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Sacred Pathway, Devotional Praxis: Actors, *Aché*, and Landscape at the Sanctuary of Regla, Cuba

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Abstract: The ferry from Havana to Regla, Cuba, transports visitors from today's cruise ship docks across a brief stretch of water in about 20 min. Despite its brevity, this watery passage symbolically foregrounds the Marian devotion on the southern rim of the grand harbor. In this way, water conjoins African diasporic histories of enslavement, labor, survival, resistance, daily life, and religiosity within Havana Bay, into which two urban geographies project. Regla historically served as a municipality for dockworkers and shipwrights and became an enclave for identity creation, civil association, and religious worship for people of African descent. The church and sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de Regla ("Our Lady of Regla") has nurtured this connection as it houses effigies of the venerated Virgin, adorned in blue. The Virgin of Regla represents one of two, along with El Cobre, of the most important Marian devotions on the island of Cuba and is the focus of insular and diasporic pilgrimage. In Regla, the Virgin's nautical iconography decorates the sanctuary and historically connects her to the working populations who sustained this devotion as they serviced Havana Harbor with their labor. Adjacent to the church is a waterfront park that looks out on the water and the city of Havana beyond. Bordered on one side by a low wall, the park incorporates a large ceiba tree, *ceiba pentandra*, also known as the silk cotton or kapok tree, a tropical species with a large trunk and spreading tree canopy native to Mexico and Central America, the Caribbean, northern South America, and West Africa (with a similar variety found in South and Southeast Asia). This article considers landscape as a methodology for examining the interplay of this tree and the adjacent church as interwoven and mutually reinforcing sites of devotion for the worship of the Virgin Mary and the oricha Yemayá in Regla, Cuba, with a view toward a broader set of local and global spaces.



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1. Introduction

When I visited the sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de Regla ("Our Lady of Regla") in June 2011, it was a Saturday, and other people had gathered at the site to pay their respects. I had taken the ferry from Havana, departing near the location of the now-lost Spanish colonial *aduana* (customs house) (Figure 1). Crossing this central portion of the bay becomes the aqueous foregrounding of an encounter with the harbor's patron saint. As the ferry meets the peninsula of Regla, the sanctuary quickly comes into view with its proud Neoclassical facade and bell tower adorning the north-side axis of the church that faces the tip of the peninsula (Figure 2). One of the two most important Marian devotions on the island, along with Nuestra Señora del Cobre¹, the Virgin of Regla's cult statue rests on the high altar, bearing her blue iconography in the robes worn by Mary and the Christ Child, with the same colors extended to the sanctuary's windows and doors (Figure 3).



Figure 1. Ferry docked at Regla, Cuba, with Havana Harbor in the background and the lighthouse of El Morro in the distance at the entrance to the harbor. Photo by the author.



Figure 2. Sanctuary of the Virgin of Regla, Cuba. Photo by the author.



Figure 3. Statue of the Virgin of Regla. Sanctuary, Regla, Cuba. Photo by the author.

I came to Regla after reading an important article by a scholar of performance studies, Carrie Viarnes, “All Roads Lead to Yemayá: Transformative Trajectories in the Procession at Regla”, which analyzes the September 8th feast day of the Virgin (Viarnes 2008). The author aptly ties her discussion to the various physical features of the site, including the cult statue, the sanctuary, and an adjacent park in which a large ceiba tree (*ceiba pentandra*) resides. Through an elaborate ceremony, comparable to processions in Spain, the Americas, and the Philippines, devotees hoist the Virgin’s statue onto a platform and carry her from the church through the streets and public spaces of Regla. In her article, Viarnes compellingly analyzes the sacred significance of this route and its meaning to Afro-Atlantic devotion.

As I disembarked the ferry and followed the line of the seawall across the street from the park, something became visible to me that Viarnes had not mentioned, a pathway made of concrete, brick, and earth, forming an axis between the sidewalk and the ceiba tree and, ultimately, wrapping around the tree’s trunk. The path provides a clear, linear, and slightly elevated route to the tree and is surely used in procession on the annual feast day (Figure 4). This addition to the site not only materially joins the tree at Regla to the urban fabric but also adds meaning to the local ceremony and relates the ceiba to other arboreal sites in Havana and beyond. I soon reached out to the late Eusebio Leal Spengler, the City Historian of Havana, with questions about this path, and Leal requisitioned a member of his staff, Alina Castellanos Rubio, to compose a bound file of historical narration and

references about Regla and its devotion and mailed it to me in the United States. Leal's office estimates that the path was created around 1997.



Figure 4. Park and ceiba tree with pathway from the sidewalk. Sanctuary of the Virgin of Regla, Cuba. Photo by the author.

It is well known to scholars that the Virgin of Regla's shrine functions in the veneration of a Catholic saint and simultaneously honors a supernatural entity descendant of West African religious traditions known as the *oricha* Yemayá, associated with the ocean and informed by the West African Yoruba belief in the *orísá* Yemoja, herself divine and oceanic. Orichas are deities that mediate between humans and a Supreme Trinity (Olodumare, Olorun, and Olofí), and they take on human traits, conjoin in narrative in narrative, and are associated with natural elements and forces. Most of them are closely associated with Catholic saints in Cuba; and, the historiography of Afro-Atlantic and diasporic material culture is populated by theories aimed at better understanding what have been viewed as such cross-cultural and/or transcultural expressions. Such theories, as in the work of Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz, have traditionally operated on the assumption of an encounter, interaction, and transformation of internally coherent and pure European and West African traditions in the Americas that might be processed into something new in form, use, and understanding². However, both Europeans and West Africans came from complex, evolving situations of their own; and Europe had already begun a colonization process in parts of West Africa by 1492. Even if transcultural processes in the Americas resulted in something new, in the context of Cuba, we cannot automatically assign African-descendant peoples to material culture informed by African religious knowledge and practices, in part, because of the fluidity of and co-produced traditions, made manifest by the fact that Iberian-descendant whites and non-Blacks participated in these religious phenomena as well.

Recent scholarship offers more flexible, historical, and situated ways of thinking about these kinds of processes and how identity is assigned to their associated forms. Art historian David H. Brown uses the idea of "innovation" to examine the ways in which American and reconfigured African institutional formations, such as confraternities or *cabildos de naciones*, were built by Africans, subjects of African descent, and non-Blacks in the Americas and how material culture serves as a source for negotiating and creating spiritual and temporal community (Brown 2003). In her study of Christian conversion in the

West African Kingdom of Kongo, art historian Cécile Fromont employs the idea of “spaces of correlation”, which she defines as “cultural creations such as narratives, artworks, or performances that offer a yet unspecified domain in which their creators can bring together ideas and forms belonging to radically different realms, confront them, and eventually turn them into inter-related parts of a new system of thought and expression” (Fromont 2014, p. 15). Furthermore, Fromont complicates what we know of Christianity’s transfer to the Americas in her study of the Kingdom of Kongo and the development of the faith there beginning in the late 15th century. Christian Kongo performative practices, such as a dance known as the *sangamento*, crossed the Atlantic and manifested in the Americas³. Anthropologist Stephan Palmié, focusing on the constitution of Afro-Cuban ethnic identity in urban contexts, emphasizes how communities have used dominant institutions to their own ends within the spectrum of freedom and control that characterized Cuban colonial and national urban societies (Palmié 2002, 2013). The movement in African diasporic material culture scholarship toward process, use, becoming, transformation, setting and place, certainly reflects a post-modern and colonial studies shift in how we see the meaning of forms, one more contingent on the viewer, time, and the process of development and utilization.

