lens through which the effects of tourism could be understood in countries such Cuba. In *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba*, Schwartz specifically examines how tourism can “initiate action, alter behavior, shape attitudes, and influence culture (art, music, religious ritual, food preferences)” (Schwartz:1997:xii-xiii). She additionally argues that tourism can define the economy and social outlook of an area. Tourists, she notes, are often
seduced by the prospects for entertainment, knowledge, adventure, changes in scenery and “authentic” experiences (Schwartz:1997:xvii, 76). Schwartz work has been important to my work because it analyzes tourism trends within Cuba. In doing so, Schwartz identifies Afro-Cuban culture as a trademark of Cuba’s long-standing experience with tourism. She writes, “Ironically, Afro-Cuban culture, embodying elements of music, dance and religion, became essential to both nationalist and touristic image builders…Tourism promoters exalted sensual and mystical qualities of Afro-Cubans for purposes of profit, and foreigners saw Cuba as an erotic, exotic island devoted to their pleasure and entertainment” (Schwartz:1997:87).

“Folk for Whom? Tourist Guidebooks, Local Color, and the Spiritual Churches of New Orleans” by Claude F. Jacobs also provided me with a framework to understand Santería’s dual role in Cuba as both folklore and a religious practice. Jacobs’ work examines how voodoo and Spiritual Churches have been used by the tourist industry to symbolize Louisiana folk culture. Using descriptions from tourist guidebooks about New Orleans between the 1930s and 1990s, Jacobs analyzes how voodoo and Spiritual churches have been equated with Louisiana folk culture. Jacob is critical of this generalization for three reasons. He argues that it ignores the religions’ complexity, deemphasizes their similarities with other mainstream religions, and helps to perpetuate stereotypes. He writes, “As long as the tourist’s introduction to New Orleans is in terms of live oak trees, Creole courtyards, and voodoo potions, current perceptions that link voodoo to Spiritual churches will persist. In a city where ‘local culture’ is so easily used as ‘local color’ and then commodified as tourism, the Spiritual churches’ lore will be portrayed in its most influential form as an ‘exotic’ expression of New Orleans ‘folk culture’. Old images will be perpetuated; stereotypes will be perpetuated; ludic will be mistaken for the authentic, and I will have to ask, folk will be folk for whom?” (Jacobs:2001:326).

The similarities between Jacobs’ conclusions and my own are striking. Cuban tourist guidebooks also describe, and most often define, Afro-Cuban culture in terms of Santería. Santería is, moreover, opportunistically presented solely as folklore and not as religion as it proudly stands as distinguishing hallmark of Cuban culture. Attempts to distinguish the religion
from Afro-Cuban culture are scarce within the Cuban tourist industry. Attempts to present Santería as an actual religion are often glossed over because it is easier to portray it as local and colorful tourist commodity. Jacobs’ work cautioned me to be critical of the folkloric representations of Santería and helped me delve deeper into understanding the religions practice and significance among believers.

A number of anthropological sources have been especially useful in helping me to understand monetary exchange and its relationship to religion. As I began searching for perspectives, for example, I immediately stumbled upon J.P. Kiernan’s, “The Other Side of the Coin: The Conversion of Money to Religious Purposes in Zulu Zionist Churches”. This work provided me with a cross-cultural perspective about money use and exchange in religious practice and ritual. Kiernan contrasts money given as a commodity with money-as-gift in Zulu Zionist religion. While Kiernan distinguishes money given as a gift from sacrifice, he points out that this distinction is not always realized in practice. Finally, Kiernan argues that Zulu Zionists in South Africa do not prize money for its commercial and industrial value. Zulu Zionists, like many of my informants in Cuba, ascribe their own meanings and purposes to money in order secure their own communal and individual boundaries from the threat that money poses to their identity.

As I reviewed my field notes, the prospect of being able to distinguish money given as gift from money given as a commodity seemed a fitting topic to pursue. I, therefore, turned to the father of “gift” theory, Marcel Mauss. I approached the fundamentals of Mauss’s argument through Maurice Godelier’s work entitled The Enigma of the Gift. In this book, Godelier reexamines Mauss’ attempt to determine the social laws that compels “the gift that has been received to be obligatory reciprocated” (Godelier:1999:6). For both Mauss and Godelier, gift giving creates a relationship between the giver and the receiver. Godelier explains,
“The act of giving seems to create simultaneously a twofold relationship between giver and receiver. A relationship of solidarity because the giver shares what he has, or what he is, with the receiver; and a relationship of superiority because the one who receives the gift and accepts it places himself in debt of the one who has given it, thereby becoming indebted to the giver and to a certain extent becoming his ‘dependant’, at least for as long as he has not ‘given back’ what he was given” (Godelier:1999:12).

Godelier’s work is most helpful because he makes a point to expand on Mauss’s discussion of the gift to religious contexts. In doing so, Godelier draws attention to the fact that the superior being involved in gift transactions is not always humans. He asserts that humans often give gifts to beings such as spirits and divinities because they consider them as their superior (Godlier:1990:13, 29). Godlier identifies this as Mauss’s “famous fourth obligation” and argues that it has been understudied in discussions of gift exchange. He contends,

“Mauss also states that the spirits of the dead and the gods ‘are the true owner of the things and possessions of the world’...men make gifts to the gods in the form of offerings and destruction of things offered. Victims are sacrificed, the aroma of the incense and the smoke of the sacrifices rise up to the gods, and in some cases the flesh of the sacrificed animal is consumed. To sacrifice is to give by destroying what is given, and...in this sense that sacrifice is a kind of potlatch and that gifts made to the gods not only belong to the same complexus...‘realize to the full’ the economy and spirit of the gift, for these ‘gods who give and repay are there to give something great in exchange for something small’” (Mauss qtd. Godlier:1999:30).

Godlier eventually disagrees with Mauss’ explanation of gift exchange in religious exchange. While Mauss attributes the causes of obligatory gift reciprocation to spiritual, moral and religious ideologies, Godlier argues that religion cannot be viewed as the sole factor affecting this phenomena. He writes,

“I do not deny either the existence or the importance of religious representations and beliefs...but...Religion is certainly not the ultimate explanation for the obligation under which individuals and groups have placed themselves to not surrender – or at least not completely – certain ‘things’ necessary to reproduction of one and all. It is not only ‘moral’ reasons that command to not disperse or surrender – without replacing – realities which are presented and experienced as necessary to the reproduction of one and all. This necessity can be material or mental, but in any case it is social. The effect of religion is not to endow common property with an inalienable character, but to impose a sacred character on the prohibition of its alienation” (Godlier:1999:45).
In short, Godlier’s analysis of the gift provided me with a framework through which I could better comprehend money circulation within Santería. Godlier, moreover, coupled with the works of Toren, Lan and Keane ultimately demonstrated that money exchange within religious settings such as Santería could be understood in the context of Mauss’s gift.

* * * Part II. History: Race, Religion and Folklore * * *

From Africa to Cuba

Santería originally began as a religion exclusively practiced by Africans and their descendants in Cuba. Initially, it held a marginalized and stigmatized place in Cuban society because of its connection to Cuba’s African heritage. However, the tradition gradually gained acceptance and public recognition as it became less exclusive to Cubans of African descent (Barnet:1997:99; Canizares:1993:4; Murphy:1993:33-35). The religion has, in fact, undergone a series of transformations with respect to its status within the Cuban nation.

Santería evolved from the beliefs of the estimated 527,828 to 702,000\(^2\) million African slaves that arrived in Cuba from 1502 until 1886 and their encounters with Spanish Catholicism and French Kardecian Spiritism (Espiritismo) (Lefever:1996:319; Gonzalez Kirby:1985:40). The Africans that arrived in Cuba were either baKongo, Carabali or Yoruba tribesmen and women. However, members of the Yoruba and baKongo tribes were the most successful in influencing what is now known and practiced as Santería (Murphy:1993:23; Lefever:1996:320).

The Yoruba were not able to survive everywhere in the New World (Murphy:1993:106). Thus, in many respects, their ability to survive and retain various aspects of their culture in Cuba is exceptional. The Yoruba were the most successful in establishing their religious presence

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\(^2\) The actual number of African slaves brought to the New World is highly contested. Diana Gonzalez Kirby writes, “It is difficult to determine how many slaved reached Cuba due to missing or falsified records. To make matters worse, the accuracy of transportation records and bills of sale worsened after the abolition of slavery…” (Gonzalez-Kirby:1985:40).
because they were able to influence Cuban culture on an elementary level. Yoruba influence has been evidenced throughout Cuba culture, especially in the colloquialisms of Cuban dialect and Cuban music. For example, most Cubans use a word of Yoruba origin, *jimaquas*, to mean twins while the majority of Spanish-speaking world uses the words *gemelos* or *mellizos* (Canizares:1993:23). Furthermore, rhythms, sounds and beats of Yoruba origin are present in various forms of Cuban national music such as the rumba, mambo, chachacha and guaguancó (Murphy:1993:115).

The influence of the Yoruba’s religion, Santería, is clearly evidenced in modern-day Cuba where an estimated 85 percent of Cubans either regularly or occasionally participate in ritual and/or sacrifice (Matibag:1996:232). Cuban political dignitaries such as Fulgencio Batista and Fidel Castro have been known to indulge in the myths, practices and color imagery associated with Santería to legitimize and gain popular support for their causes.

Eugenio Matibag notes that Ex-President Batista assembled Afro-Cuban religious leaders to “‘summon the gods of Africa to his aid and to appease the demons of war’ in a last-ditch attempt to hold power in September 1959” (Matibag:1996:229). Current dictator Castro has, moreover, borrowed from Santería imagery to gain support for his political authority. While delivering the victory speech of the Cuban revolution on January 8, 1959, for example, two white doves flew down to rest on Castro’s shoulders. While many question the authenticity of this occurrence, the doves, alleged to be messengers of the *orisha* Obatalá, were believed a divine symbol of Castro’s legitimacy (Valdés:2001:223-225).

Despite the Yoruba’s influence on Cuban culture and society, Santería was not easily absorbed or incorporated into Cuba’s national identity. This is due to the equation and association of Santería with African heritage. Africans such as the Yoruba were regarded among the least
cultured groups during Cuba’s colonial period. Both the Africans and their religious practices were feared and disregarded by Cuban society. They were, moreover, deemed “backward”, “savage”, “shameful” and an “unacceptable…social and moral evil…a pagan cult” (Gonzalez Kirby:1985:39; Matibag:1996:91). Practitioners were forced to conduct their services illegally because of prohibition and persecution from both the Spanish state and Catholic Church (Pérez y Mena:2000:19). Thus, during the colonial period, practitioners were completely excluded from the emerging ideals of Cuban national culture.

**Defining Cuban Cultural Expressions**

Shifts in Cuba’s cultural and ethnic makeup during the colonial period challenged the preservation and practice of Santería. Individuals of mixed ancestry and/or who had been born on the island became known as *mulattos* and/or *criollos* and had substantial control over the local economy. George Brandon notes that their presence in Cuba produced the birth of a “relatively homogenous creole culture and a system of racial relations which functioned without either fixed color lines or group endogamy.” However, Brandon also notes that skin color, ancestry, nativity, slave versus free status, and religion became markers through which the Creole and Afro-Cuban society was based (Brandon:1993:4,39,42,43).

While Creole culture represented the intermixing of the Spanish, Amerindian, Islamic and African influences, it was ultimately poised between Cuba’s African and Spanish heritage, and lent the term *Afro-Cuban* (Betancourt:2000:101). Nevertheless, their large presence severely jeopardized membership in the *cabildos* that had united African-born Yorubas and their descendants. *Cabildos* were institutions located in urban centers, such as Havana, and were only open to Africans, freed blacks and slaves. *Cabildos* were renowned for their ethnic dances and celebrations. Their dominant function was to preserve African religious beliefs
Membership in cabildos was eventually extended to all Blacks, people of color, Creoles and even whites living in Cuba. This strategic move opened Santería to the mainstream population (Murphy:1993:33-35). Ultimately, it helped preserve the religion by opening it to social groups that would later use the religion to define Cuban identity during the struggle for independence.

Cuban elites aspired to become an independent nation free from intervention from both Spain and the United States. Under these circumstances, they desperately searched for signifiers and definitions of national culture that would encompass all the groups living in Cuba. While still a somewhat marginalized practice, Santería became an ideal marker of national culture because it incorporated elements of African, Catholic and French religious practices. Santería, became increasingly popular as more and more Creoles joined the religion because of their interest in Espiritismo. Espiritismo, a French technique developed in the 1850s by Allan Kardec, allowed individuals to connect with the dead and had gained much popularity among the White upper and middle classes in Cuba. Santería was one of the few religions that borrowed from this tradition (Canizares:1993:5,78).

As Creole elites aspired to become an independent nation free from intervention from both Spain and the U.S., Santería came to symbolize the highest aspect of Cuban cultural expression. In many respects, Santería was considered the most “authentic source of la cubanidad” by Creole elites because it asserted Cuban identity through religious uniqueness and Creole culture. This criterion, in effect, was a severe contrast to the homogeneous “Nordic” identity of both the

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3 *La Cubanidad* - that which can be considered “uniquely Cuban” (Matibag:1996:88).
U.S. and Spain (Matibag:1996:88-90). Thus, towards the end of the colonial period, African religious heritage became an affirmed and even a prized representation of Cuba’s uniqueness. Elites involved in the struggle for nationhood prided the population’s diversity and religious uniqueness. National identity was carefully constructed so that it would acknowledge all the ethnic groups living in Cuba. In effect, Cuban national identity was seen as a singular multicultural ethnicity that sought to unite the mulatto, Black, and White (Ferrer:2000:61). In this manner, the preservation and practice of Santeria acknowledged the unification of the diverse social and ethnic groups so that a concrete Cuban national identity could be established.

20th Century: Afro-cubanismo, Revolution and Cuban Folklore

By the end of the 19th century, the cabildos that had once been supported by Catholic Church were eventually regulated and suppressed by the Cuban government. Santería became a stigmatized and marginalized religion because it was commonly associated with witchcraft. During the early 1900s, for example, the houses of Santería priests were targets of police raids because the White upper classes viewed practitioners as social delinquents and ritualistic murderers of white children. Practitioners of Santería were forced to worship secretly and the religion became a notorious underground practice in Cuba. Interestingly, this resulted in a code of secrecy that became incorporated into the religion and can still be observed today; as most devotees refuse to publicly discuss their beliefs and practices with non-initiates of the religion. (Brown:1999:206; Murphy:1993:24,124).

At the dawn of the 20th century, Cuban national identity was no longer based on its cultural diversity. Having gained their independence, Creole elites did not need to desperately respond to direct colonial oppression, pressure and interference. Blacks and mulattos were excluded from the political and national discourse that sought to define Cuban identity (Martínez
Consequently, the affirmation and uplifting of African heritage ceased. The elites, therefore, discontinued their support and promotion of various aspects of Black culture including Santería.

By the dawn of the 20th century, African heritage was regarded as a “source of shame” and “backwardness” for many Cubans (Matibag:1996:91). However, the Afrocubanismo movement served to revive Afro-Cuban religious, cultural, artistic and literary traditions between 1928 and 1940. Notably, the movement began as a means to gain equal political treatment of Blacks living in Cuba. In fact, Eugenio Matibag notes that once the Cuban government closed political avenues to Blacks through repression, Afro-Cubans channeled their political aspirations into “artistic and literary self-expression” (Matibag:1996:93). These forms of self-expression included literature, dance, music and were heavily saturated with the myths, rituals beliefs and practices found in the Santería tradition.

Cuban writers such Alejo Carpentier, Nicolas Guillen, Fernando Ortiz, José Antonio Ramos, Rómulo Lachatañeré and Lydia Cabrera were at the forefront of the afrocubanismo movement. With the exception of Guillén, many of these writers were white-skinned but greatly helped to transform the popular suspicion of Afro-Cuban society. They encouraged pride in Afro-Cuban culture through their literary and artistic works by documenting African-inspired music, dance, religion and poetry through which they found a “reservoir of cultural vitality” (Murphy:1993:34).

In many respects, this movement allowed for the continued preservation of Santería because the written works of these writers recorded aspects of the tradition which had previously been preserved orally. Additionally, these works were primarily made available to Cuban intellectual society. As result, the religion gained much popularity among the upper classes and Santería
became an acceptable means to express and acknowledge the Afro-Cuban presence that had been a shameful reminder of Cuba’s multicultural roots. (Matibag:1996:93-94; Muphy:1993:33-35).

Eugenio Matibag describes the content of the literary and artistic works that arose from this movement and writes,

“the makers of the movement characteristically featured the onomatopoeic phrasings, phonetic repetitions, and mythological references known to Afro-Cuban peoples, in poems and lyrics featuring a creolized, Africanized Spanish. The narrative….often reenacted aspects of the ceremonials practiced by the descendants of the island’s slaves, with sound…emulating the percussive effects that induced trances in initiates during the drum-playing parties, the toques de tambor or bembés.”

From Matibag’s statement, one observes that Santería was the vanguard used to represent Afro-Cuban culture and the works that emerged from the afrocubanismo movement. Afro-Cuban religion was and remains to be, according to Joseph Murphy, “the primary vehicle of Afro-Cuban culture” (Murphy:1993:35). The writers of the afrocubanismo movement, thus, helped transform the popular suspicion of not only Afro-Cuban culture, as Joseph Murphy contends, by encouraging pride in Afro-Cuban culture through their literary and artistic works, but their religion, as well.

“Despite its literary treatments”, prior to 1959 Santería represented a stage of barbarity for the upper class and bourgeois. Many hoped the “modern” Cuban republic would outgrow its African religious heritage (Matibag:1996:228). The Revolution of 1959 brought about changes in the overall treatment and acceptance of the religion as a means of cultural expression.

Eugenio Matibag observes that during the first decade and a half of the Revolution, the regime viewed the religion as potential competition to the centralized planned economy of the state (Matibag:1996:227).

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5 He writes, “It was primarily these artists who transformed much of Cuba’s attitude of suspicion toward Afro-Cuban culture into enthusiastic pride” (Murphy:1993:35).
Government officials harassed and oppressed practitioners by restricting public drumming, celebrations and banned members of Afro-Cuban fraternities from membership into the Communist Party. To discourage participation in the religion, individuals were arrested and even excluded from positions of power. Devotees often had to hide their beliefs and sacred jewelry if they desired to pursue a job in the public sphere. This approach eventually produced opposite results and officials realized that the religion had grown in sized and gone deeper underground to accommodate this adversity. Some scholars believe that the economic setbacks and the U.S. embargo encouraged many people to turn to the religion for comfort. (Brown:1999:206; Matibag:1996:229-231; Robaina:1997:88).

Rumors of religious oppression and persecution by the Cuban government continue as far into the 1970s and even 1980s (Hagedorn:2001:197, 198; Matibag:1996:231). Indeed, an informant once commented that the location of her son’s initiation ceremony in 1976 had been shuffled around to prevent local authorities from interfering. I.H. explains,

“Divination had revealed that we would run into problems with the police when L. made saint. He was seventeen at the time. So we made arrangements to hold the ceremonies at different locations. Just as we finished with the main part of the ceremony, a neighbor came by and told us that the cops were on their way. The police were on their way to my house because that is where they thought the initiation was taking place. But by the time they had arrived there, we had already left to finish up the ceremony at my sister’s house. We couldn’t even shave his head all the way because he was still in school and if they would have seen him come to school dressed in white it would have been obvious that he was involved in the religion” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

While the Castro administration has gone to extremes to repress Santería practice in Cuba, it has simultaneously done much to elevate Santería to the status of national folklore. Enriquito Hernández Armenteros, a practitioner featured in Tomas Fernandez Robaina’s Hablen Paleros y Santeros, describes this dilemma and comments,

“It was a difficult situation. The Revolution made it so that the legends of our gods were presented in the theaters, so that people would study the music and dances [of our religion], and that something that was seen as insignificant would be be seen as
something important. But a lot of people have had to hide their beliefs” (Robaina:1997:88, my translation).

Santería was officially recognized as “the repository of Cuba’s most powerful cultural distinctiveness” and received status as “national folklore” in the late 1970s. Proponents of the Revolution celebrated the African roots that contributed to Cuban national culture. Evidence of such is found in national journals\(^6\) that celebrate and acknowledge Cuba’s African cultural and religious roots. Moreover, the government has supported institutions such as the popular *Conjunto Folklórico Nacional* and the *Danza Nacional de Cuba* which channel their efforts into the revitalization and preservation of Afro-Cuban religious culture (De la Fuente:1998:61).

Clearly, this status as “national folklore” has additionally eased the burden of practitioners. This new-found folklore status allows individuals to practice the religion without the brutal stigma and oppression of the past. However, critics feel that transforming the religion into artistic folklore, is a tactic used by the government to “suppress political movements which emphasize the issues concerning Blacks…helps to silence discussions on racism…and acknowledges only the process of assimilation” (Matibag:1996:230).

The historical development of Santería in Cuba is important in understanding how the religion has adapted to racial and national politics in Cuba. Indeed, the religion has undergone a variety of inclusionary and exclusionary processes within the Cuban national project. While its current status as “national folklore” suggests that Santería has been officially accepted, it is necessary to be critical of the current folklore status of the religion. Indeed, considering the religion strictly as folklore idealizes Santeria to the point that the spiritual significance of the religion is severely devalued and is almost lost.

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\(^6\) Such as: *Actas del Folklore, Etnología y Folklore, La Gaceta de Cuba*, and *Revolución y Cultura* (De la Fuente:1998:61).
Enrique Hernandez Armentos, a santero whose testimony is included Hablen Paleros y Santero by Tomas Fernández Robaina, shares this sentiment and eloquently explains, “Afro-Cuban religions cannot be valued as something purely folkloric, to do so would be a serious error, Afro-Cuban religions are dynamic, they are alive…” (Robaina:1997:87, my translation).

*** Part III. Tourism, Religion and the Dollar/Peso Dilemma ***

**Tourism, Dual Economies and Religious Markets**

The U.S. embargo nearly paralyzed the Cuban economy. The embargo was initially the U.S. government’s reaction to Cuba’s confiscation of U.S. properties at the onset of the Cuban Revolution, their allegiance to the Soviet Union and their support of armed revolutions in Latin America and Africa (Fisk:2001:94; http://www.globalexchange.org/countries/cuba/background/history.html).

The U.S. embargo restricts all trade between Cuba and the U.S. and it has been enforced by every U.S. president since John F. Kennedy. Cuba was initially able to deflect the full impact of the embargo through their alliance with the Soviet bloc. The Soviet Bloc provided a trade relationship, economic and financial aid, and industrial and technological infrastructure to Cuba during a time when the country was most vulnerable to U.S. policy. While many of their exports were poor-quality goods and could not compete with international market competition, this exchange relationship fostered Cuba’s integration into the socialist economy and market (Azicri:2000:180). As C. Peter Ripley notes, “The U.S. embargo against Cuba…has punished the island economy, choking it for trade, tourists, friends and finally food and medicine” (Ripley:1999:8).

The fall of the Soviet bloc had a tremendous impact on the Cuban economy. The period following the collapse of the Soviet bloc is often referred to as the “Special period”. The Cuban government has tried a number of economic reforms to ease the damage incurred by the loss of
Soviet support. For example, several categories of work have been authorized to qualify for self-
employment and the country aggressively pursues joint ventures with foreign investors. All of
these reforms have been instituted to bring hard currency to the Cuban economy

Prior to 1993, possession and use of the U.S. dollar was illegal. Strict penalties were given to
those who were in possession of U.S. dollars and these individuals faced imprisonment. In 1993,
however, the Cuban government legalized the use of the U.S. dollar (dollarization) citing the
conditions of the special period and the country’s economic distress as the cause for the change
in Cuban economic policy. In a process called “dollarization”, The U.S. dollar, once legal,
replaced the devalued Cuban peso and rapidly affected Cuban society. Access to dollars
increased social clout and separated those citizens with U.S. dollars from the rest of the
population (Azicri:2000:140). Having direct access to the U.S. dollar or not has become the

Many visitors to the island have observed what one researcher characterizes as, “In Cuba
there are only two types of people: cubanos and extranjeros; that is those who pay in pesos and
those who pay in dollars” (Hagedorn:2001:24). Dollar-only stores where only the U.S. dollar is
an accepted form of currency have become trademarks of Cuba’s consumer and market
economies (Azicri:2000:7,140). Among my informants, many expressed their preference for
these shops, though expensive by Cuban wage standards, and cited the better-quality goods
available as their primary motive for shopping in these stores (Field Notes:2003).

The tourist industry has become an especially useful medium to generate and obtain U.S.
dollars given Cuba’s great economic distress. It seems to be the only self-sustaining industry
with a historical precedent and relies on Cuba’s most abundant natural resources: “sun, beaches,
Indeed, tourism has had an extensive history in Cuba even before the Revolution. Rosalie Schwartz writes,

> “Even before Cuba achieved its independence from Spain in 1898, a trickle of U.S. visitors had enjoyed the tropical island’s warm winters and its foreign atmosphere, their interest perhaps stirred by adventure-laden tales of Christopher Columbus and Caribbean pirates. As both Cubans and North Americans began to see the revenue potential of tourism…Cuba became a smiling luxuriant tropical land where romance, beautiful women, soft music-filled nights and the enchantments of Spanish culture awaited visitors” (Schwartz:1997:Introduction, xxi).

Tourism to Cuba played a huge role in pre-revolutionary period Cuba. Many North Americans discovered the “loveliness of Marianao, Cuba’s warm winters, the country club, racetrack, casino and beaches irresistible” as early as the 1920s (Schwartz:1997:49). The country moreover, enjoyed seven straight years of tourism boom from 1924 to 1931. Notably, even during this period African culture and religion was a subtle yet exploited feature in the tourist economy of pre-revolutionary Cuba (Schwartz:1997:80). Tourism continued to support the Cuban economy even into the mid-1950s as Batista needed “tourist dollars as an economic and political bulwark against enemies inside and outside the island” (Schwartz:1997:149).

The tourist boom ended with the rise of the Revolution. It was not revived until the 1980s, yet did not take full swing until the 1990s. Schwartz writes,

> “People stopped going to Cuba because the island no longer was pleasurable to visit. Vacationers wanted to relax, and they had their choice of sunny beaches and gambling casinos elsewhere in the Caribbean. Escalating antagonism over issues of sovereignty, property, and ideology threatened, and then ruptured, U.S.-Cuban relations. By the Castro nationalized U.S. property in October 1960, most North Americans had already scratched Cuba off their lists of desirable travel destinations” (Schwartz:1997:211).

In modern times, the nation has heavily depended on tourism as a solution for Cuba’s economic woes. Cuba received one million tourists in 1996 and anticipated nearly two million by the end of 2000 (Azicri:2000:80). President Fidel Castro has declared tourism to be Cuba’s future (Ripley:1999:8). Tourism has provided access to U.S. dollars when the circumstances
would otherwise not permit such access. In Cuba, regardless of nationality, all foreign tourists use the U.S. dollar to pay for transactions such as food, housing, entertainment etc…

Tourism, however, has brought about a number of unintended consequences. Specifically, a hierarchy of privilege has sprouted around the tourist industry because it provides access to U.S. dollars. Foreign tourists and those Cubans that have access to U.S. dollars and/or the tourist industry are positioned at the top of the social totem. Meanwhile, Cubans with no access to U.S. dollars and/or connection with foreign tourists are at the bottom. The population is, as Max Azicri points out,

“split between working for the tourist industry or for foreign investors, or receiving dollars from relatives and friends living oversees, and those whose livelihood depends on wages or pensions paid with national currency” (Azicri:2000:71).

Santería, as Cuban national folklore, has been an important attraction of Cuba’s tourist economy. The significance of which is best evidenced through the various Afro-Cuban museums and cultural centers scattered throughout the island. Popular folkloric troops that specialize in the sacred dances of Santería and perform at prestigious hotels such as the Inglaterra located in Old Havana also reflect the importance of Santería’s folkloric status for Cuba’s tourist industry (Slavin:1998:10).

Santería’s position as national folklore has been marketed to the tourist sector and has been quite beneficial to the country’s economy. As “national folklore”, it draws a significant amount of attention and money from tourists seeking to experience the “exoticness” of Afro-Cuban religious culture in places where it is openly promoted and displayed. Indeed, markets, museums, tours, hotels⁷, and stores have become loci where ritual objects, tools, music, dances and practices are openly available for purchase. Foreigners genuinely interested in the spiritual

⁷ In a recent Lonely Planet travel book guide to Cuba, David Stanley writes, “Many hotels stage special Santería shows for visitors, and cult objects are often sold in hotel shops” (Stanley:2000:65).
power of Santería are encouraged to explore Cuban spiritual culture. However, those participating in religious ceremonies are expected to pay a “derecho”, akin to a service charge, to the Santería priests and priestesses in U.S. dollars. Santería has, thus, become another item available for consumption on the tourist and religious market.

The tensions of tourism and the dollarized economy extend even into the religious realm of Santería. For example, while initiation into Santería serves to extend an individual practitioner’s kinship network, it is rumored that foreign ahijados (godchildren) and those that have access to U.S. dollars are more prized over Cuban ahijados (Hagedorn:2001:24). This is further illustrated through recent rumors that the Cuban government would impose a tax on the babalawo’s earnings as it was considered it a full-time job8 and because of their increased access and servicing of foreigners that pay with U.S. dollars. While the tax was not imposed, it caused much debate. Many felt the tax would take away a substantial portion of their economic livelihood (Field Notes:2003 and 2004).

Modernization: The Derecho and the Dollar/Peso Dilemma

J.P. Kiernan writes,

“When modernization breaches existing social boundaries with the diffusion of hitherto alien structural and cultural forms, the threatened boundaries can be re-asserted by divesting these forms of their alien meaning and assimilating them into indigenous symbolism” (Kiernan:1988:456).

Kiernan’s statement proves quite useful in gaining insight into how the dollar has affected Cuban Santería. Prior to 1993, the dollar held small significance among Cubans because it was an illegal form of currency, however, it is now an important symbol of economic power for Cubans. The dollar has, therefore, served as a modernizing force to which practitioners have had

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8 Interestingly, many babalawos consider their religious work a full-time job and rarely hold other positions in the traditional labor market. One informant commented, “You see how L. works. The religion is his job. With all these people knocking at his door for spiritual help, he doesn’t have the time to hold another job” (Field Notes:2003, my translation).
to adapt to and incorporate into their religious practice. Modernization has, in turn, taken the form of the dollarized economy.

Dollarization has breached many social and cultural boundaries. The increased crowding of the dollar over the Cuban peso, indeed, poses a serious threat to residents that have no access to dollars. Cuban Santería practitioners have responded to these recent economic changes by incorporating the dollar into their religious practice. The dollar has, in effect, become an acceptable form of currency and is more often than not prized in many religious transactions. For many Cubans, the dollar both symbolizes and facilitates access to better quality goods and/or higher standards of living.

The derecho is subject to the tensions of the dollar and peso dilemma in Cuba. The recent dollarization of the Cuban economy has greatly influenced the way practitioners calculate the derecho. As Katherine Hagedorn highlights:

“The rituals and necessities of Santería exist within economies of scale: everything in Santería costs money, more or less depending on the wealth of the ritual practitioner(s) in charge, and depending on the perceived wealth of those whom the ceremony is performed” (Hagedorn:2001:9).

While Cubans have traditionally been charged in pesos and foreigners in U.S. dollars, this is quickly changing. In response to a question I posed regarding what types and amounts of money were used to pay the derecho, P., an initiated devotee, replied “It depends on what you have on you and what you need to do…It could be 5 or 10 pesos…and sometimes if you happen to have a dollar then you just give that…”. A discussion with one of my primary babalawo informants and his wife D. further highlights this tension regarding the use of dollars and Cuban pesos. During one of our conversations, babalawo L. remarked:

“(L.): Nowadays no santero would come to help if they had to receive their derecho in moneda nacional when foreigners are involved. Take the time you received your kofá, I had to pretty much beg the babalawos that helped preside over the ceremony to accept their
derecho in pesos… I told them that you were a student and were getting ready to leave for home and didn’t have that much money left on you… They did it but not without a fight.

(D.): Yeah, it’s getting so bad that now some santeros are even refusing to attend to Cubans if they can’t pay in dollars” (Field Notes: 2004, my translation).

In light of current economic conditions, the amount given for the derecho is substantially higher. M.D. contrasts the historical costs associated with making saint with the contemporary by stating, “Back when J. (a close friend) and I made saint, we didn’t spend more than the equivalent of about $100. Nowadays, you can pay at least $10,000 to make saint here in the U.S. and at least half that much if you go to do it in Cuba”. The response of T.F.R. echo M.D.’s reply and helps to explain the reason for this change. T.F.R. notes:

“The problem is more complicated now because you have santeros that depend on their religious works. They live off of the consultations and spiritual sessions that they provide. Their income and money comes from their work ‘in the saint’. The derecho used to be 1.50 pesos but you can’t accept that with rising inflation. What can you buy with 1.50 in the market? Absolutely nothing… Things started to change around the time Cuba began receiving assistance from the Soviet Union. When it fell, the cost of life began to increase. They said, ‘It’s imperative that we increase the prices little by little’. But as the prices for goods went up, salaries stayed the same” (Field Notes: 2004, my translation).

*** Part IV. The Social Life of Money ***

Santería – Key Theological Concepts

As both an anthropologist and practitioner of Santería, I cannot help but emphasize that practitioners make a point to separate the religion from folkloric representations of the religion heavily promoted in the tourist sector. Many practitioners, in fact, detest the folkloric representations of the religion found mostly in the tourist sector. Although the religion is used to generate U.S. dollars from tourists, many feel that its folkloric representation negates the extreme influence and significance that the religion has had in their own lives. During a 2004 conversation, for example, an uninitiated informant stressed this distinction. She explained,

“is not this commercial stuff you see at the hotel. We Cubans know that is a bunch of crap. This religion is real and I have seen it work in my life. Once, I went to the beach with some
friends. Yemayá is saint of the ocean and I have always felt affectionate towards her. I put my feet in the water and all of a sudden it started to rain. You know they say that is something that typically happens to children of Yemayá. Well, I saw this vision of the water open and there was a crib. But I was afraid to go all the way into the ocean because I know she’d take me with her” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

The experience presented above is a fitting example of how practitioners experience Santería in their every day lives. This encounter, moreover, raises important issues regarding the theological construction of the religion. It is, thus, appropriate to explain some of the key theological concepts and ideas that shape a practitioner’s involvement and experience with the religion.

Some scholars attribute the cause of the religion’s global popularity to its similarities with many of the world’s religions. For instance, in The altar of my soul: The living traditions of Santería scholar, Marta Moreno Vega notes the similarities between Santería and other global religions. She writes:

“Native American religions worship every aspect of nature, and their affirmation that we live on sacred Mother Earth is similar to Santería’s belief that all aspects of nature are divine. Asian religions identify the energy force, or qi, as well as the principle of yin-yang – our equivalent of aché and the positive and negative balance embodied in the orisha Elegguá. In Judaism, practitioners sacrifice and cleanse with animals as we do, and they burn candles to create a spiritually charged environment during rituals” (Vega 2003:4).

Aché is the foremost concept crucial to understanding Santería. Aché is responsible for maintaining order and balance within the universe and it considered to be a dynamic life force that every human being, plant and animal posses (Canizares:1993:5). Aché connects the secular world with the spiritual realm; and it can be manipulated inside and outside the physical body. Joseph M. Murphy notes that aché connects present generations with the past. He writes, “Aché is present in the human line of continuity with the past. Every generation owes its being to the one before it. Each provides the conditions for the generations to follow” (Murphy:1993:8). Aché can be channeled to foster spiritual growth, improve physical well-being, balance forces in
nature through outlets such as sacrifice, the worship of ancestors and the veneration of orishas. This is done so that practitioners may be blessed with happiness, prosperity, positive outcomes, unity and good health. (Brown:1999:180; Canizares:1993:5; Vega:2000:3).

It is believed that spiritual strength originates with the orishas who came into being at the beginning of the world in the city of Ile-Ife⁹ (Murphy: 1993:11). Orishas are spiritual divinities who are believed to mediate between the spiritual and physical realm. They protect and help individuals in both their spiritual and personal affairs. Every individual has a guardian orisha (eleda) that protects, aides and guides them. It is susceptible to benevolent and malevolent influences of other supernatural beings and processes such as witchcraft and sorcery. An individual’s eleda can be angered, disappointed or weakened if abused or not properly cared for. When well cared for, the eleda will protect and bless the person (Sandoval:1979:140, 146; Vega 2000:2,3).

