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Pre-Paid Phone Cards, "Cosas," and Photos of the Saints: Transnational Santería Practices in a Southwest City

by

Nancy J. Burke
Department of Anthropology
University of New Mexico
Now everything is crazy. Everybody wants to send money to Cuba, to travel to Cuba, to call Cuba. We never did these things. When we came we started working and saving for our life and our kids here. We didn't have contact with our family for almost thirty years. José just got to see his family again last year, for the first time since he left in 1963. We didn't have the option to call and send money like they do now. It was much more difficult.

These are the words of Ernestina, a 72-year-old Cuban woman who immigrated to the U.S. with her children in 1962. Her husband José came the following year. I interviewed the two of them in July 1998 about their migration experience as part of a research project conducted over the course of fourteen months in Albuquerque, New Mexico. To Ernestina and José, the transnational focus of these new arrivals is crazy. They had not thought that way when they came. They thought they were transplanting themselves in a new place and they worked to succeed in that place. They did not work to maintain connections with their family abroad, not because they did not want to do so, but because maintaining such connections was nearly impossible at the time. Their experience clashes with that of a political refugee who arrived in 1994 from Cuba. He states, in response to my question if he sends money or packages to his family left on the island:

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Special thanks to Jorge Duany for comments on previous drafts of this manuscript, to Kim Lopez for essential editorial advice, and to the Latin American and Iberian Institute Ph.D. Fellowship for providing the funding necessary to conduct this research.

Names of participants in this study have been changed to protect anonymity.

Transnationalism is defined here as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement...social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders" (Basch et al. 1994).
Of course, you don’t have to ask the question. You have to send things so that they don’t die.... My wife and I send our daughter money every month. We work to keep her going. Almost all of one of our salaries goes to Cuba every month. It’s like a second rent. We live off of the rest.

These differing perspectives on the relationship between family members in Cuba and the United States point to shifts in post-Cold War global restructuring which have allowed for increased communication and currency transfers between the two countries since the early 1990s. Such shifts have influenced the reasons for migration, character of work and spending practices in the U.S., strategies for return, and structuring of religious practice. In this paper I focus on the last of these shifts, that of the changing structure of Santeria practices in exile through exploration of the experiences of three practitioners living in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Marco, a 43 year-old White balsero, was unable to bring any of his religious cosas (things) on his raft when he left Cuba for the U.S. He relies on weekly communication with his mother in Cuba, a Santeria priestess and espiritista, for guidance in Albuquerque. Ana, a 39 year-old White lottery winner suffers from depression due to separation from her mother, language isolation, and employment insecurity. She calls her mother and godmother (madrina) in Cuba weekly.

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3 Priests and practitioners in this study regularly referred to their religious practices as “Santería” or “lo(s) santo(s).” While practitioners I worked with in Cuba often used the name “Regla de Ocha,” practitioners in Albuquerque rarely did so. In addition, “santo” was the term most commonly used to refer to the “saints” or the “oricha,” the deities of the Afro-Cuban pantheon embodied in the otanes (sacred stones) received in the initiation and represented in images and statues of Catholic saints. I have adopted their naming practices here, except when referring to other parts of the U.S. where “House of Ocha” is more commonly used than “Santería House,” and where “oricha” is more common than “santo.”

4 Race and color are complex issues in Cuba (see Martinez-Alier 1989; Wells 2000) and I do not attempt to address them here. However, I do identify the color of each research participant as represented by themselves and others.

5 Balsero is the term commonly used to describe those who departed from Cuba on rafts in the mid-1990s.

6 “Cosas” is the Spanish word used by all Santeria practitioners in this study to refer to their saints (orichas) embodied in sacred stones (otanes), images and statues of the Catholic manifestations of the saints (orichas), and the accouterments of Santeria practice. “Cosas” may also be translated as “stuff” or “things” (Dean Maitland 1993).

7 Espiritista is the term commonly used to describe a practitioners of Espiritismo (Spiritism). See footnote 44 for an explanation of Espiritismo in Cuba.
for consultations. Reynaldo, a 34 year-old Black lottery winner, supports the initiations of family members in Cuba with regular remittances and gifts of clothing. These remittances also support ritual celebrations performed in his and his wife’s names in Havana to improve their lives in Albuquerque. They call his wife Niurka’s mother and her godmother (madrina) weekly for consultations and advice for their own, and Niurka’s cousin’s, problems. They plan to undergo further initiation when they return to the island for a visit.

Marco, Ana, and Reynaldo are all practitioners of Santería; they have not undergone the seven-day initiation into the priesthood, during which the initiate receives the saint (the principle oricha) in her/his head. Practitioners are members of a Santería House, or ritual community. House membership is signified in the receipt of elekes from the central godparent of the House. Each of these practitioners, like many others in Albuquerque, orients her/himself toward the island for both “small” rituals such as consultations and “works,” and “major” rituals such as initiations, and changes her/his religious practices in the process. Rather than recreating a Santería religious community in the new place, these practitioners extend their ritual community across national boundaries in the transnational space of the diaspora. The uniqueness of their transnational strategies will become apparent through comparison with Santería practitioners in other U.S. cities.

8 The immigration lottery (el bombo), discussed further below, was instituted in 1995 to regulate Cuban migration to the U.S. by granting 20,000 visas per year.
9 Elekes are also referred to as collares (necklaces). They are different colored beaded necklaces (the colors corresponding to the saint the collar represents) which practitioners receive from their godparents as one of the first stages of initiation.
Methodology

The research that informs this paper was conducted in both Albuquerque, New Mexico, and Havana, Cuba, over the course of five years (1994-1999). Continuous ethnographic fieldwork was conducted from June 1998 to August 1999. Methods include participant observation and semi- and un-structured interviews. I engaged in participant observation as a resident of Morales and Montaño neighborhoods\(^{10}\) ("the Heights") where many newcomers were resettled; as a ritual participant in both Havana and Albuquerque; and as a member of several community-based organizations working with the Cuban population in Albuquerque.

I moved into Morales neighborhood in the summer of 1998 and spent my days and nights visiting Cubans (religious and non-religious) in their homes and workplaces, sharing food, stories, and resources; celebrating baptisms, birthdays, and saint’s days; and watching Mexican soap operas. I discovered many small altars, alight with candles, images of the saints and the stones of *Eleggua*\(^{11}\) in these homes, hidden out of sight, often in the homes of Cubans asserting “respect” for the religion, not belief.

While living in Morales, I volunteered for the Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP), worked as a computer instructor for the Hispanic Association,\(^{12}\) served on its Board of Directors, and worked with other community-based organizations serving the

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\(^{10}\) Names of neighborhoods have been changed to protect the identities and interests of research participants. Morales neighborhood is coupled with Montaño neighborhood, and collectively referred to as “the Heights.”

\(^{11}\) *Eleggua* is the child oricha (saint) associated with the Niño de Atocha in Catholic iconography. A trickster figure, he is the opener and closer of the “ways” (*caminos*) and must be invoked before other saints at the opening of ritual celebrations.

\(^{12}\) The Hispanic Association is a mutual aid association created by Cuban migrants with the backing of the Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP) and federal funds for refugee resettlement. The RRP is the association’s fiscal agent. The Hispanic Association provides ESL classes, computer classes, small business training and job skills development for newly arrived Cubans. With offices in the Heights and directed by a Cuban immigrant (also an RRP case manager), the Hispanic Association basically functions as an accessible arm of the RRP (whose offices are about forty minutes drive from the Heights).
Cuban population. Participation in these organizations provided me with different perspectives on the lives of Cuban migrants in Albuquerque, as well as access to different groups within the Cuban population. I conducted two series of semi- and un-structured interviews across these groups, inconsistently along immigration categories between June 1998 and August 1999. Between January and June 2000 I conducted follow-up interviews with priests and practitioners of Santería, clarifying questions raised after review of my fieldnotes and interview transcripts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Immigration Categories</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
<th>Average Years in Albuquerque in 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politicos</td>
<td>8 men</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 women</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balseros</td>
<td>9 men</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 woman</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration Lottery</td>
<td>2 men</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13 women</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: General Household Interviews

N = 40

'Two interviews with political refugees and immigration lottery winners were conducted with couples. While their interviews are counted as “1” of the 40 conducted, each individual is counted for age and gender comparisons.

