

THE CUBAN RITE “CAMBIO DE VIDA”: THE SUBSTITUTE VICTIMS AND MAGICAL TREATMENT METHODS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

The article is devoted to the ritual practice “cambio de vida” which exists in the Afro-Caribbean religious and magical traditions, in particular, in Santería, Ifa and Palo Monte. The author shows the structure and logic of the rite which have not been detailed in the scientific literature. Particular attention is paid to the implementation of this practice in the context of the modern urban and medical infrastructure including inpatient care. Witchcraft has become a part of socio-cultural bricolage in Cuba. In the individual patient histories, it often complements a mixture of biomedical therapies and non-conventional healing practices. It is shown that witchcraft substitute sacrifice may contribute to the tensions and mistrust. Conversations with informants suggest that the ritual practice of “cambio de vida” generates and intensifies the logic of distrust, and the narratives that are formed around it correspond to social tension and competitive concerns of the population. The moral dubiousness and ambivalence of the described magical practice is noted. The article is based on the author’s field research in 2013 and 2019. Using the scientific literature related to the issues raised the author aims for a complete description of the cambio de vida current existence in Cuba.

Keywords: Cuba, Santería, Palo Monte, healing, sacrifice, rituals, spirits, witchcraft, hospitals

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