

***El sincretismo religioso del espiritismo cruzado cubano. Una
mirada contemporánea***
***The religious syncretism of the Cuban crossed spiritism. A
contemporary look***

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Resumen

El estudio y comprensión del proceso de formación y consolidación de la nacionalidad cubana y con ello, la identidad nacional constituye una prioridad, en la cual la cosmovisión religiosa sincrético-cultural aporta una importante base identitaria. A partir de la experiencia del autor en el proceso de investigación, se emplearon métodos teóricos y empíricos en la construcción teórica donde se presenta una panorámica sobre el conocimiento y la práctica del espiritismo cruzado, la diversidad de elementos culturales y religiosos que la integran como partes esenciales de la cultura nacional, por ello se considera de importancia el estudio del tema: El sincretismo religioso del espiritismo cruzado cubano. Una mirada contemporánea. El objetivo se centra en el análisis del fenómeno cultural del espiritismo cruzado con base a la identidad nacional.

Palabras claves: Cosmovisión; Sincretismo religioso; Espiritismo cruzado; Identidad.

Abstract

The study and understanding of the process of formation and consolidation of the Cuban nationality and with it, the national identity constitutes a priority, in which the syncretic-cultural religious cosmovision contributes an important identity base. From the author's experience in the research process, theoretical and empirical methods were used in the theoretical construction where an overview is presented on the knowledge and practice of crossed spiritism, the diversity of cultural and religious elements that integrate it as essential parts of the national culture, that is why the study of the topic: The religious syncretism of Cuban crossed spiritism. A contemporary look. The objective is focused on the analysis of the cultural phenomenon of crossed spiritism based on the national identity.

Keywords: Cosmovision; Religious syncretism; Cross Spiritism; Identity.

Introduction

This study is based on the conceptions of Ortiz (1940), on the African inheritances present in Cuba since the beginning of the slave trade, where transculturation gave rise to a process of syncretism between the aboriginal, African universe and the western culture and religion, which led to the cultural mixture that we know as Creole, which fostered the formation of the national identity with a deep imprint that reaches the present day; characterizing the cosmovision thought of the Cuban settled in the cult to the ancestors, saints and entities present in the roots of the national history. It is important, in the light of current studies, to deepen in the religious cultural roots contributed by syncretism in the compression of our identity.

The cultural and religious reality of Cuba preserves a great part of the African heritage that the black slaves brought with them to the island since the beginning of the slave trade.

The transculturation phenomenon originated in Cuba a syncretism process between the African universe and the western culture and religion, which led to the cultural mixture that we know as criollo, which fostered the formation of national, Latin American, Caribbean and particularly Cuban identities, with their peculiar characteristics.

Within the syncretic cults, the crossed spiritism constitutes a heterogeneous cosmovision that, as a consequence of the transculturation, these fused or mestizo cultures derived in a confluence of feelings,

customs and habits that are weaving the history of the nation in its most intrinsic aspect of the cultural, racial, individual identity, phenomenon that arrives to our days.

The research is based on the studies on the phenomenon of Cuban popular religiosity carried out by prestigious researchers, Cuban and foreign, who have contributed to knowledge and practice on the subject, such is the case of Kardec (1957, 1991), in the case of this important French philosopher and spiritist pedagogue, his spiritualist conceptions constitute a necessary reference to understand the phenomenon of religious syncretism in Cuba where components of his doctrine, the Kardecian, are present, which constitutes an important reference.

Other authors such as (Barnet, 2011; Bolivar, 2007; Cabrera, 2014; Guanche, 2005, 2013, 2011, 2015; James, 1994, 1998 and Ortiz, 1940); among others, deepened into the study of the Cuban religious syncretic phenomenon.

In spite of the research carried out in this sense, there is still a wide field of knowledge to be covered in the systematization of the knowledge on the Cuban popular religions, in particular the crossed spiritism where insufficiencies are appreciated in its study, particularly in the crossed spiritism practiced in Guantánamo, reason why it is proposed as problem: How is the cosmovision of the crossed spiritism in Guantánamo expressed from the philosophy of religion?

The objective of this research is to elaborate a characterization for the understanding of crossed spiritism in Guantánamo from the foundations of the philosophy of religion.

Therefore, key concepts such as cosmovision, religious syncretism, crossed spiritism, transculturation and cultural identity, make up the theoretical apparatus of the present research supported by the scientific contributions made in this field of knowledge by the above mentioned researchers and others dedicated to the exciting world of research on Afro-Cuban religious practices that have become heritage of cultural identity from the religious perspective.

The proposal of the present research is based on the understanding and knowledge of this variant of the Cuban popular cults as part of the Cuban cultural identity with deep historical roots.

Development

The crossed spiritism was formed as a result from the fusion or assimilation of elements of the Kardecian spiritism introduced in Cuba in the second half of the 19th century, coinciding with the Independence War initiated in 1868, and elements of the Catholic liturgical cosmovision, the African one in its Yoruba-Congo variants and the remnants of the Amerindian religion that managed to survive

the colonizing extermination and the passing of the centuries.

Cross spiritism, in its wide diversity of expressions, crosses all manifestations of Cuban popular religiosity due to its inclusive quality, from the transformed vestiges inherited from the original aruaca communities, to the practices of Hispanic, African or other cultural expressions. (Guanche, 2013).

The crossed spiritism is a religious phenomenon considered by many researchers and practitioners of this cosmovision as genuinely Cuban, although it is not only typical of Cuba, being a regularity in Latin America, existing similarity in the colonizer, in the slave labor force, first aboriginal and later African, as well as in the consequences of the historical process of colonization. From this, the deep transculturation that characterizes our culture and the indelible imprint of religious syncretism were derived.

In this order, the characteristics of this trend of popular religiosity are characteristic of the Guantanamo's cultural identity.

Cultural identity: the result of a synthesis of different cultural elements coming from Amerindian, European and African societies, which in their conjunction would produce a mestizo cultural synthesis (Vergara, 2005).

This manifestation of popular religiosity in Cuba, presents peculiar characteristics by assimilating in its center a wide syncretic cultural aspect of other religions.

The syncretism that as a result is appreciated in the religious phenomenon of the crossed spiritism, is a mixture of ethno-cultural elements decomposable in its initial members on the basis of the cultural miscegenation 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 in the cultural identity.

Cultural identity includes aspects as diverse as language, the system of values and beliefs, traditions, rites, customs and behaviors of a community.

This set of particularities, heritage and cultural heritage of the community, is what has historically defined the cultural identity of the Cuban people.

Zamora (2000) refers as a process of transculturation, the fusion of images, attributes, powers and worship that occurred with the arrival of African slaves to Cuba, who found the need to seek a religious representation in the Catholic saints through which to pay tribute to their authentic gods and "Orisha". Catholic saints endowed a range of similar characteristics to the deities of African origin, which resulted in the phenomenon known as religious syncretization.

It is highlighted that in the rituality of crossed spiritism diverse conceptions are materialized as a product of the syncretic phenomenon itself, as expressed by Fuentes (2018), in the myth are observed affectations by the Christian influence. This characteristic is peculiar in this trend of Afro-Cuban cults, given that the degree of participation of the Catholic in the syncretic belief systems is high.

The crossed spiritism has characteristics that show the deep Afro-religious diversity, which can be well appreciated in what the author of the research, defines as the bembé culture: popular celebration inherited from the old slaves that were allowed by the masters in the plantation systems in the days of rest or in the times of dead harvest.

The bembé is generally considered a religious festivity, where people play, dance and sing allegorical songs to the African commissions and to the African deities transculturated with the Catholic saints.

Its representation is a staggered altar, inherited from the Catholic tradition, accompanied by images of the same characteristics, such as the Virgin of Mercedes/Obbatalá, Santa Bárbara/Changó, the Virgin of Regla/Yemayá, the Virgin of Charity/Ochún, Saint Lazarus /Babalú-Ayé, and so on, depending on the deity to which the bembé is dedicated.

This festivity, which originated in the slave barracks, also has other characteristics such as the use of what are called stick drums, which are widely used in this tradition, as well as in the rites of the Cuban palo monte, but not in the cults of Yoruba denomination, whose tradition demands the presence of the batá drums.

In the cross type spiritism, they work with candles, tobacco, incense, incense, and offal with different leaves, making a varied use of botany both in the therapeutic and ritual order.

Prayers of the Kardecian and Catholic tradition are recited to which supplications, prayers and petitions are incorporated to the holy deity to which the bembé is dedicated or to some entity of some of the African commissions also present in the wide Cuban cosmovision, such as Mamá Francisca, Tomasa, Mamá Rufina, Ta José, Ta Julián or any other being of this nature or commission.

In this regard Cabrera (2014) addresses,

(...) most of the spirits that manifest themselves through so many colored mediums and so many supposedly white mediums, are spirits of national blacks, African slaves, real congos, all disembodied in times of the slave trade and who express themselves as muzzals. (p. 37).

The spiritism practiced in our country, since its introduction, shows more and more a heterogeneous, practical and utilitarian character. These aspects maintain a close connection with the motivational

sphere of the spiritualist believers, who through their beliefs and practices believe they can solve the problems they face in their daily lives.

In this sense it is valid to emphasize that, one of the prevailing characteristics of this Cuban spiritualism is the supremacy of a religious thought that manifests itself through antinomies and taboos related to what the incarnated spirit, that is, the individual, should or should not do in his passage through what they call the earthly plane.

In this sense, Hodge (1998), refers that the possibility of communication with the dead or spirits that this religious manifestation offers to the believing subject, the one that is established between the medium - person that falls in trance - and the spirits - ancestral entities that are evoked -; the absence of a professional clergy and a not very expensive cult, that develops with a dynamic of interchangeable roles, where all the assistants have the possibility of experiencing the direct contact with deceased beings; and, the linkage that this religious expression has in its different variants with others that make up the Cuban religious framework, giving them the possibility of having a sense of belonging, if they so wish, to other manifestations, mainly of African origin, constitute sufficient reasons for this religious expression to be considered as one of the most popular within the Cuban religious framework.

As part of the field work of the author in the period (2008-2023) and that since 2019, are part of the doctoral research that he is carrying out, the study carried out in different religious houses of this manifestation in the Cuban province of Guantanamo is shown.

The image 1, shows an altar dedicated to the Virgin of the Charity of El Cobre, here the heterogeneity within the Cuban crossed spiritism is appreciated, where aspects of the Cuban cosmovision diversity are incorporated, a staggered altar, with presence in the iconography of images of the Catholic saints, as well as the presence of representations of Africans through attributes in the very varied material forms as the typical offerings that go from the candies, fruits, foods, flowers and candles.

As the patron saint of Cuba and all Cubans, the one who has accompanied us in difficult, complex and good moments, we celebrate her day every September 8, usually in every home on that day a candle is lit, flowers are placed, mainly sunflowers, lilies and roses of different colors, and the prayer to the Virgin of Charity is prayed. The people also dress in yellow and blue, and also in white.

It is very venerated by pregnant women, who usually carry the prayer throughout the pregnancy until delivery.

Image 1. Altar dedicated to the Virgin of Charity of El Cobre, patron saint of Cuba and all Cubans.



Source: Self made, September 8, 2008

Another characteristic of the diversity of the form of popular religiosity under study is shown in image 2, through an altar dedicated to Blessed Saint Barbara, an expression of the particularity of Cuban religious syncretism.

This deity celebrates her feast day on December 4th of each year. In Cuba and particularly in Guantanamo she is very venerated by men and women, she is considered a saint of great power, who gives and takes away.

Her devotees, especially women usually dress that day in white and red with elegance, they use a lot of talcum powder on the neck and scandalous colognes or perfumes.

The festivities in her honor usually last more than a day.

Image 2. Altar dedicated to St. Barbara



Source: Self made, December 4, 2020

After several years of field study, research and religious practice that has covered Guantanamo city and part of its municipalities, the author of this work considers that, due to its history, characteristics and heritage, crossed spiritism is part of the identity, in that it is not only a religious practice, but also a solid representation of the national culture, being taken to sociocultural projects to pay tribute to the ancestors and to all those who dedicated themselves to this cultural practice with incidence in a certain territory, as demonstrated by the sociocultural project: Adela's patio and the caverchelo. com of the popular neighborhood La Loma del Chivo.

Here a San Lazarina pilgrimage takes place, carried out within the framework of the feast day: La Guantanamera from December 16 to 18, this pilgrimage to the popular Saint Lazarus, which is one of the most venerated in Cuba, in Guantanamo and particularly in the aforementioned neighborhood La Loma del Chivo, which is an important cultural focus of Afro-descendant religious practice, where are also present French-Haitian, Jamaican traditions and there is a whole cultural representation by the presence of cultural institutions, expression of these heritages, such as: The French Pompadour Tomb Pompadour Santa Catalina de Ricci.

The studies carried out and the years of observation of ceremonies of this tendency, interviews to

practitioners and a deep work of religious practice, has allowed to refer that in the manifestations of the Cuban popular culture are present the syncretic cultural prints of the long Afro-Cuban tradition, within which the crossed spiritism is an important reference in the popular religiosity and in the cultural identity, as shown in the following images, sample of the devotion of the Guantanamero people to their traditions.

Image 3 shows a pilgrimage to San Lázaro, one of the most popular saints of Afro-Cuban religious traditions, where various forms of devotion can be seen in the different communities. In addition to being venerated by women, he is also venerated by people who suffer from physical disabilities. Many people have him in the kitchen as protector of the home and family.

On December 17 of each year, he is offered feasts that in certain places and families of practitioners, can last more than a day. Generally, many devout people in the days around this date place him in a public place with a basket of yarey for people to deposit money in the form of alms and the money collected is used to buy candles, perfume, flowers, candy and other resources for the party.

In many rural communities of Guantanamo province, these festivities dedicated to Santa Barbara and San Lazaro are one of the most important cultural events that take place due to the tradition and faith they have. We cannot say that there is fanaticism, but there is a strong belief in them, people ask her and in gratitude, they pay her with a party where they waste drink, food, candles, sweets and typical dishes.

Image 3: Saint Lazarina Pilgrimage



Source: Self made. December 16, 2022

Conclusions

Taking into account that the practice of popular religiosity in Cuba and within it, the crossed spiritism, have accompanied the different historical moments of the Cuban nation since its origins, these tangible elements of the Cuban oral and material culture have allowed the creation of a social being with deep roots in the traces left in its cultural trunk by the ancestors, from them came to us all the strength that characterizes us as Cubans. The sources consulted and the field practice made it possible to conform a theory on the crossed spiritism in Guantánamo and its practitioners; to arrive at conclusions. This identity that unites us together with the patriotic symbols and self-determination as a national state allows us to rise to higher levels of social consciousness, to be Cubans. These aspects define our psychology and the cosmovision of the Cuban people, rich in tangible elements of our material culture.

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