The first series of interviews (N=40), “general household” interviews, provided narratives of departure, arrival, work, living, social, and religious experiences in Albuquerque and Cuba (See Table 1). These interviews served to clarify migration trajectories, identify religious practitioners, and to illustrate the importance of socio-political structures in individual resettlement experiences. Discussion of these socio-political factors prompted interviews with social service providers: Refugee Resettlement Program case managers and directors (N=7) and Department of Health and Human Services workers (N=4). Lastly, I conducted interviews with religious practitioners:
Santería practitioners (N=9), Santería priests (N=4), and Jehovah’s Witnesses (N=7) (See Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Religious Practice</th>
<th>Immigration Category</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Average Age</th>
<th>Average Years in Alb. in 1999</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Santería Priests</td>
<td>Balseros</td>
<td>1 man</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Politicos</td>
<td>1 man</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 woman</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>9 yrs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigration Lottery</td>
<td>1 man</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>8 mos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santería Practitioners</td>
<td>Balseros</td>
<td>2 men</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2.3 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 women</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1.8 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Immigration Lottery</td>
<td>2 men</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.5 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 women</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>1 yr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jehovah’s Witness</td>
<td>Politicos</td>
<td>3 men</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>5.3 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 women</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>4.8 yrs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1One Jehovah’s Witness interview was conducted with a couple. Counted as “1” of the 20 conducted, the couple has been split for age and gender comparisons.

I identified interview participants via snowball and convenience sampling: at the close of an interview I would ask the participant if s/he knew of another Cuban who would be interested in participating. I identified other participants in RRP orientation and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, Hispanic Association computer classes, through contacts made during previous field research in Albuquerque,13 and in chance meetings at parties and local restaurants and cafés. I conducted all interviews in Spanish, transcribed in Spanish, and later translated transcripts into English. Cuban collaborators in Albuquerque reviewed translated transcripts for accuracy.

13 In 1996 I researched and produced, in collaboration with Ileana Matamoros of the Department of Anthropology, University of New Mexico, a video documentary on migration experiences of new Cuban arrivals in Albuquerque ("Aquí estamos y no nos vamos: the Cuban Refugee Community in Albuquerque, New Mexico"). The focus of this project was to analyze the relationship between newcomer Cuban migrants and their resettlement agency, the Refugee Resettlement Program. We worked with several family groups on this project, several of whom continued to work with me on the research informing this paper in 1998 and 1999.
Interviews with the practitioners featured in this paper served primarily as a form of entrée into a deeper relationship in which I learned from them through participation in ritual events and family celebrations, sharing resources (language skills, institutional knowledge, cars, and money), and listening to stories over Cuban coffee. While these interviews are useful, most of my understanding about Cubans in Albuquerque was gained through participant observation.

The Setting

Albuquerque, New Mexico is very different from other cities of Cuban refugee resettlement, such as New York City, Miami, Los Angeles, and Union City, New Jersey. Unlike these cities, prior to the 1990s Albuquerque was not home to a substantial Cuban population. The small number of Cuban families who resettled in Albuquerque in the early 1960s (312 Cubans)\(^{14}\) eventually became business and property owners, well incorporated into Hispano politics in the city. Approximately 4,000 new arrivals joined this small group in the 1990s. Both the records of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) in Washington, DC and the Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP) in Albuquerque show that approximately 2,600 Cuban migrants and entrants have been resettled in Albuquerque since 1990. The higher number I offer here is based on estimates received from two different directors of the Refugee Resettlement Program in Albuquerque (who suggested as many as 6,000 Cubans may be living in the city) and my own experience of fourteen months of ethnographic fieldwork. There is a great deal of movement among Cubans living in Albuquerque: people move to Miami, Tampa, and New York; family members and friends resettled in other cities and states move to Albuquerque; and some

of those who leave return. The ORR and the RRP do not record these movements. The records each office maintains count Cubans “resettled” in Albuquerque and New Mexico by the Federal Government. There is no record of those who “move” to Albuquerque without the assistance of these resettlement agencies.

While some of the Cubans living in Albuquerque prior to 1990 own businesses in the city, there is nothing like an “ethnic enclave”\(^{15}\) or concentrated neighborhood waiting to greet new arrivals. New arrivals have had little contact with established families,\(^{16}\) and have, in a large sense, failed to create a sense of “community.” Three main fault lines among new Cuban migrants in Albuquerque undermine establishment of “community” in the sense of a group of people working together for a common end. These include qualitative characteristics associated with the three primary migration categories under which new arrivals enter the U.S.: political refugees (políticos), rafters (balseros), and immigration lottery winners.

Most political refugee newcomers in Albuquerque were professionals on the island and have focused their energy since arrival on either re-gaining professional status in the U.S. or preparing to return to the island as soon as Fidel Castro is no longer in power. These political refugees (políticos) tend to identify themselves as “true” refugees,

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\(^{15}\) Sociologists define ethnic enclaves as concentrations of immigrant businesses that serve the ethnic market as well as the population at large (Margolis 1994). They are described as “sheltered spheres” (Mahler 1995) of economic activity, which “cushion the impact of cultural change and protect immigrants against outside prejudice and initial economic difficulties” (Portes and Rumbaut 1996). This “protective” role fosters the experience of a kind of “bounded” ethnic solidarity among immigrants (Portes and Zhou 1992). According to this theory, immigrants, having been treated “coolly” or prejudicially by the dominant society, retreat into the familiar. They search out home-country goods and associate and socialize with co-ethnics. “This creates a natural ethnic market and fosters an ethnic identity and community” (Mahler 1995: 11). Emerging ethnic markets provide employment for the surrounding neighborhoods and immigrant firms tend to hire and promote their own (Portes and Rumbaut 1996).

\(^{16}\) Many Cubans living in Albuquerque since the 1960s view the new arrivals as “different,” as having a different work ethic and “get rich quick” mentality. One interviewee who migrated to Albuquerque with his parents in 1961 stated that they (meaning “old” Cubans) do not want to have anything to do with new arrivals because they spent too much time under the socialist system.
having fled political persecution, in comparison with “balseros” whom they identify as uneducated economic immigrants. “Balseros” are rafters whose lives on the island were bad enough, in economic, spiritual, or political terms, to warrant the risk of throwing oneself into the sea in rafts of varying seaworthiness in search of something better.

Cubans who enter under different migration categories (i.e. political refugees and lottery winners) social service agency workers, police, and the local media all tend to stereotype “balseros” as lower class, likely to be involved in the drug trade, and comparable to the Marielitos\(^\text{17}\) of the 1980s. Many “balseros” were single young men,\(^\text{18}\) and a small number of them\(^\text{19}\) had legal problems due to involvement in the local crack cocaine trade. In response to this, and public pressure, the mayor of Albuquerque halted single male resettlement in the city in 1996.\(^\text{20}\) After this point, only families, or those with family already living in Albuquerque, have resettled in the city. Immigration lottery (bombo) winners, the third category of Cuban migrants in Albuquerque, include those who left the island legally after applying for a visa from the U.S. Interests Office in Cuba.\(^\text{21}\) The goal of the immigration lottery, instituted in 1995, is to regulate Cuban – U.S. immigration to

\(^{17}\) The term “Marielito” refers to the approximately 125,000 refugees who arrived in South Florida in the 1980 Mariel boatlift. The term has a negative connotation as those arriving in 1980 were working class, some had criminal backgrounds, and many were of African descent. While these characteristics were reported by the media as major departures from the earlier waves of Cuban migration to South Florida, the education and class backgrounds of the majority of “Marielitos” were more similar than different from those arriving in the second wave (1965-1974) (Garcia 1996; See also Hamm 1995, Pedraza-Bailey 1985; Pedraza 1995 for further discussion).

