



Witchcraft and Welfare

Raquel Romberg

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Persecuted as evil during colonial times, considered charlatans during the nation-building era, Puerto Rican brujos (witch-healers) today have become spiritual entrepreneurs who advise their clients not only in consultation with the spirits but also in compliance with state laws and new economic opportunities. Combining trance, dance, magic, and healing practices with expertise in the workings of the modern welfare state, they help lawyers win custody suits, sick employees resolve labor disability claims, single mothers apply for government housing, or corporation managers maximize their commercial skills. Drawing on extensive fieldwork among practicing brujos, this book presents a masterful history and ethnography of Puerto Rican brujería (witch-healing). Raquel Romberg explores how brujería emerged from a blending of popular Catholicism, Afro-Latin religions, French Spiritism, and folk Protestantism and also looks at how it has adapted to changes in state policies and responded to global flows of ideas and commodities. She demonstrates that, far from being an exotic or marginal practice in the modern world, brujería has become an invisible yet active partner of consumerism and welfare capitalism.

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