While I have not returned to Cuba in the last decade, nor conducted research in the Regla archive to see what the documents have to say, I focus in the present article on the pathway to the ceiba tree at the sanctuary of Regla as material culture and explore a landscape methodological approach. My use of landscape is, on the one hand, spatial, as it concerns the totality of the material things made by people of African descent and others in Cuba and the Atlantic; how elements of object, thing, space, ecology, and performance interact with one another; and how dialectics of physical, mental, and social space impact how the landscape is made and remade⁴. On the other hand, I see landscape as the result of a diachronic process and a local–global interaction particular to each setting, thereby endeavoring to keep in view the long arc of cultural change with anthropological and historical perspectives in mind.

While landscape holds promise in this case, it also poses significant challenges when applied to the Afro-Atlantic and, specifically, to the African diaspora in Cuba. Firstly, there is the problem of multivalence and the fluid spatial production of meaning amongst diverse individuals and constituencies relative to the constraints and liberties presented by colonial and national spaces. Landscapes are multiple, fragmentary, overlapping, and often made and used by disparate constituencies that may perceive and decipher differently from one another. Devotees of the Virgin of Regla could interchangeably understand the Marian figure as both a particular incarnation of the Virgin Mary and the oricha Yemayá, while others may only see the veneration of a Catholic devotion⁵. Historically, worshippers of the Black Virgin of Regla/Yemayá may well have benefited from such a multiplicity of meaning in circumventing authority and surveillance, providing a convenient veneer to operate within and conferring a deniability upon unauthorized meanings if/when they rose to the level of official scrutiny. This angle, though, assumes that colonial and later national, state officials, clergy, and social elites did not also partake at some level in the very emerging African-inspired Cuban traditions that they often officially attempted to surveil. Anthropologist Ivor Miller’s work on Caribbean political performance argues that 20th-century Cuban elites engaged with such practices to construct compelling political propaganda (Miller 2000). These cases suggest that we should broadly construe multivalence and welcome the paradoxical, if the evidence supports it.

Secondly, the complexity of such landscapes presents us with the problem of working through a subject–object dichotomy introduced in the process of European colonialism that contrasts the animacy known to West African religious traditions with worldviews brought and reconstituted in the Americas. Christian delineations of sacred and profane, humans and nature, and subject and object are not emphasized in many West African and Indigenous American belief systems, in which the material world is alive with spirit, humans are not the only subjects at play, environmental elements like trees can be ac-

tors (indeed, can be subjects), and sanctity is much broader than that enclosed by the anthropocentrism of Christian epistemology and practice (Kosiba et al. 2020)⁶. Thirdly, we face the problem of how we choose our African diasporic case studies for landscape investigation. Our approach is all-too-often limited by an over-reliance on the visibility of forms, i.e., if things do not bear African-inspired visual traces, they might be discounted as not belonging to the appropriate domain of study. Art historians Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn observe a similar visual fallacy with approaches to “hybridity” in the study of Colonial Ibero–American visual culture (Dean and Leibsohn 2003). If a cultural mixture is not visible on the surface, we may not further investigate to see the cultural complexity at work in the object or thing. But what if African diasporic material culture in the Americas has evolved to resist visibility or to downplay its importance as a matter of the visual, as Matthew Rarey discusses (Rarey 2023)? In the realm of space, anthropologist Edward T. Hall argues that cultures develop a non-verbal means of communication involving spatial proximity that requires us to adopt a specialized means of interpretation (Hall 1990). What are the “silent languages,” for example, or the invisible spatial modalities at work in sites like Regla? From the repression of the Catholic church and the colonial state to adverse pressures at the hands of Republican and Revolutionary governments in Cuba, devotions such that of Regla, constituted in regimes of unequal power relations and racialized subalternization, have had to adapt, after all, of survival, identification, and community building within a dominant framework that has relied heavily on vision to impose power.

To complicate things further, looking for African-inspired religious devotions is not necessarily a search for the histories of African-descendant peoples in all cases. As Palmié argues, “Africinity and blackness are not coterminous in the world of Afro-Cuban religion. Nor have they, for what must surely be a long time, more than partially overlapped in complex and ill-understood ways” (Palmié 2002, p. 197). Material ideas sourced from Africa, so to speak, have been brought together by multiple actors, African-descendant and not, to produce complex American landscapes in Cuba. A range of subjects, including Indigenous Americans, have acted upon, used, and transmuted myriad forms in the Atlantic space *in ways that were tied to historic situations and circumstances* (emphasis mine). Regla is better viewed as a complicated Atlantic case study that is not reducible to Africa vs. Europe, Santería vs. Catholicism, or Black vs. white. As Palmié notes, it is a place where Africans, African-descendant people, and whites have manipulated the dominant frameworks to their own ends and those of their communities. Regla might, therefore, be seen as a potent space of correlation, after Fromont, where disparate parts from multiple traditions have been brought together in new ways by diverse actors to make an epistemic and performative whole.

Fourthly, scholars approaching such complex, formerly colonial landscapes associated with subalternized, racialized, and impoverished communities worldwide should note that these historic subjects have faced challenges in the options available for building and modifying their environments, especially in urban settings. Thus, one might anticipate a subtlety of expression. The September 8th feast day of the Virgin of Regla involves spatial choices within a Christian processional framework that compose a materially mediated interaction with the ceiba tree, in which subtlety seems important. The use of concrete, brick, and earth requires fewer economic resources than the cut limestone, marble, and/or ironwork, often assembled for parks, monuments, and promenades, paid for by the church, state, and elite in Havana across the harbor. Compared to the ceiba tree in Havana’s Parque de la Fraternidad (“Park of Brotherhood”), adjacent to the island nation’s capitol building and encircled by an elaborately forged iron fence set on a marble base, for instance, the Regla ceiba is modestly adorned with urban fabric. One might even argue that, by comparison, it is rendered less conspicuous or discernably “significant” from dominant perspectives, in Rarey’s terms. Though financial constraints in the realm of urban design may account for the relative modesty of the Regla pathway, we should also consider that compared to its civic counterparts, the municipality conceives and utilizes this ceiba for ostensibly Christian

religious purposes in relation to a relatively humble single-naive sanctuary. Regla has never had the economic power of Havana, and it expresses its culture on its own terms and at the local scale. In the procession of the Virgin of Regla's statue from the church sanctuary, the icon is taken through the streets of Regla to the edge of the bay and then to the ceiba tree in the park near the church, where it is circumambulated three times counterclockwise (Viarnes 2008). The pathway to the tree in this way, thus, reveals innovation and agency, however subtle in its relative scale and materiality, reveals innovation and agency in the acquisition of materials, the organization of labor, compositional choices, and an effort to connect the ceiba tree to the urban fabric of Regla through it all.