\(^{18}\) Exact numbers on single arrivals versus those with families is not available as the RRP did not tally this information. Based on interviews with RRP case managers and the director, public perception of large numbers of single men seems to be accurate.

\(^{19}\) The Refugee Resettlement Program Director estimates 7%.

\(^{20}\) By doing so, Mayor Chavez effectively put an end to the resettlement of balseros (rafters) in the city.

\(^{21}\) I also met several women who came to Albuquerque (and left Cuba) as spouses of American citizens, but the three categories of político, balsero, and lottery winner served as often repeated “class markers,” i.e. means of delineating differences within the Cuban population in Albuquerque.
20,000 people per year. Lottery winners are a mix in terms of age, race, and professional background. Both political refugees and lottery winners are able to leave the island via airplane in the company of family, if they so choose. Santería practitioners, the focus of this paper, are found in each group.

Despite their different entry statuses and class backgrounds, the individuals addressed in this paper are “transmigrants.” Anthropologists Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Blanc Szanton define transnationalism as the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated “transmigrants.” Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations – familial, economic, social organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously (1992: 1-2).

Transmigrants, according to this definition, are involved in the maintenance and construction of transnational social fields through the movement of goods, information and currency across the borders of nation states. Most studies of Mexican and Caribbean transmigrants emphasize bodily movement across space as characteristic of transnational practices (Mahler 1999; Rouse 1991; Nagengast and Kearney 1990; Pessar 1997). I argue, however, that scholars must recognize the limitations of this definition and question the general applicability of Roger Rouse’s “transnational migrant circuit” metaphor in situations where the cost of regular mobility is prohibitive, whether in financial or political terms (Rouse 1991; Mahler 1999). Anthropologists have suggested that transmigratory processes do not simply produce two distinct local or national

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22 In the first immigration lottery of 1994, there were 189,000 applications for what turned out to be almost 41,000 immigrant visas for 1995 (25,838) and 1996 (15,006). The second lottery in March 1996 generated 435,000 applications and the third lottery in the summer of 1998 produced over a half-million applicants out of a population of 11 million. The lottery is held biannually (Henken 2000: 4-5).
cultures, rather, they create a distinct transmigratory cultural system that sustains multiple and often conflicting social and cultural identities (Hurtig 2000; Mahler 1999; Rouse 1992; Nagengast and Kearney 1990). According to M.P. Smith, mobile transmigrants organize their lives “under conditions in which their life-worlds are neither ‘here’ nor ‘there’ but at once both ‘here’ and ‘there’,” what Rouse terms bifocality (M.P. Smith 1994: 17; Rouse 1991). Sarah Mahler questions the prioritization of travel and movement in discussions of transmigration, asking if face-to-face contacts made possible by bodily movement are necessarily more important to the development of transnational social fields and bifocality than the contact established by “the faceless tie of remittances – the movement of embodied not bodied ties” (1999: 77). It is through such embodied ties, including exchanges of letters, videos, audiocassettes, e-mails, and telephone calls, that transnational community is maintained and social remittances are transmitted.

Cuban migrants, due to the political relationship between Cuba and the U.S., are prohibited from returning to the island for more than a short visit. They do maintain consistent contact with family and friends, however, and contribute to the maintenance of transnational connections by keeping the flow of communication, goods and remittances between the two countries constant. New Cuban migrants I interviewed and spoke with informally in Albuquerque send money home to their families on a regular basis and packages of medicine and gifts whenever possible. Canadian companies (Antillas

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23 Social remittances are the ideas, behaviors, identities and social capital that flow from host- to sending-country communities (Levitt 2001).
24 Such restrictions on travel were lessened under the Clinton administration, making movement between the island and the U.S. easier than before. Visits are limited to 21 days, however, and all Cubans interviewed in this study who applied for permission to travel to the country claimed “medical emergency” as the reason for the visit.
Express and Cuba Packette) provide mail and wire transfer service between the two countries.25

Remittance amounts to Cuba have increased exponentially in the 1990s. In 1989, Cuban-Americans sent an estimated $48 million in remittances to the island and approximately $225 million in 1993 (prior to this year possession of dollars was illegal and thus circulated on the black market) (Duany n.d.). A United Nations Economic Commission estimated that in 1996 Cubans abroad sent $1.1 billion to Cuba, up from $532 million in 1995 (Migration News 1998). Thus, in 1996, remittances generated about as much foreign exchange as tourism ($1.4 billion) and sugar exports ($1 billion) (Migration News 1998). The Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy estimates that almost half of all Cubans living on the island currently receive some money from relatives living abroad, making remittances arguably the most visible expression of continuing transnational ties between Cuban families on and off the island (Duany n.d.: 18; Migration News 1998).

Recent increases in remittance amounts have been facilitated by policy changes the Clinton administration implemented following Pope John Paul’s visit to Cuba in 1998. Beginning in March 1998, Cuban-Americans were allowed to send up to $1,200 a year to family members in Cuba. In January 1999, the Clinton Administration opened this practice to any American to send money to anyone in Cuba, thus allowing for currency transfers of up to $1,200 to fictive kin and friends as well as blood relatives (Migration News 1998a).

While there are many mail and wire transfer services in Miami, Cubans in Albuquerque rely primarily upon these two Canadian companies for these services. These agencies charge Cuban migrants 13% for currency and $9 - $11 per pound to send packages from Canada to their families in Cuba. In July 1999 Western Union, in conjunction with the Cuban company Cimex, launched a service that will transfer up to $300 to Cuba for a fee of $29.00 (Migration News 1999a). I helped pack and mail several boxes sent to the island via Canada for Christmas in 1998. The total cost to the sending family was over $2000.00 ($774 for shipping plus the value of the contents of the boxes).
Religious practitioners send remittances and packages to religious (fictive) kin as well as consanguineous and affinal kin. Dependence on transnational wire transfer services in the maintenance of familial and religious connections, therefore, extends over a wide range of relationships.

Telephone communication, upon which divided families and religious kin rely, was seriously reduced in February 1999 after having improved steadily since the mid-1990s. This communication became a factor in legal efforts to seize Cuban assets in the United States by the relatives of four Cuban-American pilots killed when a Cuban MiG fighter north of Havana shot down their planes on February 24, 1996. The five U.S. phone companies involved in the dispute (ATT, MCI, LDDS, IDB and Wiltel) withheld payments due Cuba for December 1999 calls while awaiting the resolution of the case. A call volume of over two million hours a year is handled by U.S. phone companies and Cuba’s ETECSA, a telecommunications joint venture between the Cuban government and Telecom Italia (Fletcher 1999; BBC 1999). Both the Cuban government and the Clinton Administration stated that they did not wish to cut communication, the former because phone links are so important for separated families and friends and the latter because of the importance of phone service to the U.S. policy of fostering “people-to-people” links between the two nations (Fletcher 1999). Telecommunication was reduced in the course of this dispute but it was not completely stopped.26

Rumors circulated throughout the Cuban community in Albuquerque and migrants rushed to buy phone cards and call families in the last days before the threatened cut-off of February 25. Local Spanish news stations updated migrants on how

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26 Sprint and IDDS, who continued their payments, were not cut off. Other calls were rerouted through third countries to avoid a complete communication break.
many days they had left to hear their loved-ones’ voices. The fear and desolation expressed by migrants as they considered the prospect of not being able to communicate with their families and religious kin on the island during this crisis was palpable. That such communication, possible to the majority only since 1994, had taken on such importance on both individual and state levels points to the recognized power of transnational connections. In particular, telephone communication with religious kin on the island is central to the practice of Afro-Cuban religions in Albuquerque (and elsewhere). Reliance on telephone conversations for instructions and consultations with religious godparents contributes to the changing forms of Santería in resettlement.

As with transmigrants from other donor nations, Cuban migrants in Albuquerque maintain connections with their families and religious kin on the island via remittances, packages, and communications flows. While their bodily movement between the two countries is limited, participation in global flows places them well within Glick Schiller and colleagues’ definition of transmigrant. They differ substantially, however, in the forms their religious practices are taking in Albuquerque. In this sense, as transmigrants, they are transforming and adapting Santería practices to the constraints and opportunities they find in Albuquerque. The three practitioners featured here illustrate some of the particularities of these practices and how they are changing over time.

Santería

Santería (Regla de Ocha) describes a complex of heterogeneous religious practices. The modern (twentieth century) Santería complex is structured around a House-temple (ilé-ocha) and is characterized by decentralized authority and hierarchy.

27 Direct U.S.-Cuba phone services were restarted in 1994.
House here does not refer to an architectural structure, but rather a community of practitioners; “a group of people who see themselves bound by kinship ties at different stages of initiation and with different intensities of involvement” (Curry 1991: 137). A priest (santero/a) initiates believers into a particular oricha (saint) and ritual practice includes animal sacrifice, divination, drumming, dance, and possession. Details of practice differ from House to House.

The ‘House’ is the basic unit of social organization in Santería. George Brandon, whose research has focused on the Santería community in New York City, states that

The Santería house is not a physical location and it is not defined in territorial terms. A casa is essentially the group of devotees who have received any initiation from a specific priest to whose house they therefore belong. The house is, first of all, the groups of people over whom a priest(ess) has ritual influence because (s)he has initiated them at some level. The minimum requirement for membership in the house is receipt of elekes.28 While a person may have received other things from the priest(ess) such as ked stones or divination readings or may have been involved in other rites such as despojos29 or any of the path opening rites, the person does not become a member of the house until (s)he possesses elekes from its priest(ess) (1983: 480).

In such a House structure, members’ relationship with their godparent is paramount. All other relationships are filtered through and secondary to this, which becomes as strong as that of a child and parent. The symbolic aspects of parent-child relations are expressed in naming. “The godchild refers to the godparent not only as madrina or padrino but also as iya (Luc. ‘mother’) or baba (Luc. ‘father’)”30 (Brandon 1983: 482). This relationship is ritually elaborated within the House.

The most recently initiated godchild of a House is often referred to as the “baby” and is introduced as the central godparent’s “child” (Brandon 1983: 482). This fictive

28 See footnote 9.
29 Cleansing rituals.
30 Luc. Here refers to Lucumi, the ritual language utilized in Santería practice.
parent-child relationship is further expressed in the widely accepted rule that there should be no sexual or romantic relationship between godparent and godchild. Such a relationship would negatively affect the mutual trust and respect that support the hierarchy of the House. Priests and priestesses do not initiate their own biological children; they refer them to other santeros(as) (priests/priestesses).

House members, all ‘children’ of the central godparent, are ritually related to one another and refer to each other using kinship terms (brother in the religion, sister in the religion, uncle, aunt, etc.). A House member learns how to be a priest(ess) from his/her godparent, thus the religion is reproduced through their relationship. As each House practices in its own way, godparents expect their godchildren to restrict their practice to diviners and ritual experts associated with their House. Switching Houses, for whatever reason, is a serious offense. According to Brandon,

To give up the godparent is a most drastic step. In fact it is far easier to leave the religion entirely than to remain in it apart from the godparent or to obtain another godparent who is unrelated to the first. To be ‘in the religion’ and not be attached to some house is an incomprehensible anomaly to santera(o)s and one cannot be attached to a house and have no godparent (1983: 485).

Prior to 1959, practitioners of Santería living in the U.S., both Cuban and non-Cuban, returned to Cuba to be initiated into the religion, because that was where the ritual specialists and materials necessary for the ceremony could be found (Gregory 1999; Brown 1989). Following the Revolution of 1959, the migration of political and economic refugees, including santeros and babalowas, to major resettlement sites of New York,

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31 Babalowas (high priests who hold the most important position in the hierarchy of Regla de Ocha, a position restricted to males) are the sons of Orula (identified with Saint Francis of Assisi in the Catholic Church). The voice of Oludumare (the supreme creator god in the Afro-Cuban pantheon) is believed to speak through Orula via the babalowa’s use of the Ifá divination system (Cros Sandoval 1975).
Los Angeles, Miami, and Union City, New Jersey, made travel to the island unnecessary. Initiations have been taking place in New York since 1961 and in Miami since 1967.\(^{32}\)

In each of these large resettlement sites, Santería has taken root and attracted multi-ethnic adherents. *Santeros(as)* and *babalowas* initiated new godchildren and others migrated from the island, expanding religious kinship networks. As members of religious Houses in Cuba, migrating *santeros(as)* and *babalowas* expanded the reach of these core Houses to the U.S.\(^{33}\) Godchildren of *santeros* in the U.S. are considered to be members of the godparent’s (*padrino* or *madrina*) House in Cuba, even though they may have been initiated in the United States. They all descend from the same spiritual ancestor, and this ancestor is linked to the land and the soil of Cuba (Gregory 1986).

Santería House structure is well documented in the U.S. and Cuba (Murphy 1996; Brandon 1983, 1993; Gonzalez-Whippler 1992; Curry 1991, 1997; Evanchuck 1993; Brown 1989; Atwood Mason 1997; Gregory 1986, 1999). Scholars have explored the social value of House membership in major cities of Cuban immigrant concentration, noting that House-based ritual interactions provide members with a sense of community and friendship, a sense of being an ‘insider’ (Granda 1995; Evanchuck 1993). Julio Granda’s study, a materialist analysis of the costs incurred in the initiation ceremony in Miami, and Roberta Evanchuck’s performative study of altar creation and ritual engagement in Los Angeles, both emphasize the benefits of House membership (Granda 1995; Evanchuck 1993). Mary Curry, working in New York, differentiates between

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\(^{32}\) Puerto Rico became an important site of ritual practice following the cessation of easy travel between the U.S. and Cuba after the Revolution of 1959 (Brown 1989: 115).

\(^{33}\) Scholars agree that all Houses in the U.S. are linked to a small number of Cuban Houses. Brandon (1993) identifies one House – Casa Fundre in Marianao, Cuba, while Curry identifies the House of Ofún Che in Regla as the House from which most Black American priests descend (1991: 151).
Santería or Yoruba religion as practiced by Latin Americans and African Americans. In her analysis of an all-black House, she argues that religious practice and House membership provide members with an alternative source of prestige, particularly important for those historically marginalized from “main stream” status and prestige networks due to institutionalized racism (1991, 1997).

Mercedes Cros Sandoval, working with Cuban immigrants from the first two waves of Cuban immigration to the U.S., suggests that Santería practices became more popular in Miami among Cubans than they were on the island (1975). In the relative anonymity of the urban center and a foreign culture, many turned to the religion for a sense of community and kinship, and as means to assuage guilt for leaving behind family and friends. For younger Cubans looking for a religious experience or source of deeper meaning, Santería was attractive for its “Cubanness,” as it provided a “strong cultural anchor” for Cuban identity. Steven Gregory reiterates Cros Sandoval’s findings fifteen years later in New York, and argues that the social resources of the Santería House are particularly important for new arrivals whose face-to-face interaction with immediate and extended kin have been lessened (1999: 98; see also Sosa 1981).

In addition to providing community and psychological support, researchers address the role of religion in integration and incorporation into the host society. Juan Sosa argues that Cuban migrants living in Miami use the religion as a way of integrating into American society on their own terms, possibly because Santería offers a different

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34 Santería practices have undergone transformation in the context of several New York Houses. Renamed as “Yoruba” religion, rituals performed in these houses are more or less the same as those performed in Santería houses, but African elements and antecedents of practice are emphasized while Catholic elements are ignored (Curry 1991, 1998; Gregory 1986, 1999).
35 Cros Sandoval worked with the “Golden Exiles” of 1959 and early 1960s migration and those arriving via the “airbridge” between Varadero and Miami, in place from 1965 to 1974 (See also Pedraza-Bailey 1985)
way of “looking at and acting” in urban, industrial Miami (1981). As a means for the maintenance of cultural identity in the face of “forces of assimilation,” Santeria recreates a sense of the wilderness and “beyond-ness” in urban South Florida, a site of unity in the context of diversity (1981: 105). Gregory argues for a stronger interpretation of the role of Santería as “an emergent cultural practice” which “constitutes meanings and activity that oppose the hegemonic beliefs, values and institutions of American society” (1986: 36). As such, he theorizes religious practices as forms of resistance rather than means of selective incorporation. He supports this interpretation by drawing upon historical precedents of resistance in the religion in the colonial system of cofradías and cabildos\(^{36}\) in Cuba.

