

## THE CEIBA TREE AS A MULTIVOCAL SIGNIFIER: AFRO-CUBAN SYMBOLