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# Human-Animal Relationships in Traditional Healing Methods: A Cross-Cultural Analysis

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The University of Southern Mississippi

Human-Animal Relationships in Traditional Healing Methods: A cross-cultural analysis

by

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A Thesis

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Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts (of Science, of  
Business Administration, etc.) in the Department of Anthropology

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## Abstract

*Limpiezas* are a form of ritual used around the world for healing and diagnosis illness. In a lot of cases, rituals such as these are used with other objects such as bones, flowers, eggs, or animals. Within the Santeria and Andean cultures, *limpiezas* are performed using animals; it is the goal of this research paper to determine why certain animals are used and how they complement the healing process. Research included an exploration of contextual data and cross-cultural analysis of the different populations. It was found that the differences found in the cosmologies of the separate cultures can be referred to describe the differences in the *limpiezas*.

*Keywords:* human-animal, ritual, healing, illness, animal sacrifice

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 2011, I travelled to the Andes of northern Peru, to participate in an ethnographic field school with The Center for Social Well Being in the small community of Carhuaz. During this time, I was given the opportunity to receive a guinea pig healing, otherwise known as *shoqma* or *soba con cuy* in the Andes. This cleansing ritual or, *limpieza*, required a living guinea pig to be rubbed all over my body and subsequently sacrificed. Afterwards the animal's organs were examined and the *curandera* or, folk doctor, simultaneously spoke about the illnesses she found in the guinea pig's body parts. Since the *curandera* primarily spoke Quechua, the head anthropologist of the field school translated her diagnosis to me. She related the illnesses to personal experiences, jealous people from my past, and finally, to my eating habits and stress levels at the time of my visit. I never told the *curandera* anything about my life, or myself; yet she was able to tell me things about my life that I have only spoken about a few times. Some of the experiences she talked about had evidently resulted in *susto* or, soul loss. *Susto* is considered to be a spiritual illness that occurs when a person's soul becomes separated from the body after a frightening or unsettling experience (Browner et. al 1998:685). The *curandera* finally suggested that I receive several more *limpiezas* because I had an extreme case of *susto*. There is no doubt that the experience was life changing and undeniably the reason behind this research

Immediately after the *limpieza* was finished, I began gathering as much information as possible on *shoqma* and its practice throughout the Andes. Eventually, I became interested in cross-cultural examples of *limpieza* rituals and discovered that the



Afro-Cuban religion of Santeria had many comparable aspects. The Santeria culture is a combination of African, Spanish, and Cuban influences that include animistic beliefs similar to those of the Andean culture. It is a syncretism of Yoruba, Catholicism, and Cuban religious systems that formed after slaves from western Nigeria were brought to Cuba.. Therefore, the objective of this thesis was to present a cross-cultural analysis of the similar *limpiezas* found within the Andean and Santeria cultures. References were made to the Inca and Yoruba when their beliefs corresponded with the modern beliefs found in Santeria and the Andean culture. Some goals of the research were to determine why the specific animals were chosen for the ritual, in this case, a guinea pig in Peru and a fowl (typically a chicken) in Cuba; how the animals were capable of absorbing the illnesses; and what their specific roles were during the ritual. The focus was not on animal sacrifice but on the use of the animal as a device for diagnosis and healing since the sacrifice of the animal was a step in the process but not the ultimate goal of the ritual. However, the animal *was* considered a gift to the gods and the sacrifice was essential for the animal to gain the supernatural powers of healing. I propose that a comparative analysis of the individual *limpiezas* will show the similarities and differences within and between the two rituals, along with a thorough examination of the associated cosmological beliefs, concepts of illness and healing, and the history of the chosen animal.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review consists of contextual data on two cultures—Andean culture vs. Santeria culture—that participate in similar *limpiezas* which use animals as mediums for the transference of illness (Morales 1995; Wedel 2004). The data includes a full summary of each culture’s cosmology as well as the current cultural traditions applied to the concept of healing and illness. In consideration of the material on Santeria, there is a detailed account of how Santeria was formed in regards to how other religious systems transformed the original Yoruba culture. Also, due to the destruction of precious artifacts during Pizarro’s conquest of the Inca Empire, the section on Inca cosmology is not as thorough as the section on Yoruba cosmology. The academic field relies mainly on the descriptive writings of Spanish Conquistadors and members of the Roman Catholic Church for information on Inca cosmology and customs, which in itself, is limited because the Inca lacked a written language (Jacobs 1998:1).

In this paper, the term *illness* will most often refer to a physical ailment that resulted from disequilibrium of the spirit, body, and mind. In both Santeria and Andean cultures, there is a holistic approach to illness. Doctors examine a person’s physical issues as well as their social standing and relationship with the supernatural. Therefore, within these cultures, illness is most often a cultural construction that is attributed to an imbalance between the spirit, body, and mind. Contrastingly, term *disease* is often used to describe a physical infirmity that cannot be diagnosed or cured by a curandero (Morales 1995:76; Wedel 2004:47, 109). Last, the term *healing* will be used to refer to any ritual, ceremony, or other traditional method that encourages the spiritual, mental,

and bodily health of a sick individual. This includes, but is not limited to, the effects of animal sacrifice, baths, consumption of traditional medicines, and prayers.