Finally, in selecting case studies of African diasporic landscapes, we need to account for a wide and inter-related spatial network that is public and private, religious and non-religious, church and state-oriented, and civil and domestic. Stephan Palmié notes the preponderance of studies on religion in the African diaspora, often a consequent inattention to everyday life (Palmié 2013). Palmié underscores that how we enter the inquiry constrains what we will see. If we only look at the obvious religious aspects at Regla, for example, or if we only consider this site separately from a larger landscape of thought, use, and experience (beyond religion), we limit ourselves from seeing the relationships between devotional and quotidian spaces. The formal procession of the Virgin of Regla not only spatially links the church, tree, harbor, streets, and private houses but also offers a space for the unfolding of everyday practices. Dell Upton writes, "to approach everyday life through architecture—architecture with a lower-case a, understood in its broadest sense to encompass the entire material world (or 'cultural landscape') that people make and think—is to be forced to pin down, in ways too often lacking in theories of the quotidian, the precise ways in which everyday life is experienced and the specifics of its relationships to other aspects of life and landscape. So architecture's materiality makes it a natural conduit to the specificity of everyday life" (Upton 2002, p. 707). Further perspective on the Regla pathway's facility at furnishing space for everyday living can be appreciated by looking to a larger urban history, including of course Havana. The fashioning of the ceiba at Regla is not unlike the treatment of other such trees in Cuba and throughout the Hispanophone Caribbean, which were made into urban foci for commemorative, civil, monumental, political, ceremonial, and daily purposes, as we find at the Parque de la Fraternidad of Havana and to which I will return in this article.

These problems of landscape study in the African diaspora are manifold and situational, and many remain unresolved. What seems clear is that this small, relatively inconspicuous pathway at Regla offers us a complex cultural construction that challenges our sense of stable boundaries between European and West African cultural landscapes. It speaks to the porosity between religious and secular divisions of space at these kinds of sites and opens problems of defining African diasporic material culture in accordance with racial divisions of Black vs. white. Adequate foregrounding of these contemporary complexities at the Regla ceiba requires looking back to the origins of the devotion.

2. From Africa and Europe to the Americas

The devotion to Nuestra Señora de Regla developed in the coastal town of Chipiona, Spain, in the province of Cádiz. The town's native son and Augustinian friar Diego de Carmona Bohórquez (1590-c.1653) writes of Our Lady of Regla's origins in his *Historia sacra* of the 1630s (Carmona Bohórquez 2019). Associated with St. Augustine, the author locates the Virgin of Regla's beginnings in the fifth century. One of the distinctive features of the cult statue in Chipiona, similar to the one in Seville, is the blackness of the Virgin's skin (Figure 5)⁷. Art historian Jeanette Peterson notes that Black Madonnas in Europe, while proportionately rare in relation to their white counterparts, became cherished devotions and popular pilgrimage destinations (Peterson 2014, pp. 17–40). The early modern rise of the Atlantic World, the colonization of the Americas, and the invention of race in its modern/colonial form complicated the reception of the Black Madonna abroad⁸. Historian Erin Rowe's work, like that of Peterson, emphasizes the reverence and sanctity that Catholics

on the Iberian Peninsula held for Black saints. Rowe exposes a larger global network of the Roman Church, even pre-1492, writing that these figures remind us of the historic relationships that existed between Iberia and sub-Saharan Africa (Rowe 2019). At Regla in Cuba, a town named for the devotion, though the Madonna is Black, the Christ child is not. He appears likewise in Seville, Spain, where his phenotype is rendered in silver.



Figure 5. Virgin of Regla of Chipiona. *Canasta del paso* (basket) of the canopy of the Virgin of Regla of Seville. Brotherhood of Bakers. Seville, Andalucia, Spain. Photo by CarlosVdeHabsburgo. Wikimedia Commons.

The 20th-century sanctuary that today houses the Virgin of Regla in Chipiona sits near the beach facing the Atlantic Ocean (Figure 6). During the Virgin's annual feast day of September 8th, devotees transport the statue from its home in the sanctuary high altar; it is lifted on a *paso* (float), carried by porters, and hidden by a long skirt so that the icon appears to levitate by its own divine power. The porters walk the statue through the streets to the sound of music, songs, and the cheers of the gathered crowds. They then take the Virgin to the water, where she faces her oceanic domain⁹.



Figure 6. Sanctuary of the Virgin of Regla, Chipiona, Spain. Twentieth century. Photo by Annual. Wikimedia Commons.

The following account of the Virgin of Regla crossing the Atlantic and arriving in Cuba largely comes from Cuban-born historian José Martín Félix de Arrate (1697–1766) in his *Llave del Nuevo Mundo y Antemural de las Indias Occidentales* (1761) (“Key to the New World and Fortress of the West Indies”)¹⁰. On 3 March 1687, the *alguacil mayor* (chief constable) Don Pedro Recio de Oquendo, Marqués de la Real Proclamación, donated a portion of his sugar mill Guaicánamar to the construction of a small *oratorio de paja* (an oratory with a straw-covered roof) on the bay across from the city of Havana (Figure 7). In the religious structure, he placed a painted devotional image. Considered today as the foundational moment of Regla, the founders positioned the town in the vicinity of *un caserío de indios*, an Indigenous enclave in the region known since 1573. Pedro Recio de Oquendo specifies that he made the donation at the request of someone known as Manuel Antonio “El Peregrino”, who proposed to erect an *ermita* (small devotional chapel) to the Virgin of Regla. Established by Manuel Antonio and built in 1690, this *ermita* perished two years later in a storm known as San Rafael, which destroyed the building and the oil painting of the Virgin housed within.

In 1694, the *vecino* (town resident) Juan Martín de Conyedo financed and managed the rebuilding of the structure, with the aim of expanding it and adding three rooms for hostels, suggesting concern for travelers, the poor, and pilgrims. Master builder and stonemason Pedro Hernández de Santiago carried out the design and construction of the building to the dimensions of 7 *varas* wide (13.6 feet), 25 long (48.6 feet), and 7 high¹¹. Don Pedro Aranda de Avellaneda, the Castilian leader of the military fortress in Havana, La Punta, supposedly then brought today’s sculpture of the Virgin of Regla from Spain to Cuba and placed it in the new building.