One of the forms taken by the resistance Gregory describes is economic. In New York, Gregory argues, the house of Ocha constitutes a distinct ritual economic sphere within the dominant economy and functions in ways analogous to “ethnic enclaves” (Gregory 1986; see also Granda 1995). Members of socio-religious networks assist in finding jobs and housing and to resolve legal, financial and personal problems. In addition, the House is a community with a rich set of resources, both economic and social. Priests contract with specialists in throne creation in preparation for cumpleaños del santo (saint’s birthdays)\(^{37}\) celebrations and for initiations. They call other priests in for support in the preparation of ritual foods and animals and contract with drummers for

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\(^{36}\) In the colonial context of Cuba, African religious practices were reestablished in the context of “approved” Catholic social formations, “cabildos” and “cofradias,” which organized Cuban society (Ortiz 1906; Brown 1989; Brandon 1993). Cabildos were organized according to ethnicity and “nation,” not religion, while religious practices were often a part of cabildo gatherings.

\(^{37}\) Dias del santo are the “saints’ birthdays,” celebrated on the anniversary of a priest’s initiation into Santería.
performance at *bembés* and *toques*. Each of these forms of "work," also conceived as religious practice in the service of the saints, is paid, constituting a market for, and supply of, ritual specialists. The flow of currency through these ritual relationships forms an informal economy – a place for new arrivals to begin to "make it" when marginalized in low-wage labor jobs.

Existence of Santería Houses is necessary for the kinds of support and alternatives addressed in studies of Santería development in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, and Union City, New Jersey. House members often "gather together" in the performance of rituals and celebration of the saints. Like congregations among other immigrant groups, such gatherings serve as sites for religious and non-religious networking. The integration of exiled priests into new Houses and the ability of arriving priests to construct their own Houses in areas where they feel secure and respected are also significant factors in the development of Santería (Brown 1989). The resettlement context, therefore, must be addressed in studies of the "reconstitution" of Santería in the U.S., including Miami, New York, Albuquerque and other small centers of the Cuban diaspora.

This House structure has not been reproduced in my research site. A multitude of factors contribute to the absence of the Santería House structure in Albuquerque, including the relative newness of the community, the viability of transnational practices and the context of resettlement in Albuquerque. Rather than redirecting religious kinship ties locally, practitioners in Albuquerque maintain contact with their religious kin on the

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38 *Toque* is short for *toque de santo* also referred to as a *bembé*. These are religious celebrations which consist of drumming on the sacred bata drums, song, dance, and possession. They usually mark an important event in the religious life of a practitioner or priest(ess) or celebrate a particular *oricha* (Cros Sandoval 1975).
island. The ability to pick up the telephone and consult with one’s godparent in Cuba lessens the urgency of establishing religious connections locally. Also, the severity with which “House-switching” is viewed, as well as the close relationship godparents establish with their godchildren, makes it a less-than-ideal option. Research participants have shared that they feel that their godparent is like a second parent, that s/he is their godparent for life regardless of where they live, and that the emotional connection and respect felt for the godparent is as important, in some cases, as the religious practice itself. Therefore, finding a local substitute is an unattractive option.

In the following, I explore strategies practitioners employ as they maintain their religious practice in resettlement, and the consequences such strategies have for their relationship to their beliefs and to their religious kin on the island.

Practitioners

I first became aware of the transnational nature of Santeria practice in my research site when I interviewed Marta, Marco’s wife. In the course of our interview I asked her about her religious beliefs and she told me about her husband. “He’s a big believer in Santería,” she said, ‘and his mother is a santera in Cuba. Do you want to see?” “Of course” I told her and she led me to the bedroom. “This is his altar,” she said, pointing to an arrangement of photos next to his bed: one of his mother wearing a turban and beaded necklaces (collares) and another of his altar in Cuba. 39 I was accustomed to elaborate altars taking up at least a corner if not dominating a room in Cuba. Here in the U.S., most altars I had seen were created in hall closets. Marco’s arrangement indicated

39 The photographs of Marco’s altar were of his canistilero (hutch-like cabinet) whose shelves housed images of (statues and chromolithographs), and offerings to, the saints. Once he undergoes initiation, this
that he was relying on a photographic representation of the saints (orichas) in Cuba to bring him solace and security in Albuquerque.

When I interviewed Marco I learned that he is a practitioner of Santería, not yet a priest (santero). His padrino on the island has informed him that he must undergo the Ifá initiation to become a babalowa (high priest) sometime in the future, and he has undergone several preliminary rituals necessary prior to full Ifá initiation. A friend, recently returned from Cuba, brought him the beaded necklace and bracelet he needs to wear to be protected by Orula. He was unable to bring his with him when he migrated due to the particular circumstances of his migration experience.

The last time Marco consulted with his padrino in person was several months before he left Cuba. His padrino threw the caracoles (shells) to learn that Marco would soon leave the island. Marco protested, asking how that could be since he had no plans to leave and no way in which to do it. His padrino told him that he did not know how he would do it, only that the shells indicated he would soon leave the country. Several months later Marco’s neighbor told him that he and his family were constructing a balsa (raft) and asked him if he would like to leave with them. As Marco tells it:

> It turns out that I practice this religion, right? And the guy that brought me on his raft is from a family of Jehovah’s Witnesses. These people don’t really like my religion, you know? Or I should say that they don’t like it one bit. They think it’s evil, you know? So this guy invited me to leave with them because we grew up together. He told me “I’m only going to ask you one thing” and I said “tell me.” He said “the only thing I want is that you not bring anything of yours in the balsa. If you have faith, go, go with your heart.” I did as he asked because, well, because I didn’t want to pit two religions against one another. So I went and I didn’t bring anything, you understand? I didn’t bring anything because I didn’t

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*canistiller* will house the soperas (ceramic soup tureens in the color of each saint) in which reside the otañes (sacred stones) of the saints.

*Orula* is the saint (oricha) that speaks through the Ifá divination system, which can be performed exclusively by male babalowas. *Orula* is the son of Obatalá (the Virgin of Mercy in Catholic iconography).

The divination ritual described here is the *diloggun*, divination with sixteen cowrie shells.
want, in case something happened. There had been so many deaths, so many people drowned. I didn’t want, you know, in case something happened. I knew I was protected by my saints, we were all protected, but he was concerned with his religion. We came protected, you know?

I wish I could bring my saints here, you understand? Because here is where they should be, here with me, so that I can attend to them. My mother has them and I know that she attends to them, but it’s not the same. This is mine, you know?

The fact that he does not have any of his cosas (things) in Albuquerque and that he is unable to attend to them directly accounts for the slow distancing Marco says has been happening since he came to the U.S. He feels he is slowly losing touch with his religion, his culture.

Marco left Cuba with his friend’s family in early August 1994 and arrived in Albuquerque in late August 1995, after spending just over a year in Guantánamo Bay refugee camp. Since he has been in Albuquerque he has maintained regular communication with his mother on the island and routinely sends her money and packages. His mother is the one who attends to his cosas (things) in Cuba. She lights the candles in front of his altar, makes offerings of fruit and cake, and asks the saints to watch over him. She does it all in his name, he says, so it is as if he were the one there standing in front of the altar placing the fruit in front of la Caridad de Cobre.42 As he tells it:

I’m here but my mother does readings for me in Cuba, she reads the cards. And, for example, she goes to my padrino’s House and my padrino goes to his Orula43 and he consults and throws the shells and she sometimes tells me “this week is bad for you, be careful.” Or “you’re going to have a wonderful week.” Understand?