Also known as holistic medicine, traditional healing methods are the art and science behind preventing disease while remaining focused on empowering the patient to take steps toward optimum health. It is medical care that is focused on a healthy integration of the body, spirit, and mind (Wilson 2000). Additionally, traditional healing methods are defined as the summation of “knowledge, skills, and practices based on the theories, beliefs, and experiences indigenous to different cultures, used in the maintenance of health and in the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness.” (Wilson 2000:1) My research though, is focused on a specific healing method known as *limpieza*, or cleansing. There are several different types of *limpiezas*, but they are all considered to be a ritual process that cleanses the body of illness. The specific variety of *limpieza* at hand uses a living animal as the cleansing medium. Other types use eggs, flowers, smoke, oil, etc., to cleanse the person of illness.

The goal of my research is to determine why the animal is used as a medium in the *limpieza* ritual, as well as, how the animal acquired the supernatural capability of absorbing illness. The answers to my questions are found in the cosmological foundations, the current application of those foundations, and how each culture approaches illness and healing through their cosmological beliefs. The aim of the literature review then is to present the formerly listed qualities of both Andean and Santeria cultures as thoroughly as possible.

## THE YORUBA

The Yoruba are a cultural group that originated out of southwestern Nigeria and the neighboring parts of Benin and Togo, a region that is known as Yorubaland (Abímbólá 2006: 25). The philosophical foundation of their belief system is the notion that all life, be it rocks, soil, plants, or humans, is important and worthy of respect (Maynard 2001: 1). The culture was exported to the Americas during the Atlantic Slave Trade and once there it permeated societal thought subsequently leading to the creation of religious traditions such as Santeria and Candomblé (Abímbólá 2006:26).



*Figure 1.* Map of Yorubaland (Matthews 1991).

## *Cosmology*

The Yoruba creation story begins with an ultimate creator known as *Olodumare*, who is the Mother-Father God of all things living and non-living. He is known to maintain distance from humans and therefore is not involved with human affairs. In the hierarchical system of Yoruba religion, *Olodumare*, or owner of the skies, is at the top. He is followed by the *orishas*, or lower spirits, and next by *Egungun*, or ancestral spirits. The next in line is humans, who are followed by plants and animals, and bringing up the rear is non-living things (Caudillo 2007: 3). The category of non-living things refers to anything that is lifeless or inorganic (Brandon 1993:16).

According to Caudillo (2007), this hierarchy is a mere outline of the ideas concerning the complex cosmology of the Yoruba religion. It is relevant to note that the cosmological beliefs within Santeria are very diverse due to the variations of practice from place to place. Therefore, this brief summary of Yoruba cosmology may not grasp the full diversity of the Santeria tradition (Caudillo 2007: 3).

As stated in the Yoruba belief system, everything is surrounded by and made up of a spiritual force known as *aché*. All powers and phenomena, such as *Olodumare* and the *orishas*, are manifestations of this awesome power (Brandon 1993: 16). *Olodumare* sent the *orishas* to form the earth and look over things there. Each one was assigned a task for creation before leaving the heavenly realm. The orisha, *Oduduwa*, also known as *Odua*, created the earth and is considered to be the forefather of the Yoruba people. The remaining *orishas* became the mountains and hills, the rivers and streams, and some renowned trees of Yorubaland. They also became other natural elements such as lightning, wind, thunder, and the ocean (Caudillo 2007: 4).

The Yoruba system of cosmology, philosophy, and divination is recorded in an oral text referred to as *Ifá*. However, there is a written form entitled *Odù Ifá*, “odù” meaning saying (Caudillo 2007: 4; Robbins 1996: 1). *Odù Ifá* consists of sixteen central figures called *Olódù*. Each *Olódù* contains sixteen *esẹ ifá*, which makes a total of 256 divination verses (Washington 2005: 113). According to *Ifá* text, there are two pantheons of supernatural powers competing for the domination of the universe. One consists of the 400 *orishas* who are benevolent toward humans; the other pantheon consists of the 200 *ajogun* who are malevolent toward humans. *Eleguá* is a very powerful spirit that acts as the objective judge and mediates between the two groups. To accomplish his goal, *Eleguá* must use sacrifices offered by humans; otherwise the humans would be victims to the malevolent powers. Thus, it is through the offering of sacrifices that humans are able to resolve conflicts of the cosmos—with the help of the *orishas* of course (Caudillo 2007: 4). A wise woman of the Yoruba religion once said, “If you know the orishas, you know everything. The earth teach(es) you everything, but you must pay your respects to her always...so she will give you all her secrets. And always remember, the secrets of the earth are the secrets of the orishas.” (Caudillo 2007: 6)

### *Santeria*

In the words of George Brandon (1993), “Santeria is a New World, neo-African, religion with a clear dual heritage.” Its constituent traditions include European Christianity, traditional African religion (*orisha* worship practiced by the Yoruba of Nigeria), and Kardecian spiritism, which first became popular in France during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Brandon 1993: 2). In a global context, Santeria belongs to the Yoruba religion and should be recognized as a variant of that tradition, just as there are doctrinal and

regional variants within the Christian, Buddhist, and Islamic religious traditions (Brandon 1993: 1).

In considering the formation of Santería, I must first discuss the Atlantic Slave Trade and how a large percentage of the slaves brought to Cuba in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were Yoruba persons from southwestern Nigeria. According to David Brown of Emory University (2007), 500,000 Africans were brought to Cuba between 1800-1870, and one-third of those were Yoruba (Caudillo 2007: 2). Once in Cuba, the slaves were gathered in two major cities—Havana and Mantanzas. Eventually the slaves would settle in these two cities and undergo the process of establishing a new identity for themselves as Yoruba slaves living in Cuba (Wedel 2000: 29).