Figure 7. “General plan of the city, bay, and fortifications of Havana, with the *estancias* (ranches), houses, roads, quarries, mountains, lagoons, sanjas and streams that surround the plaza, all measured on the same terrain and sounded again, as well as the coast from El Morro to Cojimar on one side and from Punta to La Chorrera on the other. By order of Señor Don Dionisio Martínez de la Vega, Brigadier of the Royal Armies of S.M., Governor and Captain General of said plaza and island of Cuba, who finished raising it on 16 May 1733.” 5 May 1733. Archivo General de Indias, MP-Santo Domingo, 176. The peninsula upon which Regla sits can be seen just left of the central compass star.

Historian Félix de Arrate describes this structure as “the devout and delightful sanctuary of Nuestra Señora de Regla, erected on a short point on the southern part of the bay that slopes to the north; whose temple and guest houses, surrounded by a stone enclosure and crowned with battlements, if it is a devotion cited for religious pilgrimages, it also invites the taste for honest recreations” (Arrate 1964, p. 45)¹². Adjoined to the Parish of San Miguel, Don Fray Jerónimo de Valdés added it to the Parish of Havana in 1701. In 1714, the cabildo of the town of San Cristóbal de La Habana recognized the Virgin of Regla as the patron saint of the bay, which contributed to the development of the cult of and devotion to the

Virgin and the annual festival on September 8. The 18th century saw further expansions to the church, including the lengthening of the arched portal of its main door that faces north, “and it was lengthened on the south side, making it a main chapel, which, together with the body of the temple, served as the tabernacle and altar of the Lady, separated from the others that adorn her; The houses were also enlarged for the habitation of the brothers who attend the sanctuary and lodging for the people who go on a pilgrimage to it. A cloister of chambers was formed for [the brothers] and another intended for guests and pilgrims, and a room was built for the chaplain who lives there perpetually” (Ibid, p. 238)¹³. The church authors would certainly seem to have prioritized pilgrimage in these later extensions.

The present single-nave church resulted from successive transformations of the original ermita. The main facade and tower attributed to Pedro Abad Villareal represents an early example of Neoclassical style in Havana, dating to 1818. A pediment crowns the doorway, with sides framed by flat moldings. A squared bell tower surmounts the entry, lightened on all four sides by arched openings. The French expatriate artist Frédéric Mialhe portrayed the church in his 1839 engraving as part of the album *Isla de Cuba Pintoresca*; the print was named “Iglesia y Camino de Hierro en Regla” (“Church and Railroad in Regla”) (Mialhe 1839). The Mialhe print celebrates the progress achieved by the arrival of a railroad line to Regla (Figure 8) (see Herrera López 2003). Mialhe depicts the church on a hill, bearing nearly identical stylistic elements as today, with the railway vanishing into the distance along the building’s eastern side. To its west lies an unpaved area with carriage ruts and a building beyond, indicated by regular bays and a small, projecting element breaking the first story. Mialhe does not represent a park west of the church, as we find presently, nor a tree in that location; however, these urban elements likely came later with the evolution of the municipality and the continued growth of the devotion.

Within the sanctuary itself, a wooden ceiling extends the length of the nave and that of the presbytery, which was resolved in 1874 with the addition of a coffered vault supported by four cylindrical columns. The vault frames the gilded Neoclassical high altar, while niches for *santos* (statues of saints) line the nave along the walls, trimmed in blue with blue doors and a few windows (Figure 9). The altarpiece is surmounted by sculptures representing Christ and God the Father, flanking the blue orb of the Earth, with the dove of the Holy Spirit aloft defining the central axis. The recessed panels of both the altar and coffered vault are colored blue and filled with gilded decoration (Figure 10). In addition to the pervasive blue in the sanctuary, a figural iconography appears between the ceiling rafters toward the high altar. A metallic sculpture of a ship’s anchor alludes to the Virgin of Regla as patroness of Havana Harbor and to those who have historically labored there (Figure 11).

As the Regla devotion took root in Havana Harbor, African and African-descendant communities grew in number both locally and in the larger urban area of Havana. Regla appears in the census of 1817 and a statistical study of 1827 as a *barrio* (neighborhood) of Havana, with a population of 5693. Of these individuals, 3758 were whites, 797 *libertas/os* (free people of color), and 1138 *esclavos* (enslaved persons). By 1919, the number of Regla’s inhabitants had risen to 14,489, of whom 52.6% were male and 47.4% female; 77.9% were native whites, 12.8% foreign whites, and 9.3% people of color (Duque 1925, p. 104). Punctuated by the fact that the first sanctuary at Regla, a small straw-covered oratory, was built on land donated by a sugar mill owner, we cannot think of the development of the Regla shrine and its devotion without including African and African-descendant subjects, who may well have physically constructed the church buildings and shaped the devotion. In other words, this is not a story of Spanish Catholics developing a devotion that later proselytized Africans and their descendants. These latter communities have been a part of Regla since the beginning.



Figure 8. Frédéric Mialhe, “Iglesia y Camino de Hierro in Regla”, *Isla de Cuba Pintoresca*, lithograph, 1839. Cuban Heritage Collection, University of Miami Libraries.



Figure 9. Interior, Sanctuary of the Virgin of Regla, Cuba. Photo by the author.



Figure 10. High altarpiece, Sanctuary of the Virgin of Regla, Cuba. Photo by the author.



Figure 11. Maritime iconography, Sanctuary of Regla, Cuba. Photo by the author.

In Regla's colonial origins, the Spanish allowed for the growth of mutual aid societies and associations in the island's municipalities for enslaved and free Africans and their descendants, which evolved from the model of Spanish *cofradías* (confraternities) and were known as *cabildos de naciones* (council of nations). Based on the presumed ethnicities of

Africans, such as Kongo and Carabalí, these cabildos offered their members opportunities for aid, solidarity, and, in some cases, manumission through the Spanish colonial system of *coartación*. Structured hierarchically to include a queen and king who presided over the association and represented it before the Spanish authorities, each cabildo developed a patron Catholic saint. Brown defines cabildos as “social clubs and religious mutual aid societies of neo-African ethnic denomination” (Brown 2003, p. 27). In turn, Palmié underscores that cabildos empowered these diverse African and African-descendant groups within their respective neighborhoods and municipalities, as at Regla.

That cabildos de naciones functioned as a means for survival and collectively identifying became especially relevant in the 19th century with the rise of the so-called “second-slavery” in Cuba. With enslaved West Africans being brought in forcefully in droves, with a disproportionate amount coming from Yorubaland, cabildos de naciones of Lukumí (Yoruba ethnicity) appeared in greater numbers¹⁴. The fact that each cabildo maintained a patron Catholic saint offered channels through which West African deities and ideas of the sacred re-emerged and became a resource for oppressed communities within this Atlantic theater of slavery and racialized oppression. Regla would also serve as a stronghold for a male secret society, known as Abakuá, by the early 19th century. Add to these conditions the bringing of Yoruba conceptions of the sacred, performative practices, and sacred tree traditions, and we might say that Regla became a powerful enclave of Yoruba-descendant ideas and practices, among others, as the century progressed.

