TA Tomorrow's Affairs
Analysis of today
Assessment of tomorrow

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Witches and witchery: can they be forces for good?

An interesting feature you might observe in deeply religious societies is that the population seems equally obsessed with "black magic" paganism, as they are to adhering to the tenets of conventional religious precepts.

The country I am targeting is Colombia, simply because it is a flashpoint of serious crime - drugs trafficking predominantly.

I have worked there with locals and was taken aback by what I describe as their creativity. Or perhaps readiness to work with all kinds of everyone to achieve your ends.

Witches, or "brujas" as they are known in Colombia, are predominantly female but there are male brujas too. They enjoy a very privileged status in society: respected, acknowledged that "they know what they're talking about; they can see what we can't", and often feared.

Even the narco traffickers, who generally pull no punches, take care when dealing with the supernatural.

This is more or less how it works:

Narco: Oh bruja, tell me, what would be a fair day for me to sail my GoFast speedboat to Coke Island to distribute my product for further transportation to America or Europe?

Bruja: - after some heavy sighing and some chanting thrown in, if (s)he's "in the mood - next Thursday. At sundown."

Narco: Thank you oh bruja. How much do I owe you?

Bruja: Five thousand pesos

Narco: OK, here you go.

The obvious solution for an excited young law enforcement officer is to offer the bruja more than the narcos do (apparently it's always 5,000 pesos) then pounce on the traffickers on Thursday evening when they believe they have magical protection.

They may be vicious enough to murder other narcos in terrifying shoot outs or gird themselves to fall victim to fearsome sting ops, but they're terrified of the brujas.

Other kinds of witches

Where I was brought up, in the backwaters of northern Scotland, we were more populated by male witches, who were known as "seers" - people who could predict events and - in a notorious and fatal case - tell a female employer what her husband was actually doing when he was "fighting against Napoleon's troops".

This particular seer also foresaw the discovery of oil in Scottish seas, the invention of the railways and the outbreak of World War II.

Unfortunately he failed to foresee his own death - a death sentence for being a witch - in a barrel of boiling tar, which might or might not have had huge iron spikes inside it to enhance the experience.

Seers gave way to "swaynes" who tended - and tend - to stick to anodyne personal readings. I remember my father saying once that Swayne MacSwayne had given a reading to one of dad's assistants, Lynne.

Apparently the swayne told her she was soon to get married, which delighted her. Unfortunately, said dad, "what the swayne didn't tell her was that the man she married would divorce her 3 months later and - also what he didn't tell her - was that he was Algerian, and somehow knew how to make her pay him alimony." Which she continues to do to this day.

Is it a Catholic/Protestant divide? Do other religious denominations fixate on such things?

Personally, I prefer to stay away. I've had enough witchery for one lifetime.