The Yoruba people preserved their religion, to a degree, in the *cabildos*, which were societies for mutual aid, religious devotion, and entertainment, established for both free blacks and slaves. The *cabildos* were originally created in Spain, where religious associations were developed to provide their members with religious ceremonies, financial provisions, and quality health care. These associations became *naciones*, or nations, in Cuba. Essentially they were groups of people classified by ethnicity. For example, people from all of the Yoruba subgroups became the *Lucumí* nation; later, some of these nations became *cabildos*. The *cabildos* were sponsored by the Roman Catholic Church and were under the supervision of a diocesan priest (Wedel 2000: 29). The Yoruba people did not assimilate into Catholicism, they simply incorporated Catholic holidays and certain saints into their religion. They would dance and play music in the *cabildos* on Catholic holidays. Although Catholic titles were given to the *orishas*—they are referred to as Santos today—and it is common to be baptized before being initiated

into Santeria, it would be erroneous to call Santeria a form of religious syncretism. There is little evidence of Catholic elements once one delves deeper into the aspects of the religion (Wedel 2000: 30).

During the last two hundred years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *cabildos* began to undergo a significant change. Membership was made available to non-Lucumís, or people not belonging to the Yoruba nation. There is reason to believe that by expanding the *Lucumí* nation to accepting people of other ethnicities, they unknowingly created what is known today as Santeria. The culmination of various African and Afro-Cuban customs and religious traditions must have attributed to the absorption of some of those traits in Santeria (Wedel 2000: 29-30). People would have been living together in the *cabildos*, sharing their experiences with healing, illness, and religion with people from all over Africa. It is in situations like these that people most often come together and combine ideologies and feelings. Another concept from *Ifá* that pervades both Yoruba and Santeria culture is the belief in an ancient covenant between humans and nature. The *orishas* make up many aspects of the natural world, but the respect implied by the covenant includes all “non-living” things as well (Caudillo 2007: 5).

Toward the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, medical services and general health care were scarce across Cuba. Esteban Montejo (2000), a runaway slave, had this to say about the time period: “There were no powerful medicines in those days, and no doctors to be found anywhere. It was the nurses who were half witches who cured people with their homemade remedies. They often cured illnesses the doctors couldn’t understand...the secret is to trust the plants and herbs, which are the mother of medicine.” (Wedel 2000: 30) African healing knowledge then became indispensable, as the majority of blacks and



whites from the Creole population, sought for the healing powers within the *Lucumi* nation. The knowledge of medicinal herbs and ways of healing played a crucial role in the construction of Santeria (Wedel 2000: 30-31).

### *Illness and Healing*

Santeria relates sickness to a world of spirits and to a person's social situation. In this context, illness is prevented and healing is achieved by maintaining good relations with the divine beings (Wedel 2000: 47). In Santeria ontology, there are no sharp differences between the body and mind. This is why the concept of "self" in Santeria culture must be discussed. The self is not only bound to the individual as in Western culture, but may actually include, to some extent, a person's relatives as well. When an illness is cast upon a person who is spiritually strong, it is possible that the illness would ricochet onto a relative instead (Wedel 2000: 109). It is also important to discuss how the self is associated with certain objects in Santeria beliefs. When sorcery is used to cause an illness in another person, that person's name and fingernails, hair, blood, semen, sweat, and/or urine are often used. In this case, it is believed the person's bodily liquids and other bodily elements that have left the body still spiritually "belong" to the person and can be used to direct illness toward them (Wedel 2000: 111).

Illness is frequently described in terms of sorcery and is most often related to envy. When a person has done well for himself and built a stable home, he is at risk of the "evil eye" which is transferred onto a person through jealousy. In other words, someone who is very jealous of you could use the power of sorcery to send negative energies or spirits to invade your life, and in some cases, end it. Illness, then, transpires in the social body and is likewise socially experienced (Wedel 2000: 56).

“Healing in Santeria is achieved through rituals that include divination, animal sacrifice, offerings, altar buildings, music, dance, possession trance, and the use of herbs and plants.” (Wedel 2000: 109) Priests who specialize in divination use the Dilogún Divination System to determine the underlying cause of an illness and recommend advice on how to regain good health. Through each of the sixteen divination signs in the dilogún system, the *santos* “speak” to the priest. The relation between specific *santos* and a *letra*, or divination sign, help the diviner to diagnose the problem because each *santo* is correlated with a specific illness and body part (Wedel 2000: 47).

Through further divination the priest can also determine the origin of the illness. It may reveal that a spirit of the dead caused an illness; that spirit may want the person to fulfill a task or change his way of life. In other circumstances, the source of illness may be an evil spirit sent by an enemy through *Palo Monte* (Wedel 2000: 48). *Palo Monte* is a religious tradition similar to Santeria that originated in the Congo. African slaves were taken from the Congo and also brought to Cuba; their system of beliefs followed with them as usual. Most people use the term sorcery when referring to *Palo Monte*. The term is used in Santeria when referring to small “works” such as mixing powdered medicines and minor sacrifices. Witchcraft is more closely associated with *Palo Monte* and the tradition consequentially carries a negative connotation. However, it is not uncommon for people to practice both Santeria and *Palo Monte*. In addition to that, there are certainly aspects of *Palo Monte* built into the system of Santeria, especially regarding sorcery. The two religions differ mainly on the level of value placed on the Orishas, or Santos. If a person were a victim to evil sorcery by *Palo Monte*, he would need to engage in specific rituals to extract the evil spirit from the body (Wedel 2000: 53-55).