While four hundred and five divinities have been identified in Nigeria, no more than thirty are acknowledged in Cuba and even fewer in other areas where Santería is practiced. This is often attributed to the African Diaspora in the New World which allowed for the fusion, modification and synchronization of many divinities and the fundamental beliefs, customs and practices (Lawal:1996:3). Olodumare, however, is still regarded as the most supreme orisha by Cuban practitioners because he created the world and later distributed his power among the other orishas (Barnet:1997:87; Vega:2000:9).

Each orisha reigns over particular numbers, plants, flowers, trees, herbs, vegetables, colors, food, stories, body parts, characteristics, and ritual objects (Appendix 1). The color white, for instance, is sacred to orisha Obatalá, owner of intellect, creativity, truth and clarity. Regions of

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⁹ Ile-Ife is believed to be the cradle of civilization and is associated with the area known as modern day Nigeria (Canizares:1993:3).
the body such as the mind, bones, teeth and eyes fall under his governance. Meanwhile, the *orisha* Ochún is represented by both the pumpkin and the colors yellow and gold. She reigns over the stomach and genitals. She is the patron of fertility and wealth (Aróstegui:1995:121,181; Evanchuk:1999:211).

In contrast to deities from other Afro-Cuban religions such as Palo Mayombe, the *orishas* are commonly characterized as “slow-responding” but generous, noble, human-like and peaceful kings and queens who “resist pressure, expect obedience and shun quid pro quo exchanges” (Brown:1999:180, 182, 194). Joseph M. Murphy characterizes them as “personifications of *aché* that can be put at the disposal of human beings who honor them” (Murphy:1993:10-11).

Ancestors and other dead spirits (*egun* or *muertos*) also play an important role in Santería’s theology because these supernatural entities often work closely with the *orishas*. Spirits can serve to benefit and guide an individual through their journey on earth. These beings can also harm individuals and can cause illness, insanity and/or disease (Sandoval:1979:146). Practitioners of Santería combine aspects of Kardeician Spiritism (Espiritismo) to communicate with the dead in order to access *aché* and guidance from the spiritual realm. During a *consulta espiritual* or *misa*, spirits of the dead and/or an individual’s own ancestors may possess and speak through a spiritual medium (Sandoval:1979:140; Jones et al:2001:52; Brown:1999:160; Wexler:2001:90,91).

Each person is governed by his own personal *orisha* that is often referred to as *orí*. The head indeed receives much attention in Santería because an individual’s *orí* is believed to reside there. It is the central locus of a human being and is also the reservoir for spirituality (Mason:2002:33). Older practitioners often stress the importance of the head and its relationship to an individuals
life and well being. Many of my informants repeatedly commented, “sin buena cabeza, no siguen los pies” (Field Notes: 2002 and 2003).

In its strictest sense, *orí* refers to the destiny that each individual selected before birth. Upon birth, every individual forgets the *orí* that they have selected. Aspects of the religion such as divination serve to remind individuals of their destiny. *Orí* can be influenced and changed if a person heeds warning to the suggestions and warnings given during a divination session. Upon death, *orí* is required to return to heaven to be selected by other persons waiting to be born (Mason: 2002:33; Vega: 2000:83, 169, 268, 276-277).

**Ritual Practice and Money Exchange**

Most accounts of ceremony and ritual in Santería do provide an in-depth discussion of money exchange. I, however, think money plays an important role in solidifying social and spiritual relationships among practitioners. In fact, transactions involving money exchange occur during a variety of ritual venues. In each of these religious transactions, money assumes the form of the *derecho*. The *derecho* is typically characterized as an amount of money that is given in exchange for a ritual or ceremony. The amount of the *derecho* varies from practitioner to practitioner and each individual sets his/her own price. The amount can increase depending on the type of religious service that is offered and the materials that are needed. It is collected at the end or beginning of every ritual and serves an array of purposes. The purpose of this section is to highlight and describe the most popular religious and ritual contexts in which money, in the form of the *derecho*, is circulated.

Many individuals become acquainted with Santería through the religion’s divination systems and are involved with the religion at only this level. Divination is perhaps the most popular way in Santería to facilitate communication between the spiritual and physical realm. It is used to

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10 “Without a good head, the feet don’t follow” (my translation: 2003)
determine whether a person’s life choices are in harmony with their destiny, inner balance and guardian orisha (Clark:1998:122).

Orunla, also known as Orunmila, the orisha of wisdom, knowledge is the deity responsible for overseeing divination because he is said to be the only witness to God’s creation (Flores-Pena:1998:47; Murphy:1993:181). However, babalawos and santero/as actually mediate the divination process in the physical realm among clients. Divination is a service that is often referred to as “una mirada” or “un registro” by Spanish-speaking practitioners. In times of emotional or physical distress, practitioners will often go to a babalawo and/or santero to “mirarse” or to “registrarse”. Each of these terms is used extensively within the religion to refer to divination and roughly translate to “a look-see” (mirada), “to look at oneself” (mirarse), “a registry” (registro) and “to examine oneself” (Field Notes 2003 & 2004).

There are three levels of divination in Santería: the diloggún, obi and Ifá. These systems utilize four pieces of coconut (obi), cowrie shells (diloggún), and palm nuts or kola nut valves (diloggún and Ifá) as divinatory tools. Only babalawos have access to Ifá, the most complex divination method, and use tools such as the ikin (sixteen palm nuts) or the ekwele (a divining chain) (Murphy:1980:85-86; Vega:2000:143) (See Appendix 2).

Each oracle system relies on the manipulation of the divination tools so that they fall in a random combination. The resulting combination is referred to as an odu and corresponds to a particular pataki (story). Babalawos and/or santero/as assess the client’s life situation based on the odu and accompanying pataki that appears during a divinatory consultation. There are 256 possible odu combinations and each is accompanied by an array of predictions and suggestions.

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1 Babalawos are specially trained male priests. In fact, the babalawo is considered the messenger of Orunla.
2 English-speaking practitioners often translate the divination experience as a “reading” and/or “spiritual reading” (Field Notes:2003).
3 This is considered by some to be the simplest and least detailed form of divination because it yields only yes/no responses to questions (Clark:1998:122; Cabrera:1985:363).
Each *odu* carries a symbol that either predicts positive energy (*irê*) or negativity (*osogbo*). If *osogbo* is revealed, the client will be prescribed certain tasks or sacrifices that they must fulfill in order to resolve the problem and bring positive energy back to their lives (Aróstegui:1996:13-14; Flores-Pena:1998:3,48; Lefever:1996:321; Vega:2000:143).

Divination generally requires a monetary *derecho*. Historically, the cost of the *derecho* for a divination session has ranged from 1-1.50 pesos\(^{14}\) for Cubans. Currently, however, the cost of this service is debated among practitioners. M., an active devotee, stated that *registros* typically cost about 10 pesos. P., on the other hand, explained that the cost ranged from 5 to 10 pesos and at times US$1. B.H., a newly initiated practitioner, pointed out that divination fees vary among *santeros/as* or *babalawos*. He explains, “Everyone has their set fee and this is sometimes determined by their *eleda*. A child of Elegguá, for example, would charge 21 because that number belongs to him. But you no longer find that as much. Now it costs about 42 pesos to *mirarte*” (Field Notes:2003 & 2004, my translation). The cost of the *derecho* differs substantially for foreigners. In my research, I found US$21 to US$25 to be the standard fee for divination services performed with foreigners (Cabrera:1980:203).

The *misa* or *consulta espiritual* is another religious arena in which money is circulated. In circumstances where life suggests the weakening powers or dwindling favors from a Guardian Angel, the *santero/a*\(^{15}\) can attempt to restore spiritual balance through a *consulta espiritual* or *misa*. During these consultations the *santero/a* may be “mounted” or possessed by his own *eleda*, ancestral spirits or other supernatural entities. As the medium for the client, he/she is able

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\(^{14}\) Informant T.F.R. notes that one can still find practitioners that charge this fee to uphold tradition. He identifies inflation as the cause of this change and explains, “with 1.5 pesos you can only buy from the *libreta*. And if you go to the market with 1 peso, you can’t buy anything” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

\(^{15}\) However, in this ritual it is not required that the person performing the *misa* be a *santero/a*. Because this ceremony is derived from Kardecian Spiritist practices the person may be a non-initiate in the Santería faith. He/she would have had, however, to have gone through the *coronación*, a ceremony in which an individual’s guardian spirits are identified.
to predict and describe the current problems of the client. This form of spirit mediumship allows the priest to forge a direct link to the divine in order to reestablish harmony to an individual’s destiny. For Cubans, a standard derecho for the misa typically ranges from 5 to 20 pesos. Meanwhile, foreigner’s derecho ranges from $5 to $15 dollars (Sandoval:1979:140; Jones et al:2001:52; Field Notes:2004).

While many individuals participate in the religion by receiving advice from divination and/or misas, those desiring to be considered santeros/as\textsuperscript{16} and full members of the religious community must participate in various ceremonies. One learns more about the religion and its ritual through ceremony. This is one way through which knowledge is guarded and even passed on throughout the generations. Each ceremony, as Marta Moreno Vega suggests, helps individuals “understand the importance of the ancestral legacy of Santería” (Vega:2000:186). The successful completion of each ceremony moreover helps to mark an individual’s transition from a marginal member to a practitioner (Clark:1998:126).

The kofá and mano de orula ceremonies is an important ceremony in which money transactions occur. Both are important ceremonies for female and male participants because they are extended divination ceremonies that reinforce the protection and aché of Orunla. The ceremonies differ, however, along gender lines. Women receive kofá, while men receive la mano de orula. Nevertheless, these ceremonies determine which orisha serves as an individual’s eleda and which one of the odus will govern the individual’s life. Individuals are strongly encouraged to follow warnings and cautioned against breaching certain taboos specific to the odu that governs their existence. These ceremonies often indicate the extent to which an individual will participate in the religion (Vega:2000:186; Field Notes 2002 and 2003).

\textsuperscript{16} Santero is the term used to signify individuals that have become initiated into the tradition through a ceremony know as “haciendose santo”, making saint (Murphy:1993:178,182).
Receiving the warrior *orishas* Elegguá, Ogun and Ochosi is typically one of the first ceremonies employed as individuals begin their journey into Santería. Recipients of the warriors are given the fundamental symbols of these *orishas* in order to open the path for spiritual growth and development. Elegguá is symbolically represented as a concrete sculpture with a tiny knife blade and parrots feather at the point of his head. His eyes are made of cowrie shell eyes and inside, is a combination of specially herbs prepared for the recipient. This image represents his power as a warrior and owner of the crossroads. Ogun is the second *orisha* to be given in this ceremony. He is believed to be the owner of work and owns all things associated with iron, minerals and tools. The following tools symbolize this orisha: an arrow, an anvil, a pickax, a hatchet, a machete, a hammer, and a key. Ochosi is the final warrior received. He is characteristically described as a hunter and is believed to protect individuals outside the home. He also shields individuals from troubles with the law. A metal bow and arrow represent this *orisha*. Together, the three warriors are placed at the door of a believer’s home (Murphy:1993:71-73).

Practitioners are expected to care for the warriors by making weekly offerings of their favorite foods. As Joseph Murphy notes recipients are also cautioned to listen to the *orishas* and to pay attention to their lives. He writes, “I ask Padrino how I will know what the warriors want and how to satisfy them…‘What is happening in your life? Are you lucky or unlucky? This is not an accident. This is the *orishas*” (Murphy:1993:71-73). Receiving the warriors is believed to protect negative energy from the household as well as add stability, direction and help to focus an individual’s thoughts and ideas (Vega:2000:187). In my experience, this ceremony is included with the kofá/mano de orula ceremony (Field Notes:2003 & 2004).
Despite extensive fieldwork in Cuba, I was unable to pinpoint whether a standard monetary amount exists as the derecho for the kofá/mano de orula and warriors ceremonies. The derecho for my own kofá ceremony cost US$75, while a number of foreigners have paid as much as US$250. For Cubans, the amount appears to be substantial and many spend at least a year saving to cover the cost of the derecho. While observing a spiritual reading between a babalawo and his client in January 2004, for example, the divination session indicated that it was necessary for the client’s daughter to receive kofá to ensure good health and safety. Before she left the babalawo’s house she stopped to discuss the tasks she had to do with the babalawo. As the client was preparing to leave, the babalawo gently chided, “Remember to start saving because it is very important for your daughter to receive her kofá. It’s going to be expensive because there are animals involved and lots of things to buy. Other people and babalawos come to help with the ceremony and I have to give them something. By the time you finish saving it should be sometime mid to late summer. We’ll be ready to do it then” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

The ceremony of the elekes or collares is the second most important ceremony in Santería. It reflects an individual’s personal commitment and deepened relationship with the orishas. Unlike the warrior ceremony, which can only be given by males initiates, the elekes may only be given by female practitioners. The woman that gives a participant the elekes becomes that individual’s madrina, godmother. The elekes are believed to strengthen a person’s head and they are beaded necklaces that represent the colors of five principal orishas: Ochún, Obatalá, Yemayá and Changó. This ceremony is the first step in making saint and it is believed that it prepares the

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17 Murphy documents six elekes that are given to him by his padrino during this ceremony in New York, the sixth being Eleggúa’s red and black patterned necklace (Murphy:1993:77). However, I did not find this to be true in my experience in Cuba with the religion. Unless otherwise directed through divination to receive the sixth, most recipients are only given the five that I mention in this paper.
head for the *orisha* that the individual will be crowned with when they make saint (Murphy:1993:77-83; Clark:1998:126).

