

## The Orisha's ban

Category: Creeds and Religions

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Written by Gerardo Ortega

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Few people remember ancestors beyond their grandparents. Perhaps in some conversation one or another reference to "grandfather's mother" or great-grandmother, for example, appears; but, it is not usual. The expression "one of my ancestors" resolves any allusion to family origin in one fell swoop.

However, when it comes to founding a lineage, one resorts to the most remote origins; and one aspires to find a relationship between that person and some character who transcended in the collective memory, for his heroism, for his conduct, or for less spiritual elements. This is essentially human.

Some, depending on their personal philosophy, on their ideas, seek that relationship with the heroes of the mambisada, others with the families of ancestry... in the same way that those families of ancestry sought, at the time, the way to connect their existences with those that preceded them with the gift of "blue blood", of nobility. There was such a need (spiritual and material) to tie their lives to the "chosen" that not a few noble titles were bought and not granted by the monarchies (who already received such a categorization by human and not divine mandate).

But, those who were raised, in turn, dreamed of those bridges of relationship that would lead them to meet the heroes and demigods who filled the legends and epics, where genealogy also related them to the gods. And that was the end of the journey to the origin. There was nothing else backwards.

The different cultures impose their gods and their respective religions as patrons and therefore, when one nation or ethnicity imposed itself on another, it placed its gods above the gods of the subjugated nations and imposed a pantheon, a great divine family, where sometimes, they allowed the entry of the greater gods of those subjugated, as poor relatives more or less close to their own.

The history of the Romans shows us that by imposing themselves on Greece, of such a well-structured tutelary pantheon, they chose to take almost all their gods, but, calling them in their own way, parodying them, appropriating them. This is how the Greco-Latin mythology that we have been studying since adolescence came into being.

Well, in African villages, their men and women came to this relationship with the family past in a similar way, until they came into contact with their gods, which would be imposed on each other until the original pantheon of the mythology of the place, until the divine origins of each national culture... but nations were not formed in the same way as in Europe, they would be on the margins of the western culture that ended up imposing itself and it would be preferable to speak of peoples, of ethnicities.

Those of us who were "discovered", conquered and colonized by this western culture; and evangelized... we have known a great family, like our families, in which, in an original way that involves even the love

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triangle so recurrent between two men and a woman, emerges the Messiah, the man ONE, the demigod, the unquestionable son of God ONE, who was none other than represented by the HOLY SPIRIT, ie by the third triangle that conformed with Joseph the husband, with Mary, the wife.

Of these three, although those who have imposed that religion from that myth, point to the trinity of the son, the father and the line of connection of the holy spirit, as the true trinity, arises, is structured, the Large Family thanks to so original and "credible" solution, Christians (because Christ is the father) resolve, to "connect", each parishioner, with the very origin of its species. But, if in the western culture such a conception has been imposed, in the Asian culture there arose, from different roots, another great creator and another great family and, of course, another religion; and in North Africa and the Middle East another was structured; and then these three have been divided, stratified... and so the apostolic and Roman Catholic that came to us, because it was the ancient province of the Roman Empire that was Spain that evangelized us... is in no way the only one.

In the same way that this church and this religion has denied its truly revolutionary origins and has denied the inheritance of the Hebrew culture that preceded it and from which it took not a few instructive chapters; it has also denied its own "daughters" separated from the great family.

And the mythologies of other peoples have been marginalized, as the three great religions deny each other and deny those that they consider secondary or primitive, because there is, of course, no single great family....

However, despite the fact that one conception or another prevails in the

with respect, anywhere in the world is known, because part of the culture, the Greco-Latin mythology, although it is assumed as a cultural element, not as a philosophy that governs our actions. So, if we know the Greco-Latin mythology, and because of the history explained we have had to assimilate, the non-Christians, its mythology, as a cultural element... Why shouldn't we know, and incorporate, at least as part of our cultural heritage, African mythology? And more specifically, why shouldn't we know, and incorporate into our world of knowledge, Afro-Cuban mythology, that is, that which has been shaped in our country throughout history? Caridad del Cobre, Patron Saint of the Island of Cuba, is adored as Ochún, by the followers of the Rule of Ocha or Santería Cubana. Much would have to be said regarding the imprint of African religions in Cuba, if we adhere to a generalizing, integral, academic criterion... but what this opportunity is about is to inform about that amalgam of sociocultural influences, which in the Cuban

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population can still be observed; and perhaps with greater force each time, attending to the real opening of current communicative possibilities, on these subjects, which before formed something taboo, that is to say, forbidden.

