“SEXUALITY” AND “GENDER” IN SANTERÍA:

TOWARDS A QUEER OF COLOR CRITIQUE IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

by

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Abstract

"SEXUALITY" AND "GENDER" IN SANTERÍA:

TOWARDS A QUEER OF COLOR CRITIQUE IN THE STUDY OF RELIGION

by

Salvador Vidal-Ortiz

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This dissertation theorizes the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality by connecting decades of feminist and feminist of color writings with lesbian and gay studies, Queer Theory, and a recent Queer of Color Critique. It does so by empirically studying the participation and reception of Lesbian-, Gay-, Bisexual-, and Transgender- or Transsexual- (LGBT) identified practitioners of *Santería*, an Afro-Cuban religious-cultural practice, in New York's metropolitan area. Using traditional ethnographic and interview methods, selected media coverage, experimental qualitative methods, and *Santería* literatures, this dissertation challenges the relationship between "gender" and "sexuality" as either interrelated categories in the social sciences, or as ontologically distinctive. Understanding gender and sexuality in US *Santería* also requires understanding the effect of racialization upon its practitioners, and significant discussion engages the relationship between racial formations and sexuality.

I examined various aspects of LGBT participation/reception in *Santería*. These findings constitute a comprehensive look at the impact of various categories: by looking at "gay" as an all encompassing LGBT term and several "sexual minority" variations emergent from *Santería*; the place of "gender" and "sexuality" as analytic markers where

they were both seen as ontologically distinct at times but interrelated at others; and by demonstrating how perhaps "sex" was much more rigid than "gender" in this religious setting, as in the case of transsexuality, and how "gender" was more rigid that "sexuality," especially in terms of the figure of the woman in the kitchen.

The research closely examines the participants' understandings of the relationship between gendered behaviors read as based on sexual minority identities, and sexual and erotic behaviors interpreted through a gender lens. In this sense, even heterosexually-identified men with gender-atypical behavior are often understood as "sexual minorities;" likewise, understandings between women and "gays" as penetrable lumped these two groups into a newer understanding of what "sexual minorities" may be. The possession of the *Santería* deities (the "mounting") offered gendered as well as sexualized ways of understanding the relationship between gender and sexuality in this religious-cultural practice. These empirical findings loop back into the theoretical discussions on the productive relationship between a Queer of Color Critique and Queer Theory.

to Bob,

For Wanting…

…and to Patricia,

for Being

Robert Alford (1915-2003)

and

Patricia Ticineto Clough

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Introduction: Situating the Project

This dissertation extends sociological analyses by incorporating the genealogy and utility of Queer Theory in sexuality and gender studies, including a most recent Queer of Color Critique. It does so by empirically studying the participation and reception of Lesbian,- Gay,- Bisexual,- and Transgender- or Transsexual-identified (LGBT) practitioners of *Santería*, an Afro-Cuban religious-cultural system, in the New York metropolitan area, as well as how the specific categories of social scientific analysis ("gender" and "sexuality") are deployed in these settings. (*Santería* is an Afro-Cuban practice derived from the mixing of *Yoruba* traditions brought to Cuba by Nigerian slaves in the eighteenth century, later influenced by the imposition of Catholicism in the lives of slaves in Cuba. I introduce *Santería's* history and basic beliefs in the first chapter.)

A genealogy of feminist, feminist of color, lesbian feminist, gay and lesbian studies, and queer theory all influence a recently developed Queer of Color Critique, which inserts questions of racialization to those of the study of gender and sexuality. This genealogy is intercepted by sociology, however. For instance, utilizing labeling theory and more broadly deviance studies, sociology began to address homosexuality and sexuality at a critical historical juncture in the US: between the civil right movements in the 1950s/1960s and the development of various strands of feminism. As well, sociology began to address transsexuality since the 1960s through the 1980s, and classic work in the area has influenced what is known as "transgender studies." With the introduction of gay and lesbian studies, the "founding" of Queer Theory, and its subsequent inability to address race, the queer of color critique has established itself as an alternative to queer theoretical writings (in both the social sciences and the humanities) and also as a not so

simple way to dismiss a queer theoretical framework, but to address the abject of queer subjects through its many marginal positions.[1]

"Sexuality" and "Gender" in Santería*: Towards a Queer of Color Critique in the Study of Religion* is a comprehensive, empirical first look at the concepts of gender and sexuality in US-*Santería*. Specifically, I engage in a complex conversation between categories like "gender" and "sexuality," general theoretical concepts like "sexual minorities," and specific uses of identity labels: namely LGBT-identified practitioners in the worship of this religious-cultural practice. This dissertation addresses the participation and reception of LGBT *Santería* practitioners in New York's metropolitan area through an analysis of the ways in which "gender" and "sexuality" reinterpret their practitioners under newer understandings of "sexual minorities." Using extended, face to face interviews, participant observation data from conversations with informants and written field notes, religious writings that document *Santería's* history and belief system, and readings of selected media coverage, I argue for this particular study of *Santería*.

Situating Terms and Providing Context for the Dissertation

Because I use multiple terms to refer to categories (i.e., "gender" and "sexuality"), identities (i.e., LGBT-identified), communities (i.e., ethno-racial minorities), and literatures (i.e., Queer Theory), while other authors and the study participants use interchanging terms, I define some of the terms I will proceed to consistently use in order to make the argument clear from the beginning. I then provide an overview of the

[1] While the epistemological assumptions of a queer of color critique may seem to rest in essentialist thinking (of who queers of color "are"), I suggest that this critique has at its core a strategic essentialism that uses *queer* and *of color* as basic parameters of analyzing social life, and not only based on experience. The Queer of Color Critique is further discussed in Chapter 1, and inserted in discussions throughout.

dissertation chapters as well as the methods utilized. First, I discuss gender and sexuality, then the notion of an LGBT "community," and then, my use of the terms "religious-cultural practice" to refer to *Santería,* as well as the phrase "ethno-racial minorities" to refer to its predominant "people of color" constituency.[2]

1. Moving from "LGBT" identities/communities to "sexual minorities"

Using the work of anthropologist David Valentine (2000, 2002, 2003), I bracket the terms gender and sexuality in my analysis; in doing so, I engage with the links between one and the other. One could argue, as many social scientists do, that "gender" and "sexuality" are separate concepts and belong to two different domains of analysis. However, as Valentine shows, this assumption makes these two terms ontologically distinct. On the one hand, this dissertation argues for the operationalization of these terms in the social sciences more generally, and specifically, in the practice of *Santería*. On the other, the analysis throughout this document adheres to the inherent complex relationship between the two: at times speaking of "conflations" between the two, at times of "slippages," and yet at others, of a rigid separation.[3]

My use of sexual orientation and gender identity categories is doubly situated: first, as the object of investigation (as I just illustrated with the relationship between "gender" and "sexuality"), and second, as "folk" categories which are used by folks and academics themselves. Thus, I use the qualified "-identified" to index the way that identity is as much a product of being identified as it is of taking on an identity. The use

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[2] The term "people of color" is itself intercepted by the developments of feminist, and more specifically third world feminist thinkers. For a brief outline, refer to my "On Being a White Person of Color: Using Autoethnography to Understand Puerto Ricans' Racialization" (2004).

[3] I am thankful to Valentine for his help clarifying this throughout my research and writing. His book, tentatively called *Imagining Transgender,* to be published in 2006, will surely extend this analysis.

of the marker "-identified" locates these identities as either self-labeling or as imposed by others. I too owe this analysis to Valentine's support and academic work.[4] While the use of "gender identity" to refer to "gender" and "sexual orientation" to refer to "sexuality" is also addressed in Valentine's work (as I illustrate in Chapter 1), the term "sexual identity" helps to address a broader set of gender presentations, identities, and practices. This is then extended to my use of "gay" as an all-encompassing term in *Santería* practice, as used by its practitioners, as well as my use of the term "sexual minorities."

The notion of an "LGBT community" as coalitional is problematic as well. References like *Gay New York* (Chauncey, 1995) or *How Sex Changed* (Meyerowitz, 2002) illustrate how early in the twentieth century "gender" and "sexuality" were separated through class distinctions among same-sex male partners, or through racial and socio-economic differences among gender non-conformant people. Organizing among same-sex male- and same-sex female-bodied individuals, which only emerged with some political significance in the 1950s, took place separately, as organizations like the *Daughters of Bilitis* and the *Mattachine Society* erupted. Organizing for "gay" rights was first gay, then gay and lesbian, and co-ed organizing began in the 1970s with the former *National Gay Task Force* becoming the *National Gay and Lesbian Task Force*. Bisexuality has often not been mentioned, although in much theorizing, as well as organizing since perhaps the 1980s, bisexuality is attached to "gay and lesbian," as a way of stressing a gender-traditional presentation *in spite of* a non-hegemonic sexuality. (Chapter 3 mentions the idea of "gay and lesbian" in these terms in the discussion of

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[4] Labeling theory, especially primary/secondary deviance, has dealt with this in the case of homosexuality and transgenderism *separately*. Valentine complicates this indexing by looking at "gay" and "transgender" together, something earlier sociologists did not tend to. I am thankful to Judith Lorber for her comments on this matter.

Santería as "home.") A product of the 1990s' organizing is the (only sometimes used) "gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender," umbrella but, while an implicit relationship between gender identity and sexual orientation links these four groups, no explicit connection is theorized.[5] The point for this brief historical outline of "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," and "transgender"/"transsexual" as newly emerged identity markers is that decades of struggles to this level of organizing and inclusiveness attempts should not be naturalized. Many activists and scholars alike blurb "LGBT" without much consideration to where sex/gender/desire intersect with these identities; on the other hand, conservative organizing separates "LG" often from "BT," or "LGB" from "T." Notions of a fixed sex/gender system (Rubin, 1975) and a natural imposition of (rigid) gender (roles) onto two sexes are the strongest solidifying aspect in this "slicing." While some movement from within has attempted to challenge this (Gamson, 1997), organizing and national political mobilization have remained pretty static in this sense. Recently, the LGBT acronym has been opened (with various degrees of success) to accommodate other groups such as people with intersex conditions (often called hermaphrodites), presumably under the notion that bodies, identities, and practices can alter systems of heteronormativity—that is, the expectation that one's sex is congruent with one's gender and sexuality.[6]

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[5] For historical notes on that organization, refer to Valentine (2002). Valentine (2000) argues that "transgender" is a 1990s category. I explain my use of "transgender" versus "transsexual" in chapter 5.

[6] This link between bodies, identities, and practices has been noted by intersex activists such as Cheryl Chase, former Executive Director of the *Intersex Society of North America* (ISNA). Many intersex activists and scholars such as Chase have spoken of intersex as a medical condition and not as an identity – contrary to the situating of "LGBT" grassroots organizers and scholars. For more information on ISNA, visit their website at www.isna.org. While useful in Queer Theory discussions, I did not incorporate intersexuality into this research, which started around or before the insertion of "intersex" into most popular "LGBT" discourses, that is, around the year 2000. For writing on activating intersex activism, see an early article by Chase (1998).

I initially saw this dissertation research through a pilot project where I surveyed the participation and reception of LGBT people, without bracketing these identities. It was during the pilot research, during the years 2000-01, that I realized I needed to open up the research to include non-identity categories to better understand what was taking place in these events, and to question the notion of "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" as separate markers. Because these popular conceptualizations of what constitutes an "LGBT community" do not describe the processes through which "gender" and "sexuality" are being connected and disconnected, Valentine's (2000, 2002, 2003) framework was especially timely for my research, as I moved from inquiries on the participation and reception of "LGBTs," to the ways in which "gender" and "sexuality" understandings informed such participation/reception. Thus Valentine's use of "LGBT-identified," "gender," and "sexuality" helped initiate my dissertation's arguments.

Yet fieldwork and interviewing influenced my thinking on these categories and identities. Other patterns of language use were evident in the years I conducted my research. Such is the case of the term "gay." I utilize "gay" to represent "lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender" identities as understood by *Santería* practitioners, or as the most common identity label utilized by them. (I also address the naming of these identities throughout; chapter 3 focuses on gay- and lesbian-, and also bisexual-identified practitioners, and chapter 5 refers to male-to-female transsexual-identified practitioners.) I use this umbrella "gay" term for several reasons. Gay narratives were privileged in these accounts, both as stories told by gay-identified men about "gay" men, or by everyone, as they spoke of "gay" as a central category in these spaces. There are common notions that locate "gay" members in a privileged position within the practice. For

instance, many of the practitioners I talked to argue that *Santería* offers a significant space for gay-identified men to participate in this religious-cultural setting. As well, many practitioners interviewed noted how much of the history of *Santería*, especially the transmission of the religious-cultural system from Cuba, has depended on the work by gay-identified *Santeros*. Based on this data, the term "gay" has to be read as both a critique of organizing categories of identity as well as a representation of sexual minority status. As argued elsewhere (Vidal-Ortiz, 2005), there are movements, or rather slippages, away from and toward "gay" identities both in terms of dis-identifying as "gay" as well as being lumped together within that category. The dissertation moves away from the article's argument; the latter engaged with what is constituted within what people call "gay" in *Santería* (the "what"), this dissertation looks towards the negotiations of their participation (the "how").

Lastly, my dissertation moves through some key terms: from the use of "LGBT" identities, to "gay" as representing "LGBT" by the practitioners, to the broader use of "sexual minorities" as my interpretation of how "gender" and "sexuality" relate in *Santería* practice. Because not even the term "sexual identity" encompasses all that is marked through practitioners' understandings of "gender" and "sexuality," I use Gayle Rubin's (1984) "Thinking Sex" arguments that enact what is currently termed "sexual minorities." Based not only on the interview and observation data, but selected media coverage of *Santería*, the term "sexual minorities" encompasses from the "LGBT-identified" *Santeros*, to women, to men who may not be gay- or bisexual-identified but present non-hegemonic masculinities, which are at times read as "gay"-regardless of their sexuality, erotic attractions, and behavior. (Chapter 3 and 4 are particularly illustrative of

this move.) In using the term "sexual minorities," I go through identities, categories, and communities to broader analytical terms. While Rubin's work is explored more in depth in Chapter 1, suffice it to say here that the term was not intended as shorthand for "gay and lesbian" organizing, yet this has been the outcome in many parts of the US.[7] This dissertation is partly the operationalization of the term "sexual minorities" in an empirical way beyond its reductive use to refer to "gays and lesbians" (Butler, 1994).

Just as these identities, communities, and categories are in some ways interrelated, *Santería* poses a challenge, as its use often escapes fixed assignments onto labels like religion, cult, cultural practice, and way of life. This is the next section's topic.

2. Santería *as a Religious-Cultural Practice*

While I discuss the complexity of *Santería* in Chapter 1, it is important to show some of the ways I frame its meaning throughout the dissertation. Because *Santería* emerges from the forced migration of African slaves to Cuba and subsequently changes while in Cuba as well as when it is brought to the US, there is an inherent challenge in labeling it *either* as a religion or a cultural marker. *Santería* literally means "one who worships the *Santos*" [*Sp:* deities], or "the way of the Saints." [8] The religious-cultural practice is often known through this "lay" term. In fact, many practitioners, some of which I spoke with, do not like its use. Besides being the most common term through

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[7] The use of the Spanish term for sexual minorities (*minorías sexuales*) in many countries in Latin America as well as in Spain tends not to follow a reductive "gay and lesbian" use. However, globalization processes may force its use as has popularly happened in the US.

[8] As a complex religious-cultural system, *Santería* has been influenced by Yoruba language as well as Spanish. Because many of the words to describe deities, or initiation aspects, or other parts of the religious and cultural practice are used in either Yoruba or Spanish, I introduce throughout the text the word in its current use and insert the English word (using either *Y*: or *Sp:*) in parenthesis, accompanied as just illustrated with an abbreviation implying its origin.

which practitioners and onlookers alike recognize it, the use of the term *Santería* is a challenge to notions of its relationship to Catholicism.[9]

Some writers have argued, however, that this religious-cultural system has left some of its Catholic and *Yoruba* traditions behind, as migration by practitioners to the US has undoubtedly made it change (De La Torre, 2004). Because *Santería* means different things to different people—from religion, to cultural practice, to a way of life—I avoid using the term "religion" and instead refer to it as a religious-cultural practice. Yet I do not leave the use of categorizing *Santería* as a religion altogether, as it is a preferred way for practitioners to refer to it, and indeed, *Santería* challenges legal battles as to what constitutes religion in the US. (This is a central aspect of Chapter 2.)

Not only do categories and identities become problematic in the study of "gender" and "sexuality," or religion and culture. Racial and ethnic labels, and categories to refer to ethnic, racial, and area studies, are malleable and require situating. This is the focus of the next section before discussing the methods and an overview of the chapters.

3. Moving through national, "Latin American," and people of color categories

Throughout the dissertation, I refer to Cubans and Puerto Ricans as the dominant populations in *Santería.* As well, and because most of the practitioners I interviewed or served as informants were Puerto Rican, I refer to nationally-based identities in order to make some of the arguments in the dissertation. A few terms are important to distinguish in the discussion, especially chapters 2 and 3.

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[9] For instance, some parts of South America (i.e., Argentina) understand the word *Santería* as the place to purchase items for Catholic worshippers. Given the controversies surrounding *Santería* as a syncretic religion because of its Catholic influence, the use of the term *Santería* situates it as inherently related to Catholicism, and not simply a response to it.

Because the majority of the practitioners I talked with did not identify as Latino or Latin American, but through national identity, I begin with national categories of analysis. Yet the literature referring to "race," gender/sexuality, and *Santería*—either in media, religion, or social sciences—often lumps all practitioners under a "Latin American" label. Using the Queer of Color Critique as I understand it allows me to make an argument that crosses from nationally-based categories (i.e., Puerto Rican in chapter 2; Chicano in chapter 3) and through "Latin American" pan-ethnicities, to political and coalitional terms like "people of color." I do this primarily in response to the data. Because, for instance, media products often obscure the specific identities of *Santería* practitioners, blurring the lines many times between what is "Latino" and "Black," the category "people of color" becomes most useful to critically think about the messages these media illustrations provide the general population. Whenever the social scientific literature discusses "Latin American," I use it, often contrasting it with the Queer or Color Critique, as it is the case in chapter 3.

A related set of terms are those referring to what may constitute a "mainstream" US population. I use terms such as "Euro-Americans" to refer to what is most often considered "White" racially in the US. Similarly, I use the "Euro-American imaginary" (Grosfoguel and Georas, 2000) to refer to the "mainstream" ideas outsiders may have of *Santería* (and because *Santería* is predominantly practiced by "people of color"). Similar terms I refer to are: "United Staters" (a neologism I have seen used elsewhere), USAmerican (as used by Valentine, 2000), or "Americans" in quotation marks. While I avoid it, at times I use "Western" to refer to discussions linked to Africa, especially in media discussions or in relation to *Yoruba* traditions. I say all of this in order to situate

the use of terms like “racial minority” or “ethno-racial minority:” given the challenges of how *United Staters* most often understand “racial” discourse in the US, racializing all groups but maintaining “Latinos” as an “ethnic” group (Vidal-Ortiz, 2004), studying *Santería* often requires unpacking the racial assumptions embedded in the Euro-American imaginary.

With this context and terms defined, I proceed to describe both the chapter breakdown as well as the methods used in the dissertation.

Structure of the Dissertation and Methodology

Using extensive and important reviews of various literatures, offering a primer sight to the study of specific media outlets and its impact in how *Santería* is perceived by “mainstream” US, and balancing the methods such as ethnography and extended interviews with new sociological methods is what frames this dissertation. While there are six chapters besides the introduction and the conclusion, the first two chapters emphasize participant observation and analysis of media coverage on *Santería*; they also serve as a back-to-back literature reviews on Queer Theory, the Queer of Color Critique, my use of “gay” as an all encompassing term, the “sexual minorities” framework, the “gender” and “sexuality” categories, and discussions on racialization and religion.[10] The third and fourth chapters primarily engage with interview data, mostly focusing on the place of “gays” in *Santería* as well as how the categories of “gender” and “sexuality,”

[10] I cite several Spanish language references to *Santería,* or to Queer Theory. I do so in hopes that Queer Theory, and a Queer of Color project/critique, do not remain encapsulated within English language. While I am aware of the politics of what this may imply – the dissemination of a Queer Theory mostly understood as a very localized project into the Spanish speaking world – I also believe this theoretical framework owes much to the Latina and borderland feminist projects of the 1970s, as briefly discussed in the first chapter’s discussion of the Queer of Color Critique genealogy.

and the "sexual minority" concept, are made operational in the study of LGBT-identified practitioners. This middle section critically discusses the Latin American sex/gender/power scholarship and the religious scholarship on *Santería* by weaving it with the data from interviews and the Queer of Color Critique. The last two chapters draw from experimental qualitative methods, and study both the boundaries of what seems to be permissible in *Santería* practice, as well as a methodological discussion where I situate myself in the field. I offer a more elaborate illustration of each of these sections next.

1. The Queer of Color Critique, "gender" and "sexuality," and Racialization

The first chapter, "Queer of Color Theorizing and *Santería*," begins by illustrating some of the ethnographic descriptions of my research. Drawing from fieldnotes (which appear in *italics*) and descriptions of the sites I studied, I begin to show some of my entry points to this research. By discussing some of these fieldnotes and observations, I place LGBT-identified practitioners in *Santería* and explain how I see this religious-cultural practice as a premier setting for the study of LGBT-practitioners, "gender" and "sexuality," and "sexual minorities." I also give a general sense of the history and organizational hierarchy of this religious-cultural practice, as well as how "gender" and "sexuality" intercept it. The chapter is intended as a discussion of the various influences of Queer Theory, but more centrally a Queer of Color Critique, as well as an elaboration of Valentine's uses of "gender" and "sexuality," and Rubin's and Butler's notion of "sexual minorities." This chapter begins to uncover some of the links between racial formations in this religious-cultural setting as well as the relationship of these to normative assumptions around gender/sexuality.

The first phase of the research was participant observation. I conducted preliminary fieldwork between the years 2000-01, and engaged in additional fieldwork between 2002-05. Participant observation at initiations, *Santeros'* birthdays, and general deity celebrations (where there was no initiation being conducted) took place during those five years. Most visits took place in NYC; I attended a few events in Hialeah, Florida. Because initiations/events do not happen every week and because my attendance depended on networks developed, I only attended events I was invited to. Participant observation took place with a general frequency of a *Santería* event per month. Events attended lasted on average five to six hours, though sometimes I would travel to sites with practitioners and would discuss many details of my dissertation with them (sometimes adding two to three hours of fieldwork). Thus I have accumulated several hundred hours of fieldwork and dozens of pages of fieldnotes. These fieldnotes contain more general conversations, the discussion of site dynamics or physical space, and the interactions amongst practitioners and between practitioners and myself. Some fieldnotes document specific conversations about the religion, especially in relationship to gender and sexuality and not necessarily about a practitioner's experience. A tape recorder was not used to document fieldwork.[11]

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[11] *On the politics of tape-recording:* Because many people I talked to saw these events as religious, I refrained from asking to tape-record, or tape-recording, when conducting ethnography. Since I began collecting stories through extended interviews outside these settings, and since I developed a network of informants from these settings, I made a conscious decision not to ask to tape record these events. Before starting my fieldwork, I heard comments from people about the intrusion they felt to have that be posed as a question. Like Valentine (2003), I faced a group of people who, in spite of the trust I built with them, felt that it was unnecessary – even disrespectful – to tape record in these events. Throughout the years, it became clear to me that I did not need to speak specifically to the more "religious" and private aspects of *Santería*, as I felt that the project at hand did not demand that kind of examination. Reflecting on

Analysis from ethnographic notes took place through documentation of the kind of activities people were assigned based on perceived or actual sexual orientation (when disclosed to me); atypical gender expression of practitioners; participants' deity assignments based on disclosed sexual identity or non-normative gendered expression; conversation about practitioners identified by other practitioners as LGBT; the reactions that non-normative gender presentation or/and sexual identity caused overall among practitioners; and the gendered and sexualized ways in which *Santería* practice incorporates LGBT-identified people. Although problematic, observation of gender presentation and flirtatious behavior as a form of identifying sexual identity was one way of studying how gender and sexuality are intertwined in *Santería* practices. Gender non-conformist cues are useful, if anything, in detailing the ways in which effeminate men or masculine women, regardless of self-identification, are treated and categorized in *Santería* events and practices. These written ethnographic observations enabled me to refine the questions I asked in the interviews, giving me examples to draw on in asking participants about their understandings of sexuality and gender in *Santería*.

In chapter two, titled "Animal Sacrifice in *Santería* and Euro-American notions of race and sexuality: A look at Media's Portrayal," I engage with electronic and print media's illustrations of the practice of *Santería* in the US. I argue that media, like many central institutions in so-called "developed" countries, continues to collapse its understandings of racial, religious, and sexual minorities into one large "othering" group. This chapter is based on the selected data analysis from almost 1,000 US-based

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the fact that other religions are not studied with this depth, and also, recognizing that racial minority groups like *Santeros* tend to be demonized with more frequency than others, I decided not to pursue this possibility further.

newspapers, as well as a handful of TV shows and commercial movies where *Santería* has been portrayed. In it, the figure of animal sacrifice as a central marker of otherness acts as a link between religious, racial, and sexual marginal populations through an "American" imaginary that collapses all these groups into one. Together, Chapters One and Two offer a study of racial formations and racialization in a religious-cultural setting, and their relationship to systems of heteronormativity.

2. The Study of Gender and Sexuality as separate but interrelated categories

Chapter three, "Is *Santería* Home? Religious Practice, Culture, and the Place of Sexual Minorities," engages the Queer of Color critique in discussions of "house" versus "home." This chapter extends the idea of "family," especially by contrasting the place of queers of color *as people of color* (Reddy, 1998) against the home and acceptance as sexual, gender, and racial outsiders. Using the structure of the "house" in *Santería* allows for a strong analysis of the ways in which gay-identified *Santeros* are welcomed. Contrasting the anthropological and sociological analyses of Latin American versus *United Staters'* sex/gender/power systems, I engage with notions of penetration and possession, and the meanings these have for *Santeros*. An all encompassing code of "sexual minorities" is shown here through the image of possession, of the being "mounted" by an *Orisha*. "Sexual minorities" is also made operational through the literature on non-man categorizations (see Guzmán, 1997; Kulick, 1998).

In addition to participant observation, a total of seventeen extended, face to face interviews were conducted with *Santeros* and *Santería* practitioners[12] between 2001 and

[12] While this distinction between a *Santero* and a practitioner not yet initiated is less pressing to the study of gender and sexuality, and I tended to conflate practitioners with *Santeros*, I was vividly reminded of this difference by participants and informants alike.

2004. Most interviews were conducted in New York City, although a few were conducted with *Santeros* from Hialeah, Florida.[13] Interviews started with an elicitation of a narrative of the participant's introduction to the religion, after consent forms were filled out and the participants were fully informed of their rights. Questions encompassed: participants' demographics, including their deity assignment (if initiated) and house structure; their knowledge of houses where LGBT-identified people participate; their stories and relevant experiences with LGBT-identified practitioners; the rituals and activities as structured by *Santería* practitioners, and LGBT-identified people's participation/restriction within those. Particular attention was given to discussions on the participants' understandings of sexuality and gender within *Santería*. Questions about sexual activity or behavior, and sexual identification were part of the overall questions to the practitioners; however, I supplemented their self-identifications with the observations through fieldwork. In addition, interviews focused on the use of stories to illustrate the many ways in which ethnic/racial composition, sexual minority status, gender, and class subdivisions play or do not play a role within the religious structure. Interviews were tape-recorded, transcribed and coded by me. Utilizing NUD*IST's newest version of the NVivo program, interviews were fully coded with an eye for as many themes as there are in the data (Taylor and Bogdan, 1998). Analyses also focused on both common themes in participant responses, as well as comments that stood out from the rest of the interviews.

Out of these seventeen study participants, seven were self-identified women, and ten self-identified men. Most people were either gay- or lesbian- or bisexually-identified;

[13] Many of the interviews were conducted in Spanish. Whenever I am excerpting from those transcripts, I offer the text in Spanish, then the English translation (all translations are my own). As the reader will notice, this will only become evident in Chapters three to five.

only two of the women were heterosexually-identified. There were no self-identified transsexuals in the sample—something central to chapter 5. Ethno-racially, one was an Asian-identified man, one was Mexican, seven were Puerto Rican-identified, five Cuban, three were White-identified, and one identified as Jewish and White. The group had a broad educational range; from one person who had not completed high school to several people with graduate degrees and a couple with Ph.D.s. In terms of socioeconomics, there were a couple of unemployed practitioners (some of whom depended on street economy survival), one on disability, a few were students with either part-time or full time jobs, and most people were employed full time. One of the heterosexual women was over 60; and one of the elder *Santeros* was also over 60 (both of them were Cuban); the rest were people between their 30's and 40's. Over half of the sample were initiated *Santeros*. A few of them also practiced either *Espiritismo* or *Palo* (related practices which I discuss in the next chapter) in addition to *Santería*. A description of each of the participants is inserted before their first quote or excerpt throughout the dissertation.[14]

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[14] In addition to these seventeen interviews, data collected was based on informal conversations throughout the years of ethnographic work with twelve *Santería* practitioners that I met through a couple of the interviewees. I call these practitioners *informants*, primarily to distinguish them from the extended interview *participants*, but also because most of our interaction took place either at or in relation to the overall ethnographic visits to regular events. (As a result, the data relating to these informants is peripheral, and it is presented less often than the interview data.) These informants clustered into two main groups of interaction—in one case, about five or six of the informants belonged to the same house; in the other, a young *Santero* consulted the other few informants (and was a *padrino* [*Sp:* godfather] for one of them). All informants lived in the New York City area during the time of our conversations. Almost all of them were Puerto Rican, and most identified as gay men. A couple of these men cross-dressed for pageantry but did not self-identify as transgender or transsexual. They invited me, accompanied me, and/or discussed with me many aspects of *Santería* practice throughout the five years of this ethnography. I attended their *Santero* birthdays, and their *padrino's* birthdays, and communicated with them frequently.

Even though a serious attempt was made throughout the study to incorporate heterosexual, as well as LGBT-identified practitioners, the epistemological questions emergent from the available data offer a particular reading of how the study was understood, namely, what the supposed vagueness of the categories "gender" and "sexuality" seemed to imply. While I solicited interviews from any *Santero*, all the respondents were either women or LGB-identified. No male *Santero* priest, nor heterosexually-identified male practitioner, agreed to be a participant of this study. This is consistent with recent published work by Conner (2004), who interviewed about 40 *Santería* practitioners over a 20 year period, and for the most part, could not interview heterosexually-identified male *Santeros*. The underlying issues of power—of the sharing of information and access to knowledge about the religion—are central aspects to furthering the study of gender and sexuality practices in the religion. However, these results are consistent with the notion first illustrated by Diana Fuss (1989) in *Essentially Speaking*: that my study was interpreted as a space or a focus where only those most vividly seen to relate to "gender" and "sexuality"—women and "queers"—would be the ones to participate. As well, it added to my thinking of how women and "gays" both fit within newer discussions of "sexual minorities"—as evident in chapter 4.

""It has Nothing to do with it:" Fusing Gender and Sexuality in *Santería*" is the title for Chapter Four, where I discuss my observations and informal conversations at worship events in relation to the "gender" and "sexuality" categories. Using the current literature that argues for an openness to gender fluidity through homosexual participation, I establish how the religious tradition is as gendered as any other social institution, irrespective of *Orisha's* (perceived) gender fluidity. Also, whereas in Chapter 3, LGB

identities were discussed in relation to the practice, in this chapter, I show how "gender" and "sexuality" are better tools to understand the complex dynamics taking place in these religious spaces. Lastly, I show how gender expression re-labels even heterosexually-identified men as part of "sexual minorities" in their everyday practice.

3. Experimental Ethnographic Methods: What Constitutes data and participation

Chapter Five, ""I Don't think the *Orishas* Like it:" Transgendering *Santería* and the Haunting of the Transsexual Figure" is an experimental chapter where I take the apparent absence of data (my lack of interviewing *Santería* practitioners of transsexual experience) and turn it into evidence. In the narratives expressed by this study's participants, the transsexual figure offered a border of sorts, a "dump site" where all prohibitions of the body where located. I use this reference of bodily transgression as one way in which to locate the transsexual figure in the practice of the religion. In doing so, I illustrate the ways in which while very invisible (both as lacking in my data set as well as the observations conducted during four years) transsexuals and transsexual absences organize much of the rigidity in the practice of *Santería*, which is centered in its appreciation and veneration to *Orishas*, including their attending events by possessing their practitioners.

Chapter Six, "Living Ethnographically," is a most important methodological discussion for reading the rest of the dissertation. Unlike most recent scholarship that simply mentions the researcher's positionality in the introduction, often acting as a "confession" for a researcher's relationship to the field (and then evacuating any mention of their presence or reflexivity about their participation of the environment studied throughout), I have chosen to devote a whole chapter to this discussion. In it, I take to

task the notion of the ethnographer as an outsider who, through various struggles and her/his inception to a venue, learns a significant amount of insider knowledge, and emerges out of this fieldwork experience triumphant, ready to write. I also engage discussions of the void of sexuality analyses in sociological ethnographic research, by pointing to some of this void's history. I suggest ways in which such scholarship can be developed. As well, I discuss the limits of the inside/outside binary in social sciences. Seldom do social scientists avoid academic voyeurism and look at the inside/outside distinctions between ethnographers and "insiders"—where a perceived racially "native" researcher can be both. I argue that ethnographers may trouble this inside/outside relationship by illustrating how the ethnographer's being is linked to the making of the situation of the place, instead of the more traditional "entering a place."

In the conclusion, I engage with the ways in which this study connects questions of racialization inherent in the Queer of Color critique to those of the destabilization of sex/gender/sexuality's linearity as posed by Queer Theory. I want to argue that this dissertation's framework is a queer writing because it troubles identity politics' frameworks in a couple of ways: by going through identities (gender, sexual, and ethno-racial), but also by arguing something else from what is offered in traditional sociological frameworks. My dissertation thus joins the queer of color critique (Ferguson, 2004) by pointing the lack of sociological imagination to address queer of color positionings against the home, the family, and the nation.

Chapter 1: Queer of Color Theorizing and *Santería*

> *One, or any Sunday afternoon, be it a cold winter, or a breezy but hot summer, be it the Bronx, Brooklyn, or some area of Queens, Jersey City, or somewhere in the New York's Metropolitan area, anybody willing to look will notice a sea of men and women— some of whom are fully dressed in white—walking towards one neighborhood house, whose basement has become a sanctuary for the devotion of deities, or* Santos*, or* Orishas*. They are most likely walking towards the initiation of a new* Santero*. Sometimes the groups of people reach a house by cars; other times, several* Santeros *and onlookers like myself approach a Santería scene using New York City's most insightful ethnographic tool—the train. Walking through one of the avenues that splits off from any train station, sometimes these bodies are bodies of young men who may be gay-identified* Santeros*. There are groups of women who are in relationships with other women at some of these events as well, who may or may not call themselves lesbians and who are avid practitioners of* Santería*—an Afro-Cuban religion brought to the U.S. in the mid twentieth century through Caribbean-U.S. migration patterns.*

To say that there are "gay" *Santería* practitioners, or to think of *Santería* in "queer" terms may seem too obvious to some. This practitioners' and onlookers' common perception can be explained on a number of levels. First, *Santeros* have often perceived *Santería* as a practice welcoming to Lesbian,- Gay,- Bisexual,- and Transgender or Transsexual-identified people. Though the religious-cultural practice is

by no means exclusive to "gay" practitioners, and indeed has a predominant heterosexual leadership and membership, "gay" members are a significant visible group within the religious practice. This dissertation engages with some of the elements that allow for the participation of LGBT-identified *Santeros*. As the dissertation shows, there are ways in which these populations are differently allowed to practice *Santería*.

Second, practitioners recognize *Santería's* African slave history and consider it a marker of cultural resistance to "Western" notions of culture and religiosity—"queering" the line between the two. The often told stories of syncretism—the blending of Catholicism and Yoruba traditions—emphasize how African slaves engaged in this fusing of religions when Catholicism was imposed on them by the Spanish conquerors. According to syncretism, the belief system that merged Yoruba beliefs to Catholicism "matched" their *Orishas* with Catholic Saints. For instance, *Changó*, the god of thunder and fire, a hyper-masculine *Orisha*, is known in the Catholic Church as Saint Barbara; *Babalú Ayé* is Saint Lazarus; and *Ochún* is linked to the Virgin of Charity. Not everyone agrees with this syncretic view of these two religions (Yoruba and Catholicism) into *Santería*, and given that oral traditions inform so much of the passing of information, it is important to suspend the implications of this supposed merging. (I will describe *Santería's* history, religious system, ritual, and hierarchical structure in the following section.)

Third, one crucial aspect of the religion—the presence of spirits through bodily possession—offers gendered and sexualized images, and it is most often understood as a freeing of gender structures in recent publications (Conner, 2004; Strongman, 2002). In *Santería*, the gods or deities come and participate in the religious events through the

bodies of their practitioners. While deities are energy—and not gendered in a strict sense—most stories describe the *Orishas* in terms of their gender. The idea that *some* practitioners act as "horses" for the *Orishas* who come to "mount" them at various events (this is the language commonly used in the literature and among practitioners) holds gendered and sexual implications that have only begun to be described and analyzed in academic settings. Indeed, I stress the fact that not everyone allows him/herself to be possessed as a marker filled with gendered and sexualized meanings. This is a way in which gay-identified practitioners hold some ground as *Santería* practitioners, as the middle chapters illustrate.

And last, many of the practitioners I have had the opportunity to talk with have shared their clear perception of *Santería* practice as a vibrant site, full of possibility for gay-identified members. It is not simply that there are many "gay" practitioners, but that they are finding ways to worship within the structure of the religious-cultural practice. At a time in which many religious systems still have an institutionalized form of exclusion based on a self-identified "gay or lesbian" sexual orientation, this research points to a different kind of religious setting.

In sum, *Santería* is an excellent space to study empirically the perceived fluidity of sexuality and gender in an ethno-racial and religious minority setting. Because *Santería* itself queers understandings and boundaries between religion and culture—assessments of *Santería* as a sect, a cult, a cultural expression, or a religion are made by practitioners, ritual attendants, the "American" public, the Supreme Court, and media alike—this study is set apart from other religious writings on religion, racialization, migration, and gender and sexuality. As such, the study requires a theoretical approach

that can connect all of these intersectional aspects of *Santería* worship. I use a Queer of Color critique in order to move the study forward. To understand the Queer of Color critique, I must briefly discuss Queer Theory's project.

In the last fifteen years, Queer Theory has developed as an interdisciplinary field of study that has troubled the linearity and assumptions about sex, gender, and sexuality categories.[1] Queer Theory's emphasis is diverse: from the naming and studying of heteronormativity (Warner, 1993), the critical notion of homosociality (Sedgwick, 1985; 1990), the discursive practices of power and regulation (Foucault, 1990 [1978]), and the psychoanalytical use of performativity (Butler, 1990; 1993). Queer Theory encompasses a history of second wave feminist writings, lesbian feminist and feminist of color critiques, and gay and lesbian scholarship.[2]

Yet Queer Theory has itself been criticized for its inability to turn to questions of racialization and race (Jackson, 1993), and the different ways in which its Anglo American hegemony needs to be posed against the lives of people of color (Gomez, 1995). Thus, a Queer of Color critique has been developed both in response to Queer Theory and as an extension of it. I engage with Queer Theory's project, and its criticisms, by applying a Queer of Color critique to the study of *Santería*. I do so by empirically studying the relationship of these categories in fieldwork dominated by an ethno-racial minority setting. While basing my arguments and literature in sociology, anthropology,

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[1] For work disrupting the linearity between sex, gender, and sexuality see, for instance, Sedgwick (1995) and Halberstam (1998a) (focusing on masculinity without men); Dreger (1998), Fausto-Sterling (2000), Kessler (1998), and Preves (2003) (focusing on intersexuality), and Butler's arguments about the creation of "sex" based on gender constructs (1990; 1993).

[2] For an excellent discussion of Queer Theory's genealogy in Spanish, see Sáez (2004).

and social sciences more generally, I also use Queer Theory and Queer of Color critiques to frame my analysis.

What follows is an overall description of *Santería*, including a brief history, deity descriptions, hierarchical structures within the religious system, and some ethnographic notes on my fieldwork. I then situate the Queer of Color Critique and discuss the use of categories like "gender" and "sexuality" and the concept of "sexual minorities" in relation to my research in order to close the chapter.

La Regla Lukumí or *La Regla de Ochá*: The Way of the Saints

Santería involves beliefs in ritual focused on communication and interaction with spirits or deities. It is more formally known as "*Lukumí*," "*La regla Lukumí*," "*La regla de Ochá,"* or *"La regal de Ifá,"* although many people would not recognize it if only called in either of those terms.[3] *Santería*, which utilizes Africa's Yoruba religion and region as a referent,[4] in its more contemporary form involves migration patterns from Cuba to many US metropolitan areas and Puerto Rico.[5] Like *Vodou* in Haiti and the

[3] The words ***Lucumí*** or ***Lukumí*** most notably refer to the "name given to Yoruba-speaking people in Cuba" (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003: 24). The word ***regla,*** which "translates as religion, order, or rule" (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003: 222) is based on the word ***reglamiento*** (regulation), which refers to the surveillance of Afro-Cuban peoples after Cuba's independence in 1898. ***Ochá*** and ***Ifá*** represent the divination conducted by the ***Oriaté*** and the ***Babalawo,*** the two highest leadership roles held by men, respectively, as I explain in brief.

[4] Yoruba Religion itself has a complex set of influences beyond the scope of this dissertation. For the interested reader, refer to Lucas, (***Religion of the Yorubas,*** 2001 [1948]). For gender discussions within Yoruba tradition, I refer the reader to the work by Oyěwùmí (***Invention of Women,*** 1997), and Fadipe (***The Sociology of the Yoruba,*** 1970).

[5] The two largest Cuban migration patterns, taking place in the late 1950s and in1980, influenced the dissemination of this religious system in the US and Puerto Rico. Many Cubans who left before Fidel Castro's entry to power migrated to Puerto Rico, and after Dominicans, Cubans are the second largest migrant group on the Island. The 1980 migration was a more direct Cuba-Miami one. There are also significant class, racial, and economic differences between these two migration

Mexican Gulf/Louisiana area (Gaston Mulira, 1990); *Candomblé, Umbanda* and *Macumba* in Brazil, Venezuela, and other regions in South America; *Shango* in Trinidad and Tobago, Grenada, and Barbados; *Espiritismo* in Puerto Rico; and perhaps even in Mexican traditions like *Curanderismo; Santería* involves belief in the supernatural, and communication with ancestors, spirits, or various forms of energy, for the practitioners' well being. This communication encompasses (1) divination, (2) sacrifice, (3) possession trance, and (4) initiation (Murphy, 1993; Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003). (I address divination differences and initiation in this chapter; animal sacrifice in chapter 2; and possession in chapter 3.)

In the US context, blends between *Espiritismo* (communicating with spirits of the dead) and *Santería* have created *Santerismo*, furthering notions of syncretism.[6] All of these religious systems originate from various forced migration patterns by African slaves whose religious systems were in communication with imposed religious traditions, especially Catholicism. Most slave migration throughout the Americas began in the 1700s; in Cuba, the religious Yoruba tradition began to influence Cubans' religious system between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These African-derived religions,

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patterns: while in the 1950s the migrants were overwhelmingly people with a lot of economic means, many of whom were considered of an upper class in Cuba, and predominantly light skinned Cubans, the 1980s migration was labeled that of "*Marielitos*," because of its departure from Mariel. This second group of migrants was publicly labeled as scum (*Sp:* escoria), lumpen proletariats, anti-social (*Sp:* antisociales), prostitutes, and homosexuals. For an excellent view of how this second wave's stigma embodied homosexuality leaving Cuba and the Cuban American gay male experience in the US, see Susana Peña's (2002; 2005) excellent research on the topic. For the complex migration patterns from and to the Caribbean and the US, refer to the recent work by Martinez-San Miguel (Caribe *Two Ways*, 2003) and Duany (*Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, 2002).

[6] In Cuba, however, other Afro-Cuban religious systems have remained separate. Those include the *Abakú* and *Palo*, which is often divided into *Palo Monte* and *Palo Mayombe*. In the US and among my informants, some practice both *Palo* and *Santería.*

like dancing/music and in general "corporeal movement," was at once a way of rejecting African traditions by most Latin American elites in the nineteenth century, yet became a central element in the twentieth century's homogenizing project—even achieving the status of "symbols of national cultural identity" (Andrews, 2004: 10).

According to writers like David Brown (Santería *Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion*, 2003), the religion began to be studied only in the latter part of the nineteen century in Cuba, and in the mid twentieth century in the US—and most often within parameters of an anthropological gaze, criminal assumptions, and legal studies. In the US, the "first recognized initiation" has been documented in NYC by a Cuban priest as taking place in 1961, "in a small four room apartment on Amsterdam Avenue at 88th Street" (Mason, 1985: 10—see also Brandon, 1983; Brown, 2003). Half a century later, and according to some media sources, US *Santería* practitioners' estimates are of 1 million (Harper, 2000), although I must clarify that these estimates may lump together the person purchasing a candle at a *botánica*, the occasional onlooker at a *Santería* event, the newly initiated member, and the long time priest. Practitioners in NYC often come from Latino (mostly Caribbean) countries; some may be African American, although I have also met people from other ethno-racial backgrounds. Throughout some of my ethnographic experiences I noticed, however, that the knowledge of a lot of the religion still rests on the shoulders of Afro-Latinos, most certainly Cubans and Puerto Ricans of dark skin and African heritage. Moreover, the practitioners I have come in contact with at the drummings—the most public of initiation rituals—vary in terms of their racial and ethnic backgrounds; in fact, in many instances, it would be impossible to determine if someone was *either* Puerto Rican or Dominican or Cuban, and

when I inquired, I came to realize that a lot of these ethno-national categories were not applicable in any "pure" way. Many practitioners identified with more than one Caribbean country of origin, for instance. Thus the religion offers many ways to queer "race," by noting the complexity of ethno-racial, national, and cultural racial identifications. However, there are certain ethno-racial referents in my study of *Santería* that in some way "trace" the religious developments: from Yoruba, to Cuba, to the US and Puerto Rico, and to Puerto Ricans, challenging notions of what constitutes "authentic," "diasporic," "race," and "religion" and "culture."

Santería has historically been a religion open to marginalized populations.[7] It began as a force to counter the abuse and bring hope throughout slavery, later evolving into a method of strength for those Afro-Cuban believers at the dawn of the twentieth century. Its migration from Cuba to the US also signaled to some the uses of *Santería* as an alternative to marginal and poor communities. Indeed, some authors have noted that many non-Afro-Cuban Cubans began practicing *Santería* in the last decades or when they arrived to the US (Andrews, 2004; De La Torre, 2004)—presumably, because they found it to be a force to counter the experience as migrants in a foreign country. Today, *Santería* is even used and theorized as a mental health tool for many believers. For instance, it has been documented in places like the Bronx, how intravenous drug users maintain a shrine in the front yard of a private house, leaving offerings for the *Orishas* and "looking into a mirror that serves as a portal to the other world" (Feldman, 2001).

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[7] The work by Jossianna Arroyo (*Travestismos culturales: literatura y etnografía en Cuba y Brazil*, 2003) and Alicia E. Vadillo (*Santería y vodú; sexualidad y homoerotismo: caminos que se cruzan sobre la narrativa Cubana contemporánea*, 2002) separately address the historical insertion of, and links between, *Santería*, homoeroticism, and ethnographic and literature work in Cuba.

Santería has been studied for its uses as a mental health system for decades now (Sandoval, 1979). Thus, to view all of these aspects of how *Santería* serves its practitioners only within a religious framework is, according to Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert (2003), not adequate enough to address these practices. This complex system indeed addresses various needs such as those linked to the arts, music and dance, psychotherapy, community, and magic.

Santería is inherently a system of an extended notion of family: "Out of this system of tribal or familiar lineage emerges a religious brotherhood involving godfather and godchildren in a kinship that transcends blood connections to form an all-inclusive and compact horizontal lineage. This family system has been one of the most genuine characteristics of Santería in Cuba" (Barnet, 2000: 81). *Santeros* participate within a structure of rituals towards their deities and under the direction of *padrinos* (godfathers) and *madrinas* (godmothers). The formation of "houses" where a *padrino* and *madrina* lead their initiates is a basic structure of religious-cultural practice. These "houses" are not necessarily physical ones, but the formation of a family structure where *Santeros* are hierarchically placed, often depending on their years of initiation and deity assignment. "Houses" where *Santería* is practiced cluster in the Bronx and Brooklyn, although New Jersey, Connecticut, and other NYC boroughs have had long time practitioners.

Orishas (or deities) come and participate in the activities, contributing with their charms, personalities, even funny or possessive behavior. *Santería* is centered on its appreciation, veneration, and dialogue with the *Orishas*. While the deities are a force or energy, and not specifically human, given the weight of *Santería's* oral tradition, a lot of these *Orishas* are given form through anthropomorphic stories and embodiments. In fact,

the energy of the *Orishas* is often referred to as *Aché*, the "word" or "power" that created the world (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003). There are several dozen deities, and each practitioner "is crowned" with a primary deity, as well as a "mother," or secondary deity. It is said that there are 401 *Orishas*, with the number one representing the infinite (Moreno Vega, 2000), but only several dozen deities are written about and acknowledged in related literature. *Olodumaré*, the Supreme Being, created *Aché*, according to many *Santería* writings. Along with *Olofí* and *Obatalá*, the king of all *Orishas*, they rule the world. *Olofí* and *Olodumaré*, understood as the father and the mother, respectively, of heaven and earth, are such supreme beings that they do not cater to human needs—the *Orishas* stand for that.

Following *Obatalá's* central place among the *Orishas* is *Elleguá*, the opener of all roads, the messenger and most important warrior, with whom initiations and drumming events are opened and closed. *Yemayá*, the mother of all *Orishas*, stands after, along with *Ogún* (big warrior) and *Changó* (owner of thunder and fire, hyper-masculine, owner of the *Batá* drums). *Oshún* (most beautiful, very flirtatious and sexy), *Oyá* (owner of the cemetery), *Babalú Ayé* (king of illnesses), *Ochosi* (best of hunters, very intelligent), *Obá* (owner of the lakes and ponds), and *Osún* (who watches the heads of believers; said to be the messenger of *Olofí* and *Obatalá*) are some of the other deities. Thus while there are several deities, certain ones are most privileged; said in other ways, the practitioners initiated with *Elleguá* receive a certain attention and are of particular pride to a house, than other more commonly assigned or less central deities.

Worshipping takes place through public ceremonies such as *tambores* (drummings) or birthdays (celebrations held for both the *Orishas* and the practitioners'

religious birthdays), as well as the maintenance of home altars. Possession takes place particularly at the *tambores* (also called *bembés*), where the *Orishas* come down and take over the bodies of some practitioners. Because in *Santería*, unlike religions like Catholicism, the world of the flesh and the world of the spirit are not so distant, the spirit is often understood as a duplicate of the body—and of bodily needs (Bateman, 1999).

Padrinos and *madrinas* are responsible for guiding new initiates, especially during their first year of formal entrance to *Santería* as a practitioner, or what is termed in Spanish as a *Yabó* [*Y: Iyawo*]. A *Yabó* spends eight days in an altar, where he or she is served food, sleeps, and wears all-white clothing, except on the day of the drumming (the third initiation day), when the initiate wears the colors and represents the assigned deity. The *Itá*—a cowry divination session revealing the practitioner's destiny—is a central part of this week's initiation, where a series of restrictions and guidance is told to the *Yabó* by an *Oriaté* (one of the two highest leaders in *Santería*, after the *Babalawo*, as discussed in the next page). A *Yabó's padrino* and *madrina* are heavily involved in the rituals during that week and throughout the *Yabó's* new life as an initiate, but especially during the following first year of life as a *Santero*. (*Yabó* is both understood as a newborn, but also, as a "wife"—irrespective of the initiate's sex—marrying the *Orisha* who "crowns" his/her head.) During their first year, *Yabós* turn to strict all-white clothing, only complemented by garments and necklaces of colors that represent the *Orisha* assignment of each practitioner. The *Yabó* remains closely connected to his *padrinos* and is offered information about the religion one step at a time, as controlled by the *padrinos*.

The religious-cultural practice has a hierarchical structure that enables a seemingly functional division of labor, although sexuality and gender intersect it: for

instance, no self-identified gay male, or women of any sexual orientation, can become a *Babalawo*, the highest priest in *Santería*, or play the *Batá* drums, which are sacred drums utilized in religious initiations (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003: 70-1). Thus even structurally, gender and sexuality may be indexing a certain difference that merits attention.

The highest role attainable in *Santería* is that of the *Babalawo*. This role is limited to self-identified (and publicly recognized as) heterosexual men. Although, like in many rules, exceptions emerge (Fernández Robaina, 1995), some of which have been documented (a woman becoming a *Babalawo* in Africa; men who were initiated as *Babalawos* and grew up to self-identify as gay later on in life). *Babalawos' aché* is said to be different from that of any other *Santero* (Brandon, 1983), and *Babalawos* have memorized thousands of stories to recite in the divination they conduct (Matibag, 2000). The *Ifá* is said to be the narrative (or story) *Babalawos* speak in divination. *Babalawos* do have some restrictions: they cannot be the *padrinos/madrinas* of a house, and cannot attend certain activities in the religion. They also go through a different, more private kind of initiation that does not require the *asiento* (*Sp:* to be crowned or seated upon by an *Orisha*).

The *Oriaté* is the next highest role within the religion. This role is only occupied by men, and based on preliminary/pilot research (Vidal-Ortiz, 2005), I found that self-identified gay men participate in this role quite often. This *Santero* priest rules the *Ochá* divination, which is different from the *Ifá*, the one ruled by the Babalawo. *Oriatés* are also seen as masters of ceremonies, and oversee that the rituals are conducted in the appropriate way. In some houses in the US, the *Oriaté* performs all the rituals and does

not defer to a *Babalawo* (Fernández Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert, 2003:52). David Brown (2003) has documented how this role was not limited to men, and I engage with some interview data and relevant literature in Chapter 4 to illustrate this history.

Then there are the *babalochas* and *iyalochas*, male and female names for father and mothers in a house structure, as well as initiated *Santeros*. A *Yabó* or someone who has not completed an initiation is not properly a *Santero*, as a *Santero* implies the capacity to be a *Santería* priest. The *Yabó* is thus the last level of the religious practice; believers who are not initiated are often called *Aleyos*. *Aleyos* could be people without any kind of initiation-related ritual, or could have attained their *guerreros* (*Sp:* warrior necklaces).

The Drumming as a Field Site

> *Before attending my first initiation ever, I received an email from an acquaintance who I will refer to as Esteban. It was an invitation, in the summer of 2000, to join him in his initiation ritual as a new* Santero. *He gave me directions to the place, the date and time, ritual duration, and some specifications about the clothing. "Do not wear black—try to wear white or beige—and bring a hat with you, or something to cover your head. Don't worry about food, there will be plenty after the ceremony." These words stuck with me, and gave me curiosity and more desire to come to my friends' "birth as a* Santero*."*

I have attended numerous initiations from the summer of 2000 through the winter of 2005. I would often attend initiations as I was invited by a friend or an informant. Ceremonies often start at about 2 or 3 in the afternoon, when all the *Batá* drummers are

present and ready to play. Some of these houses have a similar setting or physical structure: often a three-story building in the middle of a block, just a few blocks from a train station. At many of these houses, one has to only take a few steps downstairs to the basement, where the initiations take place. (Sometimes, the house where the initiation is conducted is the house of the *padrino* or *madrina* of the initiate, but many times, this is not the case.) Because the initiation rituals are very similar (in terms of length and procedures), and most initiations take place at a similar, if not the same, house structure and location—a set of specific Bronx and Brooklyn houses—I will only describe a "typical" basement house in the following pages. (Indeed, there is something insightful to be said about the similarity of most of these houses as three-story buildings whose basements had been habilitated for initiations many times during the year.)

> *As I walk into the basement, I see a space partially lit by a few windows and lighting; also noticeable is a closet where coats and bags are placed—either right at the entrance, or in a room towards the back of the basement. From the basement entrance of most of these houses it is possible to see almost all the details of the ritualistic site—all except the altar where the initiate sits or stands. This altar is often at the end of the room, and at the corner furthest from the door. As I take a few steps into the setting where an initiation drumming is taking place, my eyes are overwhelmed by trying to grasp many details of the site, memorizing as much as I can before more action in the ceremonies take place. While people are often there at my arrival, my curiosity helps me separate the bodies from the setting, at least for a minute. To the left of the drumming*

space and at the end of the visible area, there are a couple of drums with other musical instruments and chairs. The main ceremonial space is about 45 feet long and 20 feet wide, with additional space in the back that includes a bathroom and the kitchen. (Kitchens are in actuality one of the most variant aspects of these sites; they are most often at the entrance—directly at the end of the basement's entrance door, or opposite/behind the space where the altar is.)

Of an average of seven to twelve feet long and about five to seven feet wide, the altar "hides" from the initial eye of a newly arrived person. One has to walk past a wall at the entrance and a small closet, for instance, or avoid a couple of building columns, in order to notice the privileged space. The floors and walls of the altar are covered with sheets signifying the color of the deity, and a thin wooden carpet is placed for the initiate to kneel down/lay down and salute others as they decide to greet the initiate. Altars often have many colors, many sheets of various colors are placed at the walls, marking impressively and beautifully the corner, actively separating it from the rest of the space. There is often a basket with money offerings left by the attendees for the initiate, to help support the costs of the rental space, the food, the drummers, and the presence of people who work on many of the details of the initiation (what is called a "derecho," *or your "right" for the work practitioners have done for the initiate).*

When a *bembé* ends, it is time to eat with each other. The drummers and initiated *Santeros* eat first, then the initiate, then the rest of the people attending. This is usually

the time when I get to ask questions about some of the things that took place in the evening, or when I get to know more of the people at the *bembé.* It is also the time when I let people know of my dissertation, and get to tell them a little of the project. I hear many comments, ranging from discomfort with the topic ("why gender and sexuality?") to a functional tolerance of "gay" practitioners ("they are the best *Santeros*!"). These settings offer a particularly rich site to study gender and sexuality, as it has been my observation, and confirmed by many of the study participants, that over thirty percent of all male attendees at any given initiation self-identify as gay, and, depending on the site, about a third of the women are lesbian-identified.

Gender and Sexuality in Santería*: A Conflation of terms?*

It is not simply that a high attendance of "gay" practitioners is evident; there are also several aspects that are gendered and sexualized and that are attended to in this dissertation. Some of these gendered and sexual aspects are: cross-gender deity assignment, gender-specific prohibitions and labor, and the "mounting" of some practitioners as a sexualized experience. For instance, in terms of cross-gender deity assignment, while initiated *Santeros* have a main deity who "claimed their head," a lot of times a cross-gender deity assignment takes place—and it is made evident in many of the *Santeros'* day-to-day practice with others. There are physical expressions serving as gendered ways of learning about a person's deity assignment—a permanent assignment that cannot be changed. Throughout a drumming and other events, people salute each other, and reveal through their salute the gender of their deity, as it is displayed at every interaction with other *Santeros*: if a *Santero/a* has a female deity assignment, he or she lies on the floor, rotates his/her hips, alternating the touch to the floor, and then is lifted

through a sign on his or her back by the *Santero/a* he/she was greeting; if the *Santero/a* has a male deity assignment, he or she will lay flat on the floor, arms on the sides of the body, until the *Santero/a* he or she is saluting unfetters him/her from the ground.

I began this research as there was conflicting information about the place of *Santería* in accepting LGBT-identified individuals. As I extended my research, I began to explore *Santería* in terms of its allegedly gender fluidity and opening to multiple gender experiences. On the one hand, scholars such as Strongman (2002) have argued that *Santería* offers a significant space for gender fluidity. However, some conflations between gender and sexuality have been made in his argument. While his discussion centers on *sexuality*, Strongman illustrates the possibilities of *Santería* and similar religions as sites that offer a multiplicity of *gender* identifications through their deity and religious practice.

On the other hand, activists such as Conner (2004) most adamantly argue that *Santería* is a highly homophobic and transphobic site, yet these arguments have been made assuming *Santería's* complicity in sexist/homophobic systems without a critical view of how "LGBT" *Santeros* participate, are resisted, negotiate that resistance, are welcomed, and appropriate that space. In addition, these concerns are most often framed in terms of the participation of gay-identified people, yet assumed to be about both "gender" and "sexuality" in the religious practice. Nothing in these writings engages with questions of gender and the pre-established figure of women (in the kitchen, or as *Orishas'* "horses") within this religious setting. This dissertation is a serious first engagement with these questions. As already noted in this chapter, and as illustrated in Chapters 3 and 4, there are gender-specific prohibitions that these scholars and activists alike fail to note when discussing this practice as a most welcoming religious-cultural system to "gays" (often just

meaning gay-identified men). The gendered expectations of being "possessed" or "mounted" as acts mainly enacted by women and "gays," as well as the sexualized significance given to the act of serving as a "horse" to be "mounted" by the *Orishas* are also evident in those chapters.

In addition, this research presents an opportunity to tap into religious communities seldom researched in relation to sexuality and gender. Most recent studies of religion and sexual minorities in the US focus on Euro-American, gay male identified, Judeo-Christian experiences. A study of *Santería* LGBT-identified practitioners, where Latinos and African Americans are the predominant constituencies, and where Catholicism—as a mainstream religion—is an influence, but not the driving force of the religion, will significantly broaden the scope of scholarship on sexuality, gender, and religion. In addition, given that some of the LGBT-identified *Santeros* are integrated in *Santería*, this research allows for an examination of the ways that both "gay" and non-"gay"-identified people negotiate and resist, as well as welcome, "LGBT" participation. This research contributes to the overall study of "sexual minorities" in religious groups, institutions, and alternative religions—providing insight into the understudied and fruitful domain of *Santería* religious-cultural institutions and practices, and adding to what others have documented as the impact of LGBT-identified participation in other religious settings, as well as to sexuality and gender scholarship, in broadening the scope of the term, "sexual minorities."

It is in this light that I engage the Queer of Color Critique to better understand gender and sexuality in *Santería*, as a site that inherently offers a mixture of ethno-racial, migration, cultural, and gender-sexual subjectivities and experiences from within.

Queer of Color Critiques: Interdisciplinary Ways of Studying Santería

Sociology must engage with other disciplines and fields of study in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of social organization, social systems, social change, or social interaction. *Santería* is no different from other fields of social study, and engaging with the concepts of gender and sexuality requires moving outside the disciplinarity typical of sociological research. Based on thirty years of theorizing that has named privilege and oppression as characteristic of the social sciences, I incorporate the work of scholars like Chandan Reddy (1998), José Muñoz (1999, 2000), and Roderick Ferguson (2004), scholars whose critique was aimed at sociological writings and theorizing that pathologizes those it labels queer of color. Aspects such as disidentification (Muñoz, 1999), leaving pan-ethnic labels (i.e., Latino) for a concept of affect and "feeling brown" (Muñoz, 2000), illustrating the devastating effects of the historical violence at home experienced by queers of color in the US (Reddy, 1998), and situating this historical processes of heteronormativity within US 19th century racial formations (Ferguson, 2004) help develop my arguments within a religious-cultural minority setting.

Ferguson (2004), for instance, has argued that racial formation processes have solidified White-American notions of citizenry that have as a platform gender conformity and notions of hyper-sexualized (as in the case of African Americans and Latinos) or de-sexualized (as in the case of many Asian immigrants) experiences—experiences that eject these populations from the center of American values and discourse. Calling these racialized and gendered/sexually excluded populations "surplus populations," Ferguson critiques much of contemporary social science writings—including many faulty writings evident in "canonical sociology"—that fail to account for the deployment of and mutual

constitutiveness of racial formations and heteronormativity processes. While filled with potential to address queer of color communities, most times Ferguson's critique remains within an African American focus, which hinders potential queer of color work that transcends contemporary pan-ethnic (African American, Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander, Native American, and Middle Eastern/Arab) identifications.

Muñoz (1999, 2000) has eloquently argued for the abject position of queers of color, especially with regards to queer theoretical formulations in the 1990s. He has also engaged US ethno-racial discourse by "browning" the experience of various pan-ethnic groups from queer of color communities. Yet as a result of his incomplete move towards people of color theorizing, Muñoz fails to account for specific historical racialization markings within Latino populations—namely, Puerto Ricans (for a related argument, refer to Guzmán, 2004, as well as the racialization discussion in the next chapter). Time and again, with examples of Puerto Rican individuals masked under the pretense of breaking away from Latino identities, Muñoz elaborates on the use of "people of color" possibilities by erasing this specific national/militarized link to first world countries—a link that can also help us re-think pan-ethnicity and coalition building *within* people of color communities (for a related argument, see Vidal-Ortiz, 2004).

Reddy (1998), a first writer of this Queer of Color critique, offers a similar set of arguments in his article. Reddy's discussion of the place of queers of color in US society borrows the language of "houses" and "home" based on the film *Paris is Burning* and is especially illustrative of my project. While in *Santería*, the "houses" are a structure for participation, there are ways in which "gay" *Santeros* are limited in their participation. It is the contradiction between being incorporated into a diverse space while simultaneously

facing the limitations imposed based on sexual identity for "gay" *Santeros* that moves the uses of the Queer of Color Critique forward in my arguments. This openness—however negotiated "LGBT" participation may be—opens up a flourishing site which reveals new family structures. I develop and extend the Queer of Color critique in the dissertation chapters, as I weave these discussions with media, interview, and ethnographic data.

This Queer of Color Critique is based on theoretical interventions ranging from second wave feminist writings of the 1970s; critiques developed by feminists of color soon after the second wave feminism (Anzaldúa and Moraga, 1983; Collins, 1990; Mohanty, 1991; Sandoval, 1991);[8] the emergence of gay and lesbian scholarship in the 1980s, especially as it related to historical research (D'Emilio, 1983; Faderman, 1981; Kennedy and Davis, 1994) but also in general (Adam, 1985; Epstein, 1987; Murray, 1979; Plummer, 1981; Schneider, 1984; Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Weeks, 1985); and a subsequent "Queer Theory" theorizing (the term was coined by de Lauretis, 1991) during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Butler, 1990, 1993; Duggan, 1994; Foucault, 1978 [1990]; Sedgwick, 1990; Warner, 1993).[9] In addition, I am looking at works where

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[8] Two lesbian feminist critiques of the second wave in particular cannot be omitted: Wittig's "One is not born a Woman" in ***The Straight Mind*** (1981) and Rich's "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (1980). Critiques from lesbian feminist, as well as third world countries and U.S. women of color were central to these developments. Biddy Martin's "Lesbian Identity and Autobiographical Difference[s]" (1988) is another relevant writing that comes several years after Wittig's and Rich's.

[9] While Butler and other Queer theorists were cementing what we now know as Queer Theory, Cherríe Moraga was discussing the relationship of a renewed Chicano tribe, what she calls a ***Queer Aztlán*** (2003 [1993]). In her work, Moraga challenges both the Chicano heterosexual leadership, and homosexual Chicano men—the former, for its degradation of "gays and lesbians;" the latter, for not confronting their male privilege. Influenced by the work of Latinas and feminists of color like Moraga, Queer Theory continues to challenge heteronormativity. Queer theoretical scholarly work must not erase the movements that produced much of what it currently known as such. Just as within feminist scholarship, where "canonical" works like ***This Bridge Called My Back***

migration and racialization intersect the study of gender and sexuality in more recent Filipino (Manalansan, 2003) and South Asian (Gopinath, 2005) queer diasporas work, sociological critiques such as Lionel Cantú's *queer political economy* (1999, 2001), as well as other Latino-specific scholarship centered in these intersections (Decena, 2004; Guzmán, 2004; Luibhéid, 2002; Luibhéid and Cantú, 2005; Peña, 2002; Quiroga, 2000; Rodríguez, 2003; Roque-Ramírez, 2001). These latter works are shaping a recent queer of color critique through migration and globalization. While not a comprehensive illustration of this vast body of work, this dissertation responds to the thread and connectedness of these literatures. Also, this dissertation benefits from Valentine's (2000) work that contextualizes the critique to "gender" and "sexuality" as used currently.[10]

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are reduced to a racial weekly lecture on Latinas (see Alarcón, 1990), so is the production of Moraga's work as Latino, and not Latino queer or queer, in the developments of a US-based Queer Theory. Thus to produce a "Queer Theory" devoid of its feminist and feminist of color predecessors is to conceal an ethno-racial Otherness and sustain (homo)sexuality studies as "White." (For an excellent discussion of *This Bridge's* impact in this field, see Guzmán, 2004. For a different treatment of Almaguer's work, see Chapter 3.) A Queer of Color critique can also sustain an on-going intervention in terms of such history and positioning.

[10] Gender and sexuality are seen as separate conceptual tools in the US. The argument in much of the current US social sciences is, in a nut shell: that *sex* is the term commonly used to refer to a person's biological status as a man or woman, and *gender* refers to the socio-cultural aspects, behaviors, expectations, and *insignia* (West and Zimmerman, 1987) attached to the assignment of sex at birth. Sex, like gender, is most recently considered to be a social construction as well (see Butler, 1993, but especially Fausto-Sterling, 2000—this point was initially illustrated by Kessler and McKenna, 1978, as stated by Lorber, 1994:4). *Sexual orientation* is often assumed to be biologically determined in the study of homosexuality (LeVay, 1993), because homosexuality is still pathologized when placed next to heterosexuality, and seldom do historians or social scientists embark on the study of the causes and origins of the latter (Katz, 1996). Some refer to sexual orientation as *sexuality* (Devor, 1997; Jacobs and Cromwell, 1992). Sexual orientation refers to the sexual attractions, behavior, and/or sexual history of individuals (Bell and Weinberg, 1978; De Cecco and Shively, 1983; Kinsey, Pomeron, Martin, 1948; Klein, 1993; Shively and De Cecco, 1987). But, as Laumann, Gagnon, Michael and Michaels (1994:3) have argued, "an individual engages in sexual activity on the basis of a complex set of motivations and organizes

Situating Gender and Sexuality in Queer Theory and the Dissertation

Valentine (2000, 2002, 2003) has argued for the repositioning of gender and sexuality categories as more than simply culturally specific systems. In his work with the category of "transgender" in the US, Valentine argues that "gender" and "sexuality" are themselves cultural categories and the identities/experiences that flow from them—transgenderism and homosexuality—are not naturally distinct (see also Rubin, 2003, for a less elaborated but specific case of female to male transsexuals).

David Valentine sets to study both the ethnographic emergence of the category and identity of "transgender," and compares it to the socio-historical development of "gay"—and its separation from gender variant/deviant presentation. He gathered ethnographic data at the Gender Identity Project of the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of NYC, the "House Balls" in NYC,[11] and sex work venues where feminine-looking male-bodied individuals "sold" sex for money (and while one would identify them as transgender, Valentine argues for a different analysis). He also attended meetings where psychologists and psychiatrists, as well as transgender activists, discussed the presence—and potential removal—of gender identity as a disorder in the Diagnostic and

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that activity on the basis of numerous external factors and influences." Sexual orientation is a complex social construction in which concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality are implicated (Tewksbury and Gagné, 1996; Vidal-Ortiz, 2002). Feminists began using ***gender*** as a category to address the unequal treatment of women. ***Gender identity*** was subsequently used as a term to manage the emergence of medical limitations in addressing intersexuality (Hausman, 1995; Meyerowitz, 2002). The term gender identity is, in one of its most current usages, utilized to refer to the desire of transitioning that transgender and transsexual individuals express or experience. However, such a term is rooted in the ***Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*** of the American Psychiatric Association (4th ed.)—unlike homosexuality, transsexuality has remained a (gender identity) disorder.

[11] The "house balls" are "house"-like structures where a lot of ethno-racial minorities, some of them homeless, developed a sense of "home." This urban phenomenon was captured in the film ***Paris is Burning***. I discuss the structure of the "house balls" and how I see their relationship to ***Santería*** and the queer of color critique in Chapter 3.

Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association. Finally, he was also a participant lobbying in Washington, DC, with advocates for the inclusion of "gender identity and expression" in the then employment non-discrimination act (in 1997). One of Valentine's observations in conducting his research was that many gender transgressors, who, under the Gender Identity Project of "the Center," would have fallen in the transgender category, saw themselves as both women and "gay"—something which would blend -and disrupt- gender and sexuality as we know them in academic circles (for more on this, see Valentine, 2003).

Valentine asserts that in twentieth century developments in the US—especially the "mainstreaming" of the "gay and lesbian" movement—"lesbian," "gay," and to a certain degree, "bisexual" categories become material to the study of sexuality, while during the 1990s, the emergence of transgenderism is quickly subsumed within the study of gender. "How do we decide which experiences count as gender and which as sexuality?" (Valentine, 2002:223) is an opening question that Valentine poses for us—the reader interested, either theoretically or/and politically, in the separation of these two categories as discrete. Like Valentine, I am interested in making the point that lesbian, gay, and bisexual identities have "a gender," while transgenderism offers much room to study sexuality within that identification—yet his work highlights how politics have a central responsibility in this simplification. This "de-gendering" of the gay category has a strong relation to the emergence of the transgender one—and its subsequent attempts for de-sexualization, as the transgender category "has filled the empty space left by such a de-gendering" (Valentine, 2002:224). Valentine states that while many academic and political organizations are including both *bisexual* and *transgender* in their mission and

programs, they are not changing their names to be so inclusive. He concludes that this ambiguity takes place because "transgender identities are seen to have a distinct and ontologically different source from those described by the labels gay and lesbian" (2002:225). He also makes a right-on assessment of queer theorizing—that many other markers of the sexual identity of the individuals so called gay, lesbian, or bisexual have been studied—including class and cultural difference—but that the very basis of those sexual identities—sexual orientation—has been left untouched. Thus, Valentine's work, exemplifying the need for a Queer Theory that addresses sexual identity, like the Queer of Color Critique (which requires the study of racialization through sexuality) are complementary to my intent to problematize "gender" and "sexuality" in a religious-cultural and ethno-racial minority setting.

Drawing on Valentine's work, I extend the interrogation of the complex relationship between sexuality and gender to *Santería* practices. *Santería* offers a rich site for investigating the intersection of religious identities with "Western" categories of homosexuality and the newly emerging category of transgenderism. Valentine shows how in the "drag balls" (part of the House Balls) and street culture of young African American and Latina/o LGBT-identified people in NYC, mainstream LGBT conceptions of normatively gendered homosexuality cannot necessarily make sense of the identities and experiences of those people (a topic I engage as I describe NYC and Christopher Street as an ethnographic venue linked in some ways to *Santería* in Chapter 3). This points to the fact that mainstream conceptualizations of LGBT identities cannot account for all non-normative sexual identities in the US.

Given that experience is often situated in and through identity, and that most people assume a gender- and sexuality-based identity, and understand their behavior through the meaning of those categories, I utilize and depend on LGBT identities. I also, however, suspend their meanings, as there are perhaps multiple ways of crossing from gender and sexuality to non-identificatory practices—as suggested by Valentine and the Queer of Color Critique. Thus in much research that combines ethnographic work with one-on-one interviews, while in the latter, some people may identify in a certain way, in the former, their presence may be significantly circumscribed by a different understanding of the relationship between gender and sexuality. Connecting interviewing to fieldwork and observations, and to the historical context of the setting studied, points to potential negotiations, understandings, or contradictions, as I hope the various dissertation chapters will show.

My dissertation draws on and adds to this complication of sexuality and gender–and the identities that flow from them–given that its practitioners both utilize and redefine categories of sexual identity, and therefore enable re-theorization of "sexuality" and "gender." This study of "sexual minorities" in *Santería* enhances previous research that reconceptualizes the relationship between sexuality and gender in the US in terms of migration/ transnationalism by understanding ethno-racial and religious-cultural minority experiences.[12] Reconceptualizing gender and sexuality in *Santería* requires an

[12] For a theoretically informed community-based perspective of the relationship between "gay" and "transgender" identities and their social and historical relationship, see the work developed by the *Institute for Gay Men's Health,* sponsored by the *AIDS Project Los Angeles* and *Gay Men's Health Crisis* (especially under the leadership of George Ayala and Pato Herbert).

exploration of the "sexual minorities" term, and for purposes of my research, its potential malleability and applicability in my fieldwork.

Sexual Minorities and Queer Theory

The framework for "sexual minorities" was first outlined in Gayle Rubin's 1984 "Thinking Sex" article, and later discussed by Judith Butler (1994) in her "Against Proper Objects" (an introduction to the *differences* journal special issue "More Gender Trouble: Feminism Meets Queer Theory"). In fact, Rubin's work on the formation of what she often refers to as "erotic communities," "erotic minorities," and "sexual underworlds," and her use of phrases like "sexual dissidents," and "sexual deviates" to refer to the marginalized through sexual and erotic behavior is what Butler takes on to mean "sexual minorities." By including migration patterns to US urban centers, Rubin's work is foundational to the study of acceptable sexualities and marginalized ones. While this is not a recurrent term in her article, the term "sexual minorities" is made operational by Rubin in myriad ways, including alternative sexualities such as non-monogamous, non-coupled partnering, sex for pay, sadomasochism, intergenerational sex, and transvestism– often medically and psychologically marginalized or labeled as pathological conditions. The project of thinking sex means the elimination of essentialist notions of sex and gender, as well as the challenge to government, sexological and psychological/psychiatric institutions that regulate and impose a set of norms on what constitutes "normal" sexual and erotic behavior. Rubin's work in "Thinking Sex" is also tied to a break from feminism as a privileged site to study sexuality, and to impose specific kinds of sexuality. Part of my dissertation project is to retrieve an operational definition of sexual minorities

that corresponds to my findings and that addresses the interplay between sex, gender, and sexuality. This will be particularly shown in chapters 3 to 5, as well as the conclusion.

In complicating the uses of "LGBT identities" and "sexual minorities," and in questioning the ownership of constructs by fields of study, scholars like Judith Butler continue the work of destabilizing a heteronormative structure that assumes linearity between sex, gender, and sexuality. "Against Proper Objects" is one of Butler's attempts to shake the relationship between identity categories and the experiential.[13] Butler critiques the development of gay and lesbian scholarship, and Queer Theory, for their inability to see their shortcomings in addressing complex sexuality and gender studies phenomena.

In a brilliant set of moves, Butler's "Objects" illustrates a kind of violence—more precisely, through her analyses of *repudiation* and *aggression*—in the assignment of the study of sexuality as its proper object by gay and lesbian studies, by reducing the scope of feminist theorizing to the realm of gender. Utilizing the sex/gender/sexuality equation, Butler shows that "sex" acts as a limiting, albeit quite effective bridge between gender and sexuality. By pointing out the ways in which "sex" is essentialized in order to assign it to feminist research and thought, "'sex' in the explicit and lesbian/gay sense will include and supersede the feminist sense: identity, attribute, sensation, pleasures, acts, and practices" (1994: 2). Thus "sex" assigns –and limits– feminism to "sexual difference," while in gay and lesbian studies, "sex" connects this field of study to

[13] Butler's "Imitation and Gender Insubordination" (1991) chapter most palpably suspends identity categories. In reading "Objects," it is evident how Butler's theorizing is grounded in feminist thinking, and how she maintains its central role in the study of sexuality. Her dissatisfaction with identity politics pushes thought to move beyond the experiential, still within the purview of feminist thinking.

sexuality. Marking sex as both putative and identitarian, Butler critiques a popular idea in the humanities and social sciences: that feminist studies are superceded by the emergence of lesbian and gay studies. Subsequently, Queer Theory has been faulted for assuming this same linearity, often separating its historical developments from current heteronormativity studies, as Butler's essay suggests.

There are multiple possibilities in the broadest possible use of "sexual minorities"—which in Rubin's case included transgender, transvestite and transsexual individuals, as noted in her 1992 revision of the 1984 text. It is imperative that a project focused on gender and sexuality as analytic constructs foresee that many of the identities that do not fall within an "LGBT" spectrum, or that do not fall in any kind of identity framework as we know them, have room for analysis, if not within a politics of identification. While theoretically sensing the possibilities under the "sexual minorities" term as proposed in Rubin's work (and extended in Butler's analysis), empirically, one has to utilize both the identities ("LGBT") and categories ("gender" and "sexuality")—as suggested by Valentine—because one set of concepts can put into question the other. In doing so, theorizing can help create a balance between identity-based analyses, and theorizing that only responds to gender, or only to sexuality.

Butler is more interested in the regulation imposed through the multiple uses or meanings assigned to the theoretically charged term "sex," while Valentine is intrigued by the relationship of "gender" and "sexuality." And while Rubin in "Thinking Sex" only argued for a "analytic separation" between the "gender" and "sexuality" categories (partly in response to feminist writers like Catharine McKinnon, who argued for dominance and power as synonymous aspects in the lives of women), Valentine (2000;

2002) reveals the interconnectedness of these two theoretical categories, by studying the relationship between "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" as markers of "sexuality" and "gender," respectively.

My dissertation benefits from the links between all of these frameworks. Utilizing "sexual minorities" allows me to move from identities and categories of analysis while analyzing fieldwork and interview data. Keeping "gender" and "sexuality" in check, and not assigning sexual orientation to the realm of one or gender identity to the other, I provide a comprehensive connectedness that complicates work by gendering sexualities and sexualizing gender. And, using "LGBT" identities in indexed ways illustrates how meaningful and limiting these identities may be for *Santería* practitioners.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the relationship between certain categories and identities and an all-encompassing term of "sexual minorities." It also shows the intrinsic relationship between feminist and feminist of color critiques to what we know as Queer Theory. Lastly, this review has provided a general sketch of the Queer of Color Critique in order to frame the dissertation analysis. Having offered the general theoretical framework of how these categories, identities, and constructs relate to each other, I now focus my attention to their relationship to ethno-racial discussions in the chapter on racialization, religion, and media in relation to "sexual minorities."

Chapter 2. Animal Sacrifice in *Santería* and Euro-American notions of race and sexuality: A Glance at Media's Portrayal

This chapter offers an initial view of the Euro-Americans' social imaginary of minorities, which collapses "sexual minorities" with ethno-racial and religious minorities. While not an extensive media analysis chapter, I primarily use selected newspaper articles and TV programs, and comment on movies throughout, in order to illustrate the conflation of sexual and ethno-racial/religious minority groups, and subsequent marginalization from mainstream US. This chapter thus illustrates the structural and discursive views and portrayals of ethno-racial and religious minorities, which I argue tend to be collapsed with "sexual minorities" in this dominant "Euro-American imaginary" (Grosfoguel & Georas, 2000). In other words, in the American imaginary of "otherness," such inferiorities are produced through one another, and—I want to argue that media is an excellent place to see this mutual production. Through some of these media sources, I want to bring out of the social unconscious this relationship between "sexual" and "ethno-racial minorities," which offers a platform to articulate some of the gender and sexual relationships in the participation and reception of LGBT-identified practitioners in *Santería*. In fact, my argument here depends (if only for a fraction of a second) on the unconscious images that everyone will bring to the forefront, or images that will activate as these media reports are read.

This chapter thus engages related media material (electronic and printed) in order to reveal the centrality of animal sacrifice in processes of otherness. Given some press and general media coverage in the last decade or so, animal sacrifice, even the usurping of cemetery and human bodies, are some of the most dominant images of what *Santeros* "seem to do" in the public realm. Animal sacrifice in its relationship to *Santería* is a

central axis in how this Euro-American imaginary of *Santeros* has taken shape and as such, a central component of my arguments. How popular discourse links sexuality, or even sexual marginality, with that of an "obscure," "cannibal" religion is something I address in this chapter. I illustrate some of the ways in which this Euro-American imaginary of *Santería* practice has intertwined sexual depravity with that of the nature of the practice. Media programming—be it in its electronic or printed form—often erase the specificity of *Santeros*' national or ethno-racial identities. Similarly, media reconstitutes this identity vagueness through fusing "Latino" and "Black." Instead of arguing that nationality or "race" be reified, in this chapter, I argue instead for a movement from nationally-based identities, through pan-ethnic labeling, finally reaching coalitional terms such as "people of color"—and then back to pan-ethnicity and nationality. Thus analyzing these media illustrations and what messages they provide to "mainstream" populations requires this critical racialization analysis.

On Data Selection and Data Collection

This chapter's analysis and data emerge from my review of close to 1,000 articles published over a 25-year period (since 1980) in North American, English language newspapers, as well as key television series. I only mention selected commercial movies produced in the US in order to make a point from one media outlet to another.[1]

[1] Through my analysis, I illustrate how newspaper coverage evoked a specific race and class view of *Santería*, and in contrast, how TV shows evoked a more interconnected sexual (and gendered) analysis with that of the previous views of newspaper articles – almost building on newspaper coverage but having sexuality and gender emerge on TV. While other written sources such as *Santería* and Yoruba related literatures, as well as commercial movies, are also important, I refer the reader to an excellent analysis of these other printed and electronic media in Menoukha Case's forthcoming dissertation, partially titled (after a Yoruba saying): "That Is One Person, That Is One Difference," with an expected 2006 completion (English Department, SUNY University-Albany).

For purposes of fast and easy access, newspaper articles were identified through a search engine, *Lexis Nexis,* and have been reviewed periodically since 2002.[2] Articles were annotated in a journal and recurrent themes were documented. Close to 50 newspaper titles printed any *Santería* related news, including *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *Newsday*, and *The Miami Herald*, which published near half of the total amount of articles. Particular attention was paid to the representation of *Santería* in the newspapers, which often offered a combination of journalists (and their speaking with others on issues of *Santería*), but also letters to the editor and general commentary (often times seemingly unrelated to the practice). There are several ways in which this vast source of information reflects how *Santeros* speak back to the American imaginary reflected through media, although because this chapter centers on the portrayal of the religion in the Euro-American imaginary, that important aspect of the newspaper coverage is not discussed. Instead of presenting an exhaustive, quantitative analysis, I have instead offered an in-depth look at the significance of some of its main themes throughout the sample. In other words, this chapter is not focused on a quantitative analysis of the media coverage, but in highlighting some of the evident ways in which

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[2] *Nexis Lexis* includes most of the world's major English-language newspapers, including *The New York Times* since June 1, 1980. One advantage of using this database is the reduction of research time needed for identifying the articles and determining their significance to my proposed study. A second benefit is the speed with which these articles are loaded into the engine (currently this seems to take from 1 to 3 days after an article is published). This offers less chance to miss recent information printed in mainstream media coverage. One of the disadvantages for this study is not being certain that articles are not being selectively uploaded into the database. A central limitation to this method is a bias in the downloaded information: the database only recognizes and retrieves English-written articles. While very useful in illustrating the "Euro-American" imaginary of *Santería* (the purpose of this chapter), which is most often discussed in English among "USAmericans," it is clearly an incomplete illustration of the practice in media.

Santeros' mainstream portrayal is inherently linked to perceptions of their ethno-racial and sexual experience.

In addition to the newspaper articles, I have analyzed key television shows portraying *Santería*. Selection of this material took place through the literature in which this chapter is based, and partly through word of mouth (from all the onlookers as well as *Santería* practitioners throughout the years of my ethnographic study). Textual analysis of TV program transcriptions was conducted in order to illustrate some of the ways *Santería* is portrayed in media. As with the newspaper articles, I present an interpretation of this cultural material's meanings; it is not intended as a quantitative analysis.

There are also Latino-specific media outlets, including music—through venues such as the MTV *en Español* video market—fiction and autobiographical books, Spanish newspapers, television shows, and Latin American movies that reflect a different portrayal of *Santería*.[3] In Spanish or Latin American-generated TV and movies, as well as newspaper coverage, *Santería* is illustrated differently from the US portrayal.[4] While

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[3] For instance, in recent autobiographical and cultural fiction such as Angel Lozada's *La Patografía* (1998), written from an Islander Puerto Rican perspective, and Emanuel Xavier's *Christ-Like* (1999), developed from the perspective of a New York Puerto Rican and Ecuadorian gay man, these authors have shared images of the practice of *Espiritismo* and *Santería* by gay-identified "Latino" men. These non-academic writings have offered a concrete set of experiences to what participation in *Santería* as a gay man may be—and often offer this portrayal sometimes years before academics do.

[4] Latin American *Santería*-related movies take a different route, where racialization is less evidenced (though palpable) and the films center instead on gender or sexuality by the portrayal of their central characters. For instance, the Cuban/Mexican/Spanish 1994 film *Fresa y Chocolate* (Strawberry and Chocolate) shows the relationship between a heterosexual Castro militant and a homosexual man whose belief system is centered in *Santería* in 1970s' Cuban life. Likewise, *Las Profecías de Amanda* (Amanda's Prophecies) is a Cuban/Venezuelan/Spaniard 1999 film that engages with the character of a Cuban woman who sees the past, present, and future of all the people she comes across; the film also adheres a hyper sensual character to her supernatural experience. Lastly, a recent US film focusing on Brazil's *Candomble*, *Woman on Top*

those venues provide a rich site of study, they will not comprise material for this chapter's arguments. It is important to note these media sources, however, as they offer a different interpretation of *Santería*—one outside, but linked to, the American imaginary of ethno-racial and religious minorities.[5]

What follows is the theoretical discussion of the place of racialization in the study of "Latinos" in order to illustrate the place of *Santería* in the Euro-American imaginary. I then engage with the selected newspaper articles and TV program analysis, showing the links between religious, racial, and sexuality-related marginalities. I illustrate through the newspaper articles the links between a racialized religion and racial minorities by using the image of animal sacrifice. Finally, I extend this racialization to sexuality through the TV shows where sexual marginality and depravation are collapsed with *Santería*. I conclude with thoughts on the implications of this relationship to the study of *Santería.*

Theoretical Framework on Racialization and *Santería*

US *Santería* illustrations emerge out of this public's interaction with cultural and racial aspects of difference. Ironically, *United Staters* have been exposed—in popular media—to ritualistic elements of *Santería* for many decades now; from Desi Arnaz' invoking "Babalú Ayé" in his "I Love Lucy" television show in the 1950s (something most people did not know relates to *Santería*), to recently acclaimed Hollywood celebrity

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(2000), shows the power of *Yemaya*, the female deity of the sea, and a main character besides the protagonist is an Afro-Brazilian transsexual woman. Research studying the relationship between US/Latin American produced films illustrating *Santería* –and their cultural production– is needed.

[5] For a Spanish media analysis on their coverage and representation of US-LGBT Latinos, see the *Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation's* web site and their report, commissioned to Horacio Roque-Ramirez and titled: *A Language of (In)visibility: Latina and Latino LGBT Images in Spanish-Language Television and Print Media,* accessed at: http://www.glaad.org/documents/csms/Spanish_language.pdf. I have not found an analysis of media's Spanish portrayal of *Santería.*

Javier Bardem (*Before Night Falls*), who played a *Santero* priest in *Perdita Durango (Dance with the Devil)*. Most recently, we have seen the influence of *Santería* and other African-derived religions in HBO through acclaimed plays like *Angels in America*, where the Afro-Latino character (who is a nurse), offers his White gay friend a healing cream for his cancer lesions that he purchased at a *Botánica*, only to be dismissed as useless, African voodoo ointment. We thus have over fifty years of media-related coverage that holds this Euro-American imaginary of *Santería*. Of course, the de-contextualized and uninformed portrayals of some of these religious-cultural elements add to maintaining *Santería's* general aura as one of a mysterious, and thus, seemingly dangerous, religious practice. Given *Santería's* predominantly of color membership, and its African roots, this imagery is in no way surprising when coming from an imperial nation's (White) biased perception (including stereotyping and dismissal) of ethno-racial minorities. In the social sciences, we speak about this type of portrayal as the result from processes of racialization.

Utilizing the terms "race" or "race relations" often sidesteps racism discussions, or reifies these relations as black/white. For example, Almaguer in his article "At the crossroads of race: Latino/a studies and race making in the United States" (2003) illustrates the fine line between deliberately abandoning "race" discussions and the challenge for social scientists not to reify its use. Following his lead, I propose the use of racialization as a central category of analysis. Racialization has at its core the process of race-making—and, henceforth, "race"—but it departs from the phenotypical or somatic explanations by focusing on other "racial" markers (markers that might be socioeconomic or class based). The term "racialization" better reflects discussions of social inequalities.

While in social sciences racialization may be reified as biological, I argue that racialization is only derived from biological race in as much as "race" is solidified as a social category. Thus I recognize that the social imposition of this category in the economic, political, and social experiences of people who are marked by racialization processes has some biological referent, but has actually moved from this referent.

US frameworks tend to fixate on the perception of immigrants from "Third World" countries as exotic and hypersexual. "Euro-American imaginary" frameworks of empires like the US (as proposed by Grosfoguel and Georas, 2000) insert many immigrants, particularly Caribbean Spanish speaking ones (the dominant group of *Santería* practitioners) within a myriad of stereotypes that obscure the socio-political and economic position of these groups in relation to the State. Grosfoguel and Georas argue for the central place of Puerto Ricans (in particular in the New York area), who are seen as "colonial racial subjects." The authors state that colonial racial subjects "have historically been the targets of racist representations in the Euro-American imaginary as a particular expression of the worldwide history of colonialism" (2000:90). Grosfoguel and Georas link Puerto Ricans to African Americans, labeling them both "colonial/racial subjects of the United States' empire who have been the target of many racist stereotypes" (ibid). Puerto Ricans are in this sense distinctive from other Caribbean people like Dominicans and Cubans, whom the authors discuss in relation to Puerto Ricans.[6] Through a similar process of migration spurred by US intervention in the 1960s, Dominicans began massive travel in a fashion not unlike Puerto Ricans decades before.

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[6] Work on immigration and race in the U.S. attests to the "third" great migration wave—that of African Americans from the south to north, as well as Native Americans' migration outside the reservations, and Puerto Ricans' massive migrations to the North East. (See, for instance, Pedraza and Rumbaut, 1995).

Their proximity to Puerto Ricans in NY neighborhoods, their links and at times experiences of "passing" as Puerto Ricans (to avoid involuntary return to the Dominican Republic), similarities of Spanish language dominance, and typically shared stereotypes of laziness, criminality, and stupidity made Dominicans "remain indistinguishable from Puerto Ricans in the Euro-American social imaginary" (Grosfoguel and Georas, 200:110). Cubans, on the other hand, did not become "colonial immigrants" (a phrase the authors use to describe Dominicans), but instead "immigrants," because of Cubans' prevalent incorporation into the social, political, and economic realms of the United States previous and even since the two large migrations from Cuba to the US. Cubans remain outside a "coloniality of power" framework because of their perceived difference from Puerto Ricans and Dominicans, at least in the "Euro-American imaginary." In Grosfoguel and Georas' work, Puerto Ricans organize the discussion of this imaginary, and other "Latino" groups are presented in closeness or at a distance from Puerto Ricans (which up to this day is still the largest group of *Santería* practitioners in New York City). I present all of this information to move from "Latino" racialization to that of very specific socio-historical groups as they have constituted US otherness through their marginality. As well, critical differences between Cubans and Puerto Ricans—still, the two largest groups of *Santería* practitioners—are erased in media's illustrations.

I want to argue that the United States has developed its own referent around issues of race, where central figures organize the "Euro-American imaginary" of racial injustice, feeding into a series of stereotypes that keep some groups disadvantaged. (These referents are historically grounded, as Grosfoguel and Georas illustrated.) The image of African Americans is central in US' general consciousness. Regionally, however, these

ghosts take different shape: some Asian, "Latino" and Native American groups organize such imaginations. Namely, the West offers a figure of the Chinaman and (most often) his relationship to US labor (Glenn, 2003); the South West offers the figure of the Chicano and the Native American (constructs difficult to separate at times phenotypically, as well as in that social imaginary), and the North East offers the image of the Puerto Rican—to whom Dominicans and other Caribbean immigrants may be connected, as shown before. Racialization is thus a process where present and past are connected through the image of old racialized groups, and where one cannot avoid noticing these ethno-racial groups as referents. While the Latino and ethnicity literatures move to discuss pan-Latino groups, I want to instead show how movements from symbolic national identity (as in the case of Chicanos and Puerto Ricans) to pan-ethnic labels (such as Latino) are indeed problematic and erase certain specificity to some of the arguments on "race." Specifically, I want to argue that the figure of the Puerto Rican organizes much of the imagery of *Santería's* media coverage, yet using pan-ethnicity terms diffuses such specificity. Media is a perfect site to see this unmarking.

"Latino" has been widely contested, not only as a simple replacement for "Hispanic," but as an ineffective political organizing tool that erases distinctive aspects of national heritage and histories amongst groups from Latin American countries. Often, no grounding on what helped constitute *Latinidad*—which in the US case is Mexicans/Chicanos and Puerto Ricans, is given. I hope to move discussions from "Latino" topics to better contextualized ones where nationality is evidenced and its effect accounted for. In a place like New York City, for instance, Puerto Ricans in particular have redefined their identities as Latinos, as NYC has gone through a Latinization in the

last few decades (Laó-Montes and Dávila, 2001). At the same time, there is a racialized—and sexualized—distinctiveness that Puerto Rican images still offer the "Euro-American imaginary," images that are based on the long-term migration and settling of Puerto Ricans in the North East. If in doubt, one need only to look at the sultry and vibrant representations of Puerto Rican bodies, such as "Jennifer Lopez' ass," and "Ricky Martin's moves" (Negrón-Muntaner, 2004—see also Rodríguez, 2004). While some of these authors argue that these images are Latino images, there is a particular heritage in the "Euro-American imaginary" that would distinctively use Puerto Ricanness as a referent.

As a case in point, in his dissertation, "Latino Homosexualities in the Epoch of Gayness," Manuel Guzmán asserts how Puerto Ricans' racialization in New York City (a process cemented in the 1940s throughout the 1960s) wrapped Puerto Ricanness within a very specific gay desire (as "gay liberation" movements emerged in NYC in the 1960s), so that the desire of Puerto Ricans was always in the erotic and social imaginary of non-Puerto Rican gay men. Alluding to one of the most spectacular Puerto Rican racialization films in the US, *West Side Story*, Guzmán states that: "The gay deployment of the figure of the Latin lover on the surface of brown-eyed Puerto Rican angels is nothing other than a story told on the west side of the birth of a nation. The brown angels of post-Stonewall gay life may be but one more installment in America's never ending attempt to keep blacks out and deeply within" (2004, 136). Guzmán thus establishes the place of Puerto Ricanness—between that of Black and White—in terms of offering the latter some exotic eroticism without the fear of the dark: "…no matter how erotically charged black/white sexual relations may be, they remain profoundly ambivalent and discomforting. Images

of Puerto Rican masculinity, however, resolve the dilemma of this ambivalence in the direction of pleasure without great difficulty. … In the US, Puerto Rican is as Black as you can get without getting Black" (Guzmán, 2004: 135-6). Guzmán's discussion serves as an example of where "Latino" succumbs to the historical specificity and cultural creation of what Puerto Ricans offer to this mix of nationalities that are differently sexualized. Connecting the particularities of Puerto Rican racialization to that of "Latino" pan-ethnic labels, and going through "pan-Latino" in order to see further racialization connections between various groups of people of color in the US is important in order to see the impact media has in erasing these racialized locations.

Why Media as an Outlet for the Study of Santería

The Euro-American imaginary of what constitutes *Santería* can be documented in a myriad ways: research could focus on US court decisions (Flowers, 1994; Harrison and Gilbert, 1996) and police interventions (Crouch and Damphousse, 1991; Kahaner, 1988; Lewis, 1998) to name but a few other potential sources of data gathering and analysis. My choice of media responds to a need to develop comprehensive cultural readings of the ways in which this imaginary is deployed. Media outlets particularly offer ways in which the interaction between the article/film/TV program (as a product) and the spectator have evolved throughout the last fifty-to-seventy years in US culture. Cultural sites are also imperatives in the study of a religious belief system which is itself debated within a religious and/or cultural framework, often assumed to be constituted through religious beliefs as well as a signifier of cultural resistance (Gregory, 1999).

Media and media representation have been widely theorized in their relationship to specific markers such as race, ethnicity, religion, and sexualities (see, for instance, the

2003 special issue of *Sexualities*, edited by Ken Plummer) as well as how it generally erases social inequalities (Mantsios, 1995); less work has identified an intersectional approach to an analysis of Eurocentric approaches to, and media readings mediated by, imperialist thinking (Shohat and Stam, 1997). Specifically, recent work focusing on Hollywood's simplistic portrayal of gender/gender identity (Willox, 2003), and black and gay portrayals (Baldwin, 2003) only begin to point to the deep impact of this industry in the pathologizing of gender, sexual, and racial minorities.

In *Latinos, Inc.: The Marketing and Making of a People* (2001), Arlene Dávila investigates the impact of mass media, and marketing in particular, in the sustaining of identities like "Latino" for people who are often collapsed into this category. In doing so, Dávila is engaging with the global impact of mass media, and the local configurations into which this global market may take shape. She argues for an integrative analysis of commercial media where "state-produced ideologies" need to be countered to positions groups such as "Latinos" and other ethno-racial minorities hold. Dávila avoids what she calls a "technological determinism" that taints how media's impact in cultural identities is presented, as people interpret and respond or "talk back" to a variety of media texts (see also Gamson, 1999). Specifically in the case of Latinos and other ethno-racial minorities, Dávila's research shows the impact of marketing identities to groups otherwise disparate in terms of cultural experiences, class, and varied as they may be in terms of socio-economic status and wealth. Her work is useful in situating the practice of *Santería* not as a "Latino" element of media coverage, but a very specifically-mediated one. The creation of imagined communities through marketing is one of Davila's strongest points throughout the book.

Similarly, in *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam (1997) discuss "the imperial imaginary," where they argue that a US national identity developed through the media. The project of developing cinema is outlined through the "formation" of a nation:

> The nation of course is not a desiring person but a fictive unity imposed on an aggregate of individuals, yet national histories are presented as if they displayed the continuity of the subject-writ-large. The cinema, as the world's storyteller par excellence, was ideally suited to relay the projected narratives of nations and empires. . . . Prior to the cinema, the novel and the newspaper fostered imagined communities through their integrative relations to time and space. Newspapers—like TV news today—made people aware of the simultaneity and interconnectedness of events in different places, while novels provided a sense of the powerful movement though time of fictional entities bound together in a narrative whole. . . . There is nothing inherently sinister in this process, except to the extent that it is deployed asymmetrically, to the advantage of some nationals and racial imaginaries and to the detriment of others. (1997:101-2)

The authors argued that cinema transformed some of the results brought by the novel. While the latter made sense within a "virtual lexical space," the former is literal, because and through its unfolding in front of us at a rate of 24 frames per second. Thus cinema, through its accessibility, but most centrally through an institutional ritual of homogenizing spectators as a community, allows for people to connect as a collectivity in ways that the novel could not. Shohat and Stam argue that the cinematic offers a national/imperial belonging for the European spectators, and ambivalence to the colonized. The colonized bodies discussed in *Unthinking Eurocentrism* span a global scope but are also situated in a US context.

For Blacks and Latinos in the US, othering took shape in the form of animalization and infantilizing, which the authors argue is part of a larger process of naturalization: "the reduction of the cultural to the biological, the tendency to associate

the colonized with the vegetative and the instinctual rather than with the learned and the cultural" (Shohat and Stam, 1997: 138). Furthermore, African and African-derived religions and cultures are caricatured and trivialized. Shohat and Stam argue that through (1) making these religions oral rather than written, (2) portraying them as polytheistic rather than monotheistic, (3) superstitious rather than scientific, (4) corporeal and ludic rather than theological, (5) insufficiently sublimated, and (6) a general perception of being wildly gregarious religions, the US forms notions of cults and imposes them on others successfully (Shohat and Stam, 1997: 202). This is depicted through films such as, for *Santería* in particular, *The Believers* (1986), and for other African-derived religions, *Angel Heart* (1987) and *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988) [Vodou] and *Wild Orchid* (1989) [Candomble]. Notably, these films came to fruition only a few years after *Santería* began to be covered in newspapers, speeding up the movement from the written to the cinematographic. Thus, while national ideologies of supremacy are forged in a longer historical period, and colonized people faced decades of negative portrayals by the time *Santería* became more visible in the US, the practice faced a much faster motion from the printed to the electronic in an era in which the technological and the scientific fuse (Clough, 1998).

As I illustrate in the analysis of the data, the move from the printed to electronic media has immense implications. While most written media portrays *Santería* in relation to poverty and class and race, and linked to cultural difference, television begins to uncover a deeper connection between racialization and sexual minoritarian perceptions. As well, printed media remains static, while television repeats. If you turn television on, and even with the basic coverage, movies, but especially TV series, are repeated

constantly. Movies are thus a link to television, as they begin to form a more complex set of images, yet television's constant repetitions enact a different speed and have a broader audience than printed material and movies had before. I begin with a discussion of newspaper articles, and then engage a couple of important television shows.

Newspaper Articles

Many topics emerge out of the analysis of newspaper coverage. Some of the most evident are: the perception of *Santería* by non-members, the response by practitioners, and the adjudication of rights and visibility to *Santería* by its legal battles. Individual criminal cases (i.e., burglary, rape, the public appearance of animal remains) by seemingly or known *Santeros* are also another aspect of coverage. In many instances, these criminal cases are not blamed on the person's character, but are understood to be linked to the person's religious practice. As others have shown, *Santería* has achieved recognition as a religion only in some popular and printed media while simultaneously maintaining a status of otherness (that certainly impact its practitioners) and reverting into notions of a "cult" (Wright, 2002).[7] I divide this section into a discussion of general themes emergent from the data, and then animal sacrifice and racialization discussions.

[7] There has been a significant recognition of *Santería* since a Church that practiced animal sacrifices in Hialeah, Florida, sued the local city council in 1987, and, after a number of lower court and appeals upholds, won a Supreme Court case in 1993, based on freedom of religion practices. The Church of the *Lukumí Babalú Ayé*, led by Ernesto Pichardo, a high priest of the religion, opened in April of 1987 (Cohn and Kaplan, 1992). It was forbidden to conduct animal sacrifices through a city ordinance that was passed months after the announcement of the opening of the Church. (For a description and edited version of the Court's decision, see Harrison and Gilbert, 1996). The Church of the *Lukumí Babalú Ayé* closed its doors in 2001 due (seemingly) to lack of tax payments. Information about membership to the church can be found in http://www.church-of-the-lukumi.org/. The church continues to inform people, offers readings, and educates the general public through this web site.

A general reading of news' themes

A few general themes emerged out of the reading of newspaper articles; some not directly related to the meaning of *Santería* and its animal sacrifice stigma. About ten percent of the total amount of articles mentions *Santería* in very marginal ways to the religion. As a case in point, *The Atlanta Journal and Constitution* in 1999 published a small sports news report stating: "that wasn't a Super Bowl last January in Miami. It was a *Santería* curse." Like this, several dozen other articles were seemingly irrelevant to the content of the religion—even though in excerpts like this one, the link was already made between the religion and stigma ("a *Santería* curse"). The frightening elements implicit in these seemingly unrelated news coverage actually reinforce a fear of the unknown. Other articles that fit within this general criteria included art exhibitions, music performances, book reviews, and perhaps one or another movie commentary (most of these movies were not produced in the US). These latter set of articles present the religion simultaneously as cultural and religious, linking it to its Cuban roots and Puerto Rican membership, as well as its Afro-Caribbean folklore—unlike the TV programming.

Animal sacrifice was one of the central portrayals of the religion in the newspaper articles since the first one appeared in the database 25 years ago. Over a third of the newspaper articles in some way mentioned, discussed, or centered in the animal sacrifice often engaged in *Santería* initiation rituals. In *Santería,* deity veneration includes the sacrifice of specific (most often domesticated) animals to maintain relationships with various *Orishas*. Brandon (1990) argues that the blood of the animals is needed to cleanse the practitioner, thus making the sacrifice a necessity. The sacrifice, or *ebo*, is described by Brandon as follows:

> *Ebo* is best comprehended as a religious act consisting of ritual procedures for establishing communication with spiritual or superhuman beings in order to modify the condition of the persons on whose behalf it is performed or of objects with which they are concerned. These goals are accomplished through the mediation of a victim or victims—objects or beings that are necessarily consecrated and then destroyed (or considered destroyed) in the course of the rite. (1990: 125)

In most celebrations, food feasts are prepared, using the flesh of the sacrificed animals. While animals are killed, they are utilized in the production of feasts for new initiates and initiation onlookers. Thus, animal consumption in this religious-cultural practice serves a mediating purpose between deities and humans in addition to feeding all present.

Another theme of the newspaper coverage was the discussion of law-related news, most often in relation to animal sacrifice. A particular testament to time has been the portrayal of the 1993 Supreme Court's decision to revoke a Lower Court in the state of Florida that forbade the practice of animal sacrifice in Hialeah, a neighborhood outside Miami, and part of Dade County. As mentioned previously, the Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye sued and won in a case against the City of Hialeah (508 U.S. 520), yet the legal battle is only one of many in the representation of animal sacrifice and *Santería* practitioners. This will be discussed in more detail later.

Significant topics that emerged sporadically throughout the 25 years of news were the supposed links of public personalities such as presidents of countries (Somoza in Nicaragua), Hollywood actors (Jennifer "J-Lo" Lopez and her alleged practice), perceived deviants (such as street drug sellers who used *Santería* advice, rapists, people charged with robbery and other felonies), particular national and international news (the rescuing of Elián González and its presumed link to *Santería*; Pope John Paul II's visit to Cuba) and news about accidents directly or indirectly linked to the practice of the religion

(i.e., a Bronx woman who had cancer and asked another practitioner to bathe her, as part of a ritual, in a flammable cologne which caught fire and killed her).[8]

Articles discussing New York City-specific news seemed to concentrate on the Bronx and Brooklyn, and less on Queens and Manhattan neighborhoods. New Jersey was also mentioned, often in relation to animal sacrifice. A specific case that caught much attention was the 2003 life threats faced by a *Santero* who sacrificed animals in front of media crew and journalists, purportedly in order to gain more acceptance, and in turn received a woman's message that "now the deities needed human sacrifice in order to be happy." She was prosecuted by the law, which also brought much coverage that year. While this is an extreme and isolated incident, there were newspaper articles that revealed this posture of "Americans" against animal sacrifice as an American value system.

A closer look at some of the messages embedded in the news

While animal sacrifice was not forbidden through the 1993 Supreme Court decision, the impact of what animal sacrifice meant for *United Staters* is still unexplored. The practice of *Santería* has generally been perceived as an ethno-racial minority one.[9] Religions comprised mostly by ethno-racial groups have been studied in relation to majority religions. Sherryl Leigh Wright in her 2002 dissertation *Does Majority Religion*

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[8] Other less recurrent themes were the commercial use of *Botánicas* in the religious practice; the alleged public health dangers in initiation rituals and use of some of the elements sold at *Botánicas* (such as a recent discussion of mercury as a common "bad energy" repellent among *Santeros* based on the case just illustrated); and the sporadic findings of either animal or human remains, which are most often still associated to *Santería*. Every now and then, an article illustrating the complexity of the religion, the benefits it achieves for its practitioners, or the voices of practitioners was also published. Estimates of *Santería* practitioners in various US metropolitan cities sporadically appeared as well.

[9] In fact, other immigrant communities such as the Hmong conduct animal sacrifices. Religious marginality is thus interconnected to ideas of backwardness and underdevelopment that are themselves placed onto the bodies of immigrants from many "Third World" countries.

Rule the Bench? A Study of United States Supreme Court Treatment of Minority Religions labels majority religions as legal winners, Protestant, mainstream, dominant, accorded full rights, traditional, superior, and White, among other markers (2002: 235). Minority religions are legal losers, small, at edges, labeled as cults or new religions, often coerced, its identity is often provided for them, inferior, powerless, foreign/immigrants, and ethnic minority in composition (ibid). While most ethnic minority led religions in Wright's study have lost Supreme Court cases, *Santería's* case is different.[10] Wright argues that while the decision "seems on the surface to be favorable to an ethnic minority religious group, [it] has been questioned for its use of the concept of tolerance" (Wright, 2002: 212). Citing scholarship on religion and the law, Wright shows that the use of "tolerance" in the legal decision surrounding *Santería's* animal sacrifice practice actually illustrates how a superior majority is merely "tolerating" an inferior minority (2002: 213). Tolerance in this sense substituted the usual "freedom of religion" clause decision making of the past, which many legal scholars have labeled a possible retreat on religious freedom altogether (ibid). Substituting "free exercise of religion" with "tolerance" does not show respect towards *Santería* as a religion and indeed may trivialize the decision.

Media portrayals are one way of illustrating this double edge of the Supreme Court's decision. The following newspaper article helps show this point vividly:

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[10] Wright's main point is to show how Supreme Court decisions extend religious freedom protection to European American religious groups such as Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, and limiting protection to ethnic minority groups, for which she names as examples: Native Americans, Jews, and Muslims of Asian or African heritage (2002:1). Her work focuses "not just in who won and lost, but how the Court's message impacts majority and minority religious communities and what precedent it sets for future tests of religious freedom in the United States" (2002: 4). The dissertation theme is divided into three court moments: the Warren Court (1953-69), the Burger Court (1969-86), and the Rehnquist Court (1986-on).

> In a strong defense for religious freedom for even the most unpopular sects, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously Friday that a Florida city may not suppress an African religion by banning the ritual sacrifice of animals. No religion or religious practice may be "singled out for discriminatory treatment," the high court said, even if its activities are viewed as "abhorrent" by most. (Savage [*Los Angeles Times*], 1993)

This quote symbolically abjects *Santería* from the US by labeling it an *African* religion. This "unpopular," "abhorrent"-labeled religion is, of course, a foreign one because of the acts it requires. Yoruba religion was not on trial, at least not explicitly—*Santería* was. Not many would argue against *Santería's* roots as Yoruban, or its emergence from Nigeria, but the ways in which this excerpt frames the US Supreme Court decision is by establishing a marking of otherness, and one with non-US values and norms ("…for even the most unpopular sects…"). This is especially an "other" once again linked to stereotypes of the "African" continent: cannibalism, danger, and darkness, which are all implicated in the not so illegible codes of the text.

This othering allows for mainstream institutions to regulate its practice. One of such ways is through the view that animal sacrifice endangers people's health. This New York City news report came out before the Supreme Court's decision in 1993:

> Thirty-two animals–including goats, sheep, pigeons, chickens and a duck–were taken Saturday from a Bronx apartment where they were being held for use as sacrifices in an upcoming Santeria feast, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals officials said yesterday. An anonymous tip from a neighbor led investigators to a private home at 1336 Croes Ave. in Parkchester about 3 p.m. Saturday, where they interrupted a group of people who were in the middle of a Santeria ritual. . . .'We don't object to Santeria, Cohen (an ASPCA official) said. But we do object to the sacrifice of animals if it is painful or inhuman. And we do object when animals are kept or housed improperly.' (Pérez-Rivas [*Newsday*], 1991)

In this scenario, the practitioners' "fault" is contained within the threat to official public health regulations. *Santería* sacrifice is never explored in this scenario, but

assumed to be cruel to animals as "painful or inhuman." At present time, discussions about mercury use, and misuses of flammable materials (such as the Bronx case illustrated before) are some of the ways in which the religion is regulated through institutions peripherally linked to the law. This regulation continues to mark its difference from other religions. And this difference continues to be stressed over ten years since the Supreme Court's decision. The events of September 11, 2001 have extended this marked racialization not only to Muslims, Arabs, Middle Easterners, and South Asians, but to all perceived outsiders. In April of 2004, a "suspicious package" was found, along with a bag of dead animals, outside a Florida Court House, which was immediately read as a *Santería* spell. The article details the evacuation of the block and a panic similar to that of any terrorist threat in a post-9/11 US. This treatment of animal remains as terrorist material again resembles over 20 years of direct association between the finding of animal or human remains and the automatic link to African-derived religions. It also translates the meaning of "the terrorist" with a non-human figure (the animal).

Religious beliefs outside traditional Judeo-Christian values are for the most part under surveillance, and often mistreated within the US borders. Of course, other religious-cultural expressions have been challenged by the law. James Aho's *This Thing of Darkness: A Sociology of the Enemy* (1995) engages specific examples in the case of Ruby Ridge's Weaver family, and Washington State's Goldmark family in 1985. See also the direct involvement of the government in regulating religion through the Waco, Texas Davidians case in 1995. Non-traditional religions fill the nation with an overwhelming sense of anxiety as to the potential dangers to "Americans" and a sense of American values. Unlike these examples of "White" otherness, *Santería* makes this anxiety even

more intense, as it is multiply constituted as "other" not only religiously, but also racially—and as I argue in the next section, sexually as well. Yet this section has shown, as seen in Wright's (2002) work, how *Santería* is situated in a place of tolerance when compared to these other religious-cultural practices. A combination of "outsiderness" through the newspaper articles, and an African-as-origin sentiment that distances *Santería* practitioners from "mainstream" values is shown through the judgment of animal sacrifice. And yet animal sacrifice is what glues in some way the ethno-racial and sexual minority argument, as we see in the television programming.

TV Programming

Unlike the work of Shohat and Stam (1997), Clough analyzes the capacities of TV to target self-feelings, as opposed to abstract and more general accounts of imperialism (as in the previous decades). In doing so, television concretizes the collapse of a real/image opposition, according to Clough. Her argument, originally published in 1992, discusses the extension of the soap operas' "melodramatic imagination" to all TV programming. Thirteen years later, the shape of TV production has centered on "reality shows" and "talk shows" where the private experiences are aired. Shows like *Law & Order* and *The Practice* are only some of those experiential shows based on some factual and documented situations, but coated with a melodramatic effect Clough warned us about before. TV melodrama also serves the privatization of the public as it makes "the private" or the everyday activities a focus of public discussion. This collapse of the division between the image and real, and public and private is made evident in the shows I discuss next. We now "know" what *Santería* "does" in private because it is made public through the law's intervention with the religious-cultural practice (especially through the

image of animal sacrifice), and because television's fictional characterization is heavily based on "real-life" facts.

Two TV programs are most salient to the illustrations of *Santería: The Practice* and *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*. Not many television programs address *Santería* except in terms of its relationship to animal sacrifice, and I selected these two because of their extensive discussion of *Santería*. But because they are television shows that are constantly repeated by TV networks, especially as TV portrayals of the law seem to be popular, once the episode is produced and shown, it becomes most probable to "catch a re-run" anytime—and in more than one channel sometimes. Thus these shows continue to reproduce a non-critical view of *Santería* that reifies what the newspaper articles have done in the past. I proceed to discuss both episodes now, beginning with *The Practice*.

The Practice's episode, originally airing on November 17, 2002, has two cases. Initially, the case that pertains to my study is that of a *Santero* priest who wants to continue to sacrifice animals but is challenged by the Boston legal system, as he is filmed on videotape sacrificing a goat by local media staffers. While Stanley, the name of the dark skinned character (his nationality never explained), who is a *Santería* Priest, is urging his lawyer to understand how *Santeria* is partly Roman Catholic, Eleanor, the Lawyer says: "Sacrificing animals is out there Stanley, at least in the eyes of mainstream America; let's just be clear about that." We find out soon enough that the lawyer is not pleased to take this case, and while she would like to defend it on the basis of freedom of religion, this case is evaluated under cruelty against animals, where the language on religion is absent.

The following is part of the transcript of this scene:

Priest: I was just saying that we all have our rituals. Look at Christianity, they drink the blood of Christ and they eat his body.
Lawyer: That's symbolic. You actually killed the animal.
Priest: I don't understand. The exact same issue, the Supreme Court ruled on this and we already won.
Lawyer: The difference here is that the law is facially neutral; it is not targeted at religion but only to stop cruelty. Look, I think we should consider a plea.
Priest: Fine. I will admit to the facts. I did what they say I did. But I will not stand up in a court of law and acknowledge any form of guilt.
Lawyer: That's not going to do it. Public opinion is very against you here.

Here, *Santería's* legal and social advances for recognition are met with strong resistance. We see a reference to the 1993 Supreme Court case, only to have it dismissed. The public that holds the "public opinion" Eleanor, the Lawyer, refers to is a public with very specific views on what constitutes religion. Just like in newspaper articles, the transmission of mainstream American values comes through in many of these representations. While Stanley wants to relate *Santería* to Catholicism, or open up the meaning of ritual to the secular, Eleanor resists this idea by labeling *Santería* as the practice of "cruelty" rituals (animal sacrifice). We also find out that the case is not intended to be a case of freedom of religion, even though animal sacrifice is an inherent practice of the religion (as established by the 1993 Supreme Court case).

"This is exactly what I went to Law School for, Eugene—fighting for serial goat killers," is a key comment Eleanor makes to one of her colleagues. Equating animal sacrifice to human killings (serial killer is a phrase used to refer to human assassins), Eleanor is placed at a higher position than Stanley: by acting as his lawyer, but voicing her disgust with this case, she can be redeemed or absolved and at the same time establish her distance from animal sacrifice practice, but more importantly, the religion. Eugene, one of two black characters on the show, recognizes the need for multiple religious

expressions. He states how freedom of religion is necessary: “but that amendment—it says that at least in principle, this country stands for tolerance. And Eleanor, of all the constitutional liberties that need protecting today…” She interrupts by saying, “freedom of religion…” and after a pause, she says, “…but I like goats.” So there is a privileging of the animals over the rights of other human beings she has been trained to advocate for.

We already saw in Wright’s (2002) dissertation arguments on Supreme Court decisions, as well as the previous newspaper article discussion, how pivotal the case by the Church of Lukumi Babalu Aye was to the legal movement from religious freedom to a more hierarchical stance on tolerance. In these scenarios, religious freedom is sidestepped in favor of acknowledging ethnic-minority religious differences, though marking them as foreign. Tolerance may be a middle ground where *Santería* achieves some recognition, and legal rights, but certainly not the respect of people as a religious system. Even less space is given to its animal sacrifice. Eleanor’s decision to equate animal sacrifice with human killings, combined with the vagueness of the legal arguments of the freedom of religion statutes since 1993 trivialize the meaning and ritual of *Santería*. And her repulsion and positioning as inherently superior to Stanley serves as an image of the primitive and foreign (involved in animal sacrifice) and the developed (knowledge of the law, “good” common sense of public opinion and what constitutes permissible behavior).

The second case in the same episode is a battle to defend a pedophile whose sense is that the child molested consents to their relationship and wants to be with him. Two male lawyers are in charge of defending this client, and they voice precisely the same feelings of repulsion toward child molesters that Eleanor does to goat serial killers. While

there is no relationship between the two men accused in this episode, the show effectively sets up a relationship between a sexual predator (on a same-sex pedophilia case) and a black religious system through the "personal" feelings expressed by their lawyers, their distancing from the acts in question, and their vilification of these personal choices. Thus it is the lawyers that serve as conduit to fuse the marginal position of a male pedophile with that of a priest whose religious system continues to sacrifice animals.

In previous *The Practice* episodes, the Catholic Church has been central in their Priests' wrongdoings with young children who have been raped or molested by their Priests. Perhaps because the show is filmed in Boston, Catholicism is a key religious system that organizes the general morality of its neighbors, so that when Eleanor says, the "public opinion" she is referring to a Boston public, which is over half Catholic according to Census data. This episode effectively links *Santería* to radically negative social issues such as man-child relations, using *Santería's* syncretism history to blend it to Catholicism. In doing so, it extends the Catholic Church's shame for the molestation cases to *Santería*. As a potential effect, Catholicism could be seen as a lesser evil in this unconscious framework; where *Santeros* not only "kill animals," they are also linked to other predatory-like behaviors such as child molestation. Because, I want to argue, this is a message closer to the unconscious than the obvious, Catholicism is left alone and other religious practices are targeted. In *The Practice*, the law firm director is a devout Catholic who wrestles with continuing his faith, and he is often portrayed in conversations with his wife and his priest, repeatedly attempting to confirm his faith in spite of the Catholic Church's scandal. There is no equivalent for *Santería,* as this is the only episode where the religion is discussed. The *Law & Order* episode helps extend this discussion.

In “These are Their Stories: Views of Religion in *Law & Order*,” Clanton (2003) argues for an analysis of religious portrayals in the longest running TV drama so far. Clanton’s main charge is that religion can be portrayed on TV depending on its relationship to hegemonic morals (and mainstream religious qualities), especially if it is not seen as extremist within those morals, and certainly if it avoids human harm. He engages five different episodes of *Law & Order* in order to make these points. Clanton argues that *Law & Order* has devoted entire episodes to a religious story, even if embedded in the law—something most other TV programs have not.

Of significance to *Santería’s* coverage is the relationship between printed and electronic media in conceptualizing these episodes. The Executive Producer’s story telling in *Law & Order* is often taken from the news headlines, and Clanton argues, “thus the narratives of the show represent, albeit in a fictionalized and simplified fashion, the events and concerns of a large segment of America from the 1990s onward” (Clanton, 2003: [2]). Yet there is a direct loop formed between the publication of printed media coverage and television programming and production. In telling “their stories,” one is left uncertain as to whose stories are actually being told, especially when biographical information of most central characters is often avoided. It would appear that the stories told, then, are those of the dominant group—and thus no personal or biographical information is offered. What this does to the portrayal of *Santería* religious practice is that markers such as skin color, and perceived blackness and/or Latino identity, are left to interpretation by the viewer. In this portrayal, the Puerto Rican racialization and Caribbean specificity get lost for a weakened pan-Latino ethnicity and African roots.

Three main findings emerge from Clanton's work: (1) the show offers almost no description to the religion, which Clanton argues comes from the type of show *Law & Order* is; (2) the show efficiently offers marginal and extreme religious cases because it is assumed most audiences will perceive religion like the producers do; and (3) personal responsibility, especially through the assignment of guilt, reinforces that people, *regardless of their background,* assume the responsibility of their actions. This last finding is critical, since it separates the belief from the practice of a religion. It also makes a private matter (personal responsibility and choice) a very public issue with repercussions. Lastly, this combining of individualistic choice through personal responsibility, but social condemnation for enacting beliefs not condoned by a majority, effectively sets up a homogenizing of all social groups in the U.S. today. While this is what takes place in the cases Clanton evaluates, this is not the case in *Santería*. In *Santería,* it is *both* the practitioner and the religion who suffer.

None of the regular *Law & Order* episodes deal with *Santería*. Out of the expansion of the show, *Law & Order* has tripled into a *Special Victim's Unit*, and a third show, *Criminal Intent.* Of those two more recent shows, Special Victims' Unit aired a program that on the surface seemed to be dealing with *Santería* practice. *Law and Order: Special Victims' Unit* original episode (season 5, episode 105) aired under the title: *Ritual* on Feb 3, 2004.[11] In this episode, a professor at a prestigious NYC university frames the finding of a young boy's body as a potential *Santería* human sacrifice. During the

[11] Here is a description that can be found on the internet: "The discovery of the torso of a 7-year-old Nigerian boy leads Detectives Benson and Stabler in search for a rogue Santeria practitioner reviving the old traditions of human-sacrifice. However, when the Detectives discover that the sacrifice could have been staged to hide a sex related homicide, they uncover an illegal slave smuggling business." (http://starworld.indya.com/lawandorder/episodeguide.html)

episode, we find out that the professor may have bought the kid as a sexual slave and as part of a large illegal commerce where young children from Nigeria are being sold for all sorts of labor. A married man whose wife is an anthropologist, the professor seems to have enough access to information to depict this killing as a seemingly *Santeria* provoked one. While the police officers acknowledge that *Santería* no longer conducts human sacrifices, their confused sense of whether *Santería* was a cause is evident from the beginning of the show.

At the morgue, in the second scene (after they have found the remains), police investigators and a forensic technician discuss the potential meanings of the child's remains, as illustrated in this excerpt:

> Police 1 [m]: Whoever did this knew what he was doing…
> Technician [f]: I've never seen dismemberment like this before. The body was inverted.
> Police 2 [f]: A kid killed for religious reasons…
> Police 1: Drug dealers from the Caribbean and Latin America practice *Santería*.
> Police 2: But they stopped sacrificing a century ago…

Assuming that it was a man, the policeman immediately links the death of this child with *Santería*, mediating it through the use and selling of illicit drugs. A whole set of gendered, ethno-racial, class, and religious assumptions are lumped together in just a few phrases. Not only is the value of human life stressed, it is the innocence of kids what is stressed in particular. And selling or trafficking drugs is inherently linked to *Santería* while *Santería* is then linked to a child's death as a potential sacrifice. While the policewoman is the one with more knowledge about *Santería*, they are all perplexed at the possibility that his may have been inspired by *Santería* practice.

The scene changes, and the police couple visit a *Santería* religious center:

Priest [m]: This is outrageous, we are a peaceful religion… {"Voodoo" appears in big letters on the newspaper's front page}
Police 2 [f]: We are going to need a list of all your members.
Priest: That is illegal…
Police 1 [m]: With all due respect, your religion has a record of religious sacrifice…
Priest: This is about a murder not religious tradition…

Like in *The Practice* episode, animal sacrifice is collapsed with human killings ("…has a record of religious sacrifice"). The Priest (whose national or ethno-racial identity is never clear to the viewer) attempts to distance one thing from the other, only to receive threats from the police. (After going back to the neighborhood, where some neighbors talk about the coming in and out of practitioners and label their behavior "suspicious," the police gets some help from the District Attorney and a warrant from the Judge.) When the police returns to the *Santería* Center, the Priest resists giving the list of members. The policeman enunciates: "Animal control and the health department pay you a visit at least once a day." The Priest shouts the situation as "blackmail," but finally gives the information up. Like in newspaper articles discussed before, "animal control" and "health department"—long time bureaucratic surveillance agents, are always a threat to religious marginal groups like *Santería*, and this excerpt shows it. And while the Priest here, like Staley in The Practice, makes the clarification ("this is… …not [about] religious tradition"), is becomes subsumed within the crime that frames the episode.

After the autopsy, it becomes clear that the kid arrived to the US four weeks before his death. Statistics of child labor slavery are offered and through some clues, the police finds the sister of the dead child, trying to discover what happened to him. The sister was a labor slave in a upper class White household in Manhattan. The woman who paid a fee for her tells the police where she conducted the transaction, only to find

hundreds of Nigerian children chained to beds. It is then when the links to *Santería* that were presumed from the beginning of the show are dismissed, and police begins to sense that perhaps this was purportedly framed to appear as a *Santería* human sacrifice.

"Race" is a significant factor in the portrayal of the crime's responsibility. Yet "race" in this scenario means Whiteness. A set of candles found in the presumed sacrifice were tracked down to the wife of the professor. It becomes easy to track a White person in a religion that is predominantly of color, according to the subtext of the episode, as the supplier can identify the White female purchaser. As well, the neighbors interviewed and everyone near the religious center are perceived to be White, and their Whiteness is illustrated in their disapproval and lack of understanding of *Santería.* The opposite is not true, however, as we can never identify the ethno-racial background of the practitioners.

While "race" in this episode is most evident through Whiteness, migration serves as a marker to establish African origin against a more developed society. Just as the act of purchasing the candles is linked to Whiteness—an act most people do not think of as US societies do not exchange materials without money involved—the ownership of a gift that establishes the kids' origins is made evident. The sister of the deceased boy holds a pouch with a carved figure inside, and she tells the police her brother had one too—it was a gift from their mother. (The "African" parents of these kids were told they were going to be placed in "good" homes in the US.) In searching the professor's office as part of the investigation, his research assistant is asked about the pouch and volunteers it, leading to the professor's arrest (dramatically staged as he is lecturing in a large lecture hall).

When the police comes to the house and talks about the situation with the wife (after not getting a confession from the professor), it is in the narrative she gives that they

base their conclusion that he must have killed the child. She tells them she called her husband and told him that she was returning to the US earlier than expected, only to hear of his outrage at her news. The police persuade her to tell them if there is another place they have not searched, and she informs them of the research storage room. When they go, they discover the child's remaining body parts.

The rest of the episode moves through finding and arresting the child supplier. This is an "African" man with apparent government connections that allow him to engage in these massive illegal migration strategies to sell children for labor. In a heated exchange, the African American policeman sets up a trap and is able to arrest the African trafficker, by posing as married to a woman who is a Nigerian Consulate to the US. He is then forced to offer information on the next arrival of Nigerian children (a new "shipment") in exchange for leniency. But during the interrogation, issues of race are negated via the very same racial demands of social justice against the New York Police Department that have taken place for decades. The man arrested, who was beaten when trying to escape from the trap, says to the police officers: "a case of another African man beaten by NYPD… the media is going to have a feast with this." While the African American policeman violated the "African" man's rights by using excessive force, the fact that this beating was phrased as racially motivated *by the victim* suggests that racial politics are part of the mix, effectively simplifying the long-standing negative relation of immigrants and African American communities with NYC police. By having the officer who used excessive force be an African American man, the accusations of a racist NY Police force are neutralized as well. This is most evident at the very end of the episode, where the female police says to the found trafficked children, "it's OK, we are not going

to hurt you guys, we are the police"—a phrase many New Yorkers may cringe if heard in public or private. The final racial-neutralizer is voiced by the African American policeman who simply says to the social service agents: "take good care of them, they are a long ways far from home," suggesting the policeman's own African roots as an inherent (and nostalgic) end.

Though class and race seem to be separated in the episode, by having the White upper class professor enact a sacrifice-like death, on the one hand, and the poor(er) be the dark skinned *Santería* practitioners, on the other, there is more to the plot. The episode title runs under a very broad sign, "ritual," a sign that blurs the distinction and actually weaves a line between the animal sacrifices in *Santería*, man-child sexuality, man-child torture, and human killings. Sexual prohibitions like man-child relations are said to have been rites of passage in early cultures, most notably the Greeks. Torture and rape are acts of control and illustrations of power and coercion over others, and they can also mean the passing of knowledge about a person who may hold power over another. The assassination of humans may invoke the winning of one over the other as an extension of the rapist or torturer. Death itself may be a rite of passage, and in both the animal sacrifice and the death of a religious figure, like Jesus in the Christian traditions, death acts as a sacrifice that cleanses the sins from the believers. Instead of blurring the representation of classes, distinguishing them from one another, the episode has a distinctive effect that connects these issues, if anywhere else, in the unconscious or American imaginary of what *Santería* is. A predator who abuses children and an abuser who kills animals are no longer separate: the general notion is that they both act against less powerful organisms in an unfair exchange.

As we have seen throughout these TV program depictions, all deviance—be it disrupting public health codes, sacrificing animals, being a sexual predator, or killing another human being—are all aspects with a thread when it comes to *Santería.* Sexuality as a regulated element gets consumed within this paradigm. But it does so in ways particularly linked to ethno-racial minorities: ideas about African religions (and cultures) as hyper-sexual, and the image of the African/Black/dark skinned individual as one that prowls the rest. In this sense, *Santería* effectively serves as the glue that links all minoritarian aspects into its reach in ways that operate at the unconscious social level.

Conclusion

Santería TV and newspaper coverage presents the perception held by the Euro-American imaginary of racial, religious, and sexual minorities by a collapsing that effectively constitutes one through the other. *Santería* is "black" and there is some hyper-sexual attribute linked to it: whether it be sexual predators through the Catholic church's links to *Santería*—with the redemption of the former and the solidification of the latter—or with the lack of succinct images *United Staters* have of the religion, the "American" unconscious continues to articulate racial, religious and sexual minorities through lens that equates them as deviant. These conflations of marginality and deviant stands position *Santeros* as un-American through the religious, racial, and sexualized aspects assumed to be part of the religious beliefs (even religious activities).

A central way in which this takes place is through the invisibility of nationality and ethno-racial identification by the media. While media discussions on the image of someone "black" as serving as a mediating image, or someone gay serving as a firm supporter of heterosexuality, thus not touching either racism or heternormative structures

in current social life, this is a different case.[12] The lack of specificity in these television shows, for instance, makes *Santeros* already less of a subject than the rest of the people portrayed in these shows. When we go to television shows, none of the nationalities and sexualities are explicitly acknowledged. Yet, and in a brilliant set of moves, there are links to Puerto Ricans and other Caribbean populations such as drug users, Bronx housing, and the use of Spanish as a language of religious practice. The Euro-American imaginary of what constitutes and who practices *Santería* is thus activated through the lack of explicit identifications, reinforcing the perception of criminality and negativity that gets imposed onto the bodies of Puerto Ricans—the largest group of practitioners in NYC. Indeed, "people of color" as an umbrella term may be useful in already assuming a series of slippages that these media sources continue to do: from "black" to "Latino," from "poor" to "drug user/seller," and from "animal killer" to "pedophile."

[12] Refer, for instance, to: "What a Difference a Gay Makes: Queering the Magic Negro," where Baldwin (2003) argues for a closer look at the combined portrayal of black men as the 1950s "magic negros," or Hollywood characters who, although disabled, are given magical powers to "save lost or broken White men." Baldwin ties this image to the gay characters of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, a recent TV show where five gay men offer their cultural capital to better the lives of poorly dressed and groomed heterosexual men. Baldwin argues that: "[t]his comparison concludes that racial and sexual minorities are acceptable in American popular television and film as long as the salvation and redemption motif of the American myth prevails and white heteronormativity remains unchallenged and privileged." As long as the heterosexual, White, "American" family structure remains untouched, sexually and racially marginal people may participate of certain aspects of citizenry. Some of the ways this conflation between the "magic negro" and the "Fab 5" take place are by infantilizing gay men, and in some ways portraying them as sexually dormant, which "makes them acceptable to an American psyche that has been trained to fear gay men as predatory." This has been historically the case with Black men. Another way black men and gay men are linked in these portrayals are by the use of superficial portrayals. And, like Whiteness and the figure of the "magic negro," heterosexuality is not altered with the image of the "Fab 5."

Animal sacrifice becomes this joint between "true" criminal acts and morally dubious ones, as newspapers and TV shows illustrated. Serious links within these groups continue to reproduce ideas about human sacrifice religions when the rituals engaged by them are far from related to such practices. In the end, animal sacrifice is a link between *Santería* and cannibalism (or between the primitive and Africa) be it of someone else's young sexuality, their life (as in killings), or their body (as in rape). Meanwhile, the Catholic Church's stand with regards to pedophilia remains dubious at best. Perhaps animal sacrifice redeems Catholicism, as it marks itself as a primitive religious system, only influenced—in passing—by Catholicism. In the process, "sexual minorities" (as in the case of intergenerational sexual and romantic relations) is constituted through images of *Santería* and ethno-racial minorities.

Control and fear are two of the main requisites for sustaining power, and as long as media—like other social institutions—reproduce biased images and narratives of *Santería*, racial, religious and sexual marginal groups will continue to be interconnected into a web of deviance that only keeps creating the illusion of a clean, hegemonic center. The notion of all racial and sexual minorities experiencing *Santería* together, and how *Santería's* "house" structure allows for a thriving participation of gay identified practitioners is the topic addressed in the next chapter.

Chapter 3. Is *Santería* Home? Religious practice, culture, and the place of sexual minorities

Questions about the place of "gays and lesbians" in relation to the family and the nation have been part of discussions on what constitutes a family and whether "gays and lesbians" (and here I am using these two labels intentionally) fit within the parameters of the nation. Are "gays and lesbians"—coupled as they are most often assumed to be—fit to be part of the state and its imposed "responsible functions" as law-abiding citizens? [1] After centuries of stigmatization, first by institutionalized religions, then psychiatry and state laws, and most recently through the disproportionate impact of AIDS in the lives not only of gay men, but all "LGBT" people, "LGBTs" have queered the state (Duggan, 1994) by troubling expectations of deviance and turning the table on what is constituted as "normal." Lesbian,- gay-, and bisexual-identified people have developed newer conceptions of family through advocating for involvement in government-sponsored endeavors like the military, and in pursuing a public campaign to achieve equal rights through same-sex marriage, adoption rights, or childbearing. It has been, overall, a pretty rocky last few decades in terms of how "gay and lesbian" families have developed.

Yet the preceding illustration does not encompass much of the "LGBT" communities—this scope is limiting in the ways in which racial homogeneity has been

[1] I am here alluding to the work by Lewin (2002), Walters (1996) and Zita (1993) on the relationship of typically gendered activist/academic spaces such as feminism and gay/lesbian organizing, but also, about the increasing use of "gay and lesbian" as a "marriage" of sorts that eliminates discussing the participation of bisexual-identified men and women, and transgender- and transsexual-identified men and women, in these spaces. The study of a complex articulation of values and an ideology of assimilation to the state behind the simple coupling or phrasing "gay and lesbian" needs undertaken as a conservative proposal to incorporate *some kinds* of gays and lesbians into the family and the symbolic nation, but it is not this chapter's scope.

assumed. Class, socio-economic status, age, immigration experience, and relationship to "gay and lesbian" identification are also differently experienced—in sum, "LGBT" does not achieve a complex public/political portrayal. My goal for this chapter moves from an approach to "gay rights" that often assume same-sex space exclusivity as a means to achieve "equal" rights—an irony of sorts—to a broader scope: the study of situations where "gays" live and actively engage with heterosexuals. This chapter is thus based on the re-conceptualization of "houses" in *Santería* and the ways in which these worship structures (the "house") offer some potential redefinitions as "home" for those often marginalized in many other spheres.

In this chapter, I illustrate the relationship between *Santería* practitioners who are generally identified as "gay:" this bracketed term also includes lesbian-, bisexual-, and transgender- identified people. The goal of this chapter is to unpack some of the ways in which these practitioners negotiate their participation in *Santería*, and in turn, how individuals often labeled as "gay" are interpelated by such identity in their process of participating and finding a place for themselves in *Santería*. While I have previously mentioned the large presence of "gay" practitioners in *Santería*, only a part, but certainly not all of its practitioners, are "LGBT-"identified. This mixing sets this study apart from existing studies of sexuality, gender, and religion, in a number of ways. First, *Santería* has a high number of "gay" identified followers that practice the religion, and these members are recognized as part of the religion's development and history. Second, unlike most other religions, *Santería* appears to offer specific roles for *Santeros* with non-normative genders and sexualities, such as the role of the *Oriaté* (Vidal-Ortiz, 2005). Furthermore, while existing publications (Thumma and Gray, 2005) focus on separate

religious spaces occupied by "gays and lesbians," *Santería* offers a particularly useful site for a study of both "gay" and heterosexually-identified practitioners in their sharing of space and worship. As such, this chapter also illustrates a new kinship structure in *Santería*, where "gay" participants are part of a family unit, and how that new familiar structure (the "houses") reorganizes (or re-members) peoples' lives.

In the previous chapter I discussed US mainstream media's coverage of the religious-cultural practice in relation to racialized and sexualized labeling. This chapter builds upon the links between racial minorities, gender and sexuality by using interview as well as ethnographic data. I specifically use the work of Chandan Reddy (1998)—a precursor of the queer of color critique which other scholars have furthered (Muñoz, 1999, 2000; Ferguson, 2004)—to point to the peculiar position of "gay" *Santeros* who may try to find within *Santería* a new "home."[2] Reddy's arguments help illustrate the expulsion of queers of color in society, and the high value of spaces like *Santería*—where queers of color find an alternative place to such expulsion. While in the previous chapter I focused on Puerto Ricans' invisibility within a pan-ethnic "Latino" category, or a "people of color" minority label, this chapter requires taking a closer look at the

[2] I support the analysis in this chapter with additional queer immigrant research sources that look at "gay" ethno-racial minorities through nationality, such as Mexicans (Cantú, 2001); Cubans (Peña, 2002); Dominicans (Decena, 2004); and Puerto Ricans (Guzmán, 2004). This Queer of Color critique extends the notion of "race"—most notably in a US black/white racial system—into an immigrant-based critique. As scholars like Foner and Fredrickson (2004) note, the most recent immigration wave from Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia is classified as non-white or as people of color both by the immigrants and by *United Staters*. Reddy's own work includes a poignant reading of how immigration "troubles" queer sexualities by its imposition of identities and how the U.S. setting eliminates some of the sexual behavior component in exchange for an identity acquisition. See his co-authored article (with Javid Syed) in the following address http://www.asianweek.com/2002_01_11/opinion_payattention.html.

structural processes where “colonial racial subjects” who are “sexual minorities” are historically expelled from notions of home/family/nation.

Because LGBT-identified *Santeros* have *often* incorporated themselves into the religious structure of the communities in which they live, their participation allows for an examination of the ways that both LGBT-identified *Santeros* and seemingly hegemonic *Santeros* negotiate and resist, as well as welcome, LGBT participation. While a significant finding in a moment in which much backlash is taking place within many religious structures towards LGBTs, there are clear tensions in *Santería* about their participation, as the religion can not be only interpreted as a safe haven for LGBT people.

This chapter demonstrates the extent to which “gay” practitioners, by joining the religious-cultural structure of *Santería* houses, attempt to reconstitute a sense of home. First, I engage with discussions on the meaning of “house” and “home” for “gay” *Santeros*. Contrasting the queer of color critique with recent anthropological and sociological literature on Latin American sex/gender/power systems, I illustrate the ways in which the religion may be offering a “home”-like space to “gay” practitioners—comparing *Santería* to other NYC spaces. However, the “home”-like metaphor does not operate equally for all of these “gay” members, especially for women (as I begin to illustrate here and more fully in the next chapter). I conclude with general comments to enhance studies of “Latin American” “sexual minorities” –and families– based on these findings. I begin situating NYC venues that in some ways relate to *Santería*, and then applying the queer of color critique to my project.

New York City as a Queer of Color Ethnographic Site

In a few New York City spaces, namely, "house balls" (Brown, 2001), street economy and sex work venues (Valentine, 2000), and the piers off Christopher Street in the Village, a multitude of young sexual minorities—predominantly, but not exclusively, multiracial, immigrant, and from communities of color—have disturbed neatly contained definitions of sexuality, sex and gender in ways that have challenged established gay and lesbian political groups. As mentioned in the introduction, Valentine (2000) shows how House Balls and the young African American and Latina/o LGBT-identified street culture in NYC stands at odds with mainstream "gay and lesbian" conceptions of normatively gendered homosexuality; the latter cannot necessarily make sense of the identities and experiences of the former.[3] Like him, Brown (2001) has explored the connections between ethno-racial minority groups who participate in house balls in New Jersey, and the ways in which they intertwine sex, gender, and sexuality. In addition to these spaces, the Christopher Street/Village area is a central space where these blends are taking place, which has challenged normative gay and lesbian standards.

Christopher Street's sidewalks and spaces outside local businesses have become a battleground where young sexual minorities who do not participate in the formal economy (set by patrons at bars/clubs, souvenir stores, and restaurants) of the gay enclave are under constant surveillance. Their participation is highly policed by patrons, neighbors, and the police force in various ways. Recent developments by community

[3] The "House of Latex," a project by the Gay Men's Health Crisis, the oldest HIV prevention and service organization in the country, is one site where members of some of these house balls participate. The name "house of latex" rests in part on the explicit assertion of safer sex for its participants.

residents, organized after the banner of "Residents In Distress," or RID, have argued that "street youth" are loud, sell drugs and conduct sex work in the area—activities that the community norms do not seem to support.[4] This "indoor" economy has (r)ejected the participation of many queer youth (who are, for the most part, African American, Latino, or multi-racial), who have themselves adapted to a "glocalized" economy. Decena sums this up well: "If one is young, queer and of color, Greenwich Village and Chelsea are not welcoming spaces. Currently, these neighborhoods are dominated by the racial and class politics of queer (and generally White) people with money" (2004: 3). Certainly an informal/alternative/street economy common in "first world countries," where panhandling, prostitution, and drug sales are in evidence, complicate assertions of identities beyond those commissioned by domestic notions of citizenship for "gays and lesbians."

The 1991 film *Paris is Burning* (by Jennie Livingston, Fox Lorber Studios) also engages with New York City spaces such as Christopher Street—more specifically with the street scenarios that are currently heavily policed in the neighborhood (and for some of the reasons exposed before). By exploring the meaning of the "house balls"—the spaces where a "father" and a "mother" of a given house direct and support the participation of their youth, the film engages with a recreation of "house" structures that envelop or re-take sexual minorities. *Paris is Burning* caused lots of commotion because

[4] For an exploration of this space battlegrounds, see the work in progress of Christina B. Hanhardt, at New York University's American Studies Ph.D. program. Also, various local newspapers undertook significant coverage on RID's arguments against the queer youth in the area. Lastly, I would refer the reader to a local queer youth organization called FIERCE!, especially their film "Fenced Out!," about local politics and the economic development of the area as an attack on queer of color youth and homeless youth in the area.

it illustrated a subculture within a "gay and lesbian" culture that reconfigured their identities through a sense of abjection in ways never seen before by mainstream American culture. Re-creating family, and accepting these (mostly) Puerto Rican/Caribbean and African American youngsters for who they were, the house balls re-articulated the pain of exclusion from both normative families that excluded its gay- or lesbian- identified siblings, as well as mainstream "gay" communities that misunderstood young LGBTs of color. *Paris is Burning* also offered alternative readings of the relationship between gender and sexuality, as much as alternative relations to the concept of the family.

In "Home, Houses, Nonidentity: *Paris is Burning*," Reddy (1998) offers a significant re-reading of the movie.[5] Through a historical look at the US development of racial and sexual identities in the nineteenth century, Reddy inserts a political economic exploration of how racial formations took shape while the demand for labor labeled newly arrived immigrants as un-American, and it gendered them in ways outside the norm. By using the relationship of "home" and "houses" in the film *Paris is Burning*, Reddy illustrates how queers of color are expelled from any possibility of mainstream US citizenry. His position—one that looks at these racialization and gendering processes from a queer of color perspective, shows how this expulsion:

> …forces a reconsideration of the White U.S. home as a social location whose *material* reproduction and maintenance require the forms of social division and organization (the racial formation of domestic labor, the gendered division of labor, and the colonial differential of the wage scale)

[5] The work by Butler (1993), Gomez (1995) and Harper (1999) all engage with various aspects of the movie, as well as with each other's arguments.

> instantiated and sustained by the modern U.S. state and its public culture. . . . Unaccounted for within both Marxist and liberal pluralist discussions of the home and the nation, queers of color *as people of color*, I argue, take up the critical task of both remembering and rejecting the model of the "home" offered in the United States in two ways: first, by attending to the ways in which it was defined over and against people of color, and second, by expanding the locations and moments of that critique of the home to interrogate processes of group and self-formation from the experience of being expelled from their own dwellings and families for not conforming to the dictation of and demand for uniform gendered and sexual types. (Reddy, 1998: 356-7)

Reddy's argument is grounded in the *positionality* of queer of color people as illustrated in the film *Paris is Burning*. Reddy's work is extremely useful to my study findings on the place given to gay-, lesbian-, and bisexual- identified *Santería* practitioners, for a number of reasons. Initially, Reddy articulates a very important distinction between houses and home which is necessary for my study. Because *Santería* has a clear "house" structure where there is a *padrino* and a *madrina*, and where the religion followers worship under their *padrinos*' guidance, this structure can be initially paralleled to the house balls discussed by Reddy (and present in *Paris is Burning*). The question this chapter asks is: Does the violence of expulsion from the family—the "home"—and the emptiness it causes, get to be filled by a symbolic home—now called a "house"? For Reddy, the slippage from house to home by the subjects of *Paris is Burning* represents a clear challenge to domesticity as private because, he claims, it is constitutive of racially, gendered, and colonial subjects' inferiority in the "public" sphere. Using the arguments from the previous chapter as well as Reddy's, "queer of color" can serve as a broad coloniality group against mainstream US conceptualizations of sexual identity.

Just like Valentine's (2000) discussion of the drag balls and the street economy of "sexual minorities" in the NYC area, Reddy's discussion neatly addresses the material and discursive elements critical to understanding a queer of color critique of social

scientific knowledge. Yet unlike much of the anthropological and sociological work previously discussed and included in this chapter, which sets cultural oppositions between "Latin Americans" and "Americans," implicitly reifying that difference, Reddy makes an argument that does not fall into cultural oppositional practices (see also Cantú, 2000). By using terms that do not create an inherent binary, Reddy opens up the use of "queers of color." Indeed, when citing social scientific literature, I will refer to the term "Latin American," as their use is inherently of cultural oppositional practices. When I use Reddy's theorizing, I will use "queer of color," making these literatures speak to each other in the arguments put forth in this chapter.

Another benefit in using Reddy's work is that he does not negotiate the use of pan-ethnic labels (i.e., the forced use of categories like Latino or Asian) in making his arguments; here the focus is broader that just one pan-ethnic group, yet his work recognizes country- and immigrant-specific backgrounds, which enrich racialization discussions—especially within an often polarized Black/White US racial system. Thus in Reddy's use, "people of color" is a useful coalitional term that addresses political economic inequities—not just the cultural differences that social scientists are often trained to examine. It is as important to look beyond pan-ethnic strategies to address the challenges of a globalization that depends on rigid culturally-based separations which hide political economic issues.

Santería's houses – Do they serve as "home" for "gay" practitioners?

Santería, like the other NYC settings discussed above, offers an opportunity to examine gender/sexual systems in communities of color, as well as migrant communities. While other scholarship focused on homosexuality in *Santería* as a forum to explore an

openness to sexual minorities through *Santería's* gendered codes (Strongman, 2002), or as a homophobic site (Conner, 2004), I engage with the possibilities of building a home out of a house structure, where "gays" actively participate.[6] Thus, this study of "sexual minorities" in *Santería* enhances previous research that reconceptualizes the relationship between sexuality and gender in the US, and adds as focus of analysis a religious setting, itself historically marginalized.

Like the queer of color subjects of *Paris is Burning,* gender transgressive and vocal sexual minorities who are also racial minorities, the *Santeros* in my sample engaged with aspects such as the multiple meanings of *gayness* (definition slipperiness as well as a conflation of gender and sexual constructs) for them and other "gay" practitioners. In *Paris is Burning*, the "House Balls" structure people's participation in that community. In *Santería,* the "houses" are named differently from the "house balls" even though they both act as an organizing unit. As mentioned in the introduction, *Santería's* notion of an extended family is the foundation of its existence, especially as it formed in Cuba (see, for instance, Fernández-Olmos and Paravasini-Gebert, 2000). In my research, some practitioners spoke of finding a "home" within the "house" religious structure, when often they have left their own homes because of that gender and sexual marginality (for a semi autobiographical account of the practice of *Santería* and the participation of the Christopher Street and "house ball" structures, see Xavier, 1999). In *Santería,* the "house" structure is almost as permanent as the idea of a "home." *Santería* houses or its *padrinos* are rarely abandoned by its practitioners; except in extreme

[6] A paper by Roger Lancaster, presented at the Latin American Studies Association conference in 2004, suggested *Santería* as a space of play,

circumstances (such as a move, the change of leadership in a house, or discomfort with a leader). A main question to advance the Queer of Color Critique is whether "gay" *Santeros* can find a home in a diasporic and displaced religious-cultural practice. And perhaps a more engaging question is whether "gay" *Santeros* are looking for such home. Those are the inquiries behind this chapter.

Throughout the interviews and ethnographic data, I found that "gay" *Santeros* did not reconfigure their "houses" to create "gay" exclusive ones. That is, "houses" in *Santería* are never expected to be exclusively "straight" nor "gay" houses. Practitioners may label them "gay" or "straight," yet proceed to elaborate on their lack of homogeneity, as I illustrate in brief. Even in the face of potential rejection as leaders, "gay"-specific houses are avoided. In many houses, "sexual minority" status does not supercede other factors such as house lineage (depending on whichever part of Cuba a practitioner's line comes from) and nationality (primarily Puerto Rican and Cuban differences). Instead, "gay" practitioners participated in houses where "home" was not redefined by sexual orientation; even though many practitioners in the houses where I conducted ethnographic work were LGB-identified, there was a great balance between sexual minority status and heterosexually identified practitioners.

Homosexuality is not particularly judged in the religion, as some of the practitioners confirmed. Bebo was born in Puerto Rico and has lived in the US for about two decades. Raised a Catholic, later on an Atheist, and now a *Santero*, Bebo is the head of an arts company that employs several staff and he travels constantly. In terms of *Santería* and the place it offers "homosexuals," he had the following to say:

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but I am unable to sustain an engaged commentary until the essay is published. This essay is part of a forthcoming book publication.

Por eso es que el homosexual ha encontrado un espacio bien firme y bien contínuo dentro de esta fe… Yo creo que ese es el centro, yo creo que ese es el, lo que hace que haya tanta manifestación homosexual dentro de la *Santería*, es ese mismo aspecto en el que tu sabes que a tí se te tiene que rendir el tributo que se le rinde a ese *Orisha*, lo tengas coronado o no, por que está contigo siempre, está siempre contigo, cuando tu llegas a una casa, a un hogar, el que no lo haga sabe que tiene por sí mismo que pagar las consecuencias de la falta de respeto que le ha hecho a su propia fe, y hay gente que siempre lo hará me imagino, pero el que lo hace sabe muy claramente, que está yendo en contra de la manera en que la religión misma funciona, y es una manera de tolerar, ni siquiera es tolerar, es un entendimiento de las diferencias que existen como parte del engranaje de la misma fe, y que sin esas diferencias y sin ese manto, se cae la misma fe, por que está hecha de los individuos que forman esa comunidad, y los individuos mismos no se pueden juzgar, tu no puedes juzgar a alguien, por que la espiritualidad no puede juzgar, la espiritualidad es como la lluvia, como el agua, tu entras y te mojas, te guste o no te llenas de ella, te empapas, asi es el espacio de la *Santería*… entonces no hay forma de que tu puedas juzgar el sol, el viento, la sangre, ¿cómo tu juzgas la sangre? No, eso no, cae fuera de ese espacio…	This is why the homosexual has found a firm space, and some continuity, within this faith… I believe that that's the center, I think that's why there is so much homosexual manifestation within *Santería*, is that very same aspect where you know that you have to receive the tribute that it is offered to this *Orisha*, whether you are crowned or not, because it is with you always, when you arrive at a house, at a home, whomever does not recognize it in you knows that they have to pay the consequences for disrespecting their own faith, and there are people that will always do this I imagine, but the one that does this clearly knows, that he/she is going against the way in which the very religion functions, and it is a form of tolerating, not even tolerating, is an understanding of the differences that exist as part of the foundation of the faith, and that without those differences, that without that fabric, the faith itself falls, because it is made up of individuals that form that community, and the individuals cannot be judged, you can't judge someone, because spirituality cannot be judged, spirituality is like rain, like water, you come in and you get wet, whether you like it or not you are filled with it, it is poured on you, that's how the space of Santeria is… then, there is no way you can judge the sun, the wind, the blood, how do you judge blood? No that falls outside this space…

A person's life is honored and recognized as a valid one, regardless of sexual identity, because of one's desire and commitment to practice the religion. Not accepting a

practitioner would be detrimental to the religious foundations. Unlike the Catholic church, where practitioners "love the sinner but hate the sin," in *Santería,* people knew that the diversity of its members constituted the religious belief system, and abided by this belief.

Religious narratives also separate what bodies and societies stipulate from the stipulations of gods or deities. Laura, a lesbian-identified Cuban who works for a private company and has been a *Santera* since birth (her mom was initiated when she was pregnant with Laura) said this to confirm how sexuality was something humans add to the religious equation—in this case, in terms of the same-sex attractions:

Para el ojo físico, un ejemplo, tu eres heterosexual y ves a un homosexual subiéndose con un Santo femenino, tu asumes que es más fácil por el elemento de que es una persona homosexual, pero el santo no entiende tu predilección, ellos saben, cual es tu predilección, pero ellos no se meten, por que tú eres un hijo para ellos, y a ellos no le importa, mientras tu estés correcto a ellos no les importa...	For the naked eye, for instance, you are a heterosexual and you see a homosexual being mounted with a feminine deity, you assume that it is easier because of the homosexual element of the person, but the deity does not understand this predilection, the deities don't get involved, because you are a son to them, and they could care less, as long as you are correct in your practices, they don't care…

Thus both from below, from the level of the practitioners, and according to Laura's statement, from above, from the deity's point of view, a practitioner's sexual identity is not a factor that has a major effect in the religious practice. While we see this discussed in more detail in the following chapter, for now, what solidifies the religious ground is following the *Orisha's* guidance, irrespective of what other practitioners may say.

During the time I was conducting interviews, attending initiations, and *Orishas'* birthdays, I rarely attended a house that was exclusively framed as "gay," even if "gays"

were a predominant group in any of these settings. I am thus not offering a comparison between gay and non-gay houses, as my data only responds to "mixed" houses. The point is I cannot ascertain that there are, in fact, "gay" houses, and the opposite also holds—that these mixed houses aren't considered by many as exclusively "gay." What has happened instead is that people use "ideal" types to refer to a house—either as "gay" or "straight," but upon probing, find that they are not exclusively one or the other.

Notions of homogeneity in house structures are not often based on sexual identity. Though some practitioners mentioned they had heard of gay houses, there were several reactions to that which did not support, nor seem to understand, the uses of this exclusive worship space. Amaury, a man in his late 20s, of Asian descent and who speaks Spanish fluently, said that "gay" houses feel superficial, and that this would go against *Santería's* belief system. "[W]anting to shut everyone else out is not [natural]. Ultimately is about family, so [they would be] missing the whole point." José, a Mexican man in his 30s, who is very engaged with the religion, argued something similar—even though he has been to what he termed predominant "gay" houses:

> My experience is that a lot of times, shall we say, houses that have a lot of gays in it, they tend to be very *clique-ish*, and, if you are there, if you don't belong there they are kind of like standoffish, I find, I've experienced that, and you know I can't be bothered, like that… One, we are all in the same religion, two, we have the same preference in sex, but why are you being *standoffish*, there is no reason, and if that's the case I step out. But I find there is even that in our religion.

Both Amaury and José distinguish between a more or less "gay" house, and one that is an all inclusive one; and interestingly enough, they make a negative suggestion as to the meaning and usefulness of "gay" dominated houses, or even the comfort they may feel in these. Like them, many practitioners who are "gay" attend religious events where

a mixture of heterosexual and "gays" participate. The confinement some practitioners felt in spaces where sexual identity was privileged should not be read as homophobia, but as an attempt to benefit from participating with people who can teach them and share knowledge about *Santería*—regardless of sexual identity. That there are stereotypes about how "gays" behave in *Santería* cannot simply be reduced to homophobia; José's example may be illustrative of previous experiences with a predominantly "gay" house.

Amaury tells me about the ways in which gayness is read through gender in the religious practice, and in such cases, they wonder:

> This is a straight house, but you have gay people there, some of them are really *queenie*, and like, you know… not many… And, they don't hold your homosexuality against you, but they think that if you are gonna go and flaunt it or whatever, then you're gonna have people talk about you, and that's the way it is.

Amaury's statements show a difference between practitioners based on their sexual identity and their gender appropriate behavior and expectations. What a "gay" house and a "straight" house are is not clear from these accounts, perhaps because all houses are unfit to be labeled either way. While he has mentioned before that gay houses seem problematic, he does not suspend the heterosexuality of this particular house he is referring to. Yet the challenge to scholarship in *Santería* is to recognize how some respondents feel more "at home" in seemingly "heterosexual" houses (mixed houses), and that gendered expectations embedded in heteronormativity are negotiated by the practitioners.

This reformulation of the familiar space for "gay" practitioners proves to be evident in Reddy's assessment:

> The "houses" that make up the units of the ball circuit are sites of critical importance, not only because they form counter-cultures and alternative social formations that provide both support and community for the urban queers of color interviewed in Livingston's documentary, but also because the "houses" never replace the "home." Put otherwise, the documentary subjects interviewed in Livingston's film never replace the original home from which they were often brutally expelled with the "houses" of the ball circuit. The "houses" are, rather, the site from which to remember the constitutive violence of the home, and the location from which to perform the pleasures and demands of alternative living, while at the same time functioning as an "interlocutionary device" between homes and queer subjects. These "houses" are collectivities that form precisely to supplement the often violent and constitutive experience of the home—collectivities whose potential lies not in rearticulating an idealized alternative domesticity, but rather in forming shared sites that enable each particular subject to collectively remember the home as a site of contradictory demands and conditions. (Reddy, 1998, 357)

It is the contradiction between being in a diverse space and flourishing as "gay" *Santeros* that moves the uses of the queer of color critique forward—by occupying spaces without assuming they need to be "colonized" through sexual identity. This openness—however negotiated "gay" participation may be—offers a new site to view new kinship structures. As noted before, there is a difficulty in keeping the perception of the houses "pure" as either "hetero" or "gay." This perception is subjective but in either of those locations (as voiced by respondents) there is always someone who isn't from the dominant group. Moreover, these houses *become* queer because of their varied sexual identity configuration—in a sense, these houses move through the presence of "gays" (and gender atypical behavior) to create a queer of color space beyond sexual identities.

The "trouble" in defining the houses as either/or is not a central issue in the interviews, yet maybe there is something that the all encompassing "gay" category does not include in terms of sexual identity, but gender "excess." Or perhaps because the contents of what is seen as "gay" are as much gendered as they are about sexual identity.