This ceremony begins with a ritual purification. The participant must bathe in an herbal infusion called *omeiro*. Upon completion, the individual is instructed to dress in white clothes and then is prayed over and sung to in Lucumi. Next, a preparation of cocoa butter, grated coconut and *cascarilla* is applied to various points on the participant’s body and their head is wrapped in a white cloth. Finally, the individual receives the patterned necklaces of Obatala (white beads), Yemaya (blue and white beads), Chango (red and white beads) and Ochun (yellow and gold beads) (Murphy:1993:77-83). Each *eleke* is bestowed with the ache of each *orisha* and promises of protection, health, luck, tranquillity and “all the good things in life” (Murphy:1993:82; Vega:2000:186).

There is no standard *derecho* for the *elekes* ceremony for Cubans or foreigners. I, for example, was required to give US$50 as the *derecho* for this ceremony. However, I.H., a *santera* interviewed in my study, reported charging as much as US$100. She explained, “For you, I charge US$50. I charged W. US$100. Don’t tell her that I charged you less though. It’s just that she has parents to support her and give her money. And I know that you don’t have that support so I charge less” (Field Notes:2004).

Making saint, “hacerse santo” or *kariocha*, is the final ceremony that signifies an individual’s fullest commitment to the religion. It is through this ceremony that a participant is symbolically crowned with their guardian *orisha*, or “owner of the head” and becomes a full-fledged initiate of the religious community. Practitioners consider the initiation ceremony week-long rite of passage that all initiates must go through so that they may be referred to as a *santero* (male) or

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18 Lucumi is the language used in the majority of Santería rituals. It was the original language of the Yoruba slaves that began Santería in Cuba (Murphy:1993:179).
santera (female). It is believed that through this ceremony the aché of the guardian orisha is transferred and installed in an individual’s head so that it may reside there and ultimately “mount” the initiate during ritual trances or spiritual possessions\(^{19}\) (Clark:1998:127; Mason:2002:33).

Upon completion, the individual must adhere to a year-long set of strict rules and taboos. The new initiate, for instance, is referred to as an iyawo, must dress completely in white during this year and cannot be outside after dark. They are also prohibited from sexual intercourse during that year and are prohibited from using a knife or fork when eating, and must instead, eat with a spoon. During the first three months, females are expected to wear a shawl and stockings in public and both sexes must cover their head when going outside. Mary Ann Clark describes the significance and symbolism of the kariocha experience and writes,

> “White, a symbol of purity and creativity. Immaculate white cloths represent Obatalá, the orisha of purity and creativity, who cools the fires of passion, protects against evil influences, and enhances the character of the practitioner…white separates the initiate from the profane community…the initiate’s clothes mark the wearer as a different type of being, one dedicated to a particular way of life” (Clark:1998:127).

Notably, each year a celebration is given in honor to commemorate the “birthday”, or initiation day, of those practitioners which have made saint. Practitioners, indeed, consider the day they make saint to be their spiritual birthday and count the numbers of year since their initiation to demonstrate their spiritual expertise. Thus, a standard way to inquire of a practitioners’ age and experience in the religion is to ask, “Cuantos años tienes en el santo?\(^{20}\)”. Those with the most years of “saint” receive the utmost respect in the tradition (Clark:1998:127;

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\(^{19}\) Trance and spiritual possession are common to Santería. During celebrations and ceremonies consecrated drums and songs are played to praise or call down the orishas for spiritual assistance. When a particular orisha descends (“mounts”), he/she will occupy an individual’s body and that person will take on the attributes such as special dances and/or food cravings of that orisha (Mason:2002:134).

\(^{20}\) “How old are you in the Saint?” (Field notes: 2002, my translation)
Lázara Menéndez, author of *Rodar el coco: Proceso de Cambio en la Santería*, explains,

“The *santero* accepts the existence of two ages: the chronological age and the ritual. With it...a distinction is made between two births and existences: the real and the symbolic. The ritual age refers to the ceremonial imposition of ache or coronation” (Mendez:2002:121, my translation).

Believers note that making saint is a ceremony that allows the “most essential presence of the *orisha*” to become part of the initiate’s soul (Murphy:1993:87). Menéndez characterizes this rite as “the symbolic acquirement of the power of the patron saint or ‘the guardian *orisha*’ in the subject’s head” (Menéndez:2002:12, my translation). Additionally, making saint allows participants to pass the *aché* of the *orishas* to future generations of godchildren. It is through this ceremony that an individual is granted permission to begin learning the secrets of the *orishas* and aspects of the religion such as herbal knowledge as well as instruction on carrying out religious rites (Vega:2000:25). Thus, by becoming a *santero/a*, an individual’s status and role as novice or apprentice is completely transformed. Initiation bestows spiritual authority so that the individual is permitted to observe and perform various rituals and ceremonies, divine for others and, in many cases, perform initiations.

Interestingly, not all individuals involved in Santería are required to make saint. However, many make saint for health reasons or because they have been instructed to so during a divination session with the *orishas* (Cabrera:1980:230; Sandoval:1979:147). Thus, as an informant from Tomas Fernandez Robaina research comments, “*Uno se hace santo por dos razones: por salud o porque uno nace con ese signo, con la letra de caminar por ese camino; nos guste o no. Hay quien lo hace para lucrar*” (Robaina:1997:6).

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21 “Like it or not, one makes saint for two reasons: to save their health or because one is born with this sign, with the sign go down this road. There are some who do it just to show off” (my translation:2003).
I made it a point to inquire about the cost of this ceremony during my fieldwork because the cost of the ceremony is the center of much controversy. The cost is, in fact, often a crucial factor when a foreigner has to decide whether to make saint in Cuba or in the United States\(^2\). The *derecho* charged for this ceremony ranges from US\$2,000 to US\$4,000 for a foreigner in Cuba and 10,000 pesos for Cuban nationals (Hagedorn:2001:9).

Sisters I.C. and L.C. quoted me for 2,000 pesos to perform the ceremony for Cuban initiates of Ochún and Obatalá. According to them, the same ceremonies would cost US\$1,200 for foreign initiates. They noted that both the foreigner and Cuban national would have to bring their own clothes and materials\(^3\) because the *derecho* would be only enough to buy the animals and pay the participating *santeros/as*. “The cost”, they explained, “depends on what saint you are going to receive. Elegguá, Oyá, Ogún and Ochosi cost more. That would be 3,000 pesos because their ceremonies require more things…Foreigners are expected to pay more so that the *santero/a* can resolve their problems” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

Notably, my primary informant L. disputed the amount quoted by I.C. and L.C. for the *derecho* used in the foreign initiate’s *kariocha* ceremony. L. quoted me US\$3,500 for the initiation ceremony and angrily declared,

“Ha! Only US\$1,200 to make saint. You can’t get far with that. I guess they expect you to use tap water and powdered milk. But you can’t do that for the foreigner. Their systems are not used to that water and they’d be so sick the whole time. Anyway, that’s part of the trick, they’ll keep on asking you for more money little by little. In the end, if you tally it up you realize that you’ve spent US\$3,500 like I quoted you for. The only difference is that I ask for all of it up front to go buy what is needed and they rather make you think you’re paying less when really you’re paying the same amount, if not more” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

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\(^2\) It is useful to note here that a similar initiation would likely cost between $15,000 and $20,000 in the United States. For some U.S. nationals, choosing to become initiated into Santería in Cuba is partly an economic decision” (Hagedorn:2001:14).

\(^3\) See Appendix 3 for a list of materials needed to make saint.
The Derecho: Material and Social Purposes of Money

Money is, indeed, a key ingredient for both ritual and ceremony, because it assumes the form of the derecho. Money collected from the derecho serves a variety of purposes and its use extends beyond purchasing the materials items for ceremonies and rituals. Thus, an examination of the customary derecho that is offered to practitioners for their services provides a context through which one can understand money and its relationship to the religion.

A portion of the derecho goes directly to purchasing materials that will be used in the ritual. Thus, explaining the use of money simply in its relationship with buying and purchasing is useful to understanding how it is central to a religion, such as Santería, that derives much of its spirituality from material goods. Indeed, very few practitioners will work without collecting the customary derecho in either dollars or Cuban pesos. Many cite that without money, one simply cannot purchase the material items necessary for spiritual rituals. O., an informant who, unlike others, appeared more than willing to discuss this topic with me, explained,

(O.): “The babalawo tells you what you need. But he doesn’t sell these items directly to you. Another person sells it to him, and then he uses it for you and he has to go with their prices” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

As O., indicates, the derecho is dependent on market prices because items later used in a spiritual context must first be purchased from the physical world using dollars and/or pesos. Goods such as animals, candles, alcohol, perfume, soperas, cascarrilla etc… are vital to spiritual ceremonies and rituals. These commodities must be first purchased from a store before they undergo a ritualization that gives them spiritual power or effectiveness. Therefore, it would

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24 Surely, this is dependent on the currency accepted by the locale which sells the items. While some of these items can be purchased in pesos, stores that accept the peso commonly experience shortages. Thus, many of these items are more easily purchased and obtained at dollar-only stores.

25 Soperas are tureens that are used to guard the orishas’ ache. Cascarrilla is powdered egg shell and is regularly employed as a protective agent in many Santería rituals and ceremonies.
be impossible for a practitioner to provide a *rogación de cabeza*\(^{26}\) for a believer without purchasing the ritual’s fundamental ingredients for later use: coconut, two white doves, cocoa butter, *cascarilla*, honey, and cotton (Field Notes:2004).

The *derecho* is not always used to purchase material goods for use in ritual. In fact, a portion of the *derecho* is given to the participating *santeros/as* and/or babalawos. Thus, an analysis based completely on the material approach would be incomplete as it ignores its social role. It is, therefore, paramount to examine the *derecho*’s social purpose in ceremonies that require the involvement and participation of many practitioners. A view of the *derecho* from this perspective illustrates how the *derecho* transcends its material purpose in order to function and circulate in the social realm of believers.

In most ceremonies and rituals, everyone that helps to prepare and/or perform must receive a portion of money from the *derecho* that the client initially paid to the person(s) he/she contracted for the service. The *misa espiritual*, *kofa/mano de orula* and initiation ceremonies serve as excellent examples because they are popular rituals that are routinely performed and require that at least two or more practitioners are present for successful completion. Elderly practitioner M.D. pointed this out to me when I received the ceremony. Upon my return from Cuba, she inquired, “How many babalawos were present when you received *kofá*?” I responded by stating that three had been present and she commented, “That’s good. The ceremony was done right then because there should always be at least two…That way more people with more knowledge can give you advice” (Field Notes:2002, my translation). In this manner, money can serve to compensate individuals for their time and involvement in a particular religious service.