## *Ritual*

A woman who had been sick a very long time finally sought the help of a Santeria spiritist after the medical doctors could not help her. A Santeria spiritist refers to a member of Santeria who utilizes the skills transferred from spiritism into Santeria tradition (Wedel 2000: 52-53). The sick woman participated in a spiritist mass, otherwise described as a ceremony where the spiritist becomes possessed by his *muerto*, or personal spirit of the dead (Wedel 2000: 52, 58). The spirit spoke (through the spiritist acting as a medium) to the woman about her work, her husband, her illness, and basically her life in general. It turns out that the woman had a pretty good life if you considered it without her illness. The spirit then concluded that the woman's illness was the result of an envious woman using sorcery to cast an evil spirit upon her. The spiritist closed the ritual for the day and told the woman to return after a few days to finish the ritual. When the days passed, the spiritist, along with a spiritist group, met the woman in the woods to perform the *limpieza*. The spiritist again became possessed by his *muerto* and the spirit began to cleanse the woman by rubbing a chicken over her body. The chicken was rubbed from head to toe in a downward motion on both sides of the woman's body. The downward motion is important to the idea of sweeping the evil spirit out of the body. The woman was instructed to wear the same clothes for three days and nights and to sweat as much as possible. After three days and nights, the clothes were ripped off and torn to pieces. Finally, the woman was taken to the river, and the spiritist washed her head. Shortly after these rituals the woman claimed to feel much better and, she claims to have not had any problems since then (Wedel 2000: 59).

Two important ideas concerning the roles of sorcery in ritual are included in the former example. One is *limpieza*, or ritual cleansing, which is also the basis of comparison for this research paper. *Limpieza* can be carried out with “herbs and plants, fruits, an egg, a piece of meat, or living fowl.” Any of the previous things can be rubbed over an unhealthy body; and by this process, bad energies inflicted on a person through sorcery, are transferred over to the object. In this particular case of animal sacrifice within Santeria, the animal is not eaten; in other rituals within this tradition involving animal sacrifice, the animal would have been eaten (Wedel 2000: 59-60).

The other important concept is *rompimiento*, or ritual breakage. *Rompimiento* is carried out in serious cases when a person must get rid of a particularly nasty spirit. If the *rompimiento* did not work or the spiritist suggested that you should follow up with a traditional Santeria ritual (as opposed to a ritual which involves aspects not found in the Yoruba culture). The optional ritual includes making sacrifices to two *orishas* who are related to the dead such as *Oyá* and *Yewa* (Wedel 2000: 60).



*Figure 2.* Santeria priest preparing a chicken for sacrifice (Francisco 1970)

### *The Chicken in Yoruba Culture*

Yoruba people consider the chicken to be one of, if not the most, important animal inhabiting the earth with humans. This is demonstrated by the important role the chicken plays in the Yoruba creation story. According to the myth, *Oduduwa* descended from the heavens by a chain, but he came to find that there was nowhere for him to stand since there was only water below. So *Oduduwa* left and came back, bringing with him a small amount of soil in which he dropped onto the watery marsh. He then placed the chicken on the small amount of soil and told the chicken to use his talons to spread the dirt so as to form land for him to stand on. The chicken did as told and eventually there was enough land for *Oduduwa* to stand. This is how the chicken came to be known as the “The Earth-Spreader.” (McCall 1978: 138) The chicken is therefore directly associated with the supernatural as not a only a friend to the gods but also as a tool of the gods endowed with supernatural powers. It makes sense that the chicken would be used in

divination rituals that require the absorption of an evil spirit out of a human body; the chicken is already bound to the supernatural powers and is capable of helping humans by mediating between the two.

## THE INCA

The Inca originated in the Cuzco Valley of Peru around 1150 A.D. At the height of the Inca Empire, it expanded from Columbia to Chile. In one point in time, the Inca Empire was the largest in the world and remains to be the largest to ever exist in the western hemisphere (Clark 2000: 1). The Inca state religion repeatedly emphasized the ritual and hierarchical organization, rather than mysticism and spirituality. As with most agriculturally based societies, the main concern was food production and the well being of people, animals, and plants. A highly structured calendar was created and the proper rites for the various agricultural seasons were carried out accordingly. The *Sapa Inca*, believed to be divine, would facilitate relations with the gods and ask for their help (McEwan 2006: 144).



Figure 3. Map of Inca Empire (Nikki 2011).

### Cosmology

*Viracocha*, the creator, heads the pantheon, with Inti, known as the Sun, following him; and finally, *Pacha Mama*, or the Earth Mother (Jacobs 1998: 1). Viracocha is known to have created all of the other gods as well as all of living and non-living beings. He was believed to have created the humans at the ancient site of Tiwanaku in Bolivia or on an island in Lake Titicaca near the border between modern Peru and Bolivia. There are various retellings of the creation story that is why this is unclear. Viracocha was said to have looked like an old man with a long beard wearing plain clothes and carrying a wooden staff. People were often rude or cruel to him because they did not realize him as

a deity, when this occurred, *Viracocha* would punish those people. Likewise, he would reward people who showed him kindness. At his arrival in the city Raqchi, the deity was treated especially awful and so he called down fire on the earth to punish the humans. It should be noted that there are other versions of this story that include a giant flood and not a fire (Kolata 1996: 65-72). In this particular version, the humans were not wiped clean from the earth, the fire was to merely make them beg forgiveness and recognize *Viracocha*'s power (McEwan 2006: 145). In the other versions including a flood, the humans are wiped out and another group, known to be the final group, of humans are created (Steele & Allen 2004: 18). After the creation, *Viracocha* handed over administration of the earth over to the lower deities and *huacas*, or natural spirits. He was believed to have no longer affiliated himself with humans or their affairs (McEwan 2006: 145).