I always call her on Saturdays. And she’ll say “listen, I’m worried because it came out in the cards that this, that and the other.” It’s like a warning, you know?

42 La Caridad del Cobre, Our Lady of Charity of Copper, is the patron saint of Cuba and is associated with the oricha Ochún, the goddess of love, fresh water, and gold.
43 See footnotes 40 and 41.
Yeah, like a warning. She’s always reading my cards like that. And my godfather as well. Every time that he’s going, for example, to consult Ifá for one of his other godchildren, he goes to his Orula and every time he goes to his Orula my mother goes there and then they consult for me together. And Orula speaks and he speaks about me to them, you know? Even though I’m far away.

Such reliance on advice and consultations in Cuba is a constant theme in the interviews I have conducted. Another practitioner, ready to pack up his family to move to Miami with friends, changed his mind at the last minute after speaking with his padrino on the island. His padrino had advised him to wait because there were still unexplored opportunities for him in Albuquerque. Six months later, when things had not improved and his wife was pushing to move, he consulted with his padrino again over the telephone to learn they could move if they wished – that they would find success in either place: ‘here’ or ‘there.’ They left several weeks later.

Marco plans to return to Cuba as soon as possible. His first trip will not be for his religion, however. He knows that he must receive Ifá, but his first trip will be focused on his family. His sister is extremely ill and in need of a kidney transplant. He sends medicine to her when he can, but wants to visit to see her before she dies. The second trip will be focused on his religious development. The initiation takes time and a great deal of money, he argues, and on his first trip he wants to spend all of his time with his family and his money on their needs. At the time of this writing he is awaiting his passport and planning to ask for special permission to visit the island. He has yet to receive his residency papers.

The divination process that Marco’s mother and padrino perform for him on a weekly basis is central to Santeria practice. It affords communication between believer and saint and supports the social structure of the religion (i.e., priests are essential
mediators between the spiritual world and the everyday experiences of practitioners).

There are several different forms of divination practiced in Cuba and the U.S., each linked to the hierarchical position of the priest conducting the consultation. Since many practitioners of Santería also practice Kardecian Spiritism (Espiritismo), card readings are common alongside the diloggún and Ifá. Marco, Ana and Reynaldo all utilize card readings and diloggún in their consultation practices. In Albuquerque, the performance of the rituals prescribed in divinations, later communicated over telephone lines, informs a shift in relationship of believers to their practice, as Ana’s case illustrates.

Ana left Cuba with her husband and two children in 1997 as an immigration lottery winner. When I asked Ana about her religious practices, she was reluctant to discuss them. She told me that she was concerned because Americans generally do not know about her religion, much less understand necessary rituals, especially those that involve animal sacrifice. She was reticent because she did not want to be arrested for having recently killed several small hens in a ceremony she was told to perform by her madrina in Cuba. She had to do it, she said, but she feared that this was prohibited in the U.S. and if anyone found out she could be put in jail.

I asked her why she was told to feed the chicken blood to Eleggúa and los guerreros and she said that her mother had consulted with her madrina for her.

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44 Kardecian Espiritismo arrived in Cuba in 1856 in the form of the Frenchman Kardec’s (aka León Hipólito Denizard Revail) many publications which served as vehicles for teaching and diffusing the practice as a religious doctrine. There are three types of Espiritismo currently practiced in Cuba (espiritismo de mesa, espiritismo de cordón, and espiritismo cruzao), each differing in ritual structure, reliance on the teachings of Kardec, and incorporation of elements of African-based religions (Burke 1995). See Brandon 1993 for further discussion.

45 Form of divination reserved for the babalowa priesthood. This divination is conducted using either the ekuele (a metal chain with eight pieces of coconut rinds) or el Tablero de Ifá (the table of Ifá). The ekuele is the more commonly used of the two and they are considered the most respected and reliable forms of divination in the religion.

46 Los guerreros (the warrior gods) refers to Ogún, Ochosi and Osún (although some practitioners exclude Osún and use the term to refer to Eleggúa, Ogún and Ochosi). Many practitioners receive their Eleggúa and
She [my mother] went to my madrina’s House, she’s a priest [santera]. My madrina told her and she [my mother] told me over the phone...She works with the caracoles. She throws the shells in my name to see what I have. It also came out that I’ll have to leave my husband sometime in the future. She [my mother] asked for the consultation in my name. So the spirit said that I have these problems...[I called her] to find out. She read me her notes and I’m here writing ‘buy three chickens, smoked fish’ and I did my thing.

It wasn’t very long ago. When I called my mother on the phone we talked about it and she said “we’re going to do this and this and this, and you have to do it yourself. No one else can do it for you, because your madrina isn’t there and neither am I. You yourself.”

I had to do it because we’re in a new house, in a new country. So that the saints would know where we are, so that they will protect us, help us with whatever could happen or might happen.

I did it myself, alone. My sister-in-law does her own things in her house. I did this alone. Usually the priests do this, like my godmother. An initiated person, one who has received the saint in their head, has to do this ritual...But since I don’t have my madrina here by my side or my mother either, I didn’t have any other option. I did it myself. And I wasn’t afraid. I did it very calmly and secretly.

Ana told me she had called and asked her mother to consult with her madrina for her because she is so nervous and unhappy in her new “home.” She was a healthcare provider in Cuba and despairs at the housekeeping job she currently holds. Also, she had never been separated from her mother before she migrated. She has been depressed since her arrival and is having problems with her husband.

Ana attends to her altar on a weekly, sometimes daily basis. She lights candles, puts plates of cake in front of her image of La Caridad, arranges her collares (necklaces), and blows tobacco smoke over the images of her saints. She does these things to show her saints that she still cares for them and believes in them and depends on them in this new land. She brought all of her religious cosas (things) from Cuba with her when she immigrated. She had a separate suitcase in which she carried all of them, carefully packed

_los guerreros_ at the same time. Ogún and Ochosi reside in iron implements housed in an iron cauldron,
so nothing would break. The government allowed her to do it. This is something that both
the U.S. and Cuba respect, she told me. She thinks that almost all Cuban practitioners
who have come to the U.S. have brought their cosas with them. They cannot practice
without them.

Ana belongs to a large House in Cuba. Her madrina has many godchildren,
including many living outside the country. Ana practices alone in Albuquerque. She does
everything herself, including things that she is not really prepared to do, that in Cuba her
godmother would do for her. She has to in Albuquerque, she says, because she has no
other option. She has not found anyone that she trusts to consult with or to practice with
locally. She thinks that there are a lot of believers in the city, but has not met any of them
and is suspicious:

You have to be very careful of whom you trust – you have to know someone for
years, really well and trust them before you consult with them. Otherwise they
could tell you things and say you have to do things that you don’t, that they tell
you just to make money. If I ever do find anyone here I’ll let you know.

Ana often participated in bembés, toques, and días del santo in Cuba. She has not heard
of any happening in Albuquerque since her arrival. Her sister-in-law also practices
Santería, but she does her things in her house and Ana does hers in hers. Ana has not
been initiated as a priestess of Santería, but has undergone various cleansings and
protective rituals. She also wears the collares (necklaces) she received from her madrina
on occasion, particularly when she needs strength and wants to feel the power of her
saints with her.

Whereas Marco feels a slow distancing from his religion, Ana is becoming more
intimately involved in ritual processes in Albuquerque, enacting rituals that she never had

_Elegguá_ takes the form of a stone, and _Osún_ a metal goblet topped by a rooster.
before because her madrina remains on the island. Such new relationships and performances point to the isolation of many practitioners in this study. While she conducted the ritual feeding, Ana was afraid: afraid that she would be found out. She did not even ask her sister-in-law to help. This fear and isolation contrasts sharply with the sense of community and kinship practitioners in New York, Miami, Los Angeles and New Jersey experience through their participation in the religious network of established Houses (Brandon 1983, 1993; Brown 1989; Curry 1991, 1997; Cros Sandoval 1975; Evanchuck 1993; Gregory 1986, 1999; Sosa 1981).