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\(^{26}\)A *rogación de cabeza* is a ritual believed to bring calmness to the person’s *orí*. It is used to remedy a number of situations such as mental exhaustion and fatigue. Essentially, it is believed to clear the individual’s path of negative forces in order that positive energy and balance may be restored to an individual’s life (Field Notes:2004).
Each of the participating santeros/as shares the responsibilities of the ritual task at hand and ensures the successful completion of the ceremony. For this reason, they are entitled to some sort of financial compensation for providing their time and expertise. The text included below illustrates how Cuban practitioners interpret and explain the social purpose of the derecho:

(M.D.): “You leave money and give the derecho because you can’t do it by yourself. Like when you make saint, you can’t do that by yourself and other people have to come and help you. It’s about twelve people involved. So you give them a little something for helping you” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

My observations in Cuba further illustrate the social purpose of the derecho. Once, for example, I observed an older woman performing a misa espiritual by herself. While two women she had recruited were present in the house, one was preoccupied with cleaning the house and picking up her son from school. Meanwhile, the other seemed distracted and left the room for quite a while to smoke a cigarette. In this instance, the medium did most of the predictions for the client and the task was not shared amongst the participants in the room. While “mounted”, the presumed spirit of the older woman turned to me and complained, “See how these young kids are…They know this medium can’t do this by herself. She depends on them too…They have to talk. They have spirits that will talk through them too. It can’t just be me that does all the explaining”. Later, when both women had returned to the misa room, the spirit proceeded to further chastise them remarking, “You can’t just walk out on this medium when she’s working. You’re supposed to talk and be attentive. She needs help” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

In each of these examples, money is circulated among practitioners to compensate them for their time and help in the ceremony. Practitioners understand that involvement in a ritual required that the participant(s) give up a portion of their schedule to be involved in spiritual works. In my research, they noted, and at times emphasized, that it was imperative to pay the individual with money for their willingness to sacrifice their time. As one informant explains:
“(O.): “Money that you give is a payment (tributo) to the person for attending you. If I came to your house and you read the cards (barajas) or threw the shells (dilogún) for me, I should pay you for your time. You could spend two, three or even more hours with me” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

The explanations practitioners provided are useful in explaining how individuals understand and appreciate the efforts of others. Compensating an individual for their involvement in a ceremony via monetary means is important for maintaining social relationships in Santería. The following excerpt from a popular website highlights the importance of the derecho as it relates to the social realm of practitioners:

“Before Orunmila sent his children the following message that we will site, the babalawos predicted and practiced for the good of humanity free of charge, they lived in the most absolute poverty and without material things. They sustained themselves, or at the very least tried to sustain themselves, with public charity, and they made do with whatever they received from them in reciprocation for the incalculable good that they had done. Each time what they received was more and more miserable, but even still the babalawos continued to complete their noble and sacred mission, until they almost died out because of starvation. While all this was happening, the majority of the people rapidly forgot about the good that they had received from the hands of these religious figures. Many had been cured of serious diseases, others had been saved from fatal accidents, others had recovered happiness and peace for their lives and their family, and still others had made great fortunes…and on and on went the list of the good that the people had obtained…Nevertheless, mankind showed its intense egotism, disregarding and disrespecting the vital necessity of the babalawos, because of whom they had received the charity of the orishas and ancestors. And so Orula continued with his message, ‘Because even today I continue to see with great sadness, how many human beings quickly forget the good they receive…From now on all of your actions, whether it is for you or on behalf of someone else, that involves the direct or indirect participation of an orisha or ancestor…will always have to be rewarded materially…Each babalawo must always demand a derecho de Orisha or a corresponding material, either before or after their work has been done. And it should be clear that this derecho will never mean that you have purchased the favor of the Orishas…it will always be a symbolic representation of the spirit of sacrifice for the person that has requested your services…You should not free an individual from paying the derecho, unless we indicate otherwise…the priest or priestess is also a human being, they are born, live and die like all human beings; they basically have the same material needs as everyone else, and the service they lend to humanity, is realized on earth, among all human beings, and hence they also have to live like a human being” (http://www.babalawocubano.com/html/derechos.html, my translation).

The example provided above situates the derecho in a religious-historical context. From it, one observes that the derecho is rooted in the religious narratives of Santería and the derecho originates from a divine mandate. Orunmila, the orisha charged with overseeing divination and
an individual’s destiny, instructs practitioners to charge a *derecho* for two reasons. The *derecho*, he cites, arises from man’s tendency to take the efforts of the *babalawo* for granted. It, therefore, provides an outward symbol of an individual’s respect and appreciation for both the divine and the *babalawo* or *santero* mediating the spiritual encounter between the client and the divine. Secondly, the *derecho* allows the client and attending practitioner to form a relationship based on reciprocation. Thus, spiritual counsel and help with the client’s spiritual evolution is exchanged for commodities that will aid the *babalawo* in straightening out his own earthly and/or spiritual dilemmas.

The money that is given as the *derecho* is ultimately allowed to circulate and be used for the attending practitioner’s spiritual and/or earthly needs. Money, thus, circulates among individuals to later provide a bridge across various social relationships. When asked, for instance, how the money from the *derecho* was used, T.F.R.’s comments echoed many of my informant’s remarks. In an interview during my second fieldwork trip to Cuba, he replied: “this money is for the *babalawo*. For parties for his saint or for his personal things…it’s not necessarily that you’re paying for the service, it’s so that the *babalawo* can continue on with his life” (Field Notes:2004).

Resolving one’s earthly and spiritual needs is, in fact, an important concept in the Cuban social and economic spectrum especially as it relates to Santería. Hagedorn writes,

“In Havana, resolver implies not only obtaining a goal, but having to struggle to achieve it. Resolver also implies relying on an informal network of people, both living and deceased, from all parts of one’s life; the more people one knows, the more likely one’s needs will be resuelto, resolved, effectively. In its earthly context, resolver means surviving ‘on top’ of the frequent wreckage and ruin of everyday life…In its spiritual context resolver means helping those who have passed on to the next world to rest peacefully, and persuading the dead to treat the living with care and respect rather than malice and envy” (Hagedorn:2001:205).
Throughout my field work, I wondered why a monetary derecho was the particular commodity valued and accepted in exchange for ritual services. Indeed, in all of my time in Cuba, I never observed material goods other than money given directly in exchange for spiritual services. Thus, there are few, if any, material goods that will substitute for money. While I observed instances where money was not immediately given before or after the completion of a ritual, it was always understood that money would be given on a later occasion.

Money becomes an important compensatory tool because it provides a vehicle that allows practitioners to “resolver” (resolve) their own spiritual and economic problems. Moreover, it provides the individual practitioner with the liberty to choose how this money will be utilized for their personal use and needs. The circulation of money in Santería relies on both formal and informal social networks to resolver their everyday dilemmas.

Indeed, when asked what is done with the money they received from the derecho, individuals highlighted the concept of resolver. Earnings from spiritual works provided ways to resolver and individuals often reinvest the money they have received from their portion of the derecho into the religion. L., a babalawo, explained,

“(L.): The derechos that the saints request are for the sacrifices that they ask for. Every time I do an Ifá27 or give someone saint, I am giving life to another. I lose years of my own life and I have to do a million things just to save myself” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

T.F.R. echoes this claim and highlights how the derecho is used to resolver the practitioner’s needs. He states,

(T.F.R): “Whenever the babalawo or iyalocha helps people spiritually, it is customary to leave a derecho for the saint that helps the santero. It’s a tributo so that the santero can resolve his own problems – whether they be economic or spiritual. This payment is done in the current currency (moneda corriente). It has always been necessary to pay a derecho” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

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27 This is a reference to the ceremony that trains and initiates a male practitioner as a babalawo.
An examination of money circulation within Santería would not be complete without a discussion of the social structure which mediates and supports relationships among practitioners. This structure is necessary in order to fully grasp the community’s role in providing money and goods that, in turn, help to resolver practitioner’s economic dilemmas. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the fictive kinship networks that ground and characterize social relationships within the religion.

Slavery eradicated most kinship ties among slaves brought to live and work in the New World. In Africa, for instance, the religion was passed down based on blood and family lineage. Thus, a parent or grandparent passed the religion to their children/grandchildren. The priestly orders, moreover, were based within the family lineage (Clark:1998:126).

The family system destroyed, African slaves in the New World recreated and preserved their religion through fictive families. While these fictive families contrast greatly with their former African practices, they have structured social relationships among Cuban practitioners. In Cuban Santería, relationships are formed not by blood-based families, but rather, by initiation-based fictive families. Initiations allows individuals to be “born” into a religious family (Clark:1998:126).

Everyone that becomes involved with Santería enters the religion under the protection and patronage of a senior santero/a that has years of training and experience in the religion. An individual is “born” into a religious family, often referred to as an ile (Yoruba), or “house”, through initiations by senior members of this particular family. Upon initiation, the priest or priestess then becomes the initiate’s padrino (godfather) or madrina (godmother). The initiate is considered the ahijado (godchild) of the padrino and madrina. Each initiation ceremony also

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28 The kofá/mano de orula are initiations where individuals are typically united with their padrino. Meanwhile, the elekes ceremony, brings together an individual with their madrina. In both instances, the madrina and padrino are the priest/priestess that are in charge of performing the ceremonies (Clark:1998:126; Fieldnotes:2004).
creates ties between other members of the religious family and the neophyte acquires sisters, brothers cousins, aunts, uncles and grandparents in the religion (Clark:1998:126).

Tremendous amounts of effort and energy are invested to maintain and foster relationships between fictive kin. Showing respect and concern for family members, especially elders, is an essential component of these relationships. Mary Ann Clark describes how the fictive family system functions among Santería practitioners. She writes,

“Everyone in a Santería family is related through a complex hierarchy of initiations...Those who are newer to the religion – regardless of their chronological age – honor and obey those who have been involved longer...The most obvious sign of respect is the custom of prostration. Once fully initiated, or crowned, a newcomer is expected to prostrate himself or herself at the feet of all those who are older in the religion. Respect may also be shown in other ways; by listening respectfully, by fetching water or food, or by providing other services to one’s elders. Godchildren are the basic laborers of the household” (Clark:1998:127).

In my own 2004 fieldwork, I made a point to explore the significance of the fictive family among practitioners. In many instances, I simply asked “What duties do godparents have towards their godchildren, and vice versa?”. Included below are some of the responses:

“(T.F.R.): In Santería family is structured differently. You have ‘tios de santo’ and ‘hermanos de santo’...in a lot of houses things work well and everyone gets along. The padrino worries about his godchildren. The godchildren try to help him when he needs help. And when he dies, the padrino leaves some money and all the godchildren get together to help bury him” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

“(P.): La madrina is like a mother. She gives me advice. I have to depend on her and my spiritual family whenever we have a problem. She helps me with stuff that isn’t spiritual too. The ahijado, likewise, should help the madrina with whatever problem she has” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

“(M.): The responsibilities that the madrina has towards her ahijado are forever. She is supposed to help him with his life. The ahijado should worry about the madrina and help her. I have one godchild allá [in the United States] that doesn’t even write me. Doesn’t want to even know how I am doing” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

“(L.C.): The madrina is supposed to help the godchild. Help him stay in line with his itá29. The ahijado should obey and respect the madrina. The ahijado should help the madrina with what she lacks” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

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29 An itá is the set of predictions, warnings and recommendations that guide an individual to fulfill their destiny. Itá can also refer to the part in initiation ceremonies such as kofá/mano de orula and santo when the orichas speak to
As observed earlier in this section, practitioners use money from ritual transactions for their own livelihood and survival. While relationships between practitioners are not based on money, fictive families provide channels through which money can be obtained. Thus, as observed in the above comments, individuals will tap into these networks to help resolve their material and spiritual needs. These responses illustrate yet another example in which money serves a social purpose as it circulates among individuals to larger Santería households and communities.

* * * Part V. The Spiritual Purpose of Money * * *

The monetary derecho does not serve strictly a social purpose. While the circulation of money is important in the social realm, money has equal importance in the spiritual arena. Practitioners often contend that the monetary derecho is specifically requested by the orishas. Money is symbolically offered first to the orishas and later used by the babalawo/santero. Some practitioners are, moreover, directly instructed and advised to leave small denominations of money for the orishas as offerings. While the amount and frequency of such offerings vary, their value typically corresponds to the numbers owned by the particular orisha that is receiving the offering. An offering for Elegguá could range from three to twenty-one coins or bills because these numbers belong to him. Meanwhile, an offering for Ochún would consist of a multiple of five because she owns the number five. As money is often linked and incorporated into orisha worship, a discussion of money would be incomplete without an examination of its spiritual function.

**Gifts to Gods: Money, Gratitude and Reciprocation**

During my 2004 fieldwork, it appeared that practitioners seemed unconcerned about the presence and exchange of money in ceremony and rituals. The attitudes I observed, indeed, followers through divination. Older practitioners refer to the i t à as “the sentencing” because many restrictions concerning food, clothing, their behavior etc… are imposed on them (Mason:2002:128-129; Field Notes:2004).
paralleled the Sumbanese formal exchanges that Webb Keane writes about in *Money is No Object*. Keane explains,

“In practice, Sumbanese formal exchanges stress the representative functions of objects, play down utility, and rigorously exclude money except as a symbolic piece of metal” (Keane:2001:71).