The Incas adopted the Sun god, *Inti*, and his wife and sister, the moon, as their ancestors. They referred to themselves as *Intip churin*, or “children of the sun.” (McEwan 2006: 145) *Inti* was typically represented as a human with a gold disk face from which rays and flames erupted. Apart from *Viracocha*, *Inti* was the most important member of the pantheon. The sun's rays are essential for life; they provide warmth, and produce crops for the people; therefore making *Inti* an essential god for the well being of humanity (Steele & Allen 2004: 18).

*Pacha Mama* was believed to be a female being that was responsible for all earthly life—the mother of us all. Accordingly, “pacha” means earth and “mama” means mother (Jacobs 1998: 2). *Pacha Mama* was also considered an agricultural deity and was



thus given the responsibility of protecting the crops and was worshipped for aid in fertility (McEwan 2006: 146).

Other deities include *Illapa*, the thunder god, and *Mamaquilla*, the moon goddess. *Mamaquilla* was believed to be the wife and sister of the sun god, *Inti*. She was also associated with the keeping of time and regulation of the ritual calendar (McEwan 2006: 147). *Illapa* was believed to control the changes of weather. The Inca would pray to *Illapa* for rain during drought and protection from floods. He was envisioned as a warrior in the sky who held a sling and wore shining armor; thunder was thought to be the crack of his sling and lighting to be the shining of his armor (McEwan 2006: 146).

Within the Inca world, it was possible to divide reality into three separate realms: *Hanan Pacha*, associated with the sky and the celestial world, *Ukhu Pacha*, the inner earth, and *Cay Pacha*, the realm of humankind that exists on the outer level of earth where deities can mediate with humans (Steele & Allen 2004:19).

Divination was included in the Inca's list of rituals. Everything, including illness, the investigation of crimes, and designation of sacrifices for specific gods, are all answered by consulting the oracles, or *haruspices*. The Inca *haruspices* were known to open guinea pigs with their fingernails and inspect the entrails for signs about future events. They would also do this on llamas and specifically examine the lungs.

Within present day Andean cultures, you can still find people venerating *Pacha Mama*, *Inti*, and several of the other deities. When initiating a new agricultural season or at the inception of a community event, offerings of *chicha* and *coca* are made to *Pacha Mama*. Offerings are also made to her any time there is a ceremony or ritual where one is asking for favors from the Earth Mother. Similarly, the Sun god, *Inti*, is still greatly

respected and paid tribute to by always facing the sun when giving an offering or when performing rituals that seek *Inti*'s help. Mountains, or the *Apu*, are also still venerated for providing fresh water and helping the communities that live higher in the mountains, determine the weather (Jacobs 1998: 9).

### *Illness and Healing*

In the traditional Andean health system, illness is described as a result of “the entry of excessive heat, cold, damp, or wind into the body and the spiritual and physical imbalances that result.” (Greenway 1998) Other causes such as spiritual forces are ubiquitous in Andean belief; and winds, vapors, and geographical locations also have a supernatural quality to them that can cause harm (Greenway 1998: 995). There is also still the issue of sorcery and the effects bewitchment has on the health of an Andean individual. The physiological and emotional imbalances that occur as a result of these situations can disrupt not only an individual's health but also the health of their family, crops, and animals. From an Andean viewpoint, the body cannot be separated from the environment; nor can an individual's health be disassociated from that of the household and community in which he is living. These links to the geographical embodiment of spiritual forces and the spiritual embodiment of social forces are notorious for their alternating effects on the social, physical, economical, and personal aspects of an Andean individual's life (Greenway 1998: 993).

Typically a person will seek the advice of a *curandero*, or folk doctor, in situations involving these illnesses and when home remedies have failed. In today's time, it is rare people living in small indigenous communities to visit a medical hospital before consulting a *curandero* first (Morales 1995:75). In most parts of Latin America, the

supernatural is directly bound to nature in all of its different shapes and forms. A *curandero* uses these different elements of nature to diagnose and cure illness. Their system of medicine is connected to rituals, metaphors, and symbols from their Inca ancestors, in which modern Andean people are most familiar with. A popular ritual within this system of medicine is the *soba con cuy*, or “to clean with cuy.” The *cuy* is known as the guinea pig in most parts of the world and is used in this ritual as a medium for diagnosis and healing. *Soba con cuy* has affectionately gained the title of “the Andean x-ray” because of the guinea pig’s use as a diagnostic tool. During the ritual, the guinea pig’s entrails are examined for the causes of illness (Morales 1995:78). Its popularity suggests that many people turn to this method of diagnosis over a more modern approach. Following is an example of how *soba con cuy* helped heal a ten-year-old boy named Luis (Morales 1995).

### *Ritual*

Luis worked on Saturdays and Sundays carrying adobe bricks on his back for a kilo of brown sugar. He had recently complained to his mother about bad nightmares and overwhelming amounts of anxiety and so she sought the advice of her friend Antonia, who was a well-known *curandera*, or folk doctor. The next day Antonia arrived at their house to perform a *soba con cuy* on the young Luis. It should be noted that under normal circumstances the patient would go to the *curandero* and not the other way around. However, in this instance, the *curandera* is a friend of the family and so she does them a favor by coming to them.

During the ritual, Luis was asked to lie down on floor on his stomach. First, Antonia passed flowers over the young boy’s body to ward off evil spirits and bad

energy. She then rubbed Luis's backside from head to toe with the guinea pig; Luis was asked to flip over and the same thing was done to his front. The last few minutes of this part of the ritual involve application of the guinea pig to the parts of the body that are more susceptible to illness as a result of hot and cold imbalance (Morales 1995: 82).

The next part of the ritual involved the ritual sacrifice of the guinea pig. The *curandera* grabbed the animal by its head and slit its throat. She then skinned it from the neck down; the skinning was done so meticulously that the entire pelt was eventually able to recover the body. Next the guinea pig was submerged in a bowl of fresh water. Antonia watched the body for signs of trembling and the presence of a thin white membrane; the occurrence of those two things indicated that the ritual had effectively removed the fright and cold from Luis's body (Morales 1995).

The final steps taken are by the *curandera* alone. Antonia is burdened with the responsibility of disposing of the dead guinea pig in the correct way. If not disposed of properly, there is possibility of the illness coming back to her (Morales 1995: 84).



*Figure 4.* A *curandera* examining the organs of a guinea pig during a *shoqma* (Lazar 2011)

### *The Guinea Pig in Andean Culture*

Guinea pigs are considered great delicacies throughout the Andean countries as well as an ancient device of medicine and divination. In order to better understand this animal's phenomenal role in Andean society it is important to understand the historical context of the animal. During Inca times, the guinea pig was especially sought after because it was, and still is, one of the easiest animals to domesticate. It also has significant amounts of protein when compared with much larger domesticated animals that have a lot less. The Incas believed that these properties of the guinea pig—easily acquired and extremely nutritious—made it a very important animal that the gods would appreciate. Therefore, during large ceremonies to appease the gods, the Incas would create massive burials and fill them with hundreds of solid white guinea pigs as a sacrifice. The solid white color of the animal intrigued the Incans and they believed these guinea pigs were of a purer nature than the mixed colored ones (Archetti 1997).

Guinea pigs were used in other rituals during this time period as well. In certain cases regarding divination, a shaman would open the body of the guinea pig (some records show that the shamans would often use their fingernails to do this) and inspect its organs for certain signs that could be used to predict the future (Gade 1967). A common procedure practiced during another divination ritual was to blow into a certain vein in the animal's body and the direction of the blood flow would determine the future (Malpass 1996: 107). One of the most important archaeological finds is Silverman's (1997), Feature 89 at the Cahuachi site, dating to the Early Intermediate Period. The cache consisted of 23 individual specimens, some of which had their heads "jerked off and one whose stomach appears to have been slit open by a long incision." The specimen with the

split stomach suggests that guinea pigs were used for divining future events or illnesses in the same way that the ethnohistorical and ethnographic records describe (Sandweiss & Wing 1997:50)

The healing power assigned to the guinea pig is both a means of communication with the supernatural and an offering in exchange for a favor or to appease nature's wrath (Morales 1995:93). Although, reconciliation cannot be accomplished by a direct communication between man and the supernatural; creatures given to the humans by the gods must be used to mediate the Andean's man communication with them. The guinea pig is one of these creatures that has the power to appease the gods and therefore helps to bind man to the supernatural (Morales 1995: 97).

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

Cross-cultural analysis is the comparative study of thought and behavior within at least two different cultural populations (Vijver & Leung 1997: ix, 1). During the past decade, there has been an increase in the amount of cross-cultural studies being conducted in social and behavioral sciences. The increased interest is attributed to the opening of previously sealed international borders, the globalization of the economic market, international tourism, increased cross-cultural communication and modern technological advancements such as new telecommunication systems (Vijver & Leung 1997: xi). Vijver & Leung (1997) note that the increase in interest is not credited to an increase in scientists willing to devote their time to cross-cultural studies. Rather, he argues that cross-cultural studies are actually a natural, modern extension of the intracultural analysis done previously by social scientists (Vijver & Leung 1997: xii).

The task of the cross-cultural researcher is to examine and interpret cross-cultural differences. Maintaining awareness and control of bias during the research process is an important element of cross-cultural research because the method has been criticized for being more susceptible to bias due to its broad and somewhat ambiguous nature. Since bias is one of the greatest milestones in all research, not just cross-cultural, it is especially encouraged within cross-cultural studies for researchers to scrutinize biases at every level of investigation (Vijver & Leung 1997: 5).

The cross-cultural methods undertaken in this study would be considered a small-scale, holocultural analysis (Kinzer & Gillies 2009). In this methodology, cultural characteristics are taken out of the context of the whole culture and are compared with

similar cultural characteristics in widely diverse cultures to determine patterns of regularities and differences (Kinzer & Gillies 2009:). Typically, holocultural analysis or, world-wide cross-cultural analysis, involves the comparative study of ten or more cultural populations from at least three different geographical regions. The comparative analysis conducted in this study only included two separate cultures from two different geographical regions. Similar cleansing rituals found within the different cultures were isolated and subsequently examined on the basis of animal sacrifice during the ritual. The similarities and differences between the rituals were then interpreted through a comparative analysis of cosmological beliefs, concepts of illness and healing, and the historical context of the animal that is most often used during the rituals. Specific research questions used to guide the analysis include:

1. Why are specific animals chosen as mediums for the transference of illness?
2. How then, once chosen as a medium, does the animal acquire supernatural healing powers?
3. What is the primary role of the animal during the ritual? Is it diagnostic or curative in nature? Or both?