In the early 20th century, modern Lukumí or Santería emerged with the abundant *casa templos* (house temples) dedicated to the Regla de Ocha (the law of the Oricha).¹⁵ In the 1830s, an enslaved man from Africa, known as Ño Remigio Herrera or by his African name, Adechina, arrived on the island. He would gain his freedom and go on to found the *casa templo* to the Virgin of Regla during the island’s post-slavery era. Bearing scarification on his face from his youth in Africa, Adechina’s presence as the *padrino* (godfather) of the house commanded enormous prestige, due in no small part to his direct connection to *la tierra* (the African homeland). We can only imagine that the devotion to the Virgin of Regla significantly grew during this time, as it would under his daughter Josefa Herrera, “Echu Bí Pepa”, who inherited leadership of the *casa templo* upon his death, becoming the *madrina* (godmother). A photograph survives, published in David H. Brown’s book, *Santería Enthroned*, showing Josefa in her 80s being aided by another devotee as she participates in the September 8th procession for the Virgin of Regla (Brown 2003). Such devotions thus anchored the authority of powerful African and descendant community leaders, who, in turn, supported and drew legitimacy from their veneration. In addition to houses of Ocha, the Regla de Ifá (the law of the sacred oracle of Ifá) thrived in the municipality of Regla, associated with a fraternity of *babalawos* (male diviners). During the procession on the Virgin’s feast day, her statue would be taken to individual houses of Ocha and Ifá. Regla became known for a powerful network of *babalawos*, including Quintín Lecón Lombillo, also known as Tín, who marketed his clairvoyant talents to Cuban president Carlos Prío Socarrás (Palmié 2002, pp. 197–98). However, despite these developments, the population of Regla remained largely white, as the above census and statistical figures record, a substantial number of whom by the 1960s had been involved in Abakuá for over a century and Santería for two generations. Palmié writes, “Regla had long enjoyed the paradoxical reputation of a predominately white town that nevertheless represented a crucial site both for the history of the cult of ifá in Cuba and as a bastion of the male secret society abakuá” (Ibid., pp. 197–98).

Beyond the municipality itself, the Virgin of Regla became a powerful symbolic icon for active religious veneration and identification in the Black Atlantic. She is included, for instance, among the images in the *libro de pinturas* (book of paintings) of José Antonio Aponte, one of the suspected ringleaders of the foiled 1812 rebellion to overturn slavery in Cuba, who lived in Havana. Aponte, a free man of African descent, a carpenter, and a former member of the Creole militias, drew from a wide range of ancient African and Afro-Atlantic sources, including the images of Ethiopian kings, portraits of Toussaint Louverture,

military regalia, and religious references. Considered by the authorities to be a secret and seditious code for launching slave revolt, Aponte's book is viewed by scholars as an attempt to compose a detailed visual tableau of the Black Atlantic that the author intended to ship to the Spanish monarch. That the Virgin of Regla appears in the book speaks to her role in composing and sustaining Black identity and agency in Cuba and beyond (Childs 2006; Palmié 2002, p. 123).¹⁶ Thus, Regla has long occupied a key place within the African diaspora in Cuba, though it has evolved into a space of empowerment and action shared by both whites and Blacks on the island, who have used reformulated African-descendant institutional forms and material culture to work on their situations.

3. Ceiba Tree in Cuba and the Atlantic World

In the material culture of African religions, sacred tree traditions appear with prevalence. Robert Farris Thompson relates the account of Louis Fréret, whose 1794 engraving, "Le Culte des Nègre" ("The Cult of the Blacks") depicts the African veneration of trees. The caption states, "The turf is the altar, the hollow of a tree is the temple" (Figure 12). While the print is fanciful, Thompson asserts that, based on the preponderance of such sacred trees in Africa, Fréret's account was "almost certainly based on actual witness" (Thompson 1993, p. 123). In the image, several devotees in the middle ground kneel before and supplicate a figural effigy that lies within the trunk of a tree.



Figure 12. "Religion of Negroes", by Nicolas Colibert, 1795. Engraving after Pierre Fréret, "Habitation des Negres", *Le Culte des Negres*, 1794, engraving. Photo by Rama. Wikimedia Commons.

The memory of African landscapes crossed the Atlantic in the transatlantic slave trade and Middle Passage. The need for sustenance, community, medicinal remedies, existential healing, and spirituality, within the constraints of legal and racial domination, guided the evolving relationships of these people with American ecologies. In geographer Robert Voeks' analysis of the development of African diasporic landscapes in Bahia, Brazil, he stresses the importance of Indigenous knowledge as well as the introduction of European and African plants, such as the kola nut (*obí*), *Cola acuminata*, and *Cola nitida* (Voeks 1997, pp. 7–32). In addition, Africans imported okra, palm oil, many species of grasses, and trees, like the *akokô* (*Newbouldia laevis*), which was especially sacred to the Yoruba of West Africa and was used as a medicine for treating heart disease, epilepsy, hemorrhoids, and

earache¹⁷. Conducive to creating a hedge, akokô is used to enclose shrines, and, because of its sanctity, it is often neither cut nor burned. Devotees of the Brazilian religion Candomblé revere the akokô. In Cuba, Africans brought similar tree traditions such as the *iroko*, a West African tree deity, or *òrisà*. As these African forms began to resurface in Cuba, they became associated with prominent native trees, such as the *ceiba pentandra*.

In her important fieldwork from the early 20th century, ethnographer Lydia Cabrera (1899–1991) recorded and published many references to the ceiba tree in Cuba from the diverse perspectives of her numerous Cuban interviewees or “informants” of African descent. Cabrera’s remarkable study, *El monte* (literally, “the mountain”), exposes something of the African descendant knowledge and culture of the island’s hinterland beyond the historic bastions of the coastal ports. In this work, the author records a variety of understandings of the ceiba from the human subjects she interviewed. “The ceiba is a saint: Iroko”. “It is the Purísima Concepción”. “In it is Arému, the Virgin of Mercy of Ararás”. “And Yémmu”. Cabrera notes that her interviewees could give disparate and sometimes confusing claims about the tree. “La ceiba ‘is the seat of Iroko, who is present there’”. “Babá is in the ceiba.” “La ceiba is of Oggún y of Orichaoko”. “Obbá y Changó”. “Aggayú is ceiba.” (Cabrera [1954] 1994, p. 150). What Cabrera noted as contradiction, we might reconsider as evidence of the fluidity of meaning surrounding the ceiba and the diverse and evolving interpretations of it in Cuba over time. The author goes on to register the voices of Kongo/Bantu-language descendant subjects who refer to the ceiba as *nkunga casa sami* (the tree house of God) (Ibid.). Cabrera records that for religious practitioners, the ceiba generates a hallowed site by creating an aura of its power, visually registered in the tree’s shadow. She reports that priests of Lukumí or Santería refused to cross this shadow without first asking permission. In the absence of a Christian church in rural areas of Cuba, she observes, the ceiba becomes the sanctuary where a mass is held, and other sacred rituals are carried out. Performing rituals at the base of the tree, priests would begin by circumambulating the tree three times in a counterclockwise direction, as the Virgin’s cult statue experiences at Regla on September 8th. Thus, the expression *el monte* came to represent the range of healing, sustaining, rehumanizing, and spiritualizing practices that may well have been nourished in the interstices of plantation slavery but that also existed in the liminalities between the countryside and urban areas.