On the other hand, it is significant that at every moment new sectors of the population are being added, not only because of the opening of doors, but also because of a true cultural interest, because of the desire to know the non-Christian religions that a soto voce, clandestinely, secretly, many Cubans have always practiced in one way or another, or at least they maintained themselves as a substratum of their consciences, influencing their conduct, as a philosophy of non-confessed origin.

And it is that traditionally the marginality has been the conservative of these "non-Christian" beliefs that had to subsist by the cunning of syncretism. The Africans, being violently uprooted from their lands through the slave trade and transferred as slaves to the then European colonies of the Antilles (and other parts of the New World), had no choice but to hide their religious beliefs through simulation by "accepting" the one imposed by the colonizer, through the so-called "evangelization".

The prevailing Catholicism denigrated such beliefs and therefore their practice was punished in the endowments, therefore, the simulation was the tactic and only possibility, to maintain these ideas. Worshipping the Catholic images, seeing in each of them the orisha or African saint of his region of origin, gave way to syncretism.

Later, authorized to celebrate the Catholic tradition of January 6, "the feast of the Magi", the blacks gathered and in their languages, in front of the altars of European inspiration, prayed to their African gods, in the only images they could adore. Afterwards, the freedmen would maintain this tradition and get their brothers from the different nearby endowments and the many domestic slaves to have a license to accompany them in such festivities.

On that occasion, the brothers, of race and family, were seen grouping themselves by ethnicity and remembering their folkloric dances, their costumes, their customs, and invoking their divinities in this way. That is why African dance, the dance itself, is a way of worshipping the orisha. It is prayer, an act of faith and homage to the African divinity, an invocation that replaces prayer and words.

Chance, more than any other circumstance, due to the irregularity with which each ethnic group was placed in the endowments of slaves, caused for example, that an individual of the Carabalí ethnic group was united with others of the same ethnic group or incorporated into an ingenuity whose endowment was mostly Lucumí or Conga, to cite only two examples.

The buying and selling of new slaves multiplied this situation. This meant that each individual not only received and passed on to his brothers and sisters the influence of the prevailing religion, the

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Catholic religion, but also the inter-influence with the other religions or beliefs of the black continent, thus enriching the already complex network of these religions in these lands.

The African liturgy, crushed by the Catholic liturgy and modified by the contact between its various ethnic groups (contact that did not exist in its lands of origin, or developed in other less pressing conditions), gave rise to the possibility of grouping religious ideas, at least in our country, into two significant "rules", the rule of Ocha and that of Palo Monte.

Rules that, in African lands did not exist properly, but that originate in these lares, by the characteristics previously pointed out, since even the determinant conformation of yorubas in the Ocha rule or the majority presence of congos in the Palo Monte rule, does not imply that they do not exist in both, mixed these and the remaining ethnic groups, or at least, numerous individuals of them. The Ocha rule remains more cohesive, better structured than that of Palo Monte, where a confluence of several liturgies of African origin can be appreciated; such as the one that "mounts the saint", as its practitioner "horse" of some Orisha, commonly called "mayombe liturgy"; the one that "prepares the works for health", known as "embisa liturgy"; or "the kinfinite liturgy" that is dedicated to mourning the dead (rather, according to the western point of view, to celebrating it, by means of bembé); and, among others, "the briyumbé liturgy" that totalizes a greater number of adepts perhaps, because it includes practices of the previous liturgies.

It is indisputable that in our town, an essential component is its undefined, eclectic... mixed religiosity, due to the cultural and racial "ajiaco" that is explained by the preceding notes, which refer to the mestizaje on which Don Fernando Ortiz spoke to us.

The transculturation that occurred in our case has deeper roots... The European culture participates in it -not only Spanish- (and this one in itself, already heterogeneous); the aboriginal culture (less complex, but reinforced by Yucatec and other neighbors); the Asian culture that arrives before our struggles for independence - decisive factor in the conformation of our nationality- and the African culture (the latter diverse, already extremely mixed).

Substituting prayer, the dance to Ochún, that is, to the Caridad del Cobre, is an invocation to intercede in favor of the believer.