Reynaldo arrived in Albuquerque in December 1999 with his wife Niurka and their child. They came as winners of the U.S. Immigration Lottery from Havana. Reynaldo is very adamant about distinguishing between lottery migrants and balseros (rafters), arguing that lottery winners are of a much higher quality because they undergo a screening process in Cuba: they are selected by the U.S. Interests Section in Havana for migration. As he states,

...It’s not drugs like all the Americans think that Cubans are all drug dealers, all Cubans are the same. Especially those that are arriving now. This is because they are selected by the U.S. embassy. It’s not like it was before when the balseros came and all that. Now it’s more, more controlled.47

Reynaldo was a chef in Cuba and started working at the local military base after arrival. He feels that the Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP) discriminated against him and his family because of their dark skin so he relied on Cuban friends and family, as well as his own ingenuity, to furnish their small apartment in the first months of their stay in the city. When they arrived at their apartment after having been met at the airport by friends rather than RRP case managers, they found two mattresses and an 11” black and white
television. They slowly supplemented these furnishings with a bed-frame they found in the alley behind their apartment, a chair they found by the dumpster, and furniture given to them by friends. Within the first several weeks they had a 19” color television and another couch.

Reynaldo is a palero as well as a practitioner of Santería. His godfather on the island is both palero and santero. He has befriended a priest in Albuquerque, but continues to rely on his godfather and his mother-in-law on the island for consultations because he feels more comfortable with his long-term religious kin. As he states,

[My babalowa there] is for life. If one day I did decide to chuck all of this [indicating his religious things] I would have to give them all back to my babalowa. Because my babalowa made all of this. If some day I don’t want to continue any longer in the religion, I can’t throw it out, I’ll bring them with me. Because each Eleggúa has something inside.

My padrino has a little over 900 godchildren.... He lives in Guanabacoa.... [In Cuba] I would go see him every once in a while, every once in a while....All the, the godchildren, the brothers in the religion, are united...It’s not the same here as in Cuba.

Reynaldo, like many practitioners in Albuquerque, is suspicious of local priests and babalowas, but he holds his friend Roberto up as an example of one who has continued to practice as a true priest, one who has refused to “sell” his religion for money. As he states,

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47 See Burke 1998 and 2001 for a discussion of the negative perceptions of Cubans, particularly balseros, in Albuquerque, and the role local media played in strengthening the association of “Cuban” with “criminal.”

48 Color televisions are an important symbol among new Cuban migrants in Albuquerque (and among Cubans living on the island). Most new migrants complained about the quality of the television the RRP supplied them (size, quality of picture, black and white as opposed to color) and quickly replaced it. Tales of Cubans living in Miami “like real Americans” regularly included references to the number of televisions in their homes, as well as the placement of these televisions (i.e. having a television in the bathroom was particularly desirable for some research participants).

49 Palo Monte is a religion linked to the practices brought to the island by Bantu speaking slaves in the 18th century. Palo translates as “stick” or “stalk” and monte as “forest” or “wilderness.” Palo practices are often referred to as brujería (witchcraft) and seen to be very powerful. The initiation ritual for entrance into the religion is referred to as a rayamiento or cutting. Initiates are referred to as paleros.
No, here no [we don’t know many people who practice]. Because here they dedicate themselves to... Look, not Roberto. Roberto is embarrassed to charge. And many people have come to him, many people have come to see him but he doesn’t like to charge. It’s gotten to the point where I’ve told him come on, you have to charge... You have to charge a derecho. My padrino had to charge 21 with I don’t remember how many cents. You have to charge it.... Because you have to have aguardiente, you have to have the cigars because when you go to consult all of this has to be there, and where does it come from? It has to come from the same prenda that I come to consult with... the derecho. But no, a lot of Cubans here go to Cuba to exploit the religion... How can you believe that an Eleggúa is going to cost you 500 dollars [sigh of disgust}. It’s an abuse. The paleros here are very abusive. They tell you no, I’m going to give you an Eleggúa, 500 dollars. Look, this is the reason why everyone goes to Cuba to make their saints. Because there with 600, 800 dollars you can undergo initiation in Cuba. Here it costs you, vaya.

Reynaldo and his wife were able to bring some of their cosas (things) with them on the trip including their Eleggúa, los guerreros and Reynaldo’s belt of cowrie shells sown on red cotton. Reynaldo’s babalowa made an Eleggúa for each member of the family, each with a different face. They continue to make offerings to them and ask them for help in Albuquerque.

I asked Reynaldo if they had had to do any trabajos (works/rites) since their arrival and, if so, where did such rituals take place. He told me that trabajos are usually performed in the house, because they are usually small acts such as putting the name of a person in a glass of water with sugar on the altar. If they have to feed the Eleggúa,

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50 The derecho is the ritual fee required for all spiritual services performed by santeros(as) and babalowas. The amount of derecho changes depending on the amount that “comes out” in the divination reading. Sometimes this reading will require that the priest not charge anything, other times the standard rate (usually 5 to 21 pesos) is charged.

51 A prenda is an iron cauldron containing earth, bones, blood, herbs and mirrors, elements that link it cosmically to the sea, sky, earth and the dead. It also contains elements of the urban landscapes that are the object of the priest’s spiritual work (Brown 1989: 376). Spirits of the dead live in the prenda, and are activated by the priest of Palo (palero) when needed. In Cuba these prendas vary in size from a small iron cauldron which fits in a corner or in a small cabinet to a huge iron pot filling a small room. Elements residing in the prenda differ depending on the branch of Palo Monte followed.

52 There are many different ways in which Eleggúa may manifest, including a double-faced stone and a doll. Such manifestations are linked to the camino (path) shown when a santero divines which Eleggúa an initiate should receive.
however, to wash them with blood, they do that out on the patio. A local babalowa offered to feed Reynaldo’s Eleggú for him for an outlandish price. He was disgusted. He believes that Cubans in Albuquerque are out to exploit you and says that he is learning how to do things on his own as a counter to such exploitation. As he tells it,

*I know him [a babalowa in the city], but...I know him because he carried some money to Cuba for me but I don't know him well. Just a little while ago I saw him and he said to me “hey, when are you going to feed your Eleggúás?” I said no, I'll give them food myself. “No, but I'm a babalowa.” “My babalowa is in Cuba.” So this same guy is the one who told Ricardo he would charge him 500 dollars to do it, to give him...to give him an Eleggúá.*

Like Ana, Reynaldo is learning new ritual positionings and roles under guidance of ritual kin in Cuba. Michael Atwood Mason speaks to such positionings in his analysis of a preliminary initiation ritual (1994). In his study, a North American Anglo received los guerreros from his Cuban godparent. In the course of the ritual, the initiate learns new movements, and kinesthetically grasps cultural and religious significance as he acts out salutations and takes part in animal sacrifice for the first time. The initiate had read about the religion and participated in other rituals, but this was his first experience as the subject of and actor in ritual activity. While ritual meanings can be communicated verbally, in this ritual “the signs are experientially apprehended through the body: they are not simply understood but also enacted” (Atwood Mason 1994: 24-25).

The experiential nature of this North American Anglo initiate’s learning is an essential element of his entry into his padrino’s House. Ana and Reynaldo, already members of Houses in Cuba and already familiar with some ritual movements, are forced by their distance from their godparents into a different form of learning, one based on memory and verbal instruction rather than enactment. They are becoming, for the first time, primary agents in ritual activity. Their relationship to ritual activity thus takes place
in a creative and ideational realm and they struggle with whether they are doing things “right.”

The trabajos (works/rites) that Reynaldo and his wife Niurka have performed since arrival in Albuquerque have been prescribed to them during their weekly telephone conversations with Niurka’s mother. The prescribed rituals come from either her own divinations or those of Reynaldo’s padrino, all conducted in the names of Reynaldo and Niurka.