In close relation to Cabrera’s earlier observations, cultural anthropologist Migene González-Wippler writes that santeras/os invoke the ceiba’s assistance in making blessings or casting curses by going to the ceiba at night, circumambulating it three times counterclockwise, gently grazing the tree with their fingers on each pass, and softly whispering to it¹⁸. The priest’s apprehension and care when dealing with the ceiba stems from its conception as a powerful source of *aché* in Cuba, an enabling force permeating all matter that humans seek to harness from the *orichas*. The space around the ceiba and the ground beneath it are charged with this *aché*. Religious devotees seek to appropriate the hallowed ground by leaving *ebbós* (offerings to the orichas) or *bilongos* (malevolent spells or curses) buried at the base of the tree.

The symbolic use of ceiba trees in Havana to mark the urban landscape appears in the 18th century, at the east side of the Plaza de Armas and in the foundational narrative of the city. Traditionally held as the site where, in the early 16th century, Spanish conquistadors and clergy held the first Christian Mass and meeting of the city council under the shade of a ceiba tree, the Spanish governor erected a monument in 1754 on this site, after ordering the tree be removed when its roots compromised the adjacent fortification wall. Later, in 1828, the city’s bishop, Juan José Díaz de Espada y Landa, sponsored a larger monumental program, known as El Templete, consisting of a small building with a Neoclassical portico designed to house three history paintings narrating the 16th-century events and the 19th-century inauguration of the monument (Figure 13) (see Niell 2015). To this day, El Templete is deployed to celebrate the city’s birthday on November 16th, a ceremony in which speeches are given and crowds line up to circumambulate the ceiba tree three times counterclockwise, touching the tree with their fingers on each pass¹⁹. That this civic

celebration strongly relates to the ways in which anthropologists have recorded ceiba tree use amongst religious practitioners in Cuba speaks to the historical interchange between European and West African cultural landscapes and the processes of correlation that have led to the development of this complex colonial site, where we find the interplay of tree, architecture, urban design, imagery, and performance in a ceremony of civic community building.

In the period of the Cuban Republic (1902–1959), the country’s President Gerardo Machado inaugurated a Parque de la Fraternidad (Park of Brotherhood) in 1929 to complement El Capitolio, the new nation’s capitol building, which was completed the same year. As a celebration of pan-American brotherhood, the president ordered earth to be brought from the 23 cooperating nations and placed it at the base of the ceiba tree at the center of the park (Figure 14). Ostensibly a gesture of national unity and pan-American ideology, this inauguration of the park is considered by anthropologist Ivor Miller to be a political performance aimed at the populations of African descent in Cuba²⁰. The president’s co-opting of the ceiba tree, according to Miller, invoked this formidable reservoir of *aché* to ward off Machado’s enemies. Miller notes that people deposited offerings at the tree’s base, attempting to harness its power. That Machado was suspected of consulting *babalawos*, or diviners, and may have himself been initiated into *Lukumí* or *Santería*, speaks again to the problem of assigning African ethnicity to Africa-inspired expressions in Cuba. The fluidity of belief, use, and experience complicates our understanding of how Cuban landscapes have evolved, who has created them, and how they have operated through time. Clearly, these traditions have often been shared between whites and Blacks. The president’s commission, furthermore, employed prestigious materials to adorn the tree such as an ornate and inscribed iron ring set upon a marble base and a stepped platform within a larger monumental program that included the capitol building itself. This display of wealth, power, and control of labor projected presidential authority over the ceiba tree, as Machado attempted, according to Miller, to include a wide range of constituents in his national vision²¹. A permanent monument to the nation and its president, not a site of religious devotion, the Parque ceiba still saw members of the public blur the lines between secular and religious by depositing offerings at its base.



Figure 13. Postcard of El Templete, Plaza de Armas, Havana. Photomechanical print (postcard), halftone, tinted. Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 14. Ceiba tree in the Parque de la Fraternidad, Havana, Cuba. 1929. Photo by the author.

4. Performance and Spiritual Interchange

On 8 September, when devotees transport the Virgin of Regla's cult statue from the sanctuary through a devotional succession of church, tree, waterfront, streets, and public spaces, while the statue is taken down the sacred pathway of the ceiba tree and circumambulated three times counterclockwise around the tree's base. Santeras/os in Cuba interact with the ceiba in this way likewise, often in rural contexts, in order to activate the tree and bring out its sacred power or *aché* (Figures 15–18). This dynamic, by which two powerful and sacred actors (the cult statue and ceiba tree) meet face to face, deity to deity, represents a moment of energy transfer and exchange. It would seem that the grace of the Virgin of Regla/Yemayá comes together with and amplifies the sacred power of the ceiba tree and its potential association with divinity in the *iroko* and/or the *nkunga casa sami*, if indeed they are even seen as separate forces.



Figure 15. Pathway to the ceiba tree. Sanctuary of the Virgin of Regla, Cuba. Photo by the author.



Figure 16. Concrete pathway around the ceiba tree. Sanctuary of Regla, Cuba. Photo by the author.



Figure 17. Offerings, possibly *ebbós* or *bilongos*, at the ceiba tree. Sanctuary of the Virgin of Regla, Cuba. Photo by the author.



Figure 18. Pathway extending from the ceiba tree to the sea wall. Sanctuary of Regla, Cuba. Photo by the author.

Through this performance, the pathway underscores the ceiba tree's role as an axis mundi for the site, a vertical element marking sacred energy flow like others known across the African diaspora, from the Haitian poteau mitan to the thrones of the orichas. Connecting the ceiba to the sanctuary, the pathway provides a real and implied linear axis that, if taken to infinity, would almost perpendicularly intersect with the axis formed by the sanctuary. Furthermore, the two lines would roughly cross at the position of the Virgin's statue in the high altarpiece (Figure 19). This linear intersection binds church and tree as inter-related sanctuaries to the Virgin of Regla, thus spatially suggesting equivalency between each element. This juncture of the axis mundi, joining heaven, earth, and underworld with a cross axis symbolizing the four cardinal directions, echoes cosmo-theological ideas known in Africa, especially those of Kongo origin that may have already blended with Christianity there by the time of the transatlantic slave trade before being brought to the Americas. In his examination of Kongo cosmograms, Christopher Fennell looks at what he refers to as the *dikenga dia Kongo*, a cross axis for which the horizontal is known as the "line of Kalunga". This line represents a permeable boundary, imagined as a watery world, between the realm of the living and that of the spirits. Meanwhile, the vertical axis emphasizes the capacity of such spirits to cross this boundary and enter the living world to provide aid and interventions. The energy flow at this quincunx crossroads is said to be counterclockwise²².