Once an explanation was given for each of the former questions, the differences and similarities were interpreted through an analysis of differences and similarities also found in the cosmologies, concepts of illness and healing, and the history of the sacrificial animal within each culture.



## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

Results were reached by exploration of the contextual data presented in the literature review and a cross-cultural comparison of the two.

#### Q1: Animal mediums

The first question was focused on why specific animals were chosen as the transference mediums during the *limpiezas*. Surely, the animals were selected by criteria based on availability and domestication; but one would also assume that the animals were chosen because of symbolisms relating to the individual animals. For instance, chickens, within Yoruba culture, are believed to have pre-dated the creation of the earth and were subsequently considered sacred beings by the Yoruba people. Olodumare appointed the job of earth formation to the chicken because of the fowl's habit of kicking up dirt. In the actual creation myth, the Great Sacred Yoruba Hen was described as having five toes instead of the normal three, which under analysis today, illuminates the emphasis of the chicken as a supernatural being within Yoruba culture (McCall 1978; Atteh 2003:11). Additionally, sacrifices were used to appease the gods. Instead of using other non-living objects such as eggs or wine, they use a chicken that can be sacrificed in exchange for a favor from the gods. However, the chicken may be the most widely used and praised fowl within the Yoruba culture, it is not the only animal sacrificed during *limpiezas*. The Yoruba are guided by their choice of what to offer by what *orishas* they are presenting the offering to. For instance, *Ogun* is fond of dogs, palm wine, roasted yam, and snails. Also, the materials of sacrifice hold symbolic meaning, as mentioned the chicken is associated with life and creation, but the dove is associated with good luck and longevity.

Therefore, it is possible that a different animal may be used in the *limpieza* based on either of the former aspects; although, it is the chicken that is most often used (Omosade 1973:86).

Similarly, in Andean culture, the guinea pig is considered a food delicacy for its high amounts of protein and it is praised for its domestic role because it very easy to care for. Understandably, the Incans believed these traits made the guinea pig a good sacrifice for the gods. Additionally within Andean culture, only domesticated animals were eligible to be sacrificed. It was a requirement of the sacrificial ritual to offer an animal that was given to the people for food and health back to the gods in order to receive aid and protection from them. Historically, the guinea pig has been used in divination rituals since before the Inca, and so, it remains to be a familiar aspect in ritual practice today (Morales 1995).

The same can be said about the chicken in Yoruba culture, the fowl has been used in their divination rituals for centuries. Also according to Yoruba beliefs, an animal offering to the gods must be a domesticated animal. Although this is similar to the Andean *limpieza*, there are certain variances between the reasons the animals are chosen for the ritual. In Yoruba the chicken is directly associated with the supernatural through its role in the creation myth; association with the supernatural makes the chicken an irrefutable offering for the gods and it would most certainly be sufficient to appease the gods. The guinea pig, however, was given mystical powers because it was easily domesticated, had considerable health benefits, and a long history of sacrifice. According to Eduardo Morales (1995), author of *The Guinea Pig: Healing, Food, and Ritual in the Andes*, a direct communication between humans and the supernatural cannot be

accomplished in conjunction with Andean beliefs. Therefore, the guinea pig is used as a mediator between the gods and the *curanderos* performing the rituals (Morales 1995:97).

#### Q2: Supernatural animals

Next, there is the question of how the animals gain their supernatural powers. In the case of both cultures, the animals are given their powers through their association with the supernatural. It is how the animals are associated with the supernatural that distinguishes the cultures in this aspect. Yoruba people believe that the chicken is inherently supernatural because its creation predates the creation of the earth; the guinea pig, in accordance with Andean beliefs, acquired its supernatural powers through its repeated victimization as a sacrifice for the gods and its health benefits (Atteh 2003; Morales 1995) Also, during Santeria cleansing rituals, the priest is possessed by a spirit; the spirit grants the priest the power to utilize the fowl's absorption capability. If the priest were not possessed by the spirit, whether it be an ancestor, deity, or lesser spirit, he would not be capable of using the chicken in such a way. It is not the same for Andean *limpiezas*; the guinea pig is considered a mediator between the gods and humans, and therefore, it is only the guinea pig that acquires powers from the gods in exchange for its sacrifice. In other words, during *shoqma*, it is not necessary for a *curandero* to be possessed because the guinea pig can mediate with the spirits on its own.

#### Q3: Animal roles

Among the other things, *limpiezas* found in Santeria and Andean cultures, also differ in the distinct roles of the animal during the ritual. In Santeria, the chicken is used strictly to absorb the evil spirit from a person's body. In this case, the illness has already been diagnosed and the chicken is being used to cure the person. There are other rituals

that determine the cause of illness, along with divination rituals that tell what the illness is and where it came from. During an Andean *limpieza*, the guinea pig is primarily used as a diagnostic tool. However, it is possible to use the guinea pig to heal people; it depends on the *curandero* and whether he believes the person should be cured or if an illness needs to be diagnosed. The guinea pig absorbs the illness of the person and is sacrificed and autopsied to determine what the illness is, and if the illness has already been diagnosed, the guinea pig will be used with the intention of completely removing the illness from the body. The fowl is never autopsied in Santerian *limpiezas*, after the animal is sacrificed, its body is disposed of in a particular manner and the ritual is considered to be over (Morales 1995; Brandon 1993).

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Similarities and differences found between the cosmological foundations can be referenced to explain the differences found between the *limpiezas* performed by people of the Santeria tradition and the Andean culture. These cultures are similar in their beliefs about the universe and the roles that humans, animals, and gods play within the universe. Both cultures have the belief that there is a “soul” within every living being that makes it possible to receive such supernatural healings as the *limpiezas* (Morales 1995). The same soul, or spirit, makes it possible to fall ill due to unnatural illnesses as well, such as *susto* and *mal de ojo*. Without this essential spiritual component, the *limpiezas* would not fit into either of the cultural systems, both of which are based on the belief that gods embody nature and a harmonious relationship with these gods is vital for survival (Caudillo 2007; Morales 1995).

However, the cultures differ in one very crucial aspect, and that is the evolution of the cultural system. Santeria is a syncretic religion that consists of elements from several different cultures. For instance, spirit possession is required in the Santerian *limpieza* and this is due to the spiritism elements within the culture. Spiritism is a folk system based on the belief of a world of disembodied spirits that are able to interact and communicate with people (DuBray 2001:17). It is the spirit within the *espiritista* or, spirit medium, which is capable of mediating with the deities and subsequently harnessing the supernatural capabilities of the chicken as to cleanse a person of an evil spirit (Brandon 1993).

In contrast, the Andean culture consists mostly of beliefs based on Inca cosmology and way of life. The Incas praised the guinea pig for its many good uses and hence the guinea pig's role is much more sophisticated than the chicken's in the Santerian *limipieza*. According to Andean beliefs, it is the guinea pig that holds the power to mediate with the gods and likewise it is the guinea pig that holds the power to absorb an illness from a person's body (Morales 1995:97). Also, there is a scientific element to the Andean *limpieza* that is not found with the Santeria version. In the Andes, the guinea pig is opened up and the animal's organs are examined for physical signs of illness. This practice is similar to a divination ritual practiced by the Inca that entailed a shaman opening up the guinea pig and inspecting the organs for signs that could help foretell the future. In *shoqma* however, the guinea pig's organs are inspected for signs of illness, and any signs that do show up are associated with illness and not the future (Morales 1995).

Research has been conducted on *shoqma* recently from a scientific perspective that supposedly explains how the guinea pig actually absorbs the illness into its body. Dr. Victor Reyna Pinedo, a chemist from the National University of Engineering in Lima, observed 500 different *shoqma* rituals and compared the results with biomedical diagnosis (Mayorga 2010). What he found is extremely interesting, in the majority of his cases, Dr. Pinedo found that the illnesses found in the guinea pigs were almost always the same diseases diagnosed by medical doctors. He explained the phenomenon as the result of chiral biophotons being transferred from the human to the guinea pig. According to Pinedo, biophotons are emitted from DNA molecules, and DNA in this case, acts as an antenna for reception and emission of biological signals. An exchange of photons that

maintains a consistent and steady rate will result in cell and tissue level communications and changes (Mayorga 2010:1).

Another similar aspect of the *limpiezas* is the disposal of the animals' bodies after the ritual is over. In both cases there is a belief that if the body is not properly disposed of then the illness can return to the person or to the healer who performed the ritual. However, they are different in one respect; people of Santeria believe that it is a spirit that will return to possess the other person, whereas it is only the illness that returns to the person in accordance with Andean beliefs. The difference correlates with the cosmological beliefs of the individual cultures. Yoruba people believed that *orishas* could possess a person and as mentioned, Santeria combines Yoruba beliefs with others such as spiritism; and therefore, it was most definitely these beliefs in spirit possession that initiated the belief in a spirit returning to a Santeria priest if he had not disposed of a sacrificed fowl correctly. Likewise, illnesses such as *susto* in Andean culture are supernatural because it is repeatedly described as transferring itself to others as a result of incorrect ritual practices, or in this case, incorrect disposal of a sacrificed animal.

One of the greatest criticisms of this type of cleansing ritual is the topic of the placebo effect. Many scientists argue that it is actually the placebo effect and not the animal's ability to absorb illness that is causing the positive results in the patients. Generally defined, a placebo is an inert substance or object that has no medical use whatsoever (Rajagopal 2012). In *limpiezas* then, the placebo would be the animal that is used to absorb illness; critics argue that the animal could not possibly absorb such things from being rubbed across a person's body. However, more research like that of Dr. Pinedo would be beneficial to the counterargument against the placebo effect since

Pinedo's work shows evidence that the guinea pig does indeed absorb illness from a human (Mayorga 2010).

Further research may also show different studies like Dr. Pinedo's where a different animal is used, such as a chicken. Also, participant observation in Cuba and the northern Andes would improve the data collection by supplying primary data instead of only contextual information on the separate cultures. I would like to continue work on this research project during graduate school and visit the countries of these fascinating cultures so to gain the primary data needed for a more thorough research project.

This paper contributes to the small amount of literature that pre-exists on the use of animals in *limpiezas*. Especially when considering the amount of literature on *soba concuy* that is in English, there is very little information out there. However, I am in no way claiming there is no literature on the subject, only that there is very little, and the information gathered in this research paper will significantly add to the understanding of how *limpiezas* are conducted and their cultural meanings. Also, I believe this paper gives light to how many cultures share similar practices and how ethnologies can contribute to a more accurate perception of different cultures.



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