Keane’s research is significant because it sheds light on one of the most complex ways that money functions in social and religious settings. Money, as Keane highlights, exists as both a symbol and a useful form of economic capital. It has a practical value as well as a symbolic value. Both, I learned, are equally important for practitioners of Santería. As I have already discussed the practical utility of money in the social realm in Part III, this section will highlight the symbolic meaning of money among Santería practitioners. This symbolism, in turn, illustrates the role money has in fostering relationships that are based on reciprocation.

In talking about the monetary *derecho*, Cuban practitioners understood and explained the purpose of the *derecho* in a number of fashions. Many practitioners emphasized the *derecho*’s social and material functions, while others focused on the *derecho*’s symbolic spiritual purpose. These reasons were often interconnected and result in a pluralistic interpretation that incorporated all three purposes. Like the Sumbanese, however, Cuban practitioners tended to stress the symbolic aspect of money over its utility. For them, the money used in the *derecho* was a symbol of their gratitude. In a 2004 interview, for example, I.C. commented:

(I.C.): “The monetary *derecho* is to pay those that are working. It is also so that you can buy the things that you need. But above all, the “saint” (*orisha*) requests it” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

It is rare that one encounters informants, such as I.C., who describe the many purposes of the *derecho* at the same time. For this reason, it was easy for me to initially overlook the symbolic purpose and function of the *derecho* especially as it relates to the *orishas*. I.C.’s comment reminded me of the spiritual purpose of the *derecho*. According to I.C., the *orishas* specifically
request the *derecho*. This statement becomes significant because it emphasizes a connection between the *derecho* and the *orishas*. Thus, a monetary *derecho* transcends its social and material function in order to operate in the spiritual world.

During my 2004 fieldwork, I often inquired how practitioners dealt with individuals who could not pay the *derecho*. Their responses were quite informative as they revealed the *derecho* was not solely used to purchasing material goods. In the absence of a monetary *derecho*, the individual’s spiritual well-being was potentially jeopardized because ritual materials and supplies would not be available for use in the ceremony. More importantly, however, a monetary *derecho* must be offered, even if at a later date, because it plays a complex spiritual function in maintaining relationships between man and the *orishas*. As O. explained,

> “Well, if you don’t have the money, the *babalawo* would still try to help you the most economically possible way….Perhaps he would tell you to pray, go to *el monte* and get this herb and/or say two Our Fathers. But a good *babalawo*, if he was able to and could afford it, would use his own money to purchase the items that you need. And then when you get some money then you would just give it to him to cover the cost and to show that you appreciated what he did for you” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

O.’s response highlights the role of gratitude in social relationships between humans. In the social realm, indeed, heads of spiritual households such as the *padrino* and *madrina* will accuse their godchildren of ingratitude when they feel that it has not been satisfactorily expressed. L., a *babalawo* of 28 years with a substantial clientele, his wife (D.) and his goddaughter in the religion (I.) commented,

> “*(L.):* Do you know how many godchildren I have? How many people come here half dead…All the work I do for them and no one thinks of me….All these people I help and do they ever show thanks? Do they ever stop by and say, ‘Here *padrino*, take this.’? *(D.):* Most of them live better than him with their big apartments and everything. *(L.):* And it’s not so much about the money. They only come by when they need something or when they’re in trouble.
(1): This man has done so much for us. This man is a good padrino. One who actually worries about each and everyone of his godchildren and no one gives him anything in return for all his hard work” (Field Notes:2004, my translation)

Nevertheless, the theme of gratitude resurfaces in the spiritual realm. In divination, for example, many odu caution individuals from being “mal agradecido” (ungrateful). More significantly, expressing gratitude with material objects and goods is, in fact, a theme/virtue that is stressed within the spiritual realm of Santería. The egun and orishas must be consistently placated with offerings of food, water, perfume and tobacco. In order to have their continued assistance and blessings in worldly affairs, an individual must express gratitude and appreciation with material goods. M. explains,

(M:) “The orishas work hard for us. And with this money you’re supposed to buy stuff for the saints and the muertos. Like candles, food, tobacco. The things that they like and need. Because they help you and give you the things that you like and need” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

From this perspective, the derecho becomes a crucial component in constructing reciprocal relationships based on gratitude and propitiation between orishas and men. In Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions, noted religious scholar, Catherine Bell further elaborates on such relationships. Borrowing Tylor’s term “gift theory” to describe these interactions, she writes,

“Among the best-known examples of religious rituals are those in which people make offerings to god or gods with the practical and straightforward expectation of receiving something in return –whether it be as concrete as a good harvest and a long life or as abstract as grace and redemption…Direct offerings may be given to praise, please, and placate divine power, or they may involve an explicit exchange by which human beings provide sustenance to divine powers in return for divine contributions to human well-being” (Bell:1997:108).

Bell postulates that ritual acts of offering and exchange invoke very complex relations of mutual interdependence between the human and the divine. The function of the derecho in Santería’s spiritual realm, indeed, follows the logic described in “gift theory”. Practitioners give in order to receive something in return from the orishas. M.’s statement illustrates this point. Thus, M. provides the orishas with material goods so that she can benefit from their blessings,
grace and help in the future. An anticipated reciprocation was perhaps most evident, moreover, in my research whenever I even broached the topic of money with many of my informants. For example, L., the babalawo that I spent most time with during my 2004 fieldwork, constantly chided me about my frugality in Cuba. In one of our frequent mini-arguments about the costs of ceremonies and rituals, he chided,

“(L.): Never complain about how much you give in this religion because everything you give comes back to you in bigger amounts. Let’s say you give US$20, Orula and the saints will give you back $100 or $1,000” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

Bell further argues that offerings are just as important to the social and cultural processes that organize communal identity. She writes,

“Ritual acts of offering, exchange and communion appear to invoke very complex relations of mutual interdependence between the human and the divine. In addition, these activities are likely to be important not simply to human-divine relations but also to a number of social and cultural processes by which the community organizes and understands itself” (Bell:1997:109).

My fieldwork greatly supports Bell’s claim. As we observed in Part III, the derecho has an immense social significance. Practitioners rely on the derecho to hold rituals and ceremonies crucial to their own survival. These religious activities and the derecho that makes them possible, in turn, helps preserve and organize aggregate santeros/as into larger communities/families30 of practitioners.

The Power of Money

On an overt level of analysis, the derecho is a symbol of an individual’s love, gratitude and devotion to the orishas and egun. There are, however, other ways of understanding the spiritual purpose of money. First, I examine it within the context of animal sacrifice. Later, in this section, I analyze its potential as a medium to carry spiritual force and energy.

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30 “Families” is how practitioners would describe themselves.
A deeper approach to the derecho links it to large-scale beliefs about sacrifice within Santería. Animal sacrifice, for example, is seen as a necessary practice in the religion because it activates aché and mediates cyclic relationships between the orishas and human beings. Sacrifice allows blood from animals to pass their aché to the orishas and the left-over carcass is later used to feed practitioners. Using testimony from practitioners that helped in her own initiation, Marta Moreno Vega, the author of The Altar of My Soul: The Living Traditions of Santería, describes the logic behind sacrifice. She writes,

“Zenaida continued to share her thoughts. ‘Not only are the orishas ‘fed’ through this process, but the community of initiates also eats, ensuring that members of the family will never go hungry. This divine, vital cycle links the aché of the orishas and humans, creating a complementary balance that maintains health and prosperity.’…In the Santería religions the life force of animals used in rituals is revered because it brings spiritual rebirth as well as nourishment to the community” (Vega:2000:120-130).

While Vega’s testimony helps clarify how giving the derecho parallels animal sacrifice within the Santería tradition, it does little justice in fully explaining how the money derecho actually acquires its significance. To better approximate this, it is necessary to refer to anthropological discourses on value, money, sacrifice, gift-offerings. Indeed, my fieldwork reflects larger discourses in anthropology and religious studies.

Anthropologist David Graeber provides a clearer perspective on how the monetary components of the derecho achieve their social and spiritual value in “Beads and Money: Notes toward a Theory of Wealth and Power”. For Graeber, money acquires value because it is identified with a person’s “generic and invisible inner powers” (Graeber:1996:9). Money represents an invisible potency because it can be turned into any other thing. It is, thus, a potential that can and will be specified in future transactions and exchanges (Graeber:1996:20). Applying Graeber’s theory to my own fieldwork, it is quite possible that the money used the
material basis for the *derecho* plays a corresponding function. Thus, the concept of *ache* in Santería embodies the “invisible and generic powers” discussed in Graeber’s work.

In Santería, money is a medium that carries spiritual force. *Aché* is transferred to the *derecho* through the ritual kiss and crossing of one’s self at the close of the ritual or ceremony. In this manner, *ache* becomes physically contained and/or symbolically transferred to the money used in the *derecho*. Money does not necessarily activate *ache*, but rather contains and/or transfers it to the spiritual and physical realm. Interestingly, Katherine J. Hagedorn provides further evidences of this point when describing transactions between her and a *babalawo* that she worked extensively with during her fieldwork in Cuba. She explains,

> “Initially I approached Alberto to continue teaching me *batá* lessons privately…On three different occasions Alberto had said no to my request, but my fourth attempt brought the affirmative response I had hoped for. This procession of rejections was largely the result of a series of consultations Alberto had requested with his Babalawo and his *oricha*, Eleguá. Three times I asked for lessons, and three times the answer after these consultations was no…The fourth time I asked, however, both his Babalawo and his *oricha* said yes, provided that I would pay no money to him for the lessons…Despite my consternation and confusion, Alberto insisted that I not pay him in money…After several years, and multiple conversations…I found out that Alberto had not accepted money for the lessons in order to protect himself. Through divination, Eleguá had talked at that time of possible malice directed toward Alberto, and had specified that the malice would likely come through money. As a result, Alberto was counseled by his Babalawo to accept not money, but rather products in exchange for his teaching services” (Hagdedorn:2001:88).

Following Graeber’s logic and Hagedorn’s testimony, each ritual transaction, then, allows *ache* to be transferred to the spiritual realm. A monetary *derecho* becomes an acceptable material good because it represents spiritual potential for the *orishas* and social potential for mankind. The *orishas* benefit and prosper from the spiritual potential contained in the money: i.e. client’s *ache* contained in the money. It should be noted that while money represents a material and social potential for the attending *babalawo* and/or *santero*, the physical remnants still contain spiritual power. Thus, as observed through the Hagedorn example, money retains its spiritual charge and force even after the *derecho* has been offered to the *orishas*. 
Money, Morality and Authenticity: Gift vs. Commodity Exchange

Babalawos and santero/as are important figureheads through which the orishas can obtain the derecho. They are important in ensuring that money can be used in the supernatural realm. As newly-initiated Y. explained,

“(Y:) It is necessary to charge for every spiritual work that you do. So that you can give it to your own saints. Afterall, it is a job that you’ve done because of and on behalf of your saint” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

Y.’s statement is significant because it highlights the babalawo’s and santero/a’s role as representatives of the orishas. Her response, moreover, alludes to a debated issue within Santería and involves money, morality and authenticity. As spiritual leaders, babalawos and santero/as are expected to behave in an ethical and moral manner. Money is important in mediating perceptions regarding a practitioner’s morality and authenticity. It is, thus, necessary to take the opportunity and use this section to explain the following: 1) how money and wealth is linked to discourses about ethics, morality and authenticity among practitioners 2) how money when given as a gift or commodity affects these perceptions.

The following except from my field notes further emphasizes how practitioners view their roles in mediating monetary transactions between the orishas and derecho. The descriptions at the beginning reveal the context in which our encounter took place. The dialogue at the end is, however, most intriguing as it illustrates how mankind becomes the orisha’s tool for collecting the derecho.

“Having wandered amongst tourist-filled Centro Habana the entire morning, I grew hungry and headed to the Barrio Chino31 for lunch. Slightly lost, but not entirely, I briskly walked passed a man headed in the opposite direction. I would have kept walking had he not yelled, “Señorita, te puedo hablar un momentico32”. Thinking that my bag was open or that I had

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31 The Barrio Chino has been named such because Chinese immigrants were brought to Cuba in the 1940s and this is where they and there descendants settled. Nowadays, a number of restaurants that sell “Chinese” and “Cuban” food decorate the neighborhood. One informant noted “There is a restaurant that sells the best pizza in all of La Habana”. This is one of the few places in Cuba where I observed dual acceptance of pesos and dollars.