The pathway to the ceiba tree may well suggest that one arm of the cross axis is the *dikenga*. If the pathway is imagined as such, the ceiba tree and the high altar in the sanctuary represent two prominent cross axes. If the tree defines this performative intersection, it might become the permeable boundary between humans and spirits, manipulated through devotional praxis to call the spirits and have them cross this line. When the Virgin Mary's status is taken to the ceiba tree, does she enter into this exchange, in which metaphysical boundaries are tested? Is the Marian devotion then moved counterclockwise into the event horizon, where the spirits meet humans and the living meet their ancestors? During my visit in 2011, I could clearly see that the pathway furnishes a permanent platform for the

placement of offerings, like *ebbós* or *bilangos*, at the ceiba during less-ceremonial when this powerful vortex is still honored (Figure 16). The theme of complementarity seems to pervade the space, in which conceptions of the divine descendant of Christian, Kongo, Lukumí, and other traditions have come together to form a new creative expression in Regla that is also shaped by the society, politics, and cultural practices of the municipality in relation to greater Havana, the island of Cuba, and the Afro-Atlantic. Certain striking correlations come to the fore. If the ceiba tree is the Cuban equivalent of the *iroko*, a tree–*oricha*, its Christian equivalent might well be the Virgin Mary. González-Wippler explains that *santeras/os* consider the ceiba to be female and that its spirit is essentially maternal (González-Wippler 1994). These same religious leaders also think of the ceiba as a Marian incarnation. As Lydia Cabrera noted, in the absence of an architectural sanctuary, especially in rural areas, the ceiba tree often supplies this space for priestesses and priests of Lukumí.

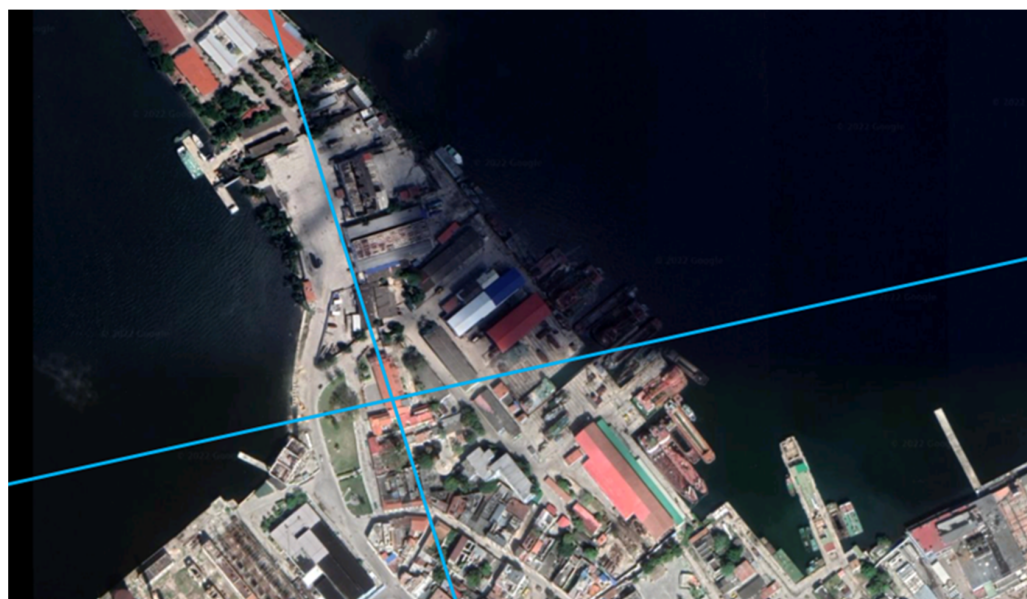


Figure 19. Satellite view of the Regla peninsula showing the convergent axes generated by the church sanctuary and the ceiba tree pathway. Google Maps.

The progression of the Virgin of Regla’s statue on the September 8th feast day intertwines the architectural sanctuary with the tree, performing synchronic connections that have arisen from diachronic processes. As devotees lovingly transport the Virgin–Yemayá’s cult status to the water’s edge, the patroness of Havana Harbor blesses the maritime history of the town’s population and commemorates the forced migrations of Africans across the Atlantic, which is rooted in the memory of the diaspora. In this performative process, as Viarnes notes, both of these things, statue and tree, animate, becoming more active and agentive toward the world. Yet, by the nature of the performance, it would seem that the Virgin Mary–Yemayá play an instrumental role in “waking up” the ceiba, given that devotees take her statue to the ceiba and circumambulate it in a mode of activation used by *santeras/os*, especially known in the countryside. Indeed, pilgrims and others from rural areas may historically have brought the secrets of *el monte* into the coastal port, to enclaves like Regla, and introduced devotional practices and means of veneration familiar to them and their ancestors.

5. Conclusions

Regla, in its identity, history, and sense of place, has offered subjects of African descent and others a powerful set of tools to confront a range of oppressions, including those enacted by the Spanish colonial regime; the Catholic church; the institution of slavery; endemic racism; the Cuban Republic, in which the state viewed such religion and culture

as impediments to national progress (even if they were manipulated to political ends); and the Revolution after 1959 that likewise considered such practices as obstacles to the Leninist–Communist model it sought to advance. However, after the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of major annual subsidies for Cuba, the island’s government even turned to African diasporic cultural tourism to generate revenues. The construction of the pathway to the ceiba tree seems to have been built shortly thereafter in 1997, whatever this might mean.

The use of landscape theory offers us a useful means of setting this walkway of concrete, brick, and earth into a broader perspective of space, society, and history. The ceiba tree conveys sacred power, specifically within the heart of a municipality of great importance to the African diaspora in Cuba for political negotiation, mutual aid, solidarity, family building, religious devotion, employment, and paying homage to ancestors who struggled and died in Cuba and during the Middle Passage. The ceiba and the sanctuary’s high altar offer beacons of connection with the larger forces that anchor the humanity and communal bonds of Cubans, both urban and rural, at a potent site of diasporic memory. For the relatively uninformed, the multivalence of the site may hide as much as it reveals. The low-lying pathway, its vibrancy hidden by a lack of understanding of an outsider perspective, might even seem insignificant to some. Walking the seawall across from the park, you can almost miss it.

In an animate system of meaning, the ceiba is perhaps just as important when it is sleeping, when it is a sign of potential energy, of possible spiritual work to be fulfilled. During the year, as the devout confer offerings at its base, the circular pathway becomes a kind of altar, quietly attesting to the power of the divine for quiet, personal devotion. On 8 September, the tree’s powerful reservoir of *aché* is aroused, and it nourishes the Marian statue and its devotees. While Regla preserves this marker of a sacred and social history, still used in religious observations, the town conspicuously lacks monuments that commemorate courageous supplicants to its Marian devotion like *Ño Remigio Herera*, *Adechina*; *Josefa Herrera*, *Echu Bí Pepa*; *Quintín Lombillo*; and others for whom the Virgin and the sacred landscape of her shrine have served as a source of solidarity, an ally in struggle, a connection to ancestors, a space for organizing, and a place for the reconstitution of their humanity before a violent, racist, and discriminatory series of regimes in Cuba, supported by dominant discourses in the Atlantic World. Instead, a rather abstract monument consisting of three entwined bodies, titled “Monument to the Martyrs of Regla”, can be found near the docks, commemorating the citizens of Regla murdered by President Fulgencio Batista in 1958 for supporting the rebellion led by Fidel Castro²³.