*Every Friday we call Cuba. Every Friday. We tell her, if we have a problem we tell her. If not, we don’t. Or if she dreams or we ourselves dream...*

*We call my mother-in-law. If she doesn’t know, or can’t understand what comes out, she calls the babalowa. And the next Friday, the babalowa calls us, or we call and he says you have to do this, this, this and that...*

Reynaldo and Niurka have been sending remittances to their family in Cuba since their arrival in Albuquerque. They have even sent the white clothes necessary for Niurka’s brothers’ initiation into Santería. They have also sent money to have rituals conducted for them on the island; rituals that they believe directly affect their quality of life in Albuquerque. According to Reynaldo,

*We send money to Cuba and there they perform a toque in our name, they do everything in our name. In, let’s see? On the 6th [of June] they had a violin in our name in Cuba. Yeah, and we call, we have this problem and so my mother-in-law usually tells us you have to do this, that and the other...And we go out and find what we need and do the things...For whatever reason we consult with her. With my padrino or Niurka’s madrina or her mother because they are all older santeros.*

Marco, Ana and Reynaldo all comment on the importance of having their cosas (things) with them for practice, on interacting with them. Ana is able to do this, and draw strength from such interaction, by way of maintaining her altar. Reynaldo feeds and
makes offerings to his *Eleggúa*, as well as those of his daughter and wife, blowing tobacco smoke over them, giving them candy, and sitting them in the grass outside their front door so that they can enjoy nature. Marco, on the other hand, feels a gradual loss of connection because he is only able to interact with his *cosas* via a third party, his mother. Thus, while his transnational telephone connection is important, it fails to provide him with the power he would feel from face-to-face interaction with his saints.

The importance of altars and the proximity of religious *cosas* is evident for the practitioners and priests who participated in this study. Without them, one is unable to practice (unless, as in Marco’s case, one creatively adapts one’s practice to include proxy interaction through a third party). Ana, for example, relies on her altar for knowledge and strength. After each ESL (English as a Second Language) class, she places her notebooks on the top shelf, above her saints. “I’m hoping that something will enter them and then me” she said, “hopefully I will get some strength or understanding if I leave them there.” Altars, in this sense, whether elaborate, shut in a hall closet, or thousands of miles away, are spaces of use. They are not static. Rituals are performed in front of and within the altar, utilizing elements, changing offerings to the saints, inserting slips of paper with the names of supplicants. They are not something to be revered, but rather provide a space of practice, performance and direct interaction with the saints.

The fact that Reynaldo and Ana have their *cosas* with them in the U.S. is directly linked to their entry status and experience of migration. They both won the U.S. immigration lottery held annually on the island. Therefore, they traveled to the U.S. on an airplane and passed through customs upon arrival. Marco, on the other hand, left Cuba on a *balsa* (raft) and spent months in Guantánamo Bay Refugee Camp. His route was much

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53 *Violin* refers to a ritual gathering in which the music of the violin is offered up to the saints.
longer. While his ability to bring his *cosas* with him was hindered by his companions’ religious beliefs as well as his means of travel, the inability to bring one’s *cosas* on the raft is a common experience of *balseros*. Many arrived in Guantánamo Bay or to U.S. shores with a portrait of their saint with them, but nothing more. The weight of stone *Elegguás* and the iron implements of *los guerreros* were impossible to bear for days at sea in makeshift rafts.

Those migrants who passed through customs in Miami with their suitcases full of religious objects, like Ana and Reynaldo, had a much smoother experience. Ana watched her suitcase being moved from place to place, noting that nothing broke, therefore concluding that it had not been tossed around as roughly as other people’s suitcases; it had been protected. Reynaldo’s wife Niurka tells the story of her experience passing through customs in Miami International Airport. A customs agent eyed her as she approached. The agent nodded to her and told her to go ahead, she would not inspect her bags. “I have *Chango*” she told Niurka. “So does my mother,” the surprised Niurka responded.

**Conclusions**

Differences between the island and host cities condition the development of Santería in the U.S. The lack of ceremonial centers such as those common in Cuba, fluid

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54 Practitioners and priests in earlier migration waves, such as those arriving in 1980 as part of the Mariel boatlift, were unable to bring their *cosas* (things) with them, and many have been unable to return to the island to retrieve them (Atwood Mason 1997). Instead, they have consecrated new stones in the U.S. They continue to place greater value on those left on the island, however, for several reasons. First, these original stones have been intimately connected with the spiritual head of the initiate in the initiation, the “crowning.” Second, the original stones, having received greetings, prayers, sacrifices and songs over years, have more “presence” than the new stones (Atwood Mason 1997: 150). Having more presence, these elder, original saints are thought to have more *aché*, “to be more efficacious in their actions and more direct in their guidance” (Atwood Mason 1997: 150).
employment and residence patterns, and the fragmentation of kinship and social relations which characterize urban industrial and post-industrial society inform this development (Gregory 1986: 98-99). In addition, conflicts with animal rights groups and police over the practice of animal sacrifice in Santería have influenced development (Palmié 1996; González-Whipppler 1992). Such conflicts have posed as barriers to the celebration of initiations, which require the ritual slaughter of a variety of animals. Different migration waves, interest and involvement among migrants in the United States who had not been involved in the religion in Cuba, and interest among non-Cuban Latinos, Anglos and African Americans, are other factors which condition Santería practice in U.S. cities with large concentrations of Cuban migrants (Gregory 1986; Cros Sandoval 1975).

While similarities may be drawn between religious strategies utilized by earlier waves of Cuban migrants and those arriving in the 1990s, differences also exist. Some of these may be traced to the class, race, and political characteristics of each wave. Others are linked to the existence of a supportive ritual infrastructure in the place of resettlement. Others are explicitly connected to the reality of transnational movement. According to David Hilary Brown, “the establishment of Afro-Cuban Houses in the U.S. from the beginning maintained strong links with ritual family in Cuba, yet almost immediately began to lay the foundation for practice exclusively centered in the United States” (1989: 114). Practitioners in Albuquerque, however, are centering their practices by maintaining them in transnational social fields connecting the two countries.

55 Changó is the god of thunder; a womanizing, powerful being whose colors are red and white. He is associated with Saint Barbara in Catholic iconography. The statement “I have Changó” means that the agent has been initiated as a daughter of Changó and therefore has the god in her head.

56 Brown identifies the Templo Bonifacio Valdés in New York as a permanent House with an established ritual infrastructure able to support the “ritual needs and security” of its members as well as of others who use its services. The House has also served to integrate newly arrived priests, with their attendant expertise,
Global advances in telecommunications technology, currency transfers and information flows allow for the maintenance of links with ritual family living in the U.S. and Cuba indefinitely and regularly for this most recent wave of arrivals. With such tools at their disposal, and faced with barriers to the development of ritual community in Albuquerque, newcomers innovatively extend and change strategies utilized by their predecessors. In doing so they exemplify the historical flexibility of Santería, as well as the importance of the continued relationship migrants maintain with the religious world of their home country to their religious life in resettlement (McAlister 1998: 133).

As illustrated in this paper, my findings differ from those of ethnographers working with Santería Houses in New York, Los Angeles, Miami and Union City, New Jersey. Practitioners in Albuquerque have not established local religious networks and instead continue to depend upon religious kin in Cuba for spiritual guidance and practical advice. This shift in orientation is facilitated by the timing and context of migration, the size and longevity of the migrant population in the new place, global transformations in the flow of capital and communication, and the ability to travel with essential accouterments of ritual practice.

The transnational practices detailed in this paper are changing meanings and place of Santería practices in daily life. In Albuquerque, religious practice becomes separate from increasing embeddedness in the resettlement site and remains linked explicitly to the people and place of the island. As Niurka states:

...I don’t go to anyone’s House. I don’t want to. I already have what I need there [in Cuba] and I have my padrinos like I told you, my godparents, I have my godparents there. I call them for whatever problem and I tell them “look, this

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Into the ritual structure as exemplified in the incorporation of “two brilliant, elder oriate who arrived from Guanbacoa (Havana) with the Mariel Exodus (1980)” (Brown 1989: 123). Oriate are ritual specialists.
happened, that happened, I feel sad, I feel depressed, I don't know what's wrong with me”...And I call there. I buy a phone card and call.
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