

SYMPOSIUM ON IMMIGRATION AND ALTERNATIVE HEALING SYSTEMS

Organized by the Immigration and Health Initiative (IAHI)

**Urban Public Health Program, The School of the Health Sciences, The Schools of the Health Professions
Hunter College of the City University of New York**

Dr. Anahí Viladrich

Presenter

Anahí Viladrich is a medical anthropologist and sociologist of Argentine origin. She is currently a faculty member at the Urban Public Health Program and Director of the Immigration and Health Initiative (IAHI) at Hunter College, CUNY. Viladrich holds two Master degrees in the US (from the New School University and from Columbia University) and a Ph.D. in Sociomedical Sciences from Columbia University. She has published extensively on gender, health, and immigration in both her home country and in the US. Her work has received numerous awards, including the Marisa de Castro Benton Prize and Distinction, both awarded by Columbia University in 2003 for her PhD thesis on the role of social networks in assisting Argentine immigrants to overcome access barriers to health care in the US. More recently, her interest in immigrants' global networks has led her to examine the role and importance of ethnic enclaves and artistic diasporas (e.g., the tango world) in the resolution of immigrants' needs. With the support of the Russo Gift and two PSC CUNY grants, she launched the Immigration and Health Initiative (IAHI) in 2004, aimed at developing expertise, research, and teaching in the field of immigrant health. One of the IAHI's more significant accomplishments has been the Latino Healers Project, an ongoing ethnographic study on the healing beliefs and practices of Latino folk healers in New York City.

Objectives of the presentation

- Provide a multi-level conceptual model for the analysis of Botánicas as complex healing-religious systems.
- Identify Latino immigrants' models of disease causation and treatment, which involve the physical, mental and spiritual realms, as distinctive but interconnected spheres.
- Highlight the need for more complex approaches to Latinos' healing beliefs and practices, including the assessment of both collective and individual healing paths.

Abstract: Botánicas in America's Backyard: An Agenda for Research

Based on an ongoing study on Latino healers treating Latino immigrants in New York City (NYC) this presentation will introduce a multi-level conceptual analysis of the role of botánicas in serving the Latino immigrant population in the city. Botánicas are ethnic-religious healing stores that provide fast, affordable, accessible and culturally meaningful products and services to their clients. Botánicas' multi-purpose products tap into the body (material), spiritual and mental realms, which are complementary with biomedicine. Four aspects will be explored, including the role of botánicas as: a) *trans-healing systems/ethnic-religious stores*; b) *informal community/religious centers*; c) *invisible pharmacies* that sell herbs, roots, potions, etc. for the treatment of diverse health conditions; and d) *therapeutic spaces*, where Latino healers provide "consultas" (consultations) either on the premises or in other venues. Viladrich's presentation will finally highlight the importance of developing conceptual models on Latinos' elaborated etiologies of health and disease, including reliance on spirituality and religiosity as a holistic and integrative method of healing.