32 “Can I talk to you for a minute mam”
dropped something, I stopped. He began “You are a daughter of Ochún, the Santísima Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre. Children of this saint never cut their hair”. The man continued on, “You have a birthmark on your body somewhere on your body where no one can see. Never let the doctors remove this birthmark because that is where your aché is…Never fall is love with a man that is not in love with you…Are you a student? (To which my reply was yes). When you have an exam, put a couple of leaves of peligioso(?) under your hat and the answers will just come to you even if you haven’t studied. Finally, my dear, don’t go out into the street after Wednesday because something bad will happen. And let your hair grow back long and pretty because you are a daughter of Ochún and she is very upset with you for cutting your hair”. The most intriguing part of this encounter came at the conclusion of his “consultation”. He explained, “Ochún in also my mother in the religion and it was through her that I was able to give you all of this advice. Now I am a babalawo and I never consult in the street. But when I passed you, I felt that I had to tell you these things. You know how babalawos are, they rarely consult outside their home. They always speak with you inside their houses on the estera. And you also know that whenever you speak with a babalawo, you leave a little something for them and the saint that protects and counsels them. To thank them for sharing their knowledge with us. So please take out something to give to my saint for sharing this wisdom with us” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

Uncertain of what to make out of the encounter, I discussed the incident with my godparents when I arrived home that evening. Although they scolded me for talking to this stranger, they were quick to point out the problems in the man’s prophesy. My godfather explained that this was a common occurrence especially among foreign women like myself. “Even though you may look like a Cuban”, he remarked, “you sure as hell don’t walk like one…He could tell that you weren’t Cuban and took advantage of that”. My godmother quickly chimed in, “He was wrong, anyways, because you already got your kofá…You had on your jacket so I guess he didn’t see the bracelet. You shouldn’t even have listened to him because Orula told you that you’re a child of Obatalá and Orula (her emphasis) doesn’t lie. See how little he knew. Just trying to see what he could get out of you. It’s shameless what people will do for money these days” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

The incident with the stranger and the discussion that followed with my godparents are poignant reminders of the controversy surrounding money and Cuban Santería. There is

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33 An estera is a palm mat that babalawos use for consultations. During a consultation, the babalawo sits on the mat while the consultee places their barefeet on the mat.
immense controversy when practitioners amass extreme wealth as a result of their religious activities. Cuban practitioners often use the verb “aprovechar” to describe such actions and for many practitioners, the religion, as a whole, becomes more “mercalizada” or “comercial”. In English, “aprovechar” acquires a strong meaning as it is often translated to mean “to get over on someone” or “to take advantage”. “Mercalizada” and “comercial” are adjectives used most often to refer the folkloric representations of Santería as many view folklore as evidence of the religion’s imminent commercialization. When this occurs, the morality, legitimacy and authenticity of the practitioner in question is subject to debate and scrutiny. T.F.R. explains, “All religions are commercialized, Catholicism, Protestantism but there are different types of commercialization. Commercialization, more clearly put, is about showing off (lucrando). It’s about trying to get more and more. And here within Santería you will find sometimes find people that will tell you that you have to do spiritual things that you don’t have to do because that’s the only way they survive. There are others that do it just to ‘aprovechar’. Those that do this aren’t good santero…Orula says that this isn’t good. Even in Ifá, Orula addresses this issue…See the story of Yemayá, Orula and the businessman. Yemayá and Orula were married. The business man would come to Orula to get his readings and his sacrifices. One day Orula was away on a trip so Yemayá attended to the man and solved all his problems. When Orula came home he was very angry because there was no longer a need for the man to keep coming to Orula. Yemayá couldn’t consult with the shells anymore because she healed the businessman…Listen, it’s like the doctor never tells you the whole truth and never heals you because he knows that if he heals you he won’t have a job. He won’t have any money” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

From the Ifá story narrated in this comment, one observes that the reciprocal money-based relationship is not necessarily called into question. The problem rather arises for practitioners such as T.F.R. when individuals use this relationship to deliberately try and inflate the price of the derecho or when they perform unnecessary rituals solely to enrich their own pockets.

Dan Lan’s research among Shona spiritual mediums in Zimbabwe presents an even clearer perspective of how these issues are similarly debated in religions such as Santería. He writes, “The key point is that money may be used only to the advantage of the spirit and his followers. It may be used by the medium only to the extent that it provides him with a home at the shrine and ritual clothes to wear. If it comes to be believed that a medium is making use of money paid to the spirit to accumulated unusually great wealth…this may lead to a
suspicion that the medium is not genuine, that his claims to possession by the mhondoro [spirit] are cynical and fraudulent” (Lan:1989:195).

Why then are a practitioner’s morality, legitimacy and authenticity linked to the ceremonial exchange of a monetary derecho? To answer this question, let us look to first try to understand the significance behind ritual by looking at Simon Harrison’s piece “Ritual as Intellectual Property”. This work focuses on the use of ritual and symbolism to define communities and political groups. Harrison highlights how rituals serve to display the solidarity of a group or collective.

Harrison’s piece provides important clues about how ritual can be understood in Santería. Indeed, the ability to adequately perform a Santería ritual is hindered by each practitioner’s individual practices and way of performing services. Knowledge of and instruction in Santería relies primarily on oral tradition. Written authoritative texts, like those found in the Christian, Muslim or Jewish religious traditions, are virtually non-existent. In the field, for example, I observed informants discrediting other practitioners because they charged fees for their services (although these same informants also charged about the same price) or because they somehow diverged from their own way of worship and practice. Informants also boasted that their particular way was the only genuine and correct way to carry out religious rituals. Thus, as one informant exclaimed, “You see the way they do things in that house…that’s nothing but a bunch of junk…We do it the right way here” (Field Notes:2003).

An important aspect of Harrsion’s discussion centers around how rituals also serve as “tournaments of value”. Rituals entitles individuals membership into a particular group, as well as, “the right to fight and compete for the important roles in these events [and] is itself often a closely guarded prerogative as well, and may be a special privilege reserved for an elite”
(Harrison:1992:226). By examining ritual and gift-exchange systems used in religious symbolism, Harrison contends that rituals reinforce and legitimize power.

C. Toren’s discussion of ceremonial money exchange in Fiji provides an even clearer explanation of how money, when figured into ritual and ceremony, gets linked to discussions of morality, legitimacy and authenticity. While there is nothing implicitly wrong in the nature of money, among the Fijians it is a symbol of commodity and villagers distinguish the manner in which it is circulated and exchanged. An ideal commodity exchange assumes the independence and equality of transactors while, the ideal gift exchange assumes a relationship between these individuals. Proper social relations are maintained and balanced when money is given as a gift rather than as a commodity (Toren:1989:143). When given and circulated as a gift, money stands in stark contrast to the European way of life in which “kinship is not valued and everything is paid for…amoral and without order – an association of strangers”\(^{34}\). Money given as a gift is, thus, in accord with Fijian tradition which is “highly moral and ordered”\(^{33}\). He states,

> “Money has a neutral moral value in explicit commodity exchanges because such exchanges are considered irrelevant to the creation, fulfillment or maintenance of social bonds. It is good in a gift exchange because, like any other gift, it marks the continuing obligations between kin. Money becomes problematic only when its exchange threatens to confuse the ideal distinction between commodity and gift and thus to call into question existing social relations. In other words, monetary transactions must not be allowed to confuse the social relations of the market with social relations ‘in the manner of the land’” (Toren:1989:144).

By highlighting the moral value of money, Toren’s research provides a clue to understanding money exchange among practitioners of Cuban Santería. As in Fiji, the *derecho* must be handed over in such a way that it assumes the appearance of a reciprocal gift (Toren:1989:145). Toren further explains,

> “In any exchange that is understood to come within the ambit of the ‘traditional’, one cannot simply pay for a service rendered as if service and payment described the sum total of the social situation. This became apparent to me very early on in my fieldwork in that people absolutely refused to state a monetary value for their services…it was clear that they

\(^{34}\) (Toren:1989:142).
expected a payment and had a definite idea of how much that payment should be...My teacher, the elderly man...refused to be paid daily or weekly for the lesson that he gave me, but this did not mean that he refused money. Rather, what was required of me was that I hand over the money at irregular intervals in such a way that it looked like a gift that reciprocated his own gift – that of teaching me...This minor ritual effectively asserted that our relationship was not entirely encompassed by saying that I paid him money to teach me; it was not an impersonal payment calculated against his labour. Instead, he was helping me and I was showing my appreciation. In other words, what we would see as commodity transactions are made to take the form of the ‘gift’” (Toren:1989:145).

Thus, in Cuba, it would be inappropriate to consider the ritual and ceremonial exchanges rendered in Santería as commodity transactions. Indeed, to pay someone for Santería services with money-as-commodity intentions would be taboo because it ignores the social bonds and relationships that are created, fulfilled and maintained through every ritual interaction. This Toben would argue is an attempt to avoid “the market relationship that is resisted by ceremonial exchange which invariable divests money of any moral neutrality and places it firmly within the context of tradition” (Toren: 1989:148). Money is, therefore, not morally neutral when placed in the context of religious and ceremonial exchanges of Santería.

**Conclusion**

The transition to a two-money economy has had immense consequences on Santería practice in Cuba. Money continues to be the preferred medium in mediating relationships between gods and men. However, in the rapidly changing Cuban environment, money has also become a symbol of status, morality and economic capital. The words of my own padrino, Lázaro Hernandez Salgado, are fitting here as they provide an insightful glimpse into this debate. He explains:

“Every brain is a world beyond. This means that every practitioner has their own way of doing things. But I’ll tell you one thing. Money is the most cursed thing on this earth. Tomorrow, I die and leave my kids money. Then the next day my kids are fighting over it. It’s better that you go make saint than get money” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

Money appears to be an ordinary commodity to foreigners, like myself. However, in religious contexts, Cuban practitioners try to distinguish money from its commodity form. Indeed,
transactions involving the derecho acquire either a “gift” or “commodity” status. Money exchanged as “gift” reinforces social bonds and solidarity among practitioners and is not subject to scrutiny or debate. Conversely, money given with “commodity” intentions is highly controversial as it negates the significance of larger social and spiritual relationship that is created through every ritual or ceremonial interaction.

So where do transactions involving U.S. dollars fall on the commodity-gift spectrum? My research indicates that even with U.S. dollars involved, the money used in the derecho is generally regarded more as a gift than a commodity. This does not negate the fact that there are increasing numbers of practitioners that consider money as a strict commodity and, thus, use their expertise and knowledge of Santería solely to take advantage of foreign capital. However, a strong majority of practitioners treat money as a gift by valuing, emphasizing and reinforcing the social bonds formed through ritual interactions between them and their clients.

This dichotomy was most evident throughout my research as practitioners appeared to tense up whenever I inquired why they charged in dollars. In retrospect, this question was extremely controversial as it was an inherent challenge to the practitioner’s attitude toward their relationships and exchanges with foreign ahijados. Many denied that U.S. dollars held more spiritual significance. Instead, they insisted that all foreigners paid in this currency because all dollars are handled this way in present-day Cuba. M., for example, contended,

“We don’t work for dollars, we request it because in this country a person who lives outside has to pay with divisa35. He/She can pay in moneda nacional but if people find out that it’s a foreigner they charge you in divisa” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).

Responses such as M.’s reveal that practitioners are keenly aware that their interactions with money have the potential to turn into commodity transactions. These responses are, in many respects, attempts to stress the equal moral value of money used in transactions between

35 Divisa is the colloquial term used to refer to U.S. dollars.
foreigners and Cubans. Thus, even when U.S. dollars are involved, practitioners are returning
the focus on the gift aspect of *derecho* instead of its commodity potential. Such practitioners
take pains to maintain their connection and dedication to the social and spiritual relationships
that have been at the heart of Cuban Santería since slavery. A comment made by scholar-activist
Lazaro Cuesta during a 2004 press conference on Santería while I was in Cuba seems to best get
at the heart of this issue:

“In all parts of the world, there are *babalawos* of Cuban descent. There are even *babalawos*
of non-Cuban descent practicing all over the world...As the religion spreads we become
more and more connected...We have to stick together because *Ifá* says that the world is
going to fall. And it is the job of the *babalawo* to figure out how to avoid this from
happening, and if it does happen we need to figure out how it can happen in the least
damaging way possible...We don't want money, we only want people to recognize what we
have done to try to save the world” (Field Notes:2004, my translation).
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