While there is a "queerness" that reconstitutes such spaces—queer in that it fails to be defined or constituted as either/or "gay" or "straight," even when those are the referents utilized—certain gender presentation expectations maybe at play. There are gendered ways that also affect who gets to be seen as "gay"—making operational a "sexual minority" term. Amaury's additional statements help illustrate how "gayness" is assigned to bodies that do not seem to conform to either hegemonic masculinity types, or certain body types, or particular behaviors:

> Where sexuality and sexual orientation, diverge, I mean, there is that gray area, there are men who are married and stuff, *y, y son los más pájaros, los más pájaros,* [and they are the most queenie, the most queenie] I mean flamboyant, that's when you get all these Cuban men with lots of jewelry, *mas que una mujer!* [more jewelry that a woman!] Or you have guys que son muy *afeminaos,'* [that are very effeminate] *que estan casaos' ahí estan la esposa y los niños.*… [that are married, and there is the wife and there are his children…] …you are with a wife, then you are a man, I mean that's part of the whole… Look at parts of Asia, for example, it doesn't matter, if you are gay or straight, if you are a man, you have to marry a woman and you have to have kids… you could be whatever the hell you want, just don't go and flaunt it in front of your wife. And same way, I think that these guys, are like that too, I've never seen any butch gay guys, I've always seen flamboyant gay guys. So either that they are or sometimes you look them up and down and you swear they are gay…
> *So it is not about their sexual behavior?*
> I wouldn't even know… It's in terms of demeanor. You know they are just very flamboyant, they are kind of effeminate. It's very interesting to see that it is not about, like there is not about who you're fucking, it is about what you are, it doesn't matter if you are fucking, you don't have to be fucking at all…

Even a man who is sexually active with women, or men or women who are not sexually active, may be perceived as "gay" depending on the way they present themselves. This phenomenon of reading gendered behavior as sexually-derived is in part reflected in anthropologists and sociologists' early work on the Latin American sex/gender systems, as I elaborate in brief.

Up to this point I have discussed the general perception some "gay" practitioners have of their participation in *Santería*, as well as how "queering" *Santería* houses takes place. I have also laid out Reddy's notion that a house cannot become a home for queer people of color. Lastly, I have marked the differences between house and home, and how the queer of color critique may apply to *Santería*. In what follows, I challenge the predominant US/Latin American social science distinctions with the queer of color critique.

From Social Scientific Sex/Gender/Power to Queer of Color Critiques

Whereas in US American social movements and identity politics, the "LGBT" acronym is representative of different, if related, "sexual minorities," scholars and lay folk outside such a community might simply locate all within the same category: *gay*. In the previous few excerpts, we can see that whatever "gay" means, it meant "non-man," where man is understood as heterosexual and with a particular (hegemonic) masculinity. With this in mind, I refer to the work of social scientists focusing on what has been glossed as *homosexuality* in Latin America and within Latino populations in the US in order to illustrate the relationship of sexuality and gender for "gays" in *Santería*. A little bit of context on the foundational texts on migration is in order. "Canonical" works on "gay and lesbian" migration have argued for the formation of "gay and lesbian" enclaves as a departure from an oppressive home to a more open space (Rubin, 1984; D'Emilio, 1993). An assumed rupture from one's family of origin was the basis for massive migratory patterns that created "gay cities" all over the US. Rubin's and D'Emilio's work has been critiqued for its inability to address the supposedly "better" place—the urban

center (Cantú, 1999; Decena, 2004; Guzmán, 2004). For instance, Decena offers an excellent illustration of the power of this imagination:

> Narratives of the liberatory power of migration towards urban centers like New York (or from the "developing" South to the "developed" North) often do not explain what happens to queers once they have migrated. One ubiquitous myth about migration in the queer imagination—that urban centers allow one a more "anonymous" exploration of a diversity of sexual cultures—rests on the assumption that migration means rupture with family and with the world of the known. In other words, the sexually liberated capital is exciting and attractive because it allows one to break away from the bonds of patriarchal family relations (2004: 4).

These perceptions have been extended to international migration in more recent years, as sexual "oppression" is often portrayed as coming from other countries—and in this scenario, the Latin American context. However, it was the writing from the borderlands (Anzaldúa & Moraga, 1983) that inspired this scholarly dialogue, though this influence was misplaced through the social scientists' arguments, as I illustrate next.

As early as 1991, Tomás Almaguer argued that unlike "Western" countries, where sexuality and gender are distinct aspects of self enacted through different vectors, in certain societies—notably Mexico, but in general, "Latin American" countries, the distinction of gender and sexuality has been notoriously marked by an understanding of the (male) actors' positioning in sexual activity. Almaguer notes how a heterosexually-identified man is still considered such in the event of having sex with another man, if he is the *activo*, relegating the homosexual stigma to the penetrated, or *pasivo* person (see also Carrier, 1995; Lancaster, 1992; Murray, 1995). Further sociological and anthropological writings have expanded and contested Almaguer's work, noting how his location of this complexity in Mexican/"Latin American" contexts implies that models of

sexuality and gender in Western contexts are simpler (Cantú, 2000), that this typology ignores the mutual influence of migration (Carrier, 1995), and that indeed "partial sexual identities" emerge out of this (like the *bugarrón*, a sexually penetrative man who has sex with men and women but does not self-identify as gay or bisexual), and are "part and parcel of the culture itself" (Guzmán, 1997:217), and not merely an incision or segment of political movements (where "gays" are most often located, even in spite of the recent legal advocacy for equality). As Guzmán (1997) has argued, the "man/non-man" categorization of sexuality and gender offer us possibilities to re-conceptualize the relationship between sexuality and gender (see also Kulick's argument with Brazilian *travestis*, 1998). While this categorization is further addressed in Chapter 4, it is important to note the ways in which this categorization interprets all who are potentially penetrated as not being men—lumping women and men who engage (or would potentially engage) as recipients of anal sex, together.

While centering my research in NYC, and in a general sense, the US, I am not dismissing the powerful effects of international migration and ideologies that set up "Latin American" models in opposition to US ones. In fact, the "Latin American"/US gender/sexuality opposition continues to be reaffirmed here in the US, under new models. Roberto Strongman (2002), in critiquing the work of scientists such as Almaguer, argues that the *activo/pasivo* model is a result of problems of academics' perspectives towards their informants. Instead, he suggests a *disclosure/secrecy* (an "out" versus "non-out" sexual identity) model to recognize the sexuality of potential "sexual minorities." Strongman's discussion centers on sexuality, even though his analysis uses gender fluidity—he conflates the two to make his point. Based on a week's worth of "fieldwork"

in Massachusetts—Strongman attempts to make these claims of "sexual freedom" on the grounds of multiple gender possibilities. Such literature, informed by these cultural difference constructs, needs to moves beyond the *pasivo/activo* paradigm and into the notion of man/non-man (Guzmán, 1997; Kulick, 1998) and how it plays out in various cultural spaces—including *Santería*.

Indeed, the influence of these oppositional deficiency models to explain cultural variations (always using "American" culture as the referent) is revealed in the illustrations provided by the study participants. Perceptions of "gay" identification often appear as a threat to someone's full participation in the religion. For instance, Petra, a Puerto Rican heterosexually-identified woman and mother, who holds a graduate degree, has been initiated, and has a vast knowledge about the religion, said something about the fine line some practitioners walk when "discovering" that someone is "gay:"

> The questions on gender and sexuality are about keeping the heterosexist male system… for heterosexual men, and [to establish] "how macho I am," "I'm not interested in having sex with you," like you have to be very clear… It's so much about keeping that front, and that, macho, thing, up… And you know, thinking about one man in particular, and how he's sort of theatrical, and some others would say, "Oh, I didn't know he was gay," which is another way of saying, "I didn't know that I should treat him differently," "I was treating him like a man," you know?" "I was treating him like a man and now I realized I shouldn't have treated him like a man, I shouldn't have been allowing him in aspects of my life, because he is really not a man…"

Literally, the man/non-man categorization takes a hold of these spaces, as seen here. Yet that is not the only way to interpret what takes place in these worship spaces. The distinction between the "Latin American" and US sex/gender/power systems could have been proposed with other differences in mind. Almaguer has been greatly criticized for

his stand,[7] yet I want to argue that perhaps he was misunderstood in his quest for separating "Latin American" and US cultures, as well as how he came about this approach.[8]

Succinctly, many of the criticisms of his article have missed the psychoanalytic foundations of Almaguer's assessment. We can find in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1962 [2000]) that sexual object choice and sexual aim are really

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[7] Cantú (2002), for instance, argued that Almaguer simplified Anglo sexualities, noting how sexual identity and sexual behavior do not have to be congruent. Cantú also signaled that a similar "urban" migration than that of gays and lesbians of European descent has taken place, by homosexual Mexican men—this time from Mexico to metropolitan areas in southern California. Cantú asserts by asking: "If the literature on the social construction of a Western gay identity is correct in linking sexual identities to capitalist development, then why should our understanding of sexual identities in the "developing world" give primacy to culture and divorce it from political economy?" (2002:141). His answer is that among US scholars, and specifically in the Anthropological literature Almaguer cited, "culture became the mechanism that reified difference and reproduced the imagined distance of 'the others' in academic discourse itself" (ibid). Another excellent critique to Almaguer's work (unfortunately unpublished) is the work by Israel Cardona-Gerena ("Beyond "Machos y Maricones" and "Chingones y Chingadas:" Toward a Reconceptualization of Latino Gay Identities"), presented at the 1996 American Studies Association. Cardona-Gerena asserts, like other critics, that Euro-American culture remains a perfect model of culture, but also challenges the idea that US sexual life is distinguished by the gay/straight assumptions of these social scientists; points that US culture is gendered and misogynistic and most often patriarchal; that violence, rape, and child abuse are elements that also take place in White America; and that even the White gay culture thrives on a active/passive distinction, where the passive is associated with femininity and highly devaluated.

[8] I limit the second point to this note, though it seems integral to the first. I believe autoethnographic work such as Moraga's, the basis for much of Almaguer's arguments, was only beginning to be recognized as such, and widely misunderstood. Autobiographical work with theoretical depth currently challenges both empirical studies, and qualitative methods, given its main dependence on the experience of the self and links to the social. Moraga's autobiographical and highly reflexive personal account illustrates sexual complexity beyond particular labels. Perhaps Almaguer's use of the unconscious (which may encompass more than structure in a sociological sense), and the fact that his was an argument devoid of empirical data, speaks to his desire to see culture as a canvas of a group of people, and not simply in oppositional terms.

important codes to define sexual activity and desire.[9] Almaguer takes these psychoanalytic constructs to create difference—a difference of cultural sorts, or a racial difference— where the sexual object choice falls within the realm of the European American, and the sexual aim falls within the purview of the Latin American sexualities. Thus, Almaguer manages to utilize psychoanalysis to account for power from within the culture that he claims is *distinctive* from Anglo culture. In psychoanalysis, gender is a system of social organization based on opposites and at its core constituted through power—that is, of a hierarchy and value of the masculine/male over the feminine/female. Almaguer contrasts Latin American culture to European American culture, thus constituting an opposition, necessary both for psychoanalysis and for his framework of difference. A kind of phantasmagoric figure is evident in his work—because he illustrates this overarching culture that reinstates this opposition in the lives of men who have sex with men, who are (expected to be) feminine, and who are (presumably) penetrated—and because of all of these aspects are socially stigmatized. Far from being a culture that currently exists, it is the very possibility of such cultural values that "haunts" the ideas of masculinity and sexual preying of Mexican, Chicano, and "Latin American" men. (Of course, one can account for that oppressive "culture" once acts against "sexual minorities" take place. Given current international human rights politics, that very same claim for freedom from oppression is utilized for migration into the US or European countries. Thus, paradoxically, this sense of oppositional culture is necessary to continue

[9] Even sexuality sociologists such as Rodriguez Rust (2000) discuss attraction as an possibility for same object choice people to organize based on such desire—that is, instead of having lesbian-identified women and gay-identified men organize together, some exploration should be given to commonalities that heterosexually-identified women and gay-identified men's may have, given a shared attraction to men.

to sustain a first world order—driven by "human rights," and a "not so" first world order, where atrocities based on gender and sexuality discrimination are taking place.) One has to wonder if Almaguer reifies the very same culture he utilizes to frame the distinction between the "Latin American" and the "Anglo." But the main point of his culturally-focused work is the additive of psychoanalysis to the concept of culture, something less developed in the scholarship of the time (and still unacceptable in much of anthropological and sociological writings).

Almaguer still utilizes elements innate to queer theory's psychoanalytic project of disrupting the relationship of sex, gender, and sexuality as clearly defined—by disentangling desire and behavior from identity. Yet, as stated earlier, Almaguer also reinstates gender expression as parallel to sexual performance and "roles," at the expense of sustaining what seems to be to him a necessary difference between Anglos and Chicanos. (And what a lot of scholars have critiqued ever since.) This theoretical project may have had at its core a political agenda—that of reclaiming a very specific space for Chicanos/Latinos in the US, and simultaneously adding intersectionality to sexual behavior and identity. Almaguer's work challenges the tenets of contemporary identity politics by requiring that we look more at behavior and motivation and less at identity—a project also central to queer theory. Almaguer's work was an attempt to both critique and bridge queer theoretical frameworks with Chicano and Latin American racialization discussions [10]—a project unsuccessful at best, but one that scholarship such as the ones cited here have arrived at.

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[10] Because "race" constructs in Latin America cannot be automatically reduced to phenotypically-driven or oppositional US black/white racial classifications, and because Latin American racial classifications are

Guzmán (2004) offers a reading on racialization and the erotic, which helps produce another answer to my reading of Almaguer's attempt. He states that there is a moment in Almaguer's work where, unlike the Mexican and Latin American families, in the Chicano context—more clearly immersed within the US racialization and racial formation systems—the "delays [in] assumption of a gay identity" are taking place not because of traditional gender/patriarchal expectations, "but the structural location of that Chicano family in the ethnoracial order in the United States." (186) While Almaguer begins to, for a moment, answer the question of this difference between Chicano and "Latin American" racializations, this distinction is dropped, perhaps for a romanticizing of the "Latin American" culture and the Chicano's place within (or relationship to) it. Over a decade and over a dozen anthropologists and other social scientists' analyses emerged before scholars began to see that the rejection of "gay" identification in Almaguer's arguments might have had embedded within it a racial separation or distinction from US identities—not a sexual one.

Clearly, this scholarly baggage continues to inform a lot of the research conducted these days, and the many responses to anthropological work which depends on this distinction. Why, for instance, have we not asked if the anthropologists' fantasy was to see (and have sex with) Latin American "natives" as others, as men, as different from themselves? Why can't we consider that the man/non-man classification could have been a sexualized racialization motivated by seeing the Other as erotically different? Sexual

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impacting the US (Almaguer, 2003) by the migration of people whose racial classification can changed because of class mobility or access to resources (Bonilla-Silva and Glover, 2004), this point needs to be further developed in immigration, queer, and queer of color scholarship.

desire could be also established, as it often is, through gender presentation differences (for more on this topic, see chapter two's discussion on Guzmán's work).

In some scenarios, including *Santería*, these gender presentation differences are embodied in the social stigma attached to effeminacy rather than to the sexual acts. Here, Petra offers an eloquent and sincere perception as to the place, and role, of "gay" *Santeros*:

> Most of the things I am saying are stories, not things that I necessarily saw… I knew people both gay and transgender within the community. I think that what I saw that was interesting to me is how people treat, heterosexuals treat gay people in the community particularly gay men without their participation, their being in the community *Santería* would not be what it is and I can probably say the same thing without any disagreement about *Candomblé*… they are the foundation of the religion. So, while that is true, there also seems to be, and this I've heard from many people, including my godparents, that, "just so long that they do what they do, *y no se parten al frente de ellos mismos* [and that they don't get crooked in front of other *Santeros*], its OK." That there seems to be still a sense that gay men act too, what, too… flamboyant. So the discretion seems to be really valued, as much as their discretion seems to be as valued as their contributions, so that if you are discreet and you are gay then that's very good, if you are gay and are not discreet, then your value as an individual tends to, diminish, although, as a class of people, as a category, they don't diminish…

Petra shows a common mix expressed by many practitioners, "gay" or heterosexual: that of gay and transgender (which I discuss in chapter 5 as well). People's use of language in this sense tended to "sexually minoritize" these varied gendered and sexual minorities into one large group. At the same time, part of what solidified this unification was an expectation of gender conformity—a gender conformity assumed not possible coming from both gay men and transgender practitioners. This correlation between presenting in an effeminate way and being gay identified has already been challenged as always

bringing negative connotations to the people who embody them (Decena, 2004; Peña, 2002).

But this excerpt also helps bring full circle the Latin American sex/gender/power system discussions. Whereas in the US, men and women are often understood through gender identity and their sexual identity in terms of who they are attracted to, in the Latin American one—as reflected both by the literature and this data—atypical (non-normative) gender presentation, combined with presumed anal/vaginal receptivity "lumps" together "gay" men and women into this non-man category. This is useful analytically, and in conversation with Reddy's queer of color critique, because it allows us to see the "rules" in the house and the acceptance of such rules as a turning of the "house" into a "home" (an incomplete project at best, which cannot happen when "they crook themselves in front of others," for instance). In excerpts posed by both "heterosexual" and "gay" *Santeros*, this difference, this idea of the non-man, organizes their way of accepting a "sexual minority" in the practice of *Santería*. This non-man imagery extends to the ritual practice of being possessed/mounted, as the following excerpt shows. Petra's additional comments reveal another set of issues with regards to the place and rationale for homosexuality's management in these spaces:

> I don't mean to be disrespectful, but here it goes, I think that in so many ways, that they are foundational, its because they can, because many, and I don't say all, so the ones that I am aware of, don't have children, don't have those kinds of responsibilities so their level of dedication can be very, it's just very central… I think the ways in which they can, that some boundaries can be blurred, around sexuality… they can be very, because I find sometimes with heterosexual men, that if they have a quote-unquote feminine *Orisha*, they don't let themselves at times, lending themselves to possession, if that's still their path, they have a lot of, they might have the right to be *Babalawo*. In my experience gay men don't seem to have—yeah, they don't feel these limitations and restrictions, and that's very important, because an *Orisha* is meant to form community, is not for the

> single person, is meant to come at a gathering and help a community of people, so if there is a restriction around letting that *Orisha* come, we don't do service the community…

"Gay" people are here foundational because of stereotypes that make them single, childless, and overall extremely available to devote time and energy to the religion. This availability extends to the perception of openness to possession. The mounting further separated gays, or gay men in particular, from the rest of the practitioners. Basically, "gays let themselves," they let themselves be mounted, which makes a sexualized assumption that all gay men let themselves be penetrated—given possession's sexualized and charged readings, it is important to note that perhaps many practitioners assume gay men are used to getting something *into* them. If that is the case, then the *activo/pasivo* model, extended as it is to explain masculinities that uphold hegemonic standards, continues to support the idea that non-heterosexual men are not men—and it intertwines gender and sexuality in ways that complicate their academic separation. For gay men, taking it "like a woman" has recently been discussed by scholars of gay masculinities and sexualities (Decena, 2004; Guzmán, 2004; Peña, 2002). Guzmán, for instance, has signaled this link between anal sex and gayness:

> The relationship of the gay male body to the body of masculinity is never more tenuous than in that erotic moment when the gay male body wants to be or is anally penetrated. Always imagined as bent over and taking it from behind, in our culture, the gay male body is synonymous with the moment of its penetration. . . . its anus, that orifice through which gay men are fantasized to enjoy the practice of forgetting themselves and taking it like a woman (2004: 120).

While Guzmán does not explain which culture he belongs to—which culture he is immersed in, there is a general sense that "American" culture assumes anal sex as "the moment of its penetration." This set of understandings of gayness is visible in both the

Latin American and the US systems, and this understanding needs underscoring. Thus Peña (2002: 103), for instance, has cautioned us how: "it is dangerous to imply that another sexual system (associated with racial privilege, international power, and class privilege) is inherently superior and egalitarian. In short, it is dangerous to hold up these systems [the US/Latin American opposition] to similar scrutiny in terms of their cooperation with patriarchy (and racism and inequality in general)."

Yet this "letting themselves"—existent in both the US and "Latin American" systems—could be understood by some practitioners as a source of potential. This kind of "labor" in the religion could be one way in which many "gay" practitioners sustain their participation in *Santería*. The extension of sexual receptivity (and a broader conflation of non-man with femininity) seems to also open up spiritual receptivity and establish it as a valuable marker of practice in the religion. Furthermore, the being mounted and allowing their *Orishas* to possess them publicly—an act that benefits all present, not particularly the person mounted—could indeed be recreating notions of "home" for them.

Interestingly enough, the avoidance of heterosexual male practitioners to be mounted, combined with the assumption that "gay" men take it, assumes a type of violence extended to being penetrated. (The notion of "taking it" and the image of "fucking" in relation to being mounted is elaborated in the next chapter.) Like any home in "America," the discretion Petra referred to before (in relation to gender presentation and flaunting) can be extended to the silences of a home: rape, violence, incest, abuse—these are all secrets of a home, a violence seldom articulated outside of the "house."[11]

[11] The work by Agustin "At Home in the Street: Questioning the Desire to Help and Save," and Kay "Sexual Abuse Victims and the Wholesome

Thus the journey of "homing" *Santería* is not without its pains, and while many "gay" *Santeros* will continue to gain such acceptance—like in many Afro-Brazilian possession cults, homosexual men are both a "despised social category" (Fry, 1996: 194) and since possession is also seen as something deviant in the Brazilian social system, the two are seen to, in combination, offer a lot of room and respect to these practitioners.

Myrna is a Puerto Rican lesbian identified *Santera* who has been a priestesses of the religion for two decades. She added:

> La mitad de la gente que participa son gente gay en los tambores… Siempre, si tu te pones a observar… y los mejores muerteros, o sea que pasan espiritus, y santeros, que bajan el Santo, miralos que son gays… lesbianas tambien, cuando yo digo gay, es mas hombres gay que mujeres, pero si, si tu miras, hay lesbianas tambien. Lo unico es que a los hombres gays, los straights miran a los hombres gays, como con un poquito mas de respeto y los dejan participar mas... a la mujer lesbiana, si tu te fijas como que la hechan un poco mas al lao'… Especialmente a nosotras las hijas de *Changó,* desde que llegamos nos miran con cosa, por que dicen que *Changó* es, entonces ellos le tienen repelillos a las hijas de *Changó* …
>
> Half the people that practice are gay people in the drummings... Always, if you really pay attention… and the best "horses", I mean the people who receive spirits, and then Santeros, meaning the ones who mount deities, pay attention to them, they are gay… lesbians, too, when I say gay, I mean more gay men than women, but yes, if you look there are lesbians too… The only thing is that heterosexuals look at gay men with a little bit more respect and they let [gays] participate more… The lesbian woman, if you pay attention, you'll notice how they put her a little to the side… Especially to us daughters of Chango, from the moment we arrive they look at us in a funny way, because they think Chango is—they show resistance to Chango's daughters…

Family: Feminist, Psychological, and State Discourses," both in *Regulating Sex: The Politics of Intimacy and Identity* (2005) prove to be excellent articles to explore this point further.

In this case, stereotypes are offered on the other side—the best at it, the ones that know how to engage with the labor in the most timely or cost-effective way. Thus in a way, gay practitioners are never "off the hook"—their every move is qualified and studied. Again, these are detailed, subtle ways in which their participation is marked continuously.

But another set of challenges are posed in the relationship between a lesbian identified woman who is "crowned" by a hyper-masculine deity like *Changó*. Her aggressive personality, justified as it is by the blend of the deity and her body and self, could serve as a threat to these spaces' hegemonic masculinities. *Changó* in lesbians could be interpreted as a violence back at the house, and back at the silences of the home. (We will hear more about *Changó* in the following chapter.)

But there are perhaps ways in which these hegemonic masculinities co-opt any challenges to the traditional notion of power in the house/home. Ester, a lesbian-identified Puerto Rican woman, with a graduate degree, and also mother of two, illustrated her frustrations in the religion with the following example:

> This guy said to me, the other day, fetch me some soda, practically, like this Machismo, this Cuban guy, he's like older—not that much older, I mean like whatever… You know, I wanted to say to him, you know, so I'll get you the soda, so as to be really mean but, because that's just like not my personality… Like I was telling my padrino last nite, when you introduce me, say this is my goddaughter, Dr. ____ this is the director of [name of the program], and there is a certain arrogance to it but there is not a certain arrogance to it, because I have worked hard— I am not a baby, I am gonna be 46 I have two babies, I have worked hard my full life… and here I am fetching soda for some guy who is a couple of years older in the religion, and he is gonna tell me to go and its just kind of weird, although I think for me is not so much the gender thing which is a pain in the neck, now I am a lot softer than then, when I first came out there was no place on earth for men, well for straight men I mean I have

> always had gay men that I loved, absolutely loved, It's more like the hierarchical thing and who is your elder, and who's next, and I am dreading it, when I do get initiated when I make Yabo, and I will have to lay on the floor and they are gonna be like, I'm gonna have to be asking everybody for blessings, it is going to be an amazing thing, for me to get dressed up in white and lay on the floor in front of people, like I do it now but rarely, only if it is really important, like I did it for the two guys cuz it was their birthday, but I didn't do it for anybody else there…

A part of the house structure has to do with the house as a place of hierarchy. Thus, not everyone in the "houses" is treated similarly, or in equal ways—even those supposedly within the sign of "gay." While this excerpt can be interpreted only as sexism (a topic I engage with in chapter 4), this treatment—which I continue to see in almost every event I attend—is also about seniority and power based on a history within the practice.[12]

Conclusion

What makes a house a home? Does a house make a home? What does it imply for sexualities and sexual politics to take place in a house as opposed to a home? Does the informality, or lack of centralization in *Santería*, as opposed to, say, the Catholic Church, have an effect in how this re-membering constitutes either a house or a home? Can the home ever be reconstituted, or is this an instance of loss that never recuperates? What about the silences of violence that seem to be constitutive of the "home" in *Santería*?

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[12] Roberto Da Matta's *The House and the Street* is a Brazilian book that argues that Brazilian society is organized/divided into two symbolic realms, the house and the street. Each realm is organized around different logics of power. He argues that Brazilians are universally sub-citizens in public. The house, on the other hand, is more fluid. Here, however, there is traditional patriarchy, hierarchical organization, but personal relations allow for greater flexibility and there is room for self-affirmation which does not exist in public. He argues that understanding Brazilian society requires not so much understanding each of these realms on its own but how the two logics of power intersect in everyday interaction and play off of each other. My thanks to Rafael de la Dehesa for this reference recommendation.

"Gays" may have an opportunity to create a "home" through their participation in *Santería*. However, it remains unclear whether "gays" desire a home, or more importantly, how they may envision that home—if it is indeed desired. "Gays" maybe somewhere between the space of the "house" and the image of the "home," and this is evident differently for those who are lesbian- or bisexual- identified. In addition, the lack of "purity" around what constitutes "gay" or "straight" houses offers much room to "gay" practitioners. Houses do not equal homogeneity, but the differences within tend to have a dual effect: they cause tensions within the religion, but also enrich the overall participation of its members. While there is a clear management of those differences, and a logic to this diversity in such spaces, this continues to be a contested space for "gay" practitioners, albeit a "home-like" alternative to other religious, social, and cultural structures. Reddy's proposition that the expulsion of queers of color may never allow them to find a "home" is telling, but in *Santería,* a "home" may not be the ultimate desired outcome. "Gays" may be redefining what home will be for them in the future. Thus, Reddy's positioning of queers of color in response to heteronormativity and racial formations that place them as abject may insufficiently detail the ways in which my study participants argued for not wanting a "home" as a main goal, or argued for a new structure of a "house" that does not respond to current "gay" expectations into "gay assimilation." Houses are made public in the way many Queer Theoretical scholars use the expulsion of queers of color to illustrate abject positions (see, for a recent illustration, Cvetkovich, 2003). Recent Queer Theoretical writings continue to use queer of color authors, arts, activism, and the like but resist addressing the racialization implicit in their presence. (This indeed comes from a long standing attempt by "gay and lesbian" activists

and scholars to equate racial discrimination with sexual orientation, without a responsible, credible response to racialization and racism.) This partial analysis also misplaces queers of color in the process, leaving them outside a proper "home."

Reddy's arguments are of use in the study of *Santería*. In his argument, various groups could not constitute their own families; in *Santería*, "gay" *Santeros* re-constitute family in ways that support their spiritual development, and a "home-like" structure through the "houses." Kinship is reconsidered not as a fight for gay marriage rights, but as redefining kinship altogether—even though gay marriage itself is foreclosing other kinship options (Butler, 2002). While "gay" *Santeros* are arriving at a home-like structure, there are tensions and limitations to the ways in which "gay" *Santeros* are treated and incorporated into the structure of the religious practice. The "houses"—never totally heterosexual or homosexual—are another significant step in "gay" *Santeros'* achievement of finding a home.

Notions of man/non-man open up categories like "sexual minorities" and redefine the possibilities of "gay" participation in *Santería*, even as they close some of its doors. Instead of oppositional cultural arrangements where "Latin American" is simply read culturally—not in terms of racialization—a Queer of Color Critique may hold a conversation with such scientific frameworks and force them to acknowledge alternative analyses besides binary systems. While "sexual minorities" was defined in relation to "gay" practitioners, the next chapter opens up the relationship between gender and sexuality, making the meaning of "non-man," or "sexual minorities," very useful.

Chapter 4. "It has Nothing to do with it…" Fusing Gender and Sexuality in *Santería*

Chapter three discussed the place of gay-, but also briefly of lesbian- and bisexual- identified *Santeros* in a home-like structure and mapped a kinship structure where "gays" seemed to have a place. This chapter engages the categories of "gender" and "sexuality" in the practice of *Santería*. These are thus two interconnected yet separate chapters; the previous chapter inserted the Queer of Color Critique to study the family structures in *Santería,* and explored the relationship of the "non-man" to the roles of the *Babalawo* and the *Oriaté*. In this chapter, I develop the notion of "sexual minorities" through the links between the non-men: women and "gay" practitioners. I do so by examining the relationship between gender and sexuality as analytical constructs and by charting the way they articulate in *Santería* through the analysis of fieldwork data, interview excerpts, and *Santería*-related stories, texts and academic analyses. Of particular relevance are the circumstances, through specific behavior in the practice of the religion, where gender and sexuality are mixed or fused. In the religious events I attended, many (typically-assumed to be) gendered cues were interpreted by practitioners as related to sexuality or sexual identity, such as in the case of non-hegemonically masculine men. Conversely, "sexual minority" experiences were channeled in the religious practice as gendered. Whereas in the previous chapter, "respect" was given to LGB-identified practitioners in their participatory roles or as members of the religion, gender and sexuality are more evident in the organization of practice than "LGB" identities. Indeed, a crucial distinction between the previous chapter and the current one is that while the previous chapter was primarily concerned with the place of "gays"

within the religion, this one looks at "gender" and "sexuality" as analytic categories that organize *Santería* in and through their relationship with each other.

"Gender" and "sexuality" interconnect in the practice of *Santería*. As cited in the first chapter, while in much of the social sciences "gender" and "sexuality" are made operational through either sex in relationship to gender identity for gender, and sexual orientation for sexuality, *Santería* offers an alternative perspective to this traditional model. It is a site where alternatively normative gender expressions and atypical behavior, womanhood, as well as queer sexual desires are lumped together—by almost everyone in the religious-cultural practice—into an encompassing notion of "sexual minorities." Nevertheless, I present data which conflict with some recent writings on *Santería* (Conner, 2004; Strongman, 2002). While there are seemingly many gender expressions in the religious practice, my data suggest that *Santería* is as gendered as any other institution in society. This chapter interrogates how the religion is gendered and the ways in which deity presence and practitioners' possession are interpreted through gender and sexuality. These practices make operational a newer sense of "sexual minorities"—a construct that includes gendered sexualities as well as marked gender presentation and sexual behavior.

Some key research questions for this chapter are: What inferences are to be made of the gendered religious structure—i.e., gender-based labor, leadership limitations based on gender, the perception of deity assignment based on gender, and the recognition of LGB *Santeros* through gendered lens? How does *Santería's* gendered religious structure relate to overall religious' dealings with (homo)sexuality? (While not a comparative study on religion, this research will elucidate some answers as to how one religious

structure manages “gay” participation.) How does a religious experience of being mounted illustrate gendered and sexual conflations? The chapter is thus divided into two main sections—namely, I am: (1) exploring, through the data, what I mean by calling *Santería* a gendered religion; and (2) discussing the meanings of possession as holding a set of gendered, as well as sexual, meanings, while showing deities’ complex relationship to their practitioners through gender and sexual analyses. I then conclude by mapping how gender expression and identity are broader than sexual identity—or perhaps, how they reconstitute it, so as to form what becomes in *Santería* “sexual minorities.”

Gendered Religious System

As we have seen throughout the dissertation, *Santería’s* history is that of a complex relationship between the coupling of Catholic and African deities; *Santería* has a long-standing fusion of genders in its underpinnings. Some of the *Orishas* worshipped accommodate feminine and masculine behavior, and a few are perceived to have dual gender experiences, as I will illustrate below. Scholarship on *Santería* has argued for a fluidity of gender in the religious practice—a gender fluidity that, it is often suggested (i.e., Strongman, 2002), grants homosexuality much space. A general structure, however, organizes the division of labor in the enactment of the religious practice, and it affects everyone’s participation. The enactment of the religious *practice* is gendered, in spite of the religious system’s syncretic and multiple-gendered *structure*. Some practitioners, researchers and onlookers alike may envision this religious structure as freeing. However, the existence of this multiple-gendered structure does not stop the religious practice from being hierarchically gendered, as we saw in the introduction and as I expand here.

The previous chapter engaged with some of the ways in which the religion accommodates LGB-identified practitioners, and indeed, creates a different sense of family; this chapter recognizes how communal religious practice is also hierarchical, and gender is, among other markers, a central, organizing principle. Initially, gender was discussed in the practice of the religion as the relation between gender roles and expectations based on presumably sexed limitations. For instance, in the following excerpt, gender emerges when discussing roles for "men" and "women." Julio, a recently initiated *Santero* who has researched the relationship between gender and labor, offered a general view on these restrictions,

> My initial impression—because of restrictions on women—you would think that there would not be a lot of women that head houses and yet there are a lot of houses where women lead, mostly because of their personality, and ability to create kinship, and create families around themselves. I always thought it weird, because a *Santera* always has to have some male partner who has to do sacrifices for them… There is no way [anybody] can practice *Santería* properly, completely, by yourself, because you always have to, even if you are going to initiate somebody it takes a number of people to hold an initiation, you can't hold it by yourself. There are some prejudices against women, you'll see them sing at times, but I have never seen women playing drums, they are definitely not allowed to play the *Batá* [drums], but *Batá* is rarely played, because it is so expensive, and [often] not available in NY… I have never even seen women playing congas, or regular drums…And for me that was a big issue in getting involved in *Santería*, and I don't know if it's going to change, and how is going to change, or not... I don't know…

This excerpt illustrates the hierarchical notion of a house, in terms of women's roles, and yet it also addresses gendered notions of home, as the ability to create "kinship" is placed on the women, especially those who head houses. Julio is illustrating the limited roles women are typically assigned in the religion as well as the ways in which women break some of those stipulations ("…yet there are a lot of houses where women lead…"). He

also argues that *Santería* is not a religion that one can practice individually. This remark, while illustrative of the community, social and therefore religious aspect of *Santería* (see for instance, arguments made by Durkheim, 1995 [1915]), is perhaps a justification for the task assignment—but it could also be an opening to rethink the role assignment.

Most of the events I attended had Puerto Rican women, often short, often dark skinned, preparing the food and in command of the kitchen. (The very few exceptions when men where involved were at a couple of houses where the men in the kitchen were gay-identified, many of whom were fieldwork informants.) The kitchen has typically been a space of control and resistance for Puerto Rican women. For instance, Judith Ortiz Cofer has noted in *The Latin Deli* (1993) how: "I too have on occasion been sent to that "kitchen," where some think I obviously belong" (1993: 153), even though she is a professor and writer. In the previous chapter, we heard from a lesbian practitioner who holds a PhD and who was abruptly asked for a coca-cola by a male *Santero*. Here, we see the places where *Santeras* are not particularly encouraged to be: playing the drums, leading houses, singing, or in animal sacrifice. Women prepare animals for sacrifice, but they are, according to many, not supposed to kill them. They are also in charge of the food preparation and serving after the *tambor* has ended.

Of significance is Julio's notion of women singing at times versus men doing the drumming. Julio's account is one of contrasts between voice and touch as female and male, respectively. Like his description, there are others that depict clear ways in which practitioners assume a traditionally gendered structure. However, Amaury illustrates a different interpretation of women's and men's roles:

> I think traditionally, even in Africa, the women are the ones who work with their hands, they are the ones that get down, and many of these men

> don't do that… Like my godfather—he never talks about money, you know, he just has a face, a look full of concern: "you need to get this and this and do this," but he is not thinking about who's going to get—that's for the women to do. So the women are all about the money, so my godmother, she is the one who handles the money.
>
> *So it is balanced between men/women?*
>
> It's very African in the sense that it requires everyone's presence… …but the ones that actually do the killings are the men because women are not allowed to hold the *cuchillo* [sacrifice knife].

Amaury establishes here a racialized and gendered dichotomy: women as action and men as thought; men as thinking and women as doing. While men hold the *cuchillo,* they act as "doers," according to this excerpt, when certain tasks that women tend not to be assigned are needed. While one could read the point about women handling the money as a positive remark, and the idea of creativity is evident in the cooking, or the actual doing of things, Amaury's notion of the division of labor by gender leaves much to say about the sense of women's agency and women's options in their religious practice. The labor performed by women is important—in fact, key to the ceremonial practices—but only reading this task assignment outside of structures of gender erases the possibility for women's choice in certain tasks in the religious rituals and practice. Women kill certain animals—the prohibition there is for holding the *cuchillo*.

As seen in previous chapters, the *Orishas* also hold a hierarchical relationship depending on their histories. According to *Santería* stories, *Ochún (or Oshún)*, one of the two strongest female *Orishas* (the other being *Yemayá*), cursed the earth when the other *Orishas* held a meeting but did not invite her (Moreno Vega, 2000; Ifayemi Elebuibon, 1999). *Olodumaré*, the Supreme Being, reprimanded the male *Orishas* who excluded her, and in turn gave back the earth its fertility and order. *Olodumaré* explained to the male *Orishas* "that without women and children, the world could not function" (Moreno Vega,

2000: 89). This story, as told by Moreno Vega, represents "the resiliency and power of women to struggle and thrive against all odds" (ibid). Yet within this story, *Olodumaré* reestablishes order by appealing to the functionality of women's participation. It is this sense of maintaining order and functionality that most precisely continues to be used to ask of women certain roles, and avoid nurturing or restricting them from others.

There is no evident element expressed so far that encompasses the reasons for this differential treatment. While Amaury does not specify this in the previous excerpt, the reason for this gender exclusion (as told by many *Santeros*) is that women cannot hold the sacrificial knife because of menstruation. In the following pages, I explore in depth how bodily experiences are linked to women's supposedly inferior status in the religion.

Magda, a Cuban woman in her late 60s, heterosexual, mother of a *Santera*, and *Santera* herself for close to 40 years, counters the previous notions by creating an general sense of womanhood as strength, like in the experience of *Ochun* as a female *Orisha*, as shown in this quote:

No es por la menstruación, es por el sexismo... Si vamos a ver, la mujer aprende más fácil que el hombre, retiene más que el hombre, y le pasa más rápido al hombre... es cuestión de machismo... ...por que han sido Santas guerreras... son santas femeninas, pero a la vez son masculinas, por que han tenido que luchar, *to survive*.	It isn't because of menstruation, is because of sexism… If we look, really look, a woman learns easier than the man, retains more than the man, and moves ahead from men quicker… it's a matter of machismo… …because there have been women warriors… they are feminine deities, but at the same time they are masculine, because they have had to fight, to survive.

Magda's perception of the situation is linked to a cultural notion—machismo—and not a religious one. (Interesting collapsing of sexism with machismo, as if removing machismo would eliminate sexism; people in societies assumed not to have machismo enact

sexism.) As a believer, she attempts to explain what she experiences as inequality based on gender. Magda does something else: she also "transgenders" the female deities as feminine and masculine, by way of highlighting their warrior-like and leadership qualities. This is a double-edged gesture, however, in that it shows that they can take on "masculine" attributes while reproducing the sense that these gestures/practices are those of men. Skills here are essentialized (women "learn easier than [men]") in order to create an account of resistance to the unequal treatment faced by women in *Santería.* But her notion of women's inherent superiority could be based on the power behind *Ochún's* story, the kind of response women put forth in settings that seem to be dominated by men. She is also the telling the story as a perceiver of bias, her experience is mediated by what is imposed on her; this is almost an iconography of women's power, in her view.

In *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion*, David H. Brown (2003) narrated how the path by female deities is marked by the Supreme Being, *Olodumaré*, through *Orula* (the source of all divination). According to Brown, the *Orula* gave "a limited portion of his wisdom to two female *orichas*, *Yemayá* and *Ochún*, who, through synecdoche, stand for the *oricha* pantheon and *La Regla de Ochá* as a whole. *Orula* grants *Yemayá* and *Ochún* sets of cowrie shells, but he excludes them from the deepest secrets of *Ifá*. In the beginning, and forever after, *Ifá's* boundaries of authority, secrecy, and oracular competence are gendered with extreme prejudice" (Brown, 2003: 154). Magda's point thus has validity: these particular deities, for instance, have "fought their way" into the veneration of the Afro-Cuban tradition.[1]

[1] As I mentioned in the introduction, *Santero* stories anthropomorphize these O*rishas'* deities. Some of the stories in this chapter use a very gendered imagery to describe the deities' position and history.

In Chapter 3, I discussed the relationship between the *Babalawo* and the *Oriaté*, the two leading figures in *Santería.* This male centered power in-balance was mediated by perceptions of "lacking" or "leaking" as opposed to "integrity," where the "leak" was associated with what Brown calls the "structurally female"—namely, the presence of "gay" *Oriatés*, or of "gays and lesbians," and of women, vis a vis the *Babalawos*, or "structurally male," who were seen as *impenetrable* (ibid). Indeed, in *Santería*, like many other non-institutionalized religions, it is assumed that the "loss" of secrets threatens its survival, and this is embodied in what Brown notes some practitioners label "a problem of 'women's' essential characteristics" (347). While little evidence comes directly from Afro-Cuban traditions, he carefully extrapolates from Yoruba traditions, and, citing crucial works on Afro-Brazilian *Candomblé*, states that: "The sexual 'penetration' of women's and gay men's bodies and the 'leakage' and 'spillage' of menstrual blood from the former are theorized as analogous to the undue revelation or 'loss' of the cult-group's secret knowledge" (ibid). Amaury's and Julio's quotes implicitly stated menstruation as a reason for the position of women—their exclusion in the animal sacrifice and the many central aspects (mostly those knowledge-bound) such as drumming, leading the songs, or becoming *Babalawos*. This, however, has not always been the case.

Moreover, these exclusions had to do with the assignment of roles that overlapped with those of the *Babalawo*. Brown asserts that "The profession of *oriaté*, it turns out, developed from overlapping ritual roles, occupied variously by *babalawos* and heterogeneous *oricha* priests including roles played by women. Women were very powerful early in Havana and Matanzas but were marginalized after about 1935, when the last of these women had passed and the students of *Obadimelli* rose to prominence in

Havana." (2003: 20). It was this passing of knowledge from a line of women to this *Santero* (*Obadimelli*) that changed our current notions of who may become an *Oriaté.*

Thus, female *Santería* practitioners, and gay males—even *Oriatés*—could be lumped together into a "sexual minority" group within the religious practice because of their presumably deficient qualities (a topic I return to in the last part of this chapter). As just noted, there is a history of ample involvement and power by women, effaced by time and the death of female elders in the early part of the twentieth century.

Noemi is a lesbian-identified Cuban woman in her late 20s, who had completed her year as a *Yabó* by the time of the interview, and who was in a partnered relationship with another *Santera*. Though relatively new to the religion, Noemi knew the story about *Obadimelli* and the "stealing" of women's knowledge, as this quote points out:

> Obadimelli, *rey de dos coronas* [king of two crowns]: he was really effeminate, and she [a very knowledgeable *Santera*] thought—I guess because she was older in age—she thought he was really a woman, and so she taught him, and he turned around and taught all the men, and so she was the last one, and then it became a man dominated role [the *Oriaté's*] and that's when we [women] were excluded… and the stories on menstruation came about [then]…

While researching *Obadimelli's* history, I came across David Brown's (2003) book. Brown has conducted excellent archival research documenting the trajectories of *ramas* (streams) of *Santería* as developed in Cuba during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Certain specific sources used by Brown depict *Obadimelli* as born in Africa, arriving in Cuba in 1850 according to John Mason (Brown, 2003: 332—though some other stories account for his background as Creole, not African, and born decades later, 2003:333). It was not until the death of Ayayi La Tuán, in 1935, that *Obadimelli* began to reign as a top *Oriaté*—professionalizing this role and (whether

purposely or not is never clear in Brown's account) excluding women from divination from this point on.

We don't know if *Obadimelli* was homoerotically inclined but the story about his gender transgressive or atypical behavior placed him—in addition to his age—in a certain contrast to women's positions, even in competition with them. However, it also places them together—women and the homoerotically inclined—in opposition to men. By being located in a similar structural position, women and "gay" men are in some parallel position. *Obadimelli* stole knowledge supposedly owned by women, according to the story told to me by Noemi. Yet his relationship to femininity points to a parallel with women in terms of their structural positioning vis-à-vis authority and power within the religion.

The *Orishas* are gendered in their (re)presentation as well, at least from a Western perspective.[2] Indeed, a lot of the *Orishas* are known for their qualities, many of which are read in gendered ways. While some deities are known for their flirtatious behavior (*Ochún*, for instance), this behavior is understood in the feminine. This has an effect in the relationship practitioners have with deities, as some *Santeros* discussed with me their fervor and intensity of worship of a particular deity. Some *Santeros* interpreted a connection between their deity's opposite gender identity and theirs. But, there are also practitioners who shattered this belief in a gender correlation between a deity's gender

[2] In the Yoruba case, Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí in *The Invention of Women* (1997) makes this argument not just about the imposition of gender onto the bodies and living practice of Yoruba tradition, but also on their deities. She speaks of the masculinizing of their *Òrìṣàs* (163) and the decision, within a Yoruba division of labor among deities, of which ones are male, and which "are not" (64). This male/non-male division (which as we have seen does not have to be male/female) is then evidenced even in Yoruba traditions. (For relevant writings in Brazilian Candomble, see Wafer, 1991.)

and the sexual orientation of its practitioners. Francisco had this to say regarding deity possession and assignment:

> La parte femenina y masculina, no tiene nada que ver [con el Orisha que se le asigne a alguien]... por que he visto locas partidas con *Changó*, y machazos machazos con *Ochún*... Pero lo de pájaro o no, eso es aparte. . . . El único Santo que puede ser.. por ejemplo *Obatalá*, hay un camino que es de mujer, que se llama *Ochanla*... El único que dicen que es andrógeno es *Olokún*, y no creo tanto que sea andrógeno, y no creo que sea eso, es que es tan misterioso, que no saben si es mujer o es hombre... pero yo creo que todos tienen su género... (el otro es *Ellegua*)
>
> The feminine part and the masculine part, they do not have anything to do (with *Orisha* assignment)… because I have seen queenie guys completely bent with *Chango*, and manly manly studs with *Ochun*… But whether he is a faggot or not it has nothing to do with it… The only *Orisha* that could be, like for example, *Obatala*, there is a female road for *Obatala*, called *Ochanla*… The only *Orisha* said to be androgynous is *Olokun*, and I don't really think that it is androgynous, I think it is very mysterious, that most people don't know if it is a man or a woman… but I think that all have their gender… (the other is *Ellegua*)

Olokun is actually a deity of the depth of the seas—some write about him as half man half fish (Brown, 2003). *Obatalá* has, as a main deity, many roads or *caminos*, some of which are understood as female. But overall, most deities are understood as participating of the human world (through possession) in gendered ways. The phenomenon of "queering" religious practice in general, and of cross-gender possession in particular, is evidenced in other scholarship—most notably though not exclusively from the social sciences and humanities-based Queer Theory and cultural studies (Conner, 2004; Strongman, 2002).[3] While the merging of the *Orishas* with practitioners can be interpreted in gender-transgressive ways—a "manly man" being possessed by a

[3] For instance, Ibrahim Farajaje', in "Loosening the Canons" addresses how to queer the study of religion is done by "suggest[ing] that the study of religions is perhaps at the very roots of our individual and collective lives" (2004: 247).

hyper-feminine or flirtatious deity like *Ochún*, for instance—there are ways in which deities are understood to be or participate of the world in gendered ways as well. These gendered discussions do not take as much space in academic settings discussing *Santería*, mostly because the gendering does not allow for Queer Theor(etical) transgendering discussions (for an exception in Queer Theory, see Butler, 1994). Perhaps this idea of the merging is itself understood in dualities, dualities that do not apply in *Santería* practice—a topic I take on in the next section.

Relationship with the Deities: Possession and fusion between the Orisha and practitioner

The merging of gender and sexuality take place in many instances, but do not seem to affect everyone similarly. Previously, we saw how women and "gays" were conflated into a "l[e]aking" group of people, from whom the sanctity of the religion needs to be guarded (the striking similarities with the Catholic church's structure, where homosexuals cannot participate, and women cannot be priests, are inevitable). Here, of course, atypical gender expression labels men or women as "gay," regardless of sexual orientation. (It also makes men suspicious when their deities are female, and who are possessed by them in public, as the next quote illustrates.) In addition, conflicting sources point to the assignment of female deities to gay men or male deities to lesbian women. In this section, I illustrate the various ways gender and sexuality are implicated—together—as elements in the practice of the religion.

One of the basic ways in which deities participate is through possession. In this quote, Myrna argues that the deity's gender presentation is made evident, and that regardless of a person's sexual orientation, the gender of the deity will be most salient.

This happens to men or women, regardless of sexual orientation, as she explains in the quote with male possessions by *Ochún* and female possessions by *Changó*:

> [Asignación de santo… gays…género opuesto] Eso no tiene que ver… O sea, no, si tú eres, hay que hacerte un santo, seas tú hombre, hombre, 100%, o sea, varón, que no seas gay ni bisexual ni nada de eso ni tendencias de ningun lao,' te asignan lo que es… Por que yo he visto hombres, hombres, que yo sé que son serios, y tienen hecho *Ochún*, y cuando *Ochún* baja a la tierra y de verdad en justicia, mi amor, tú lo que ves es *Ochún*… tú ves una mujer. Igual que en Puerto Rico esto pasó, la mujer tenía hecho *Ochún* y le bajó *Changó*, y que hizo *Changó*, ella tenía un tampón puesto, y *Changó* se metió la mano y se lo sacó, por que *Changó* no tiene nada metío adentro. *Changó* tú, no se si tú has visto cuando *Changó* baja a la tierra se agarra como si tuviera… Y eso pasa cuando baja un Santo, es el Santo, no eres tú.
>
> [Deity assignment and gays—opposite gender?] That has nothing to do… Like, no, if you are, if there is a need to throw a *bembé* for you, be it a man, man, 100%, like, male, that you are not gay or bisexual or anything like it or have side-like tendencies, they give you what it is… Because I have seen men, men, that I know they are serious, and they have made *Ochun*, and when *Ochun* comes down to the earth and in truth and justice, oh honey, what you see is *Ochun*, you see a woman. It's like in Puerto Rico, this happened, a woman had *Ochun* and *Chango* came down, she had a tampon, and *Chango* inserted the hand and took the tampon out, because *Chango* does not have anything inside him. *Chango*, I don't know if you have seen when *Chango* comes down to earth he grabs [himself] like he had [male genitals] It happens—when a deity comes down, it is the deity not you.

Initially, this quote gives us some demarcations of gay as non-male (see the previous chapter and my discussion of Guzmán, 1997, for the "non-man" category), which place "gays" closer to women by their capacity to be penetrated/"mounted." Non-heterosexual men and women are seen by the rest of the practitioners as "non-men." Here, this lumping together of all women and "gay" men is constructive, as it starts signifying a different type of "sexual" minorities. While in previous work I have alluded to this phenomenon as "third gender" (Vidal-Ortiz, 2005), I believe that these depictions of

gayness as non-male sustain a dual gender system, and reformulate the notion of "integrity" previously discussed. The *Changó* in this story—mounted in a female body—rejects anything inside his body, anything penetrative, and *Changó* is often portrayed as hypermasculine. These depictions of *Changó*, in a way, serve as a good representation of male heterosexuality in *Santería*: professed heterosexuality, bound with elements of obvious sexualizing of women, and a hyper-performed masculinity that is enacted in every interaction with women and men alike. The not so symbolic act of removing a tampon from the woman's body/vagina in this story to reflect *Changó's* impenetrable self makes the "integrity" point more evident. This idea of "integrity" is about the containment of heterosexual males in the religion: solid barriers, no loss of control, and a taking up of space typically associated with male heterosexuals.

Deity penetration into a human's body is thus understood as being taken. While I initially illustrated this through sexual orientation and the Latin American sex/gender/power system in chapter 3, I now return to this point. Western notions of allowing ourselves (not) to be taken are a challenge to the religious practice of *Santería* in the US. Perhaps there is much that women and gays—my current use of sexual minorities—can teach all of us about what it means to surrender, and the idea of relinquishing to a deity. Surrendering and relinquishing involve a sense of mutual agreement in the mounting, an agreement to be possessed. Thus, to be taken (implicitly imagining it to be a violent or forced act) for many heterosexual, non-mounted men may imply something different than for those who understand their relationship to the *Orishas* through an agreement and consent to be possessed—and to evolve in some fusion with the *Orisha*. The issue of "integrity" is connected here with acting as mediums, with

channeling a deity; some decide to be mounted; some do not let themselves be mounted. But whether a person is mounted or not, "integrity" can be achieved through the fusion of a person with the *Orisha* that mounts him/her. The interpretation cannot be that two entities are struggling or competing for a space: a body in this scenario. Such may be the case of resistant heterosexual males. Instead, "integrity" may require redefining what constitutes the one (fused) self.

In Myrna's description, the deities have certain personality characteristics: the femininity of an *Ochún* in the body of a self-identified heterosexual man or the hyper-masculinity of *Changó* in a female-bodied individual. (There are exceptions in this scenario, as sometimes these deities' personalities have been associated with "gays:" as a case in point, sometimes *Changó*, as hyper-masculine as it is, is said to possess many gay-identified men, regardless of their gender presentation. In many interviews, participants voiced their perception that as many gay-identified men had *Changó* as they were assigned *Ochún*, shattering the exclusivity of opposite-gender assignment for "gays.") These descriptions already assume that the gendered descriptions of the body mounted are suppressed. However, it is not simply, as allegedly happens in Christian traditions, that "one takes the body of Christ" *into* one's own. In *Santería*, the deity and the practitioner *fuse*, merging characteristics and having a presence that bind the *Orisha's* to the practitioners' everyday experiences and overall gender presentation.

Laura is a young lesbian-identified Cuban woman who was initiated when her mom was pregnant with her. As a child, she also engaged with the various teachings of the religion. She is an elder among her Hialeah peers due to her immersion in *Santería* for decades. Laura here adds some comments to this fusion between *body and soul*:

Changó es un santo que se enamora de sus hijos... si tú usabas maquillaje ahora usa más, si usabas zapatos bajitos, ponte tacos... ...por que, *the cover girl starts getting butcher... she starts getting his attributes...*	*Chango* is a deity that falls in love with his sons/daughters… if you used make-up before, use more now, if you used low shoes, use high heels now, because the cover girl starts getting butcher… she starts getting his attributes.

Changó is, according to Brown (2003: 371), *fire*: a thunderbolt, a procreator, and a warrior. A son of *Yemayá*, *Changó* is said to be a womanizer, and has had two or three wives at a time (Nuñez, 1999). Though ironically, *Changó's* Catholic deity form is Saint Barbara, who in some radical Catholic circles is not well respected because of the idea that Saint Barbara—not *Changó*—used to be a man.

Julio, from whom we heard before, had something significant to say about this possible relationship between who gets possessed and how that affects the functional aspects in the practice of the religion, as well as the sexualized experience of deity possession:

> *People have told me of straight men not letting themselves be mounted...*
>
> Because there is also the sexual symbolism, your relationship with the *Orisha*, I mean like I guess two parts, if it is like the whole Yoruba symbolism for it is that you marry the *Orisha*, and you are the wife of whatever *Orisha* you are crowned, and then you are mounted by it, I mean like when you get initiated you are a *Iyawo/Yabo*, which is like your, the spirit, so there is like for me, there is supposed to be odd, because you are going to get, be entered that way. But I think that is also an anthropological perspective, that I think is sort of from reading for me more than from experiencing, and from experience I think there is sort of an attitude that more that, straight men have more trouble getting mounted, that I think, but I also think, that leads into a balance in the religion between, people who get, between mediums and people who aren't mediums, and that sort of pushes a lot of straight men, there is a sort of more established role for straight men either to be singers, to be drummers, to become *Babalawo*, which are initiations, situations, positions, where you really should be somebody who doesn't get possessed. Either you're *Babalawo*, because you can't be possessed, but also if you are a drummer or singer, you can't be mounted, because how

> the hell is the ceremony going to take place. There is a split between certain, and even people, like an *Oriate*, as well, is going to be performing sacrifices, he is not going to be mounted in the middle of performing sacrifices. …I think it is functional, I think it also has to do a lot to do with gender as well, I think it has to do with gender prejudices, but I don't know if its like a gender role thing that women would be more mediumistic, if that's like a social thing (or that's the main thing), but that's sort of the way that it plays out… I don't think it is something that straight men will talk about, the idea of being mounted as something sexual, but I think the symbolism of the religion, that it is sexual, but I don't think it is something ever talked about as being sexual… But also you will find straight men who are very comfortable as mediums… I don't know about numbers but there is a certain knowledge that it is less common, sort of the common knowledge is that women and gay men are better mediums, the "better" piece is that they allow themselves to be entered.

A *Yabó* is symbolically a newlywed, a newborn. Julio, like many scholars who write about the religion, uses the word "wife" to refer to the initiate, and the ways in which the newlywed is "crowned" by the deity—in their initiation. The temporary role of a wife is sexualized through the penetration of the "husband"—the *Orisha*—independent of the gender assumed of such deity, or the gender of the practitioner. And, given that *Santería's* central aspect is its veneration of deities, and that deities' main way of communicating with practitioners is through possession, this sexualized experience is embedded in the practice of the religion, and not just a temporal one, for those new initiates.

In this excerpt, Julio also explains how not everyone can allow themselves to be mounted because there are other roles that need attendance. As briefly seen in Chapter 3, some chosen *Babalawos* (men who learn in their *Itá* that their destiny is to become one) avoid deity mounting in order to not affect their chances to perform a divination and move into that status in the future. Such roles, as previously discussed, include singing songs to each of the *Orishas*, drumming, cooking, preparing the bodies of those deity-

possessed bodies when they mount, other bodies to follow them with goods (i.e., honey in *Ochún's* case). So the theme of functionality, of everyone serving a part to accomplish the ritual, is manifest in many ways, including through gendered structures that allow for women's participation to be mediated by assigned roles, and let many men who are heterosexually-identified avoid being mounted by the *Orishas*.

Julio's notion of functionality in the division of work helps illustrate how the roles assigned to various members seem to be needed in order to call and maintain the *Orishas*. In most of the *bembés* I attended, I noticed a synchronicity between the intensity of the music and the louder chanting when people seemed to be close to being possessed. An agitated set of body movements, sometimes by suddenly pausing from the dancing, reveals to others that a person is "struggling" with the mounting of a deity. It is at this point, and only sometimes, when some of the drummers and singers would get closer to this practitioner, sing louder, sometimes even form circles around the person, so that he or she could not leave the dancing space, and a possession could take place. If the person was not dancing, for instance, but engaged in other duties (in the kitchen, or helping a deity attending the event), and a deity would come to them, others would help them avoid the possession, either by taking them outside the sacred space and into an outdoors area, or blow to their ears in order to resist the possession. I have also witnessed many moments when there is little dancing, or there are no deities present, and singers and drummers engage with loud singing and drumming, in order to motivate practitioners to dance, hence opening up possibilities of possession. The bodily motions, the rhythm of music, and the intensity *in crescendo* for deities to come down are evident in many of the *bembés*.

All in all, there is an effort on the part of many of the practitioners to support the presence of deities in a drumming. But as significant, many practitioners—of all sexual identities or gender presentations—may have somewhat internalized that this "functionality" is needed. In events where there are, for example, 75 people, and several *Babalawos*, drummers and singers, it seems problematic, perhaps not functional, if all the heterosexual-identified men occupying these roles are possessed. Thus, there seems to be an interplay between heterosexual men resisting deity possession while simultaneously assuming that women and "gays" are better (or prefer) to be mounted, and that this is the role of these "sexual minorities." This is illustrated in the idea of penetration—"gay guys can take it"—in ways in which spirit possession is rationalized to happen in some bodies, and not in others. And like briefly noted on the previous chapter, the perceived penetrative experience of women and "gays" in terms of deity mounting makes them both "sexual minorities."

Julio also observes that women and gay men are seen to be "better" mediums, or how this seems to happen more often ("that is sort of the way it plays out"). Throughout the interviews, in many instances, the mounting of a non-heterosexual identified practitioner implied the sexual nature, and the "logic" for their participation in *Santería.* Here, "gays" seem to be interpellated by this role assignment, as judged by Amaury:

> …there is this gay guy, *él tenía* [he had] *Elegguá*, and, he you know, *estaba tocando* [the drumming was taking place]… …and then his head starts moving, and he started to—but instead of being smart and taking his ass outside, he fucking stayed there, he fucking stayed there, like he is inviting it to happen to him, and you know, sure enough!, *él estaba al lado mío* [he was right next to me], and I was like, you just watch! You know, I am such a cynical… I refuse to subscribe to that whole at least stereotype, or may be not stereotype whereas the gay men, "ay, you know, *la vida es un bembé,"* [life is a *bembe*] where you go, and like, *Santo pa'quí and Santo pa'llá…* [drumming here and drumming there] you know, fuck that,

> I'm me, and I'm here, and I'm here to enjoy the music *y hacer lo que yo tengo que hacer* [and to do what I got to do], you know, whether is pouring the soda, bringing out this, cleaning up this, picking up bottles of beer, or whatever they want me to do. You know *es para trabajar, no para* [it is to work (that I am there), not to]… you know, show off my S*anto*, or whatever, but apparently he knew that that was happening so a couple of times he let it happen, you know… And of course *Elegguá* did come down, you see what I mean, so at what point are you inviting it to happen. . . . My godmother does not come down, her sister does not come down, her daughter comes down… Some *Santeros*, there are *Santeros* who don't come down with their *Santo*, so they like to have *Santeros* who do come down with their *Santos*.
>
> *How is this inviting not good?*
>
> Eso está demás, eso es lo que sobra, you know like, its not necessary… I don't even know what, who, if someone is doing their *Santo* or what? Because *no son de la casa* [they are not from the house (where the initiation is taking place)], so, I mean, I don't know, but *habían muchos Santos que bajaron esa noche*... [there were a lot of deities that came down that night] I saw two *Obatalas* …

This entry reveals a series of stands Amaury has regarding the position gay men hold in the general notion of *Santeros*. Gay *Santeros* who keep jumping "from *bembé* to *bembé*," represent the idea that there is a stereotype ("…life is a *bembé*…") Amaury does not wish to be linked to. He contrasts his service experience in the practice with the gay men who want to attend all events they can, be possessed, and continue to attend other events to do the same. His judgment seems to emanate from the lack of substance, or perhaps lack of stability, of grounding, in this act, although the quote does not have enough elements to know for sure.

But there is a lot of symbolism explicitly linked to the theme of the sexualized relationship with the *Orishas*. Phrases like being "smart to take his ass out" are significant at a moment in which Amaury is talking about possession and mounting. It is almost as if the man is reduced to his ass, and the presumed capacity gay men have "to be taken." Further, coded language is evidenced through the use of the word fucking—a

word he nonetheless used in much of the interview, but one that signifies the entry of an object into one's body. "Fucking" does not automatically imply relinquishing, or surrendering; fucking implies a violent action, an imposition. Lastly, the "show off" and "inviting it to happen to him" phrases may actually serve as an implicit use of how gay men "flaunt" both their homosexuality and (through their "flirting") their capacity to be penetrated—in this case either by another human being, or by a deity. Taken together, this language suggests a very charged sense of disapproval from Amaury to the idea of this man's participation in the initiation, an idea he extends to other gay men, or to a gay men's stereotype.

There is also the discussion on the cost of an initiation and how the presence of people who will be mounted is requested. Practitioners, especially those who are initiated *Santeros,* receive a *derecho*, or a "right" for a small sum of money for those helping in the initiation. Initiation rituals vary in estimates, but can cost from $3,000.00 to over $10,000.00 depending on the deity claiming one's head and the house where one is initiated. There are a multitude of costs involved in the initiation of a new practitioner—from the *derecho*, the rental of the place where the altar will be set up for 8 days, to drummers, singers, priests present, and the initiation clothing, altar materials, animals purchased, additional food, etc. It is a community effort—and much of the money stays within the community of *Santeros*.

Many practitioners stated that not everyone is supposed to be "mounted," but never stated the reasons for this selectiveness. Indeed, the literature I have researched does not include any information that delimits the choice of the *Orishas* for some and not

other bodies. Only Miguel Barnet in his "La Regla de Ocha: The Religious System of Santería" (2000) mentions this selectiveness, though not its reasons:

> A possessed is a person who receives a god; the god mounts his "horse"—that is, the person's body—and forces him into contortions and gestures that characterize the deity. . . . Previous awareness is critical for any type of manifestation of possession to occur. Those who are entitled to be possessed by a santo and who succeed in faithfully interpreting the santo's gesture and character immediately attain a higher level of power within the social milieu where these cults are practiced. . . . The possessed are also the bearers of a faith that makes it possible for them to become the docile "horses" of the santos who want to take possession of them. (86).

For Barnet, there is a "fucking" taking place: a forcing of the *Orisha* over the body of the "horse" in its mounting. This forcing, however, does not come without benefits: thus some "gay" men, as viable "horses" eager to be possessed in many instances, also gain a particular recognition within the religious practice. Being the "bearer of the faith" is also what allows the willing mounted practitioners to be mounted—Barnet clarifies that an onlooker whose first time attending an event will most likely not experience any trance-like sensations, since he/she is not ritually-prepared ("open") to such arrangements.

Similarly, the choice of deity assignment rests in divination and is communicated to a *Santero* priest by an *Orisha*. In other words, an *Orisha* "claims one's head." This divination is confirmed through some other divinations, and is conducted after the practitioner has received blessings such as the *guerreros* (warriors), and in the process of beginning his/her initiation. In sum, by the time an *Orisha* is claiming a practitioner's head, he/she has been involved in the religion for a number of years. Practitioners do not have much control over the deity assignment, and as it turns out, only sometimes does a male practitioner receive the assignment of a same-sex deity. As discussed before, while some of the research shows conflicting evidence as to whether possession by opposite

gender deity takes place with lesbian or gay practitioners, there does not seem to be a clear pattern. Steven, a gay-identified white man in his late 30s, praised this gender complexity:

> In the religion you have a specific relationship with specific *Orishas*, you are a child of one of the *Orishas*, and you don't pick the *Orisha*, you don't go like uhm, "I like red so I think *Chango* is going to be my *Orisha*," it's done in divination and its basically your destiny and you know its kind of like astrology in that sense, and you know, men can have female *Orishas* and women can have male *Orishas*, and you know when you become initiated you can become mounted by that *Orisha* and you become that *Orisha*, and , you know, there's not even… like nobody's tongue even slightly stumbles over saying, you know "she told me I had to do X Y and Z," when it is a male priest who is you know possessed by *Yemaya* giving advice, you know like nobody goes, "Oh, you know, José's Yemaya said," or "José when he was *Yemaya*," you know it's "*Yemaya*, she told me, to do this," and that's amazing to me, like there is total lack of contradiction about that, like that's just the way it is, you know, you salute the *Orishas* based on who, on whether your *Orisha* is male or female, so like, men who are said to be the child of a female *Orisha* will do this kind of like courtesy thing on the floor and there is no impingement on their masculinity for doing that its just like, on the one sense there is a very rigid sense of gender rules, like my godfather for instance is very, very strict about women either wearing a dress or wrapped wearing thing to salute the *Orishas*, and when you know you are a *Yabo*, you basically have to surrender to this archaic, 19th century male or female fashions, but, those are kind of, you know, it's a really interesting relationship to gender that seems much more real to me, in a certain kind of way…
> *Because of the gender crossing?*
> It's a way of saying that you have something inside you that needs to express itself, like there is this drive to do whatever it is, and it's like, for some people, they have this spiritual thing is primarily female, or they are male or female, and that's so cool that this is built sort of into this religion, and it's not so pigeonholing that well now all the boys get to go with the male *Orishas* and all the girls get to go with the female ones… So that's pretty interesting to me…

In this quote, Steven illustrates not only that the deity selects a practitioner, but that one fuses or becomes a given deity. As Barnet stated before, a practitioner gains currency within the circle he/she is in because of presenting the way the deity wants the

practitioner to represent it, but also, because he/she allows him/herself to be mounted and *thus* represent it the way the *Orisha* wishes ("and forces him into contortions and gestures that characterize the deity"). Even in Barnet's view, this is not a process of surrendering.

Because one is initiated into a deity, and the initiation requires that one's head be shaved as the basis of the possession by a deity, one begins the fusion with one's *Orisha* through initiation, regardless of possession. One's deity assignment is permanent—a person can not change their deity—and it is displayed at every interaction with other *Santeros* in any ritualistic setting: if a *Santero/a* has a female deity assignment, he or she lies on the floor (always face down), switch and touch the floor with one hip first, then the other, with a hand on the waist, and then is lifted through a sign on his or her back by the *Santero/a* he/she was greeting; if the *Santero/a* has a male deity assignment, he or she will lay flat on the floor, arms on the sides of the body, until the *Santero/a* he or she is saluting unfetters him/her from the ground.

In Steven's excerpt, one can see that a male with a female *Orisha* assignment salutes other *Santeros* with a visual greeting that does not diminish his masculinity. However, there is a significant difference between having a female *Orisha* as one's head, which is understood as being a part of you, and being publicly mounted by a deity, if a person feels his masculinity and heterosexuality are threatened in the process. Unfortunately, Steven's quote does not extend this image to the discussion of possession.

In that excerpt, we also learn how female practitioners are expected to wear a dress or skirt when they salute the *Orishas* or other practitioners. An important act of resistance has been enacted by many women, regardless of their sexual orientation, in many of the Brooklyn events I attended. Many women, but particularly large-bodied

ones, would wear blue jeans while cooking, and will only place a light skin of a white skirt over their jeans, and quickly remove it—even to go outside the *bembé* to smoke a cigarette. For some of these women, wearing very relaxed, gender neutral clothing like tennis shoes and blue jeans is the best way they embody their participation in their everyday lives, and resist the seemingly oppressive view that women must wear skirts as *Yabó,* even if their *Orisha* is male—especially when the case is not as compulsory in male *Yabós* initiated in the US with female *Orishas*. This functionality of putting the skirt over the jeans also represents US' emphasis on work, so that in *Santería* practice, the skirts can act as "work clothes."

Yet one strong point comes out of Steve's posture on the religion: that an *Orisha* is already inside you, a part of you—not a distant god but inherently you—that can "express itself" without (certain) fears of retaliation in terms of gender and sexuality-related stigmas. That one can't choose which *Orisha* claims one's head is significant in sustaining a general sense of gender bending tolerance amongst *Santería* practitioners. Like other practitioners, Steve sees that gender and sexuality are not important aspects of this assignment. Joanne, a Jewish self-identified bisexual woman in her 40s who is also pursuing a Ph.D., and knows a lot about the *Orishas,* had this to say about these categories in the selection of practitioners (by the *Orishas*):

> In *Santería* practice, the *Orisha* chooses you to serve them or to embody them regardless of our biological sex, our gender performance, and our sexuality, it has nothing to do with it. As far as I can tell, it had nothing to do with it, it had to do with some aspect of your character… Some people have thought, this *Orisha* takes lesbians, or gay men, and I have seen every *Orisha* taking every type of person. So the fact that is resonating with character rather than biology, and at the same time it's an embodied practice is intriguing to me—that means that the connection of embodiment to gender performance or sexuality is not natural, OK? So that's something that really appealed to me…

Besides not having a gender congruent assignment as a requisite, as stated in Steve's account, this entry addresses the possibility of "gays and lesbians" being assigned opposite deity *Orishas*. While some authors have argued that indeed certain *Orishas* seem to claim disproportionately gay men, lesbians, and bisexual and transgender people (Conner, 2004), this practitioner has witnessed a non-proportionate amount of *Orishas* be particularly assigned to gays or lesbians. Joanne actually insists that it is character, not biology, what influences deity assignment. But character is not defined outside of a gendered world. Sexed bodies are intercepted by gender role and identity expectations, and assumed normative sexuality is attached to them, unless their gender expression is atypical for any given society.

Conclusion: Becoming sexual minorities through gender expressions

As illustrated through the interview excerpts, sexual identity, based as it most often is on gender identity and sexual orientation, falls short of explaining the links between gender expression and identity, perceived sexual orientation (often based on gender expression cues), and threats to one's normative gender and sexuality status in *Santería*—especially in its interconnection with practitioners' deity assignment. It also complicates notions of gender transgressions by having non-gender congruent deity assignments made evident in almost every interaction with other practitioners. This complexity tends to be addressed through a queer theoretical framework that "transgenders" practitioners' identities, but does not recognize the social organization in the religion. This will indeed be discussed in the next chapter.

Spirituality may not be gendered, but the religion's social organization that enables the practice is. Gender roles established throughout the practice of the religion, and its supposedly functionality, need to be bracketed to better interrogate instances of either homophobia or sexism. Thus, the potential tension between spiritual possibilities and gender roles as evidenced in my fieldwork, interview material, and *Santería*-related documentation needs to be advanced without privileging only some aspects of gendered experience, and not others. When "queer" social scientists (Conner, 2004; Strongman, 2002) highlight sexuality possibilities without addressing gendered implications (especially to the female practitioners), it glamorizes a religion that has otherwise significant, and impressive, blessings.

The fusion between a deity and its practitioner offers added possibilities to understand the friction between "body" and "soul" as separate markers of self, or as currently portrayed in the social sciences, especially sociological ethnographic writings. A different understanding of the possibilities of mounting for its practitioners, one that acknowledges the capacity to be mounted as a strength, and not a liability, requires that USAmerican constructs of (hetero)sexuality are contrasted to that of Yoruba and non-Western constructs, and that US diasporic *Santería* be better linked to its various influences (such is the case of the work by Brown, 2003). Additionally, the discussion of fusing gender and sexuality into a practitioner—straight or gay, man or woman—with that of his/her deity will only better our understanding of the relationship between the supernatural and the human, a relationship that is signified by the embodiment of nature.

Assuming a biology "has nothing to do with it" posture may actually neglect the ways in which the interaction between gender identity and gender roles within the

religion is taking place. Yet Joanne's point about an embodied practice is an important one. While one's gender presentation does not need to correspond with one's deity, one's biological sex seems to still be in some way important—at least in terms of the general practice of the religion as well as one's participation. This is the point of the next chapter.

Chapter 5. "I Don't Think the *Orishas* Like it:" Transgendering *Santería* and the Haunting of the Transsexual Figure

In the introduction, I explained the relationship between "gender" and "sexuality" as analytical constructs and as markers that often guide academics to split sexual orientation from gender identity. Using David Valentine's (2000) work, I argued not for a reorganization of spaces where gender and sexuality are perceived to conflate, but the move to assume that such discrete categories—"gender" and "sexuality"—exist separate from each other to begin with, and as discrete aspects of self, it is only then possible to think of these as conflated. In the previous chapter, gender and sexuality were most evident in the everyday religious practice of *Santería.* This chapter, on the other hand, addresses a set of absences in the participation of *Santería* transsexual practitioners. While my dissertation mostly focuses on the relationship between what social scientists call gender and sexuality in *Santería,* there are ways in which the relationship between sex and gender is troubled in the figure of potential transsexual *Santeras.*[1] This trouble is what fuels the writing of this chapter. Much of what transpired in my research requires that I discuss transsexuality in terms of its absences. While there was much talk about transsexual participation and transsexuals' involvement in the religion, I did not conduct any interviews with nor meet transsexual *Santeros* or *Santeras* at religious events during my fieldwork between the years of 2000 and 2005.

This chapter is also a methodological challenge to notions of what constitutes "data" and evidence. I am using the simultaneous absence of transsexual respondents from my sample of interviews and fieldwork, yet the specific referent to the transsexual as voiced by participants in my research. I use the lack of data as evidence itself, to

[1] All cases mentioned referred only to Male-to-Female transsexuals.

trouble sociologists' notions of what constitutes the presence of evidence. Based on the work of sociologists Avery Gordon (1996) and Grace Mitchell (2005) on haunting and ghosts, this chapter illustrates the figure of the transsexual as a marker of otherness—a space not so clearly occupied by its supposed "gay and lesbian" counterparts—but one where the specificity of sex change, and the particularities assumed to be part of the experiences of transsexuals, organize much of the restrictions in the religious practice. While "hunting" for interviewees, and adamantly looking for transsexual people to converse with me about the dissertation, I found a reversal had taken place, where I was becoming haunted by this paradox between discourses on gender identity and transsexuality, yet an unmistakable absence of those who may identify as transsexual in my sample. Although important, I am less invested in a methodological discussion on the limitations of writing about transsexuals without transsexual voices. What I aim at doing in this chapter is to move from the use of bodies and voices to the ways in which certain absences organize the boundaries or regulations of a communal space. I argue in this chapter that the figure of the transsexual serves the purpose of establishing and configuring prohibitions in the religion.

The chapter is divided in three parts. I first offer a general discussion of the relationship between the terms "transgender" and "transsexual" as a way of engaging with current literature—including some relevant *Santería* sources. I then discuss work by Gordon and Mitchell in order to illustrate the value or weight of the void I refer to, which is expressed through the narratives shared with me by non-transsexual practitioners. I conclude with specific remarks on the impact of this kind of sociological analysis in the study of transsexuality.

Developments of transgender and transsexual identities in relevant literature

Although the relationship between "transgender" and "transsexual" in the social science literature, queer theory, and an emergent "transgender studies" field (where transsexual only sometimes continues to be a part of the transgender category) is complex and rich, its development and scope is outside the purview of this chapter. And while this chapter engages less with the historical literature on transsexuality (Meyerowitz, 2002—see also Hausman, 1995, and Rubin, 2003), than with the discussion on transsexuality as part of a more recent "transgender" category (Stryker, 1992; Valentine, 2000), a few notes to contextualize such history and the boundaries between these two terms are necessary.

During the first 50 years of the twentieth century, "transsexual" emerged as an identification label through a complex interplay between medical technologies, media coverage on "gender inverts" (which focused on intersex people), and battles to demand sex change acquisition and legal acceptance (Irvine, 1990; Meyerowitz, 2002). The early second part of the twentieth century provided for much study from a medical, psychiatric, psychological, sociological and anthropological angle (Billings and Urban, 1982; Bolin, 1988; Bullough and Bullough, 1993; Irvine, 1990; Kessler and McKenna, 1978; Risman, 1982), especially after the opening of gender identity clinics that offered, though with some resistance, surgical reconstruction to those who could convince medical providers of their "gender inversion." The 1970s/early 1980s saw an elimination of centers where transsexuals could access surgical reconstructions in exchange for their participation in gender identity-specific research. In the early 1990s, a discursive break emerged between the categories of transsexual (both as a medical construct and also as a two gender pole

category) and transgender (as a grassroots-derived move outside two-gender systems). Even though this break continues to be contested (Roen, 2002), their relationship is slippery: “transgender” and “transsexual” are at times used interchangeably; yet at others, “transgender” has been used as a broader alternative to transsexual—and at times as a distancing from the latter. In my move to separate transsexual as a specific aspect outside of “the transgender,” I want to locate the bodily experiences of surgical and hormonal transition, and of being perceived as a person of opposite sex from the one assigned at birth (which is most often done through surgical genital reassignment of the person in question). While I recognize that these two terms are evolving, and that for instance, hormone use may itself be the basis of a transsexual identity for some, I am also establishing this distinction between the two based on my data: as we will see, whether labeled transsexual, transgender, or even intersex (called hermaphrodites in the past), practitioners referred to “the operation” (distinctively speaking of lower genitalia surgical reconstruction) as a marker of a “trans-”status of sorts.

It is often assumed that transsexualism takes place in the context of surgical procedures that permit a movement from one gender construct to another (Devor, 1997). Inversely, Halberstam (1998) has argued that transgender identities respond to certain gender transitivity that “stops short” of surgery. By creating this rupture between transgender as an umbrella term, and transsexual, as based on surgical or other medical developments (such as hormone use) to reaffirm someone’s gender identity, I participate in the identity boundary maintenance that others have referred to as gender policing (Wilchins, 1997), or more specifically in the realm of the sexual, as “border wars” (Rubin, 1992). Yet this is imperative to the study of sex, gender, and sexuality in the

practice of *Santería*, given the limitations placed on body "modifications," as discussed in the following remarks.

How transsexual identities operate in Santería

Little has been mentioned in the literature about the participation of transsexuals, except in relation to explicit gender disruptions, or how open to multiple gender/sexual identities the religion has been. In that case, the discussion centers on homosexuality, and transsexuality is reduced to a cross-dressing inherently encoding homosexuality (Strongman, 2002, 184). While Strongman's discussion centers on *sexuality*, as he is discussing gay and lesbian practitioners, he proceeds to illustrate the possibilities of *Santería* and similar religions as sites that offer a multiplicity of *gender* identifications through their deity and religious practice. However, no mention of transsexuality is evidenced (his foregrounding of the term "gay/lesbian/queer" in his writing may have actually helped erase transsexuality's potential presence). Perhaps for Strongman, homosexuality acts as a code for all gender/sexual marginalization, including that of transsexuals—I am clearly making this extension a possibility, given that he does not point to this in his analysis. His work has in turn been criticized for assuming that these religious structures do not penalize their members, or for that matter, exclude homosexuals (Reid-Pharr, 2002).

Randy P. Conner in *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Participation in African-Inspired Traditions in the Americas* (2004) goes a step further and frames the lack of transsexual participation as blunt transphobia in *Santería*. He argues against some of his informants' discussion on the presence of transsexual, transgender and drag queen practitioners that:

> …transgender, and particularly transsexual, practitioners are likely to be shunned by many practitioners of Lucumí/ *Santería*—including, somewhat surprisingly, lesbian, gay, and bisexual adherents. Numerous practitioners I have interviewed in the United States and Cuba have suggested that they are not at ease with drag queens, drag kings, transvestites, or transsexuals, and they believe that beyond a certain androgynous or gender-diverse comportment, transgender behavior and, even more critically, transsexual identity and behavior signify a transgression against that destiny which the individual and the high god Olodumare have agreed upon prior to the individual's birth. This belief is often evidenced by the insistence that the drag queen, transvestite, or transsexual practitioner must be dressed in garments signifying the sex organs which the individual possessed at birth, as opposed to either her or his psychological persona and/or altered/corrected anatomy. (113)

Conner distinguishes between transgender and transsexual as well as transvestite or drag queens/kings (the latter three cross-dressers, some of which do so for erotic reasons versus performing a gender presentation in public opposite of one's sexed body). According to Conner's informants, biology *is* destiny, and transsexuals who discuss their transitioning desires are negatively assessed by practitioners as disrupting their destiny. When an *Oriaté* makes the *Itá* reading to a *Yabó* during his/her initiation, this is a reading of past, present and future that "confirms" a person's destiny. It is said that that destiny is set before one is born. Yet there are things that are changed in the life of a *Santero*, decisions that a *Santero* makes that alter his or her destiny. Yet no information in the *Santería* literature explains the reason for a prohibition on "sex change" and whether this prohibition comes from the *Itá.*

In previous chapters, we have learned that some people are "mounted" by deities, while others do not. For instance, some chosen *Babalawos* avoid deity mounting in order to not affect their chances to perform a divination and move into that status. A person could have decided not to become a *Babalawo*, because of choice or life circumstances,

in which case, their being mounted in public can take place because such high priest status is not desired. This example implies a choice in a given matter—pursuing becoming a *Babalawo*—and a destiny change. The reasons for a "sex change" as a prohibition are perhaps selectively applied to those *Santeros* who profess a desire to undergo such surgical procedures (thus the reason for this chapter's discussion).

In this scenario, the *Orishas* seem to have crafted a plan for their followers before birth—or so say the practitioners. Understandings of sex are thus immutable, and while surgical interventions to accommodate to a person's sense of self through "sex change" exist—a process which entails most of all the "persistence of gender" (Shapiro, 1991)—the most common response to this surgical transition among *Santeros* is rejection. While resembling a common Catholic homophobic narrative—"love the sinner, hate the sin"—*Santeros* in my study made more complex arguments about the presence and participation of transsexuals. Time and again, practitioners would allude to their knowledge of some transsexual practitioners. Some gay and lesbian *Santeros* acknowledged competing priorities (like money to pay for surgical procedures versus raising funds to become an initiated *Santero/a*) and others collapsed gay and transsexual experiences together.

The evident invisibility in works like Strongman, and the pointed lack of presence of transsexuals in the work by Conner illustrates the importance of this chapter.[2] My

[2] Conner (2004) does report the presence of a Female to Male transsexual practitioner in his US sample. He adds that Don Kulick (1998) points to the presence of a couple of *travestis* in Salvador, Brazil, that practice *Candomblé*, and challenge the notion that most *travestis* are *Candomblé* practitioners (2004: 105). Conner also cites a preliminary work of mine which has been recently published (Vidal-Ortiz, 2005) where a practitioner, who "used to do drag," speaks of a house where there are transsexual practitioners (his name is Julio, and I discuss this case later on in this chapter). I have inquired since our 2002 interview to get in touch with any of the transsexuals, to no avail.

findings further their initial claims by exploring the position taken by most practitioners as to how transsexual practitioners form a boundary of what is permissible and forbidden within the religious practice. Transsexual experience was made evident in most of the conducted interviews in my research, and many times, I was told that I would "run into many transsexuals" conducting fieldwork, or that I would be referred by some of the informants to transsexual practitioners. Those calls never came in. I never ran into a transsexual in my fieldwork during those four years. These "facts" deserve attention by themselves. They also merit an assertive theoretical framework before engaging with the informants' narratives about the transsexual figure.

Haunting and the transsexual referent throughout

Avery F. Gordon's *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (1997), engage the framework I want to use in discussing the evidence shift I am proposing. Emerging from an interest to look at the relationship between power, knowledge, and experience (1997: 23) Gordon's book helps reveal assumptions about the use of evidence directly based on experience, and the authority embedded in the empirical discourses that utilize it (for this last point, see also Clough, 2000). The "ghost" is a useful aspect of analysis, because it shifts (our) social scientists' view, from what can be seen or heard as evidence, to floating themes that can structure the borders of a practice, or even create the consciousness of a group of people:

> If haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or the apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or

> seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us, in its own way, of course. The way of the ghost is haunting, and haunting is a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. (1997: 8)

Gordon's use of the imagery of the ghost asks us as sociologists to critically engage with the powers vested in the empirical framework of fieldwork, ethnography, interviewing and the "giving voice" (that rests on gathering the opinions of specific members from a group), and other methods assumed to offer the best understandings of a social reality. Her work imagines research that continues to engage with questions of power, and perhaps some of the most essential questions: Who gets to speak for him/herself in research? How can social inequalities be addressed when fieldwork and interviewing alone do not get social scientists to people who *one would assume* want to tell a truth?

I also reference Grace Mitchell's dissertation to argue for the simultaneous avoidance of discussing a topic with the ways in which such silences could be organizing social life in any given setting. Her dissertation uses the figure of the Korean prostitute in US military, also called the *yanggongju*, to illustrate the ways in which Koreans forbid talking or discussing their links to the women (mothers, sisters, wives, daughters) who at one point engaged in sex labor for US soldiers. Using Abraham and Torok's (1994) "transgenerational haunting," she illustrates how the Korean sex laborer haunts Korean society by its mere referent—a referent that remains even in its absence through speech. [3]

[3] Mitchell also argues for a challenge to historical linearity in telling stories such as this one—a point much more central to her dissertation than this chapter. She says: "There is a chronology that is useful to keep in mind, but the story I want to tell is about the ways in which the figure of the *yanggongju* gets its very life from the effects of trauma, and the temporality of trauma is never faithful to linear timelines" (Mitchell, 2005: 23).

Within the practice of *Santería*, certain bodies, images, and depositories of trauma and displacement get to bear the pain of otherness—they also get to organize, through this marginality, the permissible and forbidden forces of a group of practitioners. In everyday social perceptions, transsexual people are seen as deviants. Some of this bias towards transsexuals spills into the practice of the religion. In general, the figure of the transsexual takes shape as a marginal, hyper-sexual, often posed as drug using, commercial sex working; specifically in *Santería*, transsexual people are inherently represented as inadequate practitioners. These two scenarios—the general and the particular—are central to my understanding of the ghost that tends to organize *Santería* restrictions. Because "[o]ne method of engaging a haunted history is to look into the space of loss itself for its creative possibilities" (Mitchell, 2005: 39), I focus on this void left in the empirical endeavor of seeking respondents, yet also attempting to address the meaning of so many messages tied to the image of the transsexual. The lack of transsexual interviewees is one aspect of this void I want to address through her frame:

> I am compelled to enter these empty spaces to find out what emerges, to find out what one can learn from listening to silence. Rather than writing a sociological narrative of military prostitution, I am making a methodological shift away from traditional sources of data and forms of writing my interpretations. . . . How, for example, is trauma transmitted across time and space through vehicles other than the speaking subject (such as the interviewee) or the historical record? . . . I use both narrative and non-narrative methods of unfolding the layers of the multiple, often competing, stories about the yanggongju that have developed over the past fifty-plus years. She is a ghost who is not just an apparition of the dead or a melancholic reminder of the past, but also a productive and powerful force of the present. (Mitchell, 2005: 24)

Relying on the fields of critical methodology, literary criticism, transnational feminism, Asian American studies, and performance studies, Mitchell builds a strong case in

studying meanings of haunting and the haunted in sociology as a field. She does so, because, realistically, "the mainstream of social science would dismiss the notion that something that is seemingly absent or non-existent can be a powerful force in shaping empirical reality, let alone this unseen presence can itself be the object of study" (Mitchell, 2005, 25). While I depart from the use of trauma in Mitchell's framework, her analysis of the void as data, and as a challenge to empiricism, informs the use of interview excerpts in this chapter—as the rest of the section will show.

This section focuses on several aspects associated with the image of the transsexual in the practice of *Santería*. While the available literature indicates a strong bias and possible transphobic context in *Santería* (Conner, 2004), I illustrate the complexity of the transsexual's position in the religion and argue for a reconceptualization of the religion as more than merely "transphobic." Succinctly, the fluidity of terms to describe this transsexual figure, its relationship (and distance) to/from homosexuality, and the general prohibitions associated with transsexuality are discussed, as well as some memories that give the transsexual figure an embodied texture and a history.

Transsexuality in relationship to transgender categories and sex

Much of the participants' understanding of transgender identities, when posed as a question in the interviews or during fieldwork, was interpreted in relationship to one of its most specific narratives, that of the transsexual (Roen, 2002; Broad, 2002). Yet while "transgender" was mostly read as transsexuality among the practitioners, the language used in describing transsexuals in the religious participation is itself significant, as speaking about transsexuals constituted a challenge to some of the informants. It did so in

a few ways: first, practitioners I talked to in both NYC and Miami all had trouble utilizing pronouns to refer to transsexual practitioners, most times assigning a male one to them, or shifting between "he" and "she," in spite of their predominant female presentation.[4] And second, my study participants' move to lump these practitioners within any or all of terms "transgendered" responded to their lack of language to address their identity. Indeed, labels such as crossdressing, doing drag, transvestite, transgender, and transsexual were often used interchangeably. In some interviews, the specificity of surgical intervention, or gender reassignment was clear, but in others, the use of general terms back and forth did not allow for precision on a reference to transsexuality. Julio, one of the few informants who said he has cross dressed in the past, shares his take on the limited participation of transgender practitioners—his language is not specific to the transsexual, but fluid in referent:

> I've only encountered a few transgenders, like one of my godfather's godchildren was a transvestite, but she died. So yeah, you don't see a lot of transgender in, actually you don't see a lot of transgender, I think people feel ambivalent in general about transgender people…

Ambivalence offers most practitioners a sense of resistance towards transsexual *Santeros*. Ironically, ambivalence gives room to transsexuals but as well erases transsexual subjectivity. As a case in point, Julio uses transgender and transvestite as terms to refer to those whose gender presentation he has not faced often in his religious practice. Julio reveals that it is mainly through his participation in a house where transsexual practitioners worship that he knows of "a few transgenders." Julio's house has a significant number of transsexual practitioners and a godfather accepting of their gender

[4] Again, all practitioners spoken of are Male-to-Female transsexuals.

transitions. It is perhaps due to his house's openness to transsexual practitioners that he is aware of their participation. Different houses may restrict, to various degrees, the participation of transgender people in general, and transsexuals in particular.

Other participants more specifically collapsed drag queens with transgenders and transsexuals. Amaury said this about transgender and transsexual participation in the religion:

> I don't think the *Orishas* like it… I have a friend who is a drag queen, who's got involved recently into *Santería* because her sister's ex husband was a *Santero*, and he tried to get him into it, and he went to readings, and the reading said, "you know, its' OK if you are gay, but if you are gay and you are a man, you should be a man, if you are a woman, be a woman."

A regulation of transsexuality took place in a number of ways, in participants' views—initially, because it disrupts gendered understandings that depend on two—and only two—genders (Kessler and McKenna, 1978); Amaury shows this through the previous quote. This regulation is connected in this particular comment to sexuality, as gayness is also regulated—policed—via gendered norms, as when Amaury states "if you are a man, you should be a man" (and as we briefly saw in the previous chapter). Stories like these only promote a two-sex system and a rigid gendered participation, in this case, with "gays" as practitioners. Again, drag queens are supplanted by a topic on sexuality, specifically gayness, and transsexuality is only implicitly restricted.

Another reading of Amaury's statement may actually show that transsexuality, as a two gender pole experience, may be a solution—in some practitioners' views—to the ambiguity of cross-dressing and travestism. But the practice of the religion takes more than anything an issue with the biological sex of a person, as a link to their deities. In *Santería,* the sex of the transsexual never changes, even if their gender identity (and body

make up) is now socially perceived as that of the opposite from that assigned at birth. Mark, a White self identified gay man, initiated several years ago, stated:

> I've known a number of transsexuals, in the religion, and there is almost always, I think its even true of post surgery transsexuals, that when you are before the *Orishas* you are, you know, your birth gender… but it just sort of become so complicated because you could be a male, you could be born a male, you could be like on a transgender path towards being a female and have a female *Orisha*, and so, like in a, a sacred divine setting if you were coming down with Yemaya, you know, people will treat you as female, but in sort of this mundane world, you know it's not like people would, if you said, "you have to call me Tina instead of Tom," like people would refuse to do that, they would completely honor that, except like, when you are being, say you had the shells thrown on you, for you, you would be called Tom, and it's a really interesting… I guess it's not that it actually is so fluid, it's just that it is more compartmentalized, you know it almost become sort of trivial, like it just brings it down to the level of rules but not about values at all, which I think I really respect. I mean I think there are certainly undoubtedly homophobic people in the religion, there's just that in the world, but I think my experience is that there is such a jumble of things that you know it's only god's doing, that there is no way you could have any judgment about any of that stuff whatsoever…

Regulations within *Santería's* ritual establish that a person's birth sex is sustained in every interaction with their deities. What Mark calls "interesting"—the move from pronouns or names to distinguish a practitioner's gender preference—is one of the main elements characteristic of transsexual transition: the use of a pronoun/name that responds to their chosen gender identity. While some scholars have argued that in some cases transsexuals or transgender people may think of themselves as both male and female (Hale, 1998; Valentine, 2000), the use of "he" throughout this chapter's excerpts responds to *Santeros'* unease regarding gender categories in everyday use, and an assignment of a person to one gender or the other (in this case, Male to Female transsexuals).

Clearly, there is a slippage this practitioner makes in speaking of "sex" as "gender" ("you are your birth gender"). This becomes important to the study of gender and sexuality in *Santería*, as there are other slippages between the use of those categories. This slippage in particular regulates sex change by assuming that one's "gender" has been already selected at birth—not just the sex. Yet Mark raises a central issue about the general treatment of transsexuals in this quote: while the rule may be that the sex of the person is the required element for worshipping ("before the *Orishas* you are your birth gender…"), the values of the practitioners do not immediately imply a violation of the person's desired gender identity. Whereas in other scenarios the use of "he" may distinctively mark a bias against male to female transsexuals, in the practice of *Santería* this may take place as ritual organizes interaction among its members. Contextualizing the religious practice by understanding these nuances may offer an alternative explanation to the simple argument of transphobia. Yet attempts to respect transsexuals in the practice of *Santería* do not exclude an analysis of how transsexuality ranks last in comparison to homosexuality—the topic of the comments that follow.

Regulating transsexuality: its proximity, but eventual distance, from homosexuality

Besides the use of many "transgendered" terms to refer to the figure of the transsexual, I also found a tendency to collapse homosexuality and transsexuality; or perhaps to extend homosexuality to include transsexuality in a general use of "sexual minorities." Rubin (1984) argued for a notion of sexual minorities to be opened up to incorporate transsexual (and in her 1992 revision, transgender) individuals, and it was indeed first used to uncover the many possibilities of thinking sex outside a reproductive, monogamous, heterosexual, private, and romantic setting (as described in the first

chapter). Butler's (1994) discussion of Rubin's work inserts a notion of "sexual minorities" that offers a myriad ways to illustrate the relationship between sex, gender, and sexuality. "Sexual minorities" is then a larger analytical term that makes the distinctions between transsexuality and homosexuality blurrier. Here, Walter blends the two in this quote:

> Padrino Larry, el padrino de él era homosexual, transsexual, antes de morir, murió de SIDA, le faltaba solamente la operación vaginal, la operación del pene, por que ya él tenía tetas… De ahí, el padrino de él que era Corujo, que tenía hecho Changó, Obba, era un *Oriaté*, también era homosexual, y homosexuales declarados, o sea eran homosexuales, que no tenian el más mínimo respeto por la homophobia de la gente, si tu eras homofóbico, te daban una patá…
>
> Godfather Larry, whose godfather was homosexual, transsexual… …before [the transsexual] died of AIDS, he needed only the vaginal reconstruction, the penile surgery, because he already had breasts… From there, his godparent that was Corujo, that had *Chango*, Obba, was an *Oriate*, who was also gay, and a declared one, I mean they were openly homosexuals, they did not have the least of respect for people's homophobia, if you were homophobic they would kick you.

This collapsing happens both because of a common reading given to "sexual minorities," but also because of the unstable relationship between gender and sexuality. Transsexuals and homosexuals were all marginalized, and there were specific ways in which they shared experiences—and continue to, even though social scientists and activists alike have developed clear distinctions between one or the other (as sexual orientation and gender identity respectively). In Walter's view, both groups were similarly affected by HIV/AIDS. The deaths due to AIDS that he mentioned signified the absence of strong members. Walter's comments also illustrate a very specific transsexual aspect of a particular practitioner, by centering the transsexual narrative and basing it on the surgical reconstruction of this person's body.

Most participants disclosed having heard of or having known transsexuals who had died of AIDS in the 1980s and 1990s, which has partially mythologized transsexual people within *Santería,* and perhaps continues to be the case today. Petra's quote is particularly illustrative:

> I know the story of someone in particular, who was a nightclub cross dresser, and maybe more than a cross dresser, I think he wore make up, I don't know… it might be better defined by another term... So anyways, and he made *Orisha*, and the *Orisha* came down, and said "I will be the only quote-unquote, woman in the house," and he in fact did change careers, like he no longer dances, because he wanted to be, live by what he considered to be his destiny. I know someone else who decided to not do that, who had the same, who decided that he was gonna go through the surgery, and he was told, the *Orisha* came down and it started hitting this young man's chest, and she kept saying, "this is not my son," because that wasn't the body that she was used to possessing, because she was used to being the only female in that house. If you think about how sort of the body is like a mode of communication. And I think that he came to a premature death, and when I heard the story, it was attributed to not following the *Orisha*.

This specific account registers a female deity in a "man," and thus is not generalizable to others, but it raises the question of the body's location in this discussion—the body is not absent, it is the mounting element that is registered by the *Orishas* as a tool to communicate with others. Initially, rigid gender constructs mediate the possession of a body, according to Petra. It also privileges biological understandings of self over self-identification. While one cross dresser remained loyal to the practice of the religion by his renouncing a "sex change," or a stage presence in clubs, another paid the "ultimate price" for continuing to pursue a sense of self, because this sense of self clashed with *Santería's* traditional views on a person's sex as irrefutable. In fact, apparent in this judgment is the effect the "sex change" has on the practitioners; it embodies a different, even contradictory mode of communication, one that cannot allow for the *Orishas* to

possess their practitioners. Thus the body is perceived as the vehicle for worship, and in a gendered and sexualized way ("mounting"). Lastly, readings of the body as a sacred venue are inevitable in this quote; the *Orisha* in this scenario would not attend an event in this person's body because this person was not articulated in the ways in which the saint knew "him." This is again another excerpt where the relationship between the worship and the body is extremely under theorized. Transsexuals make choices between their transitioning needs and practicing (and advancing) in *Santería*. In this quote, Bebo speculates that economic priorities—to buy hormones and/or get money secured for surgery, for those interested—are competing with becoming an initiate. When asked if he knew transsexual practitioners, he answered:

> Con collares muchos, *Santeros* hasta ahora no he ido a fiestas de ninguno… Si sé de gente transgénero que está bien interesada en dar ese paso pero a veces son cuestiones mas económicas, o continuo para mi operación o hago esto, y esas son decisiones muy íntimas que yo no… pero sí he conocido a, es lo que te decia orita, si alguien viene a tu casa buscando sociego, desenvolvimiento, entendimiento, o conversar sobre la fe, nosotros pues vemos que lo que viene ante uno es el conjunto de todo aquello que vino antes y acompaña a esa persona que llega a tu casa, o sea que usualmente, el *Santero* pues no te ve a ti ve necesariamente sino que ve toda tu historia y ve todos tus antepasados, y eso esta contigo y camina contigo… entonces muchos de los transgéneros con los que yo he hablado, pues se le reconoce como tal, como una persona que viene
>
> With necklaces a lot (of transgenders), *Santeros* 'til now I haven't been to a festivity… I do know of very interested transgender people who want to take that step but sometimes it is about economic issues, either I continue with my plan for surgeries, or I do this, and these are very intimate decisions that I don't… but I have known, like I said earlier, if someone comes to your house looking for support, involvement, understanding, or to talk about faith, we see that what comes to us is the set of everything that came before and accompanies this person that arrives at your door, so that usually, the *Santero* does not necessarily see you but sees all your history and all your ancestors, and that remains with you and walks with you… then many transgender people with whom I have talked, well they are recognized as such, like a person that comes with all this baggage, and experience, and a

con todo este bagaje, y la experiencia, y la cual hay que respetar también, siempre, te digo, es una religión muy popular donde todo lo que la sociedad misma piensa y cree se filtra de una manera u otra al trato individual, siempre se tinta, pero cuando llega el momento de tirar esos caracoles, cuando llega el momento de sentarte en una estera, cuando llega el momento de divinación, o de tirar cocos, eso son grandes ligas, ahí lo demás se tiene que hechar a un lado y la persona tiene que lidiar... Tú estas como mensajero de tu santo...	person that also has to be respected, always, like I say, this is a very popular religion where all that society as a whole thinks and believes is filtered one way or another to the individual treatment, it always comes through, when it is time to throw those cowry shells, or time to sit on an *estera* [a woven grass mat where certain readings take place], to do a divination, or coconut readings, that's really big league, everything else is put aside, and the person has to deal… you are acting as a messenger of your deity…

Bebo spoke of the many transsexuals he knew, who weren't initiated, but had gotten their *collares* (bead necklaces). Moving forward with other more advanced rituals and their initiation was a challenge, especially given that initiation rituals can cost from $3,000.00 to $10,000.00 depending on the deity that has "claimed one's head" (a practitioner's main deity). But these are high costs for people also trying to access enough money to achieve certain surgical reconstructions. As Bebo puts it, those are very "intimate decisions." These are not decisions many self-identified gay men or lesbian women have to tend to. Transsexuals continue to be less present in the religion in part due to these choices and needs that are unique to their transitioning experience. Thus, transsexual invisibility is a point of contention.

Invisibility and misrepresentation: the embodiment of "evil" in transsexuality

The work of Vivian Namaste in *Invisible Lives: the Erasure of Transsexual and Transgendered People* (2000) seems fitting in this discussion. Namaste challenges the place given to transgender people at, for instance, gay bars, where a "drag queen"

performer never participates in the physical spaces that serve a population defined by their identity: gay men. Like "drag queens," often times transgender and transsexual people are relegated to the stage, a performative, non-identity, space, where they come in and out and entertain their gay-identified audience. In *Santería*, the figure of the transsexual offers a vacuum for a number of marginalized experiences that leave the rest of the population untouched. Assignments of drug use, prostitution, emotional instability, and overall wrong choices are attributed to transsexuals in particular. While some practitioners recognize that *Santería* attracts people who are in serious need of help in terms of emotional, economic, mental and physical matters, the figure of the transsexual resonates as embodying all of these elements. Mark, a White gay man, illustrates one of these cases:

> There is a woman who was a, or a man, [laughs nervously] who was a godchild of my *padrino* for a little while, who was just a wreck, and, so she is not really around the house anymore, she was never initiated. She was born a man, she actually still had her stuff, she didn't have surgery, she had breasts, so she was pre-op, but just had such a hard life, she was like, the wrong person to be really involved in the religion in the sense like she needs the religion but she doesn't, her life is too complicated to, and she completely turned tricks in The Village, and she is really, really trashy, she can be very sweet and she is very smart, but she is not, she is too into her, "life" set to like really pursue an agenda, to like get very far, so she's got her necklaces, she's got a lot of spiritual ability and potential, but I don't see her ever getting crowned, I don't think she could ever, really, get her life stabilized enough for that… …I think that she doesn't have a lot of money, and I think that she is in some of a questionable health, and I just think that that's not a stable lifestyle for, you know, I mean it's a religion that brings a lot of stability to people, but you know like the initiation its really expensive, and that's not like, I meant there is tremendous room for abuse in the fact that you do have to pay for everything in the religion, but on the other hand there is no more commitment than paying for everything, like, I don't remember what I paid to make *Obatala* 8 years ago, but it was, 6 or 7 thousand dollars, and I've heard it's more than that…

Mark has inserted almost all of the elements into the narrative of the "trashy transsexual:" she is a "wreck," she "turns tricks," has "questionable health," and "not stable" as a person to be able to focus on the practice of the religion. So *Santería* requires some commitment that this transsexual is seemingly not capable of making. Never mind that transsexuals are often not employed due to their often atypical gender presentation, where employers may shy away from having transsexuals work for them if they do not "pass." Forget also that transsexuals are attacked regularly and at least two transsexuals a month are killed because of their gender identity.[5] Given the socio-economic conditions faced by many transsexuals, why hold them to the same standards than the rest of the population? The lens needs to be turned around to notice the social conditions that most transsexuals face everyday.

Esteban, a Cuban gay man from Miami, also offers a troubling but relevant story:

Por cierto, hay un, ¿qué será él por dios? Tiene tetas pero tiene rabo... ¿y qué es eso? Trans... whatever... ¿que sera ella? El tipo tiene hecho Yemayá,... el tipo personalmente es un desastre... [¿o sea su vida es un reguero?] un reguero... es mentiroso es ladrón, es drogadicto, es horrible, horrible, no que sea malo hacia una persona pero just his life in general is a mess... pero, se sube con Yemayá, y esa Yemayá, si ella me dice, que me tire de un puente que me va a salvar la vida, ahi me estoy tirando del puente, por que esa Yemayá me ha dao' pruebas a mi, que es lo mas increible del mundo,	By the way, there is a… what is he for god's sake? He has teeties but a "tail." What is that? Trans… whatever. What would she be? The guy has Yemaya, he is personally a disaster... [you mean his life is messy?] His life is messy… He is a liar, a cheater, a junkie, it is… horrible, horrible… not that he is bad towards a person but that just his life in general is a mess… but, when Yemaya comes down and mounts him, and that Yemaya that takes him, if she (Yemaya) says to me, that I need to jump from a bridge I am going ahead and jumping… because that Yemaya has given me tests, it

[5] See, for instance, the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Policy Institute 2000 report "Transgender Equality: A Handbook for Activists and Policymakers" by Paisley Currah and Shannon Minter. Download from: http://www.thetaskforce.org/reslibrary/list.cfm?pubTypeID=2#pub61.

la adoro... el te dire el es un paquete el es comiquisimo, se pasa con el un par de horas divinas, pero ya, despues de eso, just, cuz his lifestyle is horrible, you know? Pero de nuevo, la Yemayá que pasa por el, la adoro... Es una persona que aunque el Santo le diga que no haga cosas ella lo haria... yo si se que el se hizo las tetas, y un dia decidio que ya no las queria, y se las empezo a reventarlas, y en vez de bajarse, lo que hizo el silicón ese, se le amarró, a los órganos, y ya mas nunca se lo puede quitar... por que el mismo se los, reventó, a ver si se le iba, pero al contrario, se le hicieron permanentes... La cara toa' llena de silicón, feísima, feísima... tenia pelo largo, ahora se pone peluca, cuando decide vestirse de mujer... no vive de mujer, ves, se viste como mujer de noche y para hacer sus, sus shows y todo eso, pero vive como hombre, pero con sus tetas, siempre anda con tshirts bien grandes pa' salir pa' la calle...	has been the most incredible thing, I adore that Yemaya… He I will tell you, he is a sweetheart, he is super funny, you can have a really good couple of hours having a good time, but after that, nothing, because his lifestyle is horrible, you know? But again, the Yemaya that goes through him, is amazing… He is a person that even if the deity said not to do things, he would do them… I do know that he did get his teeties, and that he at some point did not want them anymore, so he tried to burst them, and that instead of leaking, the silicon tied itself into his organs, and so that he could no longer remove it, ever… because he himself tried to burst them, but it became permanent… His face is all full of silicon, ugly, ugly… He used to have long hair, now he wears wigs, whenever he dresses up as a woman. …he does not live as a woman, he dresses up for shows at time but he lives as a man, with his teeties, always with large t-shirts to go out…

It is difficult not to assume a negative reading of Esteban's intentions towards this particular transsexual. Indeed, his evaluation of the life of such transsexual is a mixed bag: drug use, negativity, lack of focus on the religion, but at the same time, this person is possessed by a rather strong presence of Yemayá, which has blessed Esteban more than once. He stresses that the person he refers to is not mean towards others, yet the life circumstances are terrible for a solid involvement in the religion. Like Mark's excerpt, Esteban seems not to notice the precarious place transsexuals may be placed in society by their gender presentation and general treatment in society. These two scenarios may actually be very illustrative of Namaste's argument: that transsexuals may only serve as

entertainment to others. In these two examples, these transsexuals' lives are too complicated, they receive a lot of energy deemed negative, and are not perceived to be focused enough to engage with the requirements of the religion. Yet on the other hand, these illustrations stress the fun, energetic, almost entertaining character assumed of transsexuals. Their seemingly incomplete transitions as entry points of conversation on them signify their amusing position. Their lack of success in transitioning, or in worshipping for that matter, is used as an element to put them down (the referent of them as men may respond to their failure to fully transition).

How ghostly transsexuality may take shape: naming and (re)membering their presence

The previous three sub-sections have shown a variety of ways in which transsexuals reside in the common imagination of *Santeros*. It is noteworthy to point out that no names of transsexual practitioners appeared in any of those quotes. The following are three accounts of named practitioners who are themselves central to the imaginary of transsexuals in the religion. They are important for this discussion in that these excerpts come from Puerto Rico and New York, and embody additional elements of the transsexual figure, this time with some identifier. Myrna shows how there was a similar view of one transsexual; *Maria Dolores* was widely known:

> No se ahora en PR, pero aqui es donde mas yo los he visto, en Puerto Rico yo no vi nunca a ninguna loca partia, la unica loca en Puerto Rico, que se viste de mujer y to el mundo la conoce se llama creo que Maria Dolores, yo no se como carajo se llama la loca, tiene como mil años tiene hecho Yemaya, y esa es la unica que va asi, bella, maquillada, olvidate… pero es una loca de
>
> I don't know how it is in Puerto Rico now, but here is where I have seen transsexuals the most, in PR I did not see any flaming queen, the only one in PR that dresses up as a woman and everyone knows her I think is called Maria Dolores, I don't know how the hell is she called, has like a thousand years and Yemaya and is the only one looking pretty, with make-up

> muchos años, y to' el mundo lo conoce.. Maria Dolores, yo no se como se llama… y la vieja chacho tu lo ves alli, y to el mundo le llama por ese nombre, no por el nombre de el… Pero despues de unos años a el se lo prohibio el Santo, el Santo le prohibio ya vestirse mas de mujer. Esto, una vez, en una ceremonia, el santo le dijo, por que a principio cuando el era joven, parece que era media prostituto, y estaba asi, y despues el Santo lo acepto cuando se hizo santo, entonces el Santo le dijo, eventualmente vas a parar de vestirte de mujer, y el siempre va maquillado y todo, pero pantalon, y you know, limpio… Tiene ya como 70 años, ya se esta muriendo, si no se ha muerto ya… Aqui es donde mas tu los ves, mas que todo Cubanas, hay una que otra Boricua, sera, pero en verdad lo mas que he conocido ha sido Cubanos. E inclusive muchos de ellos dis que Straight o bisexuales que los exprimen, que viven de ellos…
>
> forget it… Is a big queen of many years, everybody knows him… Maria Dolores, I don't know his name. And everyone calls him by the female name, that name, not his… But after many years he got a prohibition, the deity forbid him from dressing up as a woman. This one time, in a feast, the deity said, because before when he was young it seems like he was kind of a prostitute, and the deity accepted him and the deity said you'll eventually stop dressing up as a woman, and he continues to come with make up and everything, but clean… He's like 70, dying, if he is not dead yet... Here is where you see this the most, Cubans mostly, some Boricuas, but most I know are Cubans. Also, many of the supposedly straight or bisexual men court them and live off them…

Here, Myrna has collapsed loca (loosely translated as queenie, crazy woman, faggot) with transsexual. She has also qualified this person by references such as "flaming" and "big queen." Although Myrna never calls this person a she, there is a play about her gender and sexuality in these excerpts. Clear prohibitions are set in this narrative. In addition, the reference to prostitution, health remarks (he is still alive), and the exploitation faced by Maria Dolores by men clinging to her (presumably for her money) all have an effect to give Maria Dolores some mythological sense of her life.

Walter also mentions a person by name, Chiquineta, which unlike Maria Dolores, is not a proper name—but he explains:

Transgenero si, si, chiquiteta, es uno de los, tienes que conocer a Chiquiteta, y Chiquiteta es uno de los antiguos, que sobrevivio la epidemia, y es una persona bien Buena pa' conocer y es una persona encantador, y tiene hecho Ochun, y todo el mundo lo conoce por Chiquiteta, dentro de la comunidad de Santeros. Yo creo que, yo no se si el tiene 'la operacion,' yo se que tiene la de arriba, le dicen Chiquiteta por que de momento cuando Ochun le dio parece senos, pues… y el hace unos tronos preciosos y es una de las personas que tronos mas bellos hace en Nueva York. O sea, tu quieres tener el major trono, tu tienes que hablar con Chiquiteta.	Transgender, yes of course Chiquineta, is one of the, you have to meet Chiquineta, and Chiquineta is one of the oldest, one that survived the epidemic, and is a good person, charming, and has Oshun, and everyone knows him by Chiquineta, within the Santero community. I think that, I am not sure if he has "the operation," I do know that it has the top one, they call him Chiquineta because suddenly Ushun gave him breasts, or so it seems, and so… he does fabulous altars and is one of the best artists decorating altars in New York. So, you wanna have the best altar? You have to talk with Chiquineta…

Chiquineta is a survivor—she did not die of AIDS like most of her counterparts. She also seems to have been blessed by *Ochún* by getting breasts given to her by the deity (first story I heard about this!). Lastly, the "operation" or "surgery" reference is about the simplification often made of transsexuality.

Mark also speaks about another person with an uncommon name, and one who seems to have gained a lot of respect from the community of *Santeros*:

> …there is a, I don't know this woman well, her name is Chi Chi, she is considered an elder and she's very well respected, and she is definitely a very prominent transsexual, like its really, its impossible not to recognize that of her immediately, and she is very very well respected, I don't know anything about her, except, people always seem to know when Chi Chi is about to show up… I'd love to know more about her but he doesn't speak so much English…

As Mark makes evident in the excerpt, there is a back and forth between "woman," "her," "she," and then "he" to refer to the person's capacity to speak English. Mark was indeed

the most constant of all practitioners whose sense of gender for transsexuals was that of a woman. Yet even for Mark, the back and forth continues, as notions of "sex" and "gender" conflations continue to be made by all practitioners.

In general, the transsexual figure is discussed as a figure without a name or specificity, yet in these last scenarios, a name is given to transsexuals, even if the name is contested by means of presuppositions of death, or not being sure of the name. Certainly, there are instances where transsexuals have received some recognition and respect—qualified by their attributes in the religion (i.e., altars, possession, devotion), while for the most part, transsexuals seem to embody the marginal and negative aspects of society in general, and of these racial and religious minority communities in particular. I conclude with some general reflections on where the transsexual figure may be headed.

Concluding Remarks

"Sex," "gender," and "sexuality" are the basis for a set of movements from biological sex, to gender, to sexuality—and back. These three categories are particularly troubled in the narratives of *Santeros* who speak of transsexuals, but whose presence could not be confirmed through my years of ethnographic and interview study. Transsexuals may be set up to fail in the practice of *Santería*, even if seldom seen in those spaces—by the expectations that their bodies be deficient, deformed (as in the story of the transsexual with "loose" silicon in her body), infectious, dangerous, and drugged. Specific bodily aspects of a transsexual figure also haunt the practice of *Santería*. The "surgery" as a marker of successful transition may be one way in which transsexuals are maintained outside of this religious-cultural practice. Sex, gender and sexuality are combined in unique ways in the study of *Santería* and the transsexual figure: while sex is

reified as the foundation to worshipping (a finding that seldom has any effect on non-transsexual gay, lesbian, or bisexual practitioners), it certainly restricts the participation of transsexuals who want to be recognized by the sex and gender to which they ascribe currently. At best, gender and sexuality are being negotiated with gay, lesbian, and bisexual practitioners, whereas sex and gender are the elements under (failed) negotiation in the case of transsexuals.

This empirical use of the categories and movements from sex to gender and gender to sexuality as outlined in this chapter are necessary to expand on the work of "transgender studies." It is precisely the kinds of gender and sexual crossings discussed in previous chapters (i.e., a male bodied person being "mounted" by a female *Orisha*) that are frequently framed in transgender-related literature as examples of transgender practices. Valentine's *Imagining Transgender* book (forthcoming) I am sure will shed light on the power of the transgender category and the ways in which practices and identities are conflated in it. My use of transsexuality responds to the ways in which sex, gender, and sexuality complicate the participation in *Santería*. While much study of transgenderism in the religious-cultural practice is needed, transsexuality also requires study because of the ever-essentializing ways of sustaining it.

Throughout this chapter, I have intended to move outside the specific transsexuals referred to in these interviews and recreate a (my) sense of a transsexual figure that while regionally distinctive, has a general set of characteristics. Methodologically, I marked the lack of transsexual participation in my study as an aspect of evidence that merits future attention in sociology and the social sciences. I aimed at giving that lack of transsexual subjectivity in my study a space; so as to create a form out of the vacuum occupied by the

lack, perhaps a discourse of the expelled, which in this case appears to be the image of the transsexual and its prohibitions in *Santería*. Part of the use of lack as evidence may lead scholars to acknowledge the discursive practices of pos-structuralist and Queer Theory's framework—all while not abandoning interviewing and ethnographic methods. This last element merits further investigation and while outside the purview of this dissertation, may be a furthering of our understandings of data, evidence, and experience in our inquiry for better understandings of social organization practices.

Chapter 6. Living Ethnographically

This chapter is a discussion of where theoretical and methodological aspects of a research enterprise—in this case, ethnography—collide. Its main goal is to move beyond traditional ethnographic narratives of 20th century sociology that circumscribe an "outside" ethnographer who valiantly engages a "field," conquering (most often) *his* fears and learning "the ways of the natives" and coming out triumphant, ready to write and make a plausible analysis of what *he* "saw" (Clough, 1998). This chapter also centers two other aspects of methodology specific to sociological inquiry. I discuss the lack of sexuality studies in ethnographic and sociological research—a topic inherently linked to what the 20th century ethnographer *does not see*, but experiences and writes about—*even if in its absences* or between the lines. An interrelated aspect of ethnographic inquiry and writing is the imbalance of common ethnographic expressions in the social sciences, such as "giving voice," in contrast to the "sight seen" (from the outside) by ethnographers, especially when most of the ethnographic history in U.S. sociology focuses on racial minorities—particularly blacks. Following new experimental and performance qualitative methods that are based on the body, memory, and haunting (Gordon, 1996; Mitchell, 2005; Roberts, 2005), I too engage the sociological literature of embodiment, race, and sexuality in order to methodologically place my study. Perhaps I am, like others, conducting a feminist project of forming new methodologies to move thought forward (Clough, 1994; Sandoval, 2000; Smith, 1999).

I thus wish to make a distinction between the narrowed task of a methods chapter, where one discusses the mechanics and displays the ways in which the study was conducted, and those of a methodological engagement, where theoretical discussions are

imminent in the making operational one's study. Thinking of the body and racialization and the place of sexuality studies in sociology are all conceptual, theoretical, and methodological discussions and I address these in this chapter. (I hope the reader recognizes this chapter as an effort to discuss my methodological framework; for a description of the methods of the study, refer to the introduction.)

Seldom do social scientists avoid academic voyeurism and look at the inside/outside distinctions between ethnographers and "insiders"—where a perceived racially "native" researcher can be both. I claim that ethnographers can trouble this inside/outside relationship by illustrating how the ethnographer's *being* is inherently linked to the making of the situation, instead of the more traditional ethnographic and sociological notion of "entering a place." The self, argues Reinharz (1997), has to be added as part of fieldwork experience and writing because not only does one bring the self, one creates a "wide range of selves conducting fieldwork" (4). Ethnographers negotiate insider/outsider status everyday and in multiple ways including race, nationality, sexual orientation, gender, religion, and education (Naples, 1996). Recent sociological ethnographic literature (Duenier, 1999; Wacquant, 2004) and feminist/social thought writings (Clough, 1994, 1998, 2000; Naples, 1996, 2003) help me engage with dissertation data, as I illustrate how these negotiations take place—and how my religious "outsiderness" was neutralized by my nationality, sexual orientation, and education. Thus, I want to show, the insider/outsider status often flows.

More importantly, I have chosen to devote an entire chapter to this discussion, navigating through the native/outsider notions pertinent to most contemporary ethnographic research that attempts to be critical. Unlike most recent reflexive

scholarship that situates researchers' positionality at the beginning of their work (often in the introduction), supposedly foregrounding the ways in which "their" experience informs their readings of their research, I have chosen to critically discuss my participation and the ways in which my embodiment and my desires are central to the analysis of the data presented throughout the dissertation. I hope that writing the thinking and feeling my way through these experiences will move beyond the common reflexive attempt than just dismissing the researcher's role by "confessing" it early on. My proposed format also allows for a challenge to sociological ways of researching in analyzing both the evidence of experience (Scott, 1993) as well as sociologically legitimized "data" (in this case, archival, interview, and ethnographic data)—following queer of color critique's lead, especially the work by Roderick Ferguson (2004).

