
***El elemento cruzado en el espiritismo cubano. Su
manifestación de identidad cultural en Guantánamo***
***The crossover element in Cuban spiritualism. Its
manifestation of cultural identity in Guantánamo***

Luis Alberto Pérez-Leyva

Universidad de Guantánamo, Cuba

Correo(s) electrónico(s)

albertopl@cug.co.cu

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8874-1502>

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Resumen

La mezcla del catolicismo, el espiritismo kardeciano y las prácticas de los cultos africanos originó el espiritismo cruzado que constituye la mejor expresión de la transculturación desde el aspecto socio-religioso, cataduras culturales que fusionados o mestizados derivaron en una confluencia de sentimientos, costumbres y hábitos que van tejiendo la historia de la nación cubana, fenómeno que llega a nuestro días. En este sentido, se destaca la impronta dejada en Guantánamo por la práctica de esta manifestación religiosa que conserva los elementos culturales legados por nuestros ancestros y que es objeto de esta investigación.

Palabras clave: Catolicismo; Espiritismo kardeciano; Cultos africanos; Espiritismo cruzado; Identidad cultural

Abstract

The mixture of Catholicism, the Kardinian Spiritualism and the practices of the African cults originated the Crossed Spiritualism that constitutes the best expression of the transculturation from the social-religious aspect, cultural tastes that fused or mixed derived in a confluence of feelings, customs and habits that are weaving the history of the Cuban nation, phenomenon that arrives to our days. In this sense, it stands out the mark left in Guantanamo by the practice of this religious manifestation that

preserves the cultural elements bequeathed by our ancestors and that is the object of this research.

Keywords: Catholicism; Kardinian Spiritualism; African Cults; Crossed Spiritualism; Cultural Identity

Introduction

The study of the elements of cultural identity that gave origin to the Cuban nation constitutes a necessary reference to know the significance and scope of the Cuban Revolution. The main manifestations of the material and spiritual culture of Cuba are linked to the historical process of formation and development of the society that goes from the settlement, the colonial period, the stages of the struggle of national liberation, the victory of the socialist revolution and it extends until the present time.

The challenges imposed on Cuban society by neo-liberal globalization and the iron consequences of the US economic blockade place the issue of identity in a privileged position.

In the aspiration to defend these conquests, Guantánamo possesses a deep cultural arsenal that facilitates a constant renewal and enrichment of its identity, while justifying its capacity for resistance. The cultural identity of the Guantanamo is the result of a long process of historical evolution that continues to this day. The deep mark left by cultural syncretism, especially in the religious aspect, which has undoubtedly contributed to the cultural identity of the nation and in particular of the land crossed by the Guaso River.

The Province, in this aspect constitutes a territory rich in identity expressions from the ethnic-cultural fusion, which in diverse fields took place, especially in the religious aspect, from the mixture of Catholicism with the African religions and the Spiritualism that emerged from France, to give as a result a religious phenomenon known as crossed Spiritualism.

In this research, it is emphasized the study and knowledge of Afro-Cuban cultures, which in synthesis are the mixture of colonizing Catholicism, which resulted in the practices of diverse cults that were the center of the formation of Cuban nationality.

Within these cults, the crossed spiritualism constitutes the best expression of the transculturation of these cultures, which, fused or mixed, derived in a confluence of feelings, customs and habits that are weaving the history of Cuban nation in its most intrinsic aspect of cultural identity, phenomenon that arrives to our days.

In this sense, Cuban researchers have deepened in the trace of Afro-Cuban cultures, such is the case of Ortiz (1940, 1976, 1987), Barnet (1966 and 2011), James (1998, 1994, 2001), Guanche (2005, 2009,

2011 and 2015), Cabrera (2014), and others, whose works are prolific, among which stand out Bolívar (1990) and Martínez (2007, 2010, 2015).

In spite of the studies carried out on these topics, there are still paths in the field of research and religious practice itself to be followed and there are limitations that close, in many cases, the way to the knowledge of a sensitive and indissoluble part of our history, showing insufficiencies in the knowledge of the practice of cross spiritualism in Guantanamo in a wide sector of society that goes from the very religious of these cults that unconsciously do not recognize it with this terminology. Also, insufficiencies are appreciated in the treatment to the classic works of the Spiritism, as well as of the subjects that in general form; treat the contents of the Afro-Cuban religions.

The essential problem lies in approaching, from a historical-sociological approach, the knowledge of the practice of Crossed Spiritism in Guantanamo as a manifestation of cultural identity, with the purpose of designing a characterization for the knowledge of the practice of Crossed Spiritism in Guantanamo as a manifestation of cultural identity. For this purpose, theoretical methods were used such as analysis-synthesis, induction-deduction, historical-logical and from the empirical level the participant observation, focused interview, survey and the ethnographic method.

Development

As for the magical-religious notions sustained by the Neolithic communities in general, the assistance to the dead, whose origin goes back to the Paleolithic age, which must have acquired a deeper significance in the Neolithic age, stands out.

The dead were carefully buried in built or excavated tombs, either grouped in cemeteries near towns or dug near individual houses; normally the dead were provided with utensils or weapons, vessels with food and drink, and other personal items. Such assistance denotes an attitude toward the spirits of the ancestors, which goes back to the most ancient periods. However, the ancestors considered the land on which the ancestors rested to be the soil from which the food supply magically flowed every year.

The biblical passages also focus on various interpretations of ancestor worship, such as:

2 Chronicles 16:14 ... And they buried him in the sepulcher which he had dug for himself in the city of David, and laid him upon the bed which he had filled with spices of divers kinds, mingled according to the art of the perfumers; and they lighted a very great fire for him.

1 Kings 13:30-31. And he laid the body in his own grave, and they mourned for him, saying, Alas, my brother! And it came to pass, when he had buried him, that he spake unto his sons, saying, when I am dead; bury me in the sepulchre where I am

These postulates demonstrate that from the most ancient times, man has worshipped his ancestors. In this sense, our people assimilated this custom from the legacy of the African peoples enslaved in the Americas, Africans and their descendants mixed not only among themselves to be able to understand the diverse languages of the different African peoples punished by the same oppressor and united by the same end; the freedom of the slave regime from oppression.

In 1854, in Paris, France, the spiritualist Allan Kardec devoted himself to the study of paranormal phenomena, in particular, to the manifestations of the revolving tables. The explanations of the causes of these phenomena, as well as the philosophical system, laid the foundations of spiritualism; his researches were the basis of the publication in 1857, of *The Book of the Spirits*, this volume supposes the beginning of the contemporary spiritualist movement.

Spiritism arrived in Cuba in the second half of the 19th century, approximately during the Ten Years' War against the Spanish colonial power. The new spiritualistic ideas came from the United States and Europe, particularly from France.

Most of the population practiced a popular Christianity that was moving away more and more from the dogmas of the Catholic Church. This was the fertile soil in which the seed of Spiritism took root in our country.

Martínez (2007), states that Spiritism made its appearance in Cuba in 1856. Already between 1887 and 1889, the first spiritualist publications appeared in the cities of Santiago de Cuba, Havana and Camagüey.

In Cuba, there are three variants of Spiritism: the scientific or modern or also called table spiritism, which is mainly located in the western part of the Island; the cordon spiritism, which is very syncretized with the Catholic religion and is basically present in the areas of Bayamo, Manzanillo, Holguín and Camagüey; and the so-called crossed spiritism, which is the object of this research, where elements of Catholicism, Santería and the conga rule appear, located in some areas of the eastern part of the country.

Particularly in Guantánamo, the crossed spiritualism has presence of elements of the Haitian voodoo that is characterized to incorporate to its rites, elements of the Catholicism with elements of the Santería and the Palo Monte.