Over 10 years earlier, in the 1940s, several veterans of the Spanish Civil War joined forces with a number of Cuban anti-fascists to install a plaque memorializing José Antonio Aponte near the site at the intersection of Belascoaín and Reina streets, where Aponte’s severed head, following his execution by the Spanish in 1812, was put on public display. The plaque, stolen in the 1990s, read, “To José Aponte and his comrades: 1812–1943. Association of Former Combatants and Revolutionary Anti-Fascists of Cuba.”²⁴ In 1995, prior to the theft, members of the *Organización de Unidad Abakuá* (“Abakuá Unity Association”) held a tribute to Aponte at the site to protest racism and elevate Black solidarity. The sanctuary of Regla joins these other sites of African diasporic remembering in Cuba in the complex landscapes of diasporic memory, blurring the boundaries between temporal and eternal, civic and religious, and West African and European. Regla has meant survival, resistance, and rehumanizing practice, a place where such a pathway to the ceiba offers a route to an indeterminate reconnection to larger forces and deeper bonds.

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Notes

- 1 For a historical study on Our Lady of El Cobre, see (Díaz 2000).
- 2 Fernando Ortiz formulated a theory of *transculturation*, in which he argued that in the transition from one culture to another in such a process of combination, a previous culture may be lost (deculturation) and new cultural phenomena (neoculturation) produced. Anthropologists Sidney Mintz (1922–2015) and Richard Price (b. 1944), in their development of Creolization theory for Caribbean plantation sites, placed emphasis on the process of formation and generated a cultural building perspective, in which diverse source material is selectively used to construct the Creole world of the enslaved, as foundational to the rise of African American culture. Art historian Robert Farris Thompson, in his many works, drew out processes and products identified in African cultures, especially the Yoruba, that informed cultural expressions in the Americas. See (Ortiz 1995; Mintz and Price [1976] 1992; Thompson 1984).
- 3 For spaces of correlation, see (Fromont 2014, pp. 15–19) with quote on 15; for sangamento, see 21–63. Miguel A. Valerio looks at the sangamento in the context of Mexico, in (Valerio 2019).
- 4 Approaches to landscape in the humanities can be found in (Bender 1993; Jackson 1986, 1994, 2000; Upton 1984). For an important theory of space, see (Lefebvre [1974] 1991).
- 5 For this relation between Yemayá and the Virgin of Regla, see (Martín [1930] 2004); (Viarnes 2008); and (Brown 2003).
- 6 For an account of how animacy works in Native American material culture, see (VanPool and Newsome 2012). The volume co-edited by Steve Kosiba, John Wayne Janusek, and Thomas B.F. Cummins provides a rich study of animacy in the American hemisphere, though its focus is largely on the Indigenous Americas and not the African Diaspora. See (Kosiba et al. 2020). The notion that plants and other living things, even environmental forces, can be actors in an animate worldview can be contrasted with the long tradition of anthropocentrism in the West and found in (Latour 2007).
- 7 The Sanctuary and cult statue in Chipiona can be viewed at the following website: <https://www.santamariaderegla.com/index.php/la-virgen/> (accessed on 26 November 2023).
- 8 For a contemporary view of such complexities, see (Perez 2010).
- 9 For footage of the September 8th procession in Chipiona, see the following: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RnwB52X9TBQ> (accessed on 26 November 2023).
- 10 This history of the sanctuary of the Virgin of Regla largely comes from late 18th-century Havana-born historian (Arrate 1964).
- 11 A *vara* is a unit of measure employed in the Spanish colonial period and equivalent to 0.8359 m (32.909 inches).
- 12 “el devoto y deleitable santuario de nuestra señora de Regla, erigido en una breve punta que de la parte del sur se introduce en la bahía inclinada al norte; cuyo templo y casas de hospedería, ceñidas de un recinto de piedra y coronado de almenas, si e cita la devoción para religiosas romerías, también convida al gusto para recreaciones honestas” (Arrate 1964, p. 45).
- 13 “y se le alargó por la parte del sur, haciéndole capilla mayor, que unida al cuerpo del templo, sirviese para el sagrario y altar de la Señora, separado de los demas que le adornan: también se ensancharon las viviendas para habitación de los hermanos que asisten al santuario, y hospedagede la gente que va de romería á él. Formóse un claustro de aposentos bajos para aquellos, y otro destinado para huéspedes y peregrinos, y se levantó una pieza para vivir el capellán que está perpetuamente allí.” Ibid., 238.
- 14 The “second slavery” in Cuba refers to the post-Haitian Revolution turn to export-oriented, industrial-scale plantation agriculture that saw a marked increase in Spain’s participation in the transatlantic slave trade. See (Tomich and Zeuske 2008). For cabildos de naciones, see (Howard 1998; Childs 2006).
- 15 For the practice of Regla de Ocha, see (Aróstegui 1994; Barnett 2001); and (Brown 2003).
- 16 The trial record of Aponte that mentions his use of the Virgin of Regla can be found and translated to English on the site *Digital Aponte*, developed by the late art historian Linda Rodríguez. URL: <http://aponte.hosting.nyu.edu/> (accessed on 26 November 2023).
- 17 For other sacred tree traditions in West Africa’s Yorubaland, see (Agbaje-Williams 2005, pp. 157–87).
- 18 (González-Wippler 1994). I address some of these aspects of ceiba tree use in Santería for an earlier article, (Niell 2009). The author would like to thank Sara I. Rodríguez Rivera for emphasizing the importance of thinking about Cuban landscapes through the lens of “el monte” as given in (Cabrera [1954] 1994).
- 19 For an image of this ritual, see the following: <https://havanatimes.org/uncategorized/havana> (accessed on 26 November 2023).
- 20 (Miller 2000). For an extensive account of the national architectural program to which the Parque ceiba relates, see also (Hartman 2019). The author wishes to thank Joseph R. Hartman for many stimulating conversations about the ceibas of Havana.
- 21 Such intersections between African Diasporic religion and the Cuban state are addressed in such scholarly works as (Ayorinde 2004; Hearn 2008; Routon 2010).
- 22 The author acknowledges Chris Marie Conzone for bringing this cosmogram analysis to my attention (Fennell 2007).

- ²³ For Regla's support of revolutionary politics in the 1950s, see (Diez Barreras 2007).
- ²⁴ A blurry photograph of the plaque and information from which this passage is drawn can be found in (Prieto 2013).

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