I pose that the most recent portrayals of reflexivity are not enough to discuss and interpret other people's experiences. While I have never believed that one can comprehensively interpret and portray the experiences, circumstances, history, and context of the lives of those one studies, I found out throughout this research that unfolding one's own experiences *vis-à-vis* the ethnography at hand provides a clearer sense of how one's history, experiences, circumstances, and context are inherently complicit in the analysis of social scientific projects in the search for "the truth." A recent paradigm social scientists are engaging with in order to address this is autoethnography. While understandings of autoethnographic research vary from writing about the self (Asher, 2001; Ellis, 1995; Tenni, Smyth, Boucher, 2003), theorizing the self (as an individual) in relation to the social (Red-Danaway, 1997; Vidal-Ortiz, 2004) and writing about other members of one's own group (Hayano, 1979; Brown, 2003), I am here using

the idea of living ethnographically to move beyond autoethnography of the self and into a methodological argument fusing autoethnography and interpretative narrative analysis (Behar, 1996). I am thus less interested in blurring the line between researcher and researched as I have in the past (2004) and as autoethnography often does (Culiba, Heimer, and Coleman Petty, 2004), but to use this self-reflexive writing that stretches our understanding of my/the researcher's place in the data gathering, the selection of participants, the coding, and interpretation of such data, as well as one's motives. I thus propose a different kind of autoethnographic writing that is linked to the research and the data—it is, indeed, data—in order to expand the analysis. While writing about the self may be uncomfortable, I find it crucial to better articulate the truths behind research questions and, as argued by Clough (2000), to "turn the sociological eye back to the ethnographer" (p. 179). By going through social scientific ethnographies, I hope to build towards the concept of "living ethnographically." This concept encapsulates the challenges to a sociological thinking that sets up a insider/outsider binary to explain social scientific endeavors without turning the researcher's eye onto Himself and without noting the ways in which traditional ethnographic writings voyeuristically portray those it studies.

This chapter is divided into three sections. I first delineate the need to explore the void of sexuality in the sociological ethnographic imagination. Assumed heterosexuality, attached to a certain asexuality in the field, is the norm of current ethnographies, which undoubtedly taint the analysis at hand. I link my ethnographic fieldnotes to my own sexuality, sexual behavior, and desire, in contrast to this normativity in current ethnographic research in the US. The second part engages with the insider/outsider

illusory distinctions and makes a point for the "living ethnographically," which incorporates but moves beyond autoethnographic writing. And the third section concludes with ideas for what constitutes an "always already there" approach to ethnography, as opposed to the entering and leaving the field triumphant.

1. The void of Sexuality Studies in Contemporary Ethnographies

> *I am at a class with Mitch Duneier at the Graduate Center. He is teaching a workshop on writing ethnographic fieldnotes, where he advises us that one should be oneself in the field. I burst into nervous laughter; and as I get to explain my reaction, I simply say: "If I were to be myself in the field, really, I would be in a lot of trouble." We begin to have a conversation about sexuality and fieldwork, and of course, a lot of it leads towards the oh-so-old "sleeping with your informants." I recognize that there is more to sexuality in the field than just the prohibition of having sex with study participants, yet not much more evolves out of this session. Later on in the semester, Duneier brings a copy of the book* Taboo*, where anthropologists argue for a deeper discussion of the researcher's positionality beyond the "sleeping with your informants" ethics.*
>
> *A couple of years earlier, at the American Sociological Association meetings, I present my MA research, and I discuss the possibilities of heterosexual researchers to sleeping with their informants—and validate their relationships through marriage, either during fieldwork or after. Certainly, there is much left to be said about the value of not sleeping with*

your informants. But there is also something else, about ignoring the sensuality, the desire, the erotics that often play a role, whether implicitly or explicitly, in fieldwork. Meanwhile, I find that the sensuality and overt carrying of sexuality is often a tool for researchers on the field where sexuality is a topic of study. I flirt a lot—in life—and to stop myself from being a flirtatious person means to present a different self on the field. So, while anything else can be counted, can be made permissible, in the "being yourself" experts' advice, why is sexuality singled out as a particular issue? When abuse can be enacted through coercion towards informants (as in interrogation and judgment, instead of interviewing), through not recognizing that certain communities may benefit from economic disbursements as a token for their study participation (as studies in the Village or Christopher Street have shown), or by lying to potential informants by silently gathering data, why is sexuality suddenly the only aspect that stops a researcher from keeping healthy boundaries with participants? (And I am not here simply thinking of sexual acts or romantic relationships, but the gamut of erotic subjectivity: sensuality, desire, and sexual approaching.)

Sociology has activated sexuality analyses throughout the twentieth century in more ways than the classical field (Seidman, 1996). While anthropology continues to write about the study of sexuality (Vance, 1991; Kulick and Willson, 1995) in ways that sociology did not, except through the ethnographies of the Chicago school (Irvine, 2003); sociology developed a critique to psychiatry and sexology which allowed for further

analyses to take place (see, for instance, Rubin, 2002). While sociology has addressed many aspects of research on sexuality, this field remains marginal within the discipline. As well, sex and gender limitations in the sociological enterprise of the 1960s and 1970s were slowly overcome (Warren, 2003). Yet with the exception of the work of Humphreys (1970), sociologists have remained outside *the doing* in sexuality research. That is, identities and narratives of identities are continuously studied, yet sex itself is seldom addressed. (For a significant exception, see Matt Brown, 2003.) When it is, it tends to be framed within the "sleeping with your informants" perspective (Goode, 2002). And like a valve waiting to explode, the tensions within sociological scholarship about "sex" (the actual "getting some" in the field) are ironically always already there, ready to demand some response (Bell, 2002; Manning, 2002; Saguy, 2002; Williams, 2002). Kulick and Willson argue (1995: xiv-xv) that this reflects back into social scientists' selective concerns with their informants and their informant voices—scholars who would otherwise care little about informants' voices and experience are immediately disturbed and need to hear what the researched/researcher sexual activity and interaction has been. In a way, the image of Humphreys "watching" has been extended to a sociological surveillance of what constitutes ethical research, and less about what constitutes useful methodologies (refer to Foucault's (1990 [1978] surveillance discussions).

Perhaps because sexuality is a component of *any* ethnographic work, I foresaw the need to address sexuality—not just because I am focusing on sexuality, or "sexual minorities" for that matter, but because sexuality is an inherent component of ethnographic work, whether acknowledged or not. Many ethnographers are in some way forced to deal with sexuality as an element of their fieldwork, but few decidedly talk

about this in their reporting. Moreover, a lot of the ethnographic enterprise of the twentieth century has focused on racial minorities and marginal sexualities, to the point in which all of these groups fell into the "deviance" labels developed by sociology (as discussed in chapter 2). The ethnographic enterprise as a whole has extended a racialization process that pathologizes ethno-racial minorities' sexuality—especially that of the black male body. Put another way, when gender, sexuality, and race collide, black bodies are regulated through their portrayal of hyper masculinity, virility, and uncontrolled sexuality; white bodies are read as feminine, weak, and penetrable. Even the creation of racial boundaries through sexually "appropriate" behavior has been documented throughout the twentieth century (Donovan, 2003; Somerville, 2000—for a much more basic argument on this point, see Nagel, 2003). While this is part of the unconscious work of ethnographic writing (see Clough, 1998), it is important to point it out. And like others (Mitchell, 2005), I engage with a "methodological shift away from traditional sources of data and forms of writing my interpretations" in hopes to better understand this project (25). This chapter and the previous one together constitute the last part of the dissertation arguments which in this case are focusing on experimental qualitative methods and sociology.

Indeed, it is because of the challenges of the history of ethnographic doing and writing that I move towards an autoethnographically-informed approach. The marking of one's entry into a field as a performance suspends the idea of a reality (Johnson, 2003). "[Our] entrance in the "field" of the ethnographic Other necessarily implicates [us] in the performance of being witnessed," (Johnson, 2003:10) an argument he uses to suggest performance anthropology as a method. This also allows for less fixed notions of power:

"to construe ethnographic practice as, in general, a "fiction" and, more specifically, a practice that is "acted out" or performed, is to liberate it from the assumption that the informant is a fixed object and therefore inferior to the ethnographer" (ibid).

Even in recent ethnographic writings (Waquant, 2004) there are seemingly straight ethnographies about "race" and "class" and the "ghetto" that in many ways encompass sexuality studies. The products of such ethnographies—in Waquant's case, *Body and Soul*—lack the discussion of sexual topics often implicit in much of the writing (i.e., the homosociality, the eroticism of the Other bodies portrayed, the supposed emphasis on sexuality by these Others). By calling into question aspects of the interaction with the researched, or by illustrating homosociality (Sedgwick, 1990) in otherwise non-sexuality scholarship, one could trouble this writing. I write about sexuality—my own and others—in hopes that sexuality studies also become about the study of sexuality and sexual behavior, not just its telling. This brings me to the second part of the chapter.

2. In it, not coming into or going through it

> *As I began to develop my dissertation idea, I was employed at the National Development and Research Institutes in NYC (between 2000 and 2001) in a research project on "Youth At Risk." I routinely attended "sexual minority" venues (sites which included not only gay- and bisexual-identified bars and cruising places, but male and transgender [Male-to-Female] sex workers cruising areas) to discuss the project's quick survey and to recruit participants for in-depth life history interviews. Some of the venues assigned to me were precisely in the area where I lived. One of my supervisors asked me to be cautious about the venues that I visited while*

outside of work. She seemed to think that it is important that I avoid these places where I conducted fieldwork during the week. This in her view influences, perhaps "infects" the field with my presence, as other people have seen me before as a researcher. I engaged in an argument about the intrinsic contradiction of an ethnographer who is culturally qualified to be hired because of his ethnic-minority status and experiences, yet how, simultaneously, this expertise was being evacuated through its objectification as useful only in the working clock.

While insider/outsider discussions have been addressed at length (see, for instance, Clough, 1994; Collins, 1990; Naples, 1996, 2003), I attempt to look at these discussions in relationship to the impact of these experiences on the field. But the inside/outside debates are important to mention, not just because of the politics of who should conduct fieldwork, or whether a minority viewpoint will offer less colonized observations, but because these debates help us rethink the place of the researcher and the ways in which his/her positionality is not fixed or stable. I thus want to move from the idea of representation in the field—who ought to conduct research within given communities—to a deeper reflexivity stand on how to conduct social science studies.

In the previous scenario, I was hired as a "gay Latino," a man supposedly devoted to, and highly knowledgeable of, "minority" youth and their experiences. Thus, I was seen as an "insider" by the management of the project. This, in spite of my views of self as an outsider—illustrated by my recent move into the city, my older age, my non-involvement with the Latino gay scene in the city, and my desire for a scholarly career. Although subtle at times, the class shifting—the mobility to become middle class as an

academic, or an academic "in formation," is often ignored, thus erasing the very same process of middle-class status invigorated in academic traditions, and for Doctoral students in particular (see Baca Zinn, 1979; Pierce, 1995). Although their hiring presupposed some essentialist ideas of community and my participation in it, employment in the kinds of academic and research settings like this one aim at empirical, "neutral" science. This specific goal required that I both identified with an essential "Latino" or "minority" culture while simultaneously limiting or banning any interaction in clubs and gay settings dominated by minority men who have sex with men. In this kind of "objective" knowledge collection, I was expected to keep the data *clean* from any interaction, so that I could keep my researcher biases away from potential participants. Any history of my life and whereabouts needed to be removed from the venues in question—even better if I just did not frequent those venues. Some may understand this as simply an issue of boundaries—yet if you see the contradiction in the ethno-racial and sexual "insiderness" of a researcher, you can see the problematic use of this boundary establishing to begin with.

In the case of *Santería*, I myself did not participate of the venues as a practitioner. I stood in one corner, talked with a few people, and instead of expanding myself, my body, into the setting, I restricted my participation while also restricting bodily movements. I did not dance most times at these events, while the drumming was taking place. I stood still. I helped in whatever ways I could, and always told a practitioner—besides those with whom I came in with—of my research. I also have no formal involvement with the religion: I have not been initiated, nor have I received any of the first *collares* (necklaces) nor *guerreros* (warrior necklaces). Thus my religious status was

clearly that of an outsider. I can write about what I was *not* in the research (Reinharz, 1997: 5), as much as what I was. I can also say that because of my outsider religious status, arranging and conducting interviews with practitioners became a most difficult task, ending in my completion of 17 formal interviews.

Yet if one troubles *Santería* and sees it outside a religious framework, and as a cultural one, my participation as a Puerto Rican interested in the religious practice offered insightful information and access to asking questions and further inquiries. Participants who spoke with me saw my role in the setting as an important one, and offered as many resources as possible. The predominant identification with Puerto Rican-ness among the practitioners and my own undoubtedly helped me access some sites. In addition, given that most of my study participants did not identify as heterosexual, just like me, there was an affinity in my curiosity that others shared as "gays." Thus, this insider/outsider status shifts constantly.

In addition, "one's most salient self (researcher) does not match the "research subjects" or community members' perceptions" (Reinharz, 1997: 4). Perhaps the most salient self also shifts within the fieldwork. What is most important for this insider/outsider discussion is to also note how the researcher's life and circumstances change. The impact of the field on the researcher cannot be underestimated (Reinharz, 1997). I want to add that perhaps the researcher comes into the field always already aware of what he/she is studying and that the field, for some who "live" within the communities one studies, is ever changing, as the following excerpt from my fieldnotes will show.

During the summer of 2003, I am back in a Bronx hospital after having been there a couple of days before with a joint inflammation condition. I am roomed with an old Puerto Rican man—he is in his 60s, a diabetic, with multiple health conditions and double the number of medications, and who speaks little to no English. He is a professed heterosexual married man, as our conversations reveal. His demeanor, in spite of his illnesses, is very jovial and very talkative. Because he does not understand a lot of English, I am automatically assigned (by the nurses, the doctors, but especially himself) the task of translating for him throughout the close to a week we are both hospitalized.

On my first day, I inevitably pick up on a phone conversation he has begun with his wife. A Santero *is supposed to stop by the hospital before or by Sunday. As they speak of this particular* Santero*, he responds to some of her inquiries:* "That's because he is the woman in the relationship. He cooks, and is a little more effeminate; the other one is the one that mows the lawn and does all the manly things." *I am way beyond surprise as to what I am hearing, and begin writing notes about this conversation—not knowing that these will become at some later point part of my fieldnotes. As the days go by, he continues to have these gendered discussions with some of his relatives on the* Santero*, and then on other homosexual men, he knows. He says of this one:* "He is very lady like," *and repeats to another family member, that the* Santero *is simply being the*

woman of the relationship, that the Santero's *partner is the man. I am fascinated by what it means—he has interacted with me and my (homo)sexuality, yet he continues to have these conversations with no reflection of his interactions with me. It is never clear to me by the time I leave the hospital if he knows I am not heterosexual.*

In a most clear recollection of this experience, I can tell how he described the Santero *as "dressing in a womanly way," qualifying it by stating "like African priestesses." His wife shows up and I confirm by talking with them that they both practice* Santería*, and I notice his necklaces with colorful beads and of various meanings representing several* Orishas*. His wife has shared with me, in addition to her deities and personal divination, her ways of praying for the sick, and told me, in addition to her husband, how she had lit a candle for* San Lázaro*, hoping he would interfere in her husband's recovery.*[1] *Sunday, out of the blue, a man in his 40s, with dark skin complexion (who as he comes in begins the often unsettling project of one's/my readings of phenotype as race) a seemingly shaved head, a hat, all in a* Santa Barbara *blue, and black designs, comes into the room. He does not display hegemonic masculinity; in fact, he seems to be very comfortable embodying gendered neutral expressions. He briefly greets me and begins to talk to my neighbor. The hospital roommate and the priest begin to chit chat, five minutes later they pull the curtain dividing us, and begin a ritual that lasts about 15 to 20 minutes.*

[1] For health-related concerns and *Santería* practice, see Varela (2001).

> *I begin to think about how my research forces itself into my life, in the most unexpected ways. Unlike traditional ethnographies, where one comes into a setting and professes to learn and give voice and illustrate the qualities of whatever "underworld" one studies (of some racial, gender, sexual, or overall socio-economic "minority," which is often the case), this project is one where I have carried it with me, or it has stuck with me, wherever I go. For some, this could simply be a matter of chance, an odd meeting of people. One reading I could make of this experience is that it was my destiny—that I needed to take on this research, that some supernatural force wanted me to experience this. Yet I see how such reading would be positioning myself as a 20th century ethnographer—ready to write it, to tell, to share. I fight against it, as it has not been a successful ethnographic story by social scientific standards—but I believe it has to be told… I also fight against it because I don't believe… or do I?*

"Living Ethnographically" emerged as a project when I discovered that I was taking the ethnography with me, as part of my life, everywhere, as opposed to ending it after the interviews. I am in fact not sure that my ethnographic "journey" has ended. In meeting (key) informants in Chelsea, an upper class neighborhood by NYC standards, especially as a *Yabó* (dressed in all White clothing), they embodied a very specific racialization code, mediated through a religiously marginalized belief system. Being with *Yabós* anywhere in NYC makes the research very palpable. In taking the train with *Santeros* on our way to a *bembé*, or living and hanging out with practitioners, or

attending social events where I met practitioners, research became an on-going, everyday endeavor. As well, it implied that this research would be an ethnography of the study of *Santería*, gender, and sexuality, and not simply a set of interviews. This project thus moves from the liberal thinking embedded in "giving voice" to practitioners.

Karen McCarthy Brown (2001), author of *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (1991), problematizes the often accepted view of "giving voice" to participants, as her encounter with Mama Lola after the book's publication revealed the situatedness of the *character* portrayed in the written version. As much as I "locate" the experiences of the participants, it is still within a reductionist approach that creates specific, generic accounts of *Santería* practices. That critique of "epistemological bias" Brown refers to (citing Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble*) is central to mine and of other social scientists' positioning ourselves *vis à vis* the participants we attempt to "understand." My writing of this process undoubtedly recognizes that the presentation of their voices is a reduction of their experience; in particular, in a setting in which their religious-cultural, sexual identity, and national and ethno-racial markers are often seen as marginal. Like Mama Lola, the generous participants of this study have changed—moreover, their experiences are so rich that it is impossible to create a fair portrayal in a few pages. I act as a medium, but unlike the participants, I do not enact the richness of the details of the experience of being possessed; nor do I provide comprehensive accounts of the participants' lives outside of the context of *Santería* practices, which would lessen this objectifying of the textual provision of their experience. The liberal posture of "giving voice" attests to the directionality of most research, which focuses on the marginal, the ghetto (Waquant, 2004), the poor (Duneier, 1999), the sexually deviant, and racial minorities. This is part

of a larger enterprise that works to elevate the researcher in a position of power, emotionally superior to those studied—an often missed point in methodological debates.[2] Just like in many social movements (the White anti-racist movement, the male anti-sexist debates), the position of authority and thus a higher one is held by those who, on the surface, appear to be saviors of a less advantaged group. Instead, recent research (Kenny, 2000; Pierce, 1995) is shifting the study of the marginal and focusing on the privileged. Instead of only offering "what I see" or participants' voices, I engage with the being within the communities researched, to better understand the research, and to reduce this liberal thinking throughout. But I also engage with what it means to have already been a part of those communities before research began through the use of memory.

3. Sources of Desire and Ethnography

> *1992—I remember! On my first visit to New York City, (many, many hairs ago), I stayed with some Puerto Rican friends who lived in Brooklyn. (Five or six years before, I had enrolled in the US Army Reserves in order to travel a bit and to earn money to attend college. Lucky enough for me, our two-week summer training was in New Jersey, in early June. I had decided to stay in NYC for "gay pride" and to visit friends.) We'd all volunteered for the Puerto Rico Stop AIDS Project back in the 1980s. We went to Hatfields—a heavily Latino club in Brooklyn, one of those nights. I picked*

[2] And, even while writing about this, I am still completing a Ph.D., and this writing may still fall within a representation of *Santeros'* experiences. The argument should not be dismissed, however, based on the reproduction of power for the ethnographer; indeed, bracketing the ethnographer's thinking throughout may help situate the relationship of the researcher to the field and to *Santeros*, and complicate the place of ethnographers who may be LGBT-identified, people of color, or in some other way marked as minorities, in academia.

up this young Puerto Rican guy, I remember thinking "obviously a Newyorican," *and with my friend's permission, brought him home.*

My friend was soo good to me. We weren't intimate or close friends back in Puerto Rico, but we used to crack up joking about things—silly things, sexual innuendos, the ironies of the everyday. This young Newyorican was smooth and steamy.… …and of course the difference I saw between us, a "real" and an "imagined" Puerto Rican, eroticized all our interactions. Though I remember thinking—"Who's bringing who back to his roots here?" My friend, who was good to me, offered for us to stay in the bedroom of his apartment. I was surprised, given that I didn't even expect him to agree to bring the guy home to begin with! Perhaps we were all mesmerized with the "black eyes of a Puerto Rican" and the ways in which we all desired him.[3] *Was I bringing him home for all of us to enjoy? Absolutely. I think the ritual of picking one guy out of the group (there were a couple of friends staying with the host that nite who came from other boroughs) did not shatter the desire we all had for him.*

What I remember the most—as a central aspect of unconscious troubling, which will haunt me for a long time as I complete my research on Santería—*is the host's only request. He said:* "cover the *Santa Barbara* statue in the room." "*Los Santos* cannot see sex," *he said to me—a rule I*

[3] From *Dancer from the Dance*, 1978, authored by Andrew Holleran, and as discussed in Guzmán (2004).

was somehow supposed to have known. I could not even carry the Santa Barbara *statue out of the room.* Santa Barbara *is a catholic deity known as* Changó*, lord of lightening and a hyper-masculine* Orisha *in* Santería*, who, according to syncretic views, was hidden by slaves beneath* Santa Barbara's *image. Because I could not carry the statue outside, it was covered, and it stayed with us in the room. I'member. Sex was different because I thought a deity was watching us, watching me, at our primal. Did I begin to believe in* Santería *because it seemed so distant from me—just like the dark eyed Newyorican? Did I always believe in it? Will I ever?*

My friend was very ill. He weighed barely 96 pounds. He had lived with HIV for close to a decade, and had recently been terribly ill. Lost a lot of weight, limped on one leg… Yet somehow the bitterness of his life was so sweet to me. All this ordeal in life and here, he was pretty damn good to his friends. He even managed to tease us now and then. And he acted as a mother—his evident and very vocal experience with AIDS gave him the mother goose authority to tell us. And he told us. And grabbed condoms for us. And scared us with his illness—really wanting our safety. By then, I had met guys who were jealous that some of us didn't have HIV. We, all the youngsters, were so naïve—I can see now how that was annoying. What's robbed from us when HIV is part of the picture. He was not jealous—hell, he brought us to the Brooklyn park, taught me about public

> *sex in NYC—he exercised his wish to continue to be sexual, and I loved him for that. Not because he was "brave," but because he was living. So when he said "Santa Barbara* has to be covered," *with such firmness, I believed him. Or was it that I believed? What is it that I remember from this event? The very beautiful and dark eyes of my Rican buddy? His smooth skin? His kisses? His cock? His butt? Or the mysteriousness I myself attached to the Orisha in the room? Or the tacit bonding between my friend and I? Was it the hope of a better belief? Was it a cultural bonding? It wasn't just sex.… …it wasn't love either. I ask myself these questions, trying to intrude my remembrance with an analysis, every time I went to a* Santería *event, everytime I interviewed a practitioner, or everytime an* Oshún *or* Changó*, as opposite as they can be in their personalities, blessed me with their presence.*

Was I always already there, in the ethnography, living it? Yes, if we think of *Santería* as a cultural expression and not as a marginal religious expression. No, if we think of the lack of my bodily engagement with the practice. Yes, if we bring the unconscious and my own motivations and biases (such as sexualized racializations) into my analysis today. No, in the sense that I was not a participant observer. Yes, because of my curiosity before studying the religion. No, in the sense that I am not a practitioner (the question about being a believer is certainly more complex.) Yet this question helps us move outside of notions like "going native"—if I was always already there, and the field was part of my life culturally, when *Santería* is not exclusively seen through religiosity—then there is no possibility of going into a field that I grew up with.

The role of memory and the motivations for this research are questions I have only began to ask. Yet the analysis of *Santeros* and one's own motivations into a field, and what constitutes a field to begin with, are central questions to the study of "queer of color" sites like *Santería*. Moreover, the impact of the field onto the researcher needs to be better articulated, and autoethnographic writing can facilitate this articulation.

Conclusion

The fact that "desire" in fieldwork is often assumed to be limited to "sleeping with your informants" obscures the complexity of a researcher's life, and that of the participants. Furthering sexuality research must move beyond the need to see the informants as asexual "sources" of information or hyper-sexual; it must also let go of the fear of a deeply concealed sexual predator within the researcher—whose "hidden" character could come out any minute, and requires domesticity. The idea of "sleeping with one's informants" misses a world of research on sexuality that communicates the complexity of dealings with sexuality. The erotics of research, as others have pointed out (Kulick and Willson, 1995), in all the racialized, classed ways in which it may take place, may be a more fruitful way of studying the researchers' positionality.

The *Living Ethnographically* project is a way of addressing a question I often get. Do I think that only some people can or should write autoethnographically? Is autoethnography a method of the oppressed? This question in my estimation assumes that minoritarian populations have not been the authors of autoethnographic writing, yet feminists of color, transsexuals, and ethno-racial minorities have talked back to academia and have even challenged social scientists' liberal stands of giving voice by joining academia and developing academic writings.

The Queer of Color Critique and some other frameworks were theorizing projects unfolding in front of me, just as I was beginning to think about this research—in fact, I remember being at conferences with Chandan Reddy, David Valentine, Gayatri Gopinath, Carlos Decena, Lionel Cantú, Manolo Guzmán, and Susana Peña, and listening to some of the arguments they would later write in their work, now central to mine. I have been reminded how Weber's work on "elective affinities" seems fitting to think of the conflation between methods and theory I began this chapter with, as the "doing" of this ethnography and the "thinking" of it theoretically or methodologically are paralleled worlds going towards one another. I hope to show in the dissertation how these two paralleled accounts informed each other throughout my writing and thinking processes. Instead of thinking of a place as a closed one, and one outside of my self, the "living ethnographically" is intended to reflect the ways in which this research started to live in me, beyond methodological assumptions of traditional sociological ethnographies.

The next and last chapter, the conclusion, summarizes the findings of the study and engages the idea of the term "sexual minorities" through "gender" and "sexuality." It does so by posing a conversation between social scientific ways of knowing like sociology, and Queer Theory's needed conversation with a Queer of Color Critique.

Conclusion: Sexual Minorities revisited

"Sexuality" and "Gender" in Santería*: Towards a Queer of Color Critique in the Study of Religion* has engaged a set of difficult questions: How has the place of "sexual minorities" developed in *Santería*? What are the conditions that create such a vibrant space for "gay" practitioners? What are the historical and cultural reasons for the limitations imposed on practitioners based on sex, gender, and sexuality? How did these distinctions (based on sex, gender, and sexuality) reconstitute a "sexual minority" group throughout the fieldwork? There are significant differences between the ways in which identities linked to the "sex," "gender," and "sexuality" categories are dealt with. While "sexuality" tends to be the least of the limiting entry aspects by *Santeros* (where, for instance, lots of "gay" men would participate), "gender" became a more restricting and regulated aspect (such as the figure of women's position in the kitchen). Also, and in a challenge to some recent scholarship, I argue that scholars such as Strongman (2002) intentionally collapsed "gender" and "sexuality" in order to visibly achieve some rights or space in these settings for those who they see fall within "sexuality"—that is, gay men—and erasing the explicit inequities based on gender. While in the dissertation I argued that gender and sexuality are not so separable within the religious belief system, this collapsing—the formation of certain "sexual minorities" groupings—is actively making the religion evolve and address the multiplicity of populations who remain adamant practitioners. I am making a distinction between the fusing of gender and sexuality in *Santería* by practitioners and the religious system, versus the intentional erasure of gender (and gender-based inequities) being erased by Queer scholars (Conner, 2004, Strongman, 2002).

As well, I specifically situate the figure of the transsexual to "trouble" the relationship between "sex" and "gender" in this research. Out of the sex/gender/sexuality equation troubled by Queer Theory, in the practice of *Santería*, sexuality is made operational with the best of outcomes for those presumably understood through such category; gender is a somewhat restricted category, and when understood to be women and women's roles in the practice, it continues to marginalize some within the practice. Yet "sex"—the assumption that there are two and only two sexes, and the use of an origin, a source of all energy and *Aché*—is unchangeable, and it deeply affects how transsexual people see themselves as potential practitioners in the religion. This dissertation has, in sum, attempted to empirically engage with this "troubling" of the linearity between sex, gender, and sexuality, and assumptions about heteronormativity in a religious setting, itself greatly marginalized.

This setting's complexity leads me to discuss the role of gender and sexuality as analytical categories, and the study of LGBT practitioners' negotiation in these spaces. Many people assumed my role as a researcher was to "liberate" *Santería* from its homophobic and sexist attitudes, by pointing to these as aspects dangerous to the religious practice. I of course assumed a role of critical thought in my research, but I was less interested in participating in the recent discourse that flags *Santería* as a terrible site for LGBT practitioners (i.e., Connor, 2004). It seemed to me, and it still does, that *Santería* offers a great deal of space and that negotiations presume that homophobia and sexism is at work, yet so are elements of resistance. Perhaps *Santería* is a perfect site to study how women and "gays" as sexual minorities resist the supposedly homophobic and sexist structures of the religion, just like African slaves resisted Catholicism, slavery, and

the rape and violence towards them. Of course practitioners may not evaluate these (racial versus gender and sexuality markers) similarly. Neither do I sometimes. Yet as a researcher, I aimed at looking at the ways in which people resolve some of these tensions, and not at the kind of activist demand that homophobia ends. I wanted to suspend the so called homophobia in these sites in order to explore why so many practitioners who are not Latino or African American make no such claim, whereas others do. Perhaps notions of homophobia themselves are differently understood by practitioners of various class and racial experiences; while a lot of white *Santeros* demand that homosexuals be *Babalawos*, for instance, they do not demand that practitioners other than women work in the kitchen. These issues of access to power within the religious structure, and notions of "equality," need to be uniformly addressed in order to become effective. Assumptions that sexism would end by simply allowing "gay" *Santeros* to be *Babalawos* do not hold significance except for those making the demands. Finally, in these situations, one has to ask whether access to a particular role is what these practitioners may want to begin with. In my findings, "gay" people were not horrified by their lack of practice of the religion as a *Babalawo*. Petra, a heterosexually-identified *Santera*, established that she knew she could engage in various roles, but her life circumstances—a Ph.D. student and mother of two— not certain restrictions in the religion, were what limited her development, *at this point in time*, in *Santería.* Thus, a more complex analysis than simply "homophobia" and "sexism" needs to be developed—one where other markers of analysis such as racialization and class are equally studied, in order to move thought about oppression and liberation forward. I hope that this manuscript has begun to do some of this.

I began this document by setting up and discussing some of the categories, communities and identities necessary to set up the study of "sexuality" and "gender" in *Santería.* All the dissertation chapters depended on media material, interviews, ethnographic notes, and experimental qualitative methods in order to study the relationship between those categories, identities, and communities. All chapters, in some way or another, attempted to engage questions of racialization and to link them with sex, gender, and sexuality. Racialization can not be seen outside of the discourses on sexuality, as Queer Theory scholars like Foucault (1990 [1978]) have argued, and other sociologists have discussed (Guzmán, 2004; Ferguson, 2004). The mutual constitutiveness of these marginalities can be seen through the discursive practices of Othering in *Santería,* as the chapter on animal sacrifice showed; or through the imposition of "Latino" pan-ethnicities, which erase political economic issues or nationally-based racialization (especially for Puerto Ricans' erased nationality but hyper-sexualized portrayal in *Santería*); or the ways in which religious-cultural readings may privilege "sexuality" over "gender" and "sex"—and how that gets operationalized in terms of privileging, out of what I call "sexual minorities" in *Santería,* gay-identified practitioners, versus women practitioners and transsexual practitioners.

Reddy (1998) and Ferguson (2004) both illustrate the historical mutual constitutiveness of racial formations and heteronormativity through migration, labor, and housing for marginalized populations in processes during the late nineteenth century or the beginning of the twentieth century. Moving this *Santería* project forward with that critique will require, for instance, an extension of the selective media analysis of animal sacrifice to discussions of how "moves" from printed (beginning 1980) to

cinematographic (late 1980s and early 1990s) to television (since 2000) not only repeat, but through the movies, insert the hyper-sexualized aspects into the religious-cultural practice in the Euro-American imagination. This move can be mapped through each media outlet, so that when we finally arrive to the study of television, that work of interrelating a hyper-sexualized predatory image of vaguely identified people (certainly presented as dark/Black bodies) has already been done; thus, offering a logic to link pedophilia and *Santería* and ethno-racial minorities, and be at least partially convinced that there is a relationship there.

As well, some of the ways in which racialization and sexual formations may be inherently central to *Santería* is in how many new practitioners are perceived by older members as light skinned Latinos, or indeed from non-Afro-Latino backgrounds. In the study of racialization, social scientists often perceive racialization as a process subjects resist because it marks them socially in negative ways. Yet in *Santería,* we may be witnessing the beginnings of a reverse kind of racialization where many light skinned practitioners are beginning to see *Santería* as a positive marker of racialization *through religious practice*. This may be more complex for those "sexual minorities" whose identification as LGBT, for instance, may not mark them in society in ways they want to be seen, but their participation in *Santería* will undoubtedly racialize them—no matter how light skinned they may be. This raises a series of questions to further the constitutive analysis: Are "gays," for instance, wanting to be re-racialized as ethno-racial minorities through the marginalized and racialized position of *Santería* in US society? Could it be that "sexual minorities" are categorized in ways that demand that they seek a different racialization through *Santería?* What does that do to the long-time practitioners, who

may –understandably– see this as a religion of resistance by their earlier African generations? These are a newer set of questions that blend racialization with sexuality and gender discussions and that will help illustrate some of the ways in which *Santería* has continued to evolve.

Because bodies carry histories and those maybe unconscious, the last chapters in particular engage the reader with experimental methods and challenges to what sociologists assume to be evidence in research. Sometimes only descriptions such as those on Chapter 6 can get to the illustrations of sexuality, and how inherently linked to ethnographic portrayals of the twentieth century ethnographer (and *his* Black subject) they are. Both the genealogy of the Queer of Color Critique and the illustration of being "mounted" refer to a certain embodiment of the past: by inherently carrying "gender" and "sexuality" analyses, or by being possessed by *Orishas* that lived an oppressive experience under slavery or colonization. The bodies and energy carried through them exceeds many times the "gender" and "sexuality" categories, but the ways in which we, social human beings understand it, is through categorization.

But bodies are also important in the study of this constitutiveness. The impact of AIDS in communities of color, at once said to dominate "sexual minorities" has a shade of that mutual constitutiveness. The further demonizing of sexual behaviors not framed within gayness (such as the notion of men "on the Down Low") successfully link these processes of racialization and hyper-sexuality as one. Just like Reddy's notion of the physical marginality of queers of color, bodies are read in particular ways, and in turn redirect what is placed onto them back to the discursive practices that read them as such to begin with.

As a non-initiated *Santero*, I had to address my intent to neither marginalize nor glamorize a religious-cultural practice I knew little about. Because of this, part of the study required my suspension of *Santería's* belief system, and a temporary belief in the possession and mounting I often saw in these settings. In order to study the categories in *Santería,* I could not also challenge the religious aspect of possession and the belief in these *Orishas*. While some may see this as a limitation of my research, I conclude that it may have given the study strength to understand how "gender" and "sexuality" played out among practitioners. As well, spirits manifested through bodies were not always in my presence, as I am not an initiated *Santero*, and did not have access to all spaces. Access is also about knowledge, and with my limited information about the religious-cultural practice, I could not see every aspect of a "mounting," or an initiation. I valued this as respect to those who consider *Santería* not only a way of life, but as a religion, and hope it will be recognized that way. I can only suggest that others interested in this study will join me in raising similar questions from their various positionalities.

The history of forced migration and struggles by African slaves throughout the Americas, and the specific role of Cuban history, culture, and migration patterns in the development of what is experienced as *Santería* in the twenty-first century New York also links to bodies and histories. A series of traumas and racialization experiences are evidenced in the deployment of the religion in Cuba and in NYC. As well, the predominance of Puerto Rican practitioners noticed in this study attests to further practitioners' demographics changing, and thus added changes in *Santería* practice, so that when I enunciate a research project with NYC *Santeros,* this enunciation implies the sliding of religious and cultural developments: from Yoruba to Cuba, from Cuba to

Miami, Puerto Rico, and New York, and from predominantly Cuban practitioners to Puerto Ricans. In addition, where *Espiritismo* as a religious force blends with *Santería,* it creates different versions of religious practice. Just like the permutations on the Queer of Color Critique, which have improved an already critical analysis, the *Santería* I observed has evolved to a great point from its origin. Still, there are a set of elements that remain significantly fixed: notions of history, of practice, and of labor continue to be regulated by a set of earlier assumptions. This offers room for criticism *and* praise—a religious-cultural tradition that has foregrounded its need to resist change has eliminated some of its aspects, yet retained others that make it continue to be a haven for the marginalized in many US settings. It was this complexity what I saw in my first *bembé*, and one that continues to fill my self with multiple possibilities and research questions to be sought.

Certain contextual elements cannot be missed in this analysis. For instance, in Cuba, *Santería* is an everyday event, and in the US, it is much more compartmentalized. It could be argued that the US and Cuba's structures of work and *Santería* mediate the role assignment and leadership of *Santeros*, although as a general rule, homosexual men and no women can become *Babalawos*. The fact that *Santería* is so marginalized in the US in comparison with Cuba (where, while it may have had a tumultuous relationship to Castro's leadership and ruling, it is most recently used as an icon of national/homogenizing identity and pride) requires a different reading of *Santería* on US soil. While for instance, some women could become *Oriatés*, in their US practice, it could be listed in their *Itá*, but because of time, affected by work as it is, and could choose not to—and Petra is but one example of these choices people make, vis-à-vis the destiny given in the *Itá*.

Not interviewing *Babalawos* and other heterosexually identified men only shows one aspect of the religious practice. But the link of heteronormativity and the figure of the *Babalawo* needs further explanation, especially in an ever-changing religious-cultural setting like *Santería.* We might be assuming too much of this religious leader, just as have assumed so much of heteronormativity. Of course, more research will help us take a closer look at this link of normativity in the male heterosexual leaders of *Santería*. In spite of that gap, the interviews and fieldwork on hand do reveal a strong religious structure. As well, the absence of African-American and other people of color from the sample gives a very specific Puerto Rican or Caribbean contour to this manuscript's analysis. This may actually give the manuscript a tone of focusing on "Latino studies" specifically; yet I want to stress the tension between Puerto Rican and Cuban studies, and a broader, umbrella "Latino" studies field. While this is a healthy tension, Afro-Caribbean, Caribbean, and Afro-Latino scholarship needs to be also central, as much of the references and studies cited here are not "Latino-"specific, but nationally-bound, or move through those identities towards a "people of color" term.

The bodily experience of the religion—not just possession, but the shaving of one's head when a *Yabó*, the adjustment to all-white clothing during that year, the prohibitions from the *Itá*, the prohibitions/regulations for some practitioners and leaders in the religion, the greetings as denoted in every interaction in a religious setting, these are all very body-oriented and as such, all these markers help recontextualize studies of body and the bodily. Because having sex is an exchange of energy (seen by some as a "dirty" exchange of energy), and especially same-sex sexual activity is seen as a lot of energy (in flow); because menstruation is another strong exchange of (sometimes

conceived as very powerful) energy; and because transsexuality is assumed to be a change of "sex" that needs to be regulated, as the sex (energy) of the practitioner is sacred, these were all interrelated aspects where energy was exchanged, strongly judged as it was, and sometimes dismissed. Sexual activity is often seen as the exchange of energy, in ways that challenge the study of "gender" and "sexuality" in *Santería.* To try to understand either of these markers requires a better understanding of *Santería.* In this sense, my journey of learning about the religion just began. This dissertation is only a primer to the comprehensive type of analysis needed in order to understand not simply the participation and reception of LGBT people in *Santería*, but the ways in which sexuality and gender, along with racialization, are constitutive of some of *Santería's* strongest underpinnings.

I have addressed several complex aspects of the ways in which Queer Theory can be made operational, adding density to the analysis by using a Queer of Color critique that addresses aspects of racialization often missed by Queer Theory. Aspects such as the trauma of forced migration, the ways in which *Santería* becomes a system of mental health to its practitioners, and the mode of using it as a "way of life" and not simply a belief system need further analysis. Yet the Queer of Color critique will offer more light into the abject position of some, while simultaneously engaging in earlier projects held by feminist, feminist of color, lesbian feminist, and Queer theoretical paradigms: the illustration of systems of domination and power and the ending of their invisibility. *Santería* is, indeed, one site where all of these aspects are lived and which enrich our understanding not only of the social world, but the un-worldly as well.

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