All the spiritualistic aspects that have been mixed in Cuba to the Afro-Cuban pantheons and Catholicism resulted in the so-called Crossed Spiritualism. Among these are included those who call themselves independent or on their own account, who even say they are far from the cults of African

origin. They, for lack of knowledge or guidance to introduce them in the matter, probably have not achieved an evolution within the known rites, but under their intuition they use a manual to throw the cards or any other method, such as saying the horoscope that so much captivates, they also learn to divest or sanctify with beneficial healing purposes. There have even been cases in which, by calling themselves Christians, because they are supposedly touched by the hand of Jesus Christ to heal and Christianize in his name, they create Temples that specialize in a type of evangelizing or Christian spiritualism that is very different from the practices and beliefs of the Christian religions that are separate from the Catholic Church of Rome, and which many confuse because they are eager for hope, needing help, and thirsting for company and faith.

According to Vizcaino (2009), these beliefs have now become so widespread that most Cuban spiritualists, even if they do not know it, are crusaders because they have been mixed with all the doctrines they are finding and continue to evolve and multiply, both in Cuba and abroad.

The crossed spiritualism, in its wide diversity of expressions, crosses all the manifestations of the Cuban popular religiosity by its inclusive quality, from the transformed vestiges inherited from the original Aruacan communities, to the practices of Hispanic, African or other cultural expressions. (Guanche 2013)

In the image 1, it is appreciated the religious syncretism present in the Cuban social imaginary where elements of Catholicism and African religions are present, in Cuba becoming like Santería and Palo Monte.



Image 1: altar representing Cuban religious syncretism.

Elaboration source: taken from: <https://www.google.com/search?q=sincretismo+religious>

In this order, the characteristics of this trend of popular religiosity are typical of the cultural identity of the Guantanamo. Cultural identity: the result of a synthesis of different cultural elements coming from

the Amerindian, European and African societies, which in their conjunction would produce a mestizo cultural synthesis. (Vergara, 2005).

This manifestation of the popular religiosity in Cuba, presents peculiar characteristics when assimilating in its center an ample syncretic cultural aspect of other religions. The syncretism that as a result can be appreciated in the religious phenomenon of crossed spiritualism, is a mixture of ethnical-cultural elements that can be decomposed in its initial members on the basis of cultural crossbreeding to the Creole-Hispanic-African synthesis, where the initial limits of the original cultures disappear to produce a new quality: the Cuban, with its corresponding impact on cultural identity.

Cultural identity includes aspects as diverse as a community's language, value and belief system, traditions, rites, customs or behaviors. This set of particularities, heritage and cultural heritage of the community, is what has historically defined the cultural identity of peoples.

The cult of cross spiritualism assimilated from Catholicism its beliefs and superstitions, the faith in the saints, as miraculous figures in themselves, and which synthesize the syncretic processes that have taken place. Belief in souls of the dead, ghosts and appearances, and the possibility of their communication with human beings. Even, at a popular level, it is widely spread in the Cuban people the regular visit to the cemeteries to attend the mortal remains of the deceased relatives, besides dedicating to them flowers and glasses of water in front of their portraits in the homes. Masses for the dead are also held in churches, with the purpose of propitiating the rest of their souls. On the other hand, there was an assimilation of certain elements of the ritual practices of the worship to deities and ancestors of the different magical-religious systems of African origin in Cuba, especially the worship to the ancestors. From the Regla de Ocha, transcultural and syncretic product of Yoruba practices to the ancestors and orishas in Cuba, the crossed spiritualism assimilated elements of the ideas and magical-religious representations about deities and ancestors, the image that is shown evidences the syncretism that was produced between Catholicism and the diverse elements of African religiosity in Cuba. A transcendent aspect occurs with the Catholic Virgin of Regla, very venerated in our country, whose cosmological scope comes to syncretize with other creeds of the African religiosity practiced in our country as shown from left to right; in the center is Mother of Water in Palo Monte and in the far right



Representation of Francisca.



Image 2: (Virgin of Catholic Rule) (Mother of Water in Palo Monte) (The typical African Francisca)

Source of elaboration: taken from: <https://www.google.com/search?q=sincretismo+religioso>

In this manifestation, greater emphasis is placed on magic, elements such as tobacco and liquor are used, the drum is used in festivals in homage to the saints and coconuts and snails are used as a divination system, in addition to the specific procedure of questioning the protective spirit.

In this variant of spiritism, the individual consultations to people acquire great importance in which the solution to their problems is looked for, it maintains like part of its ritual the spiritual masses made in honor of the deceased, in them offerings of candles, flowers, perfume and glasses of clear water are made invoking itself thus with the purpose of giving light and causing that it has a favorable evolution in its new life.

Other important rites are: the one of sanctifying, the baptisms and the offal, for its realization are used elements like glasses of water, perfume, flowers, crucifixes, holy water of the Catholic Church and some plants like the basil, the opens way and the known one as dead scare.

Another variant where the syncretism, the transculturation and the tolerance between the religions of African origin and the Catholicism is manifested is in the holy cross, which is characterized by the predominance of the elements used of the different variants of the Rule Conga and of the Rule of Ocha. From the conga rule he took the belief in the supernatural forces existing in nature through their spiritual representations, present in trees, plants, herbs, rivers and seas. In short, it is in the nganga where this world is summarized; it is the concretion of the microcosm of the foundation of the palero. It is also popularly known as the caldero, although in less proportion and weight than the nganga.

From the Rule of Ocha it assumed its deities, its divinatory systems. Like the religious expressions of African origin practiced in Cuba, animal sacrifices, food offerings, and the use of plants and herbs occupy an important place. The dead are invoked through the songs called transmissions.

The relationship with the Rule of Ocha and Spiritism is also manifested in the presence of certain elements of this first religious expression in the spiritist practice. These include, among others, the following:

Presence of the so-called dolls and saint dolls, dressed in the colors representing the orishas, in whose current they are manifested.

Spiritual manifestations, and even states of possession of the so-called dead saints (Babalú Ayé, Oshún, Yemayá, Oyá, Obatalá), which are known by the syncretic names of San Lázaro, Virgin of Regla or Mother of Regla; also mother Charity, mother Teresa and sister or little virgin of Las Mercedes, respectively. The realization of certain magical-religious actions, related to the cult of the orishas, such as cleanings, offal, baths, buckets, offerings, works, among others. Even, like the kariocha or coronation of the saint, in the practice of Crossed Spiritualism, the so-called spiritual coronation takes place.

Also one has the conception that the spirits of the most illustrious, the great, the big heads are housed in the ceiba, and iroko is the meeting point of the souls. Africans and creoles are dead, and all dead people are there.

In order to pay attention to them, especially with regard to food, a new container is always used and everything they ate as widows is offered to them. In this sense, the ceiba is the altar of the ganguleros,

who build and animate their garments under it. Similarly, in Ocha ceremonies, Iroko is never left out of the picture.

In this way a whole religious philosophy is intermingled that constitutes a center of gravitation assimilated by the crossed spiritualism, hence its terminology, that in some explicit or implicit way all religious of the Afro-Cuban cults are crossed spiritualists either consciously or unconsciously.

Conclusions

The practice of cross spiritualism has been one of the manifestations of the popular religiosity in Cuba that due to its characteristics, heterogeneity and multiplicity in its worship became one of the most popular religious manifestations.

This religious manifestation or current bases the idea of faith, based on the belief in the saints and the spirits to which elements of Santería and the African stick rule have been incorporated, which makes its ritual a diverse religious-cultural complex, which does not mean that its patterns move away from the dogmatic of the traditional faith of Catholicism and Spiritism its main religious components.

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