



Developing the Dead: Mediumship and Selfhood in Cuban Espiritismo

Diana Espírito Santo

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“A major empirical contribution to the debate about antirepresentationalism and posthumanism that has been agitating the entire discipline of anthropology in recent years.”—Stephan Palmié, author of *The Cooking of History: How Not to Study Afro-Cuban Religion*

“The most provocative and complete portrayal of contemporary Cuban espiritismo available. It underscores the embodied character of espiritista practices and offers a dynamic portrayal of espiritista mediums’ crucial roles within a complex of Afro-Cuban religions that includes ocha, palo monte, and other faiths.”—Reinaldo L. Román, author of *Governing Spirits: Religion, Miracles, and Spectacles in Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1898–1956*

“To read this book is to enter into an apparently alien world and yet find that it makes complete sense, and for that reason *Developing the Dead* is a model of the anthropological enterprise.”—Charles Stewart, author of *Dreaming and Historical Consciousness in Island Greece*

Based on extensive fieldwork among espiritistas and their patrons in Havana, this book makes the surprising claim that Spiritist practices are fundamentally a project of developing the self.

When mediums cultivate relationships between the living and the dead, argues Diana Espírito Santo, they develop, learn, sense, dream, and connect to multiple spirits (*muertos*), expanding the borders of the self. This understanding of selfhood is radically different from Enlightenment ideas of an autonomous, bounded self and holds fascinating implications for prophecy, healing, and self-consciousness. *Developing the Dead* shows how Espiritismo’s self-making process permeates all aspects of life, not only for its own practitioners but also for those of other Afro-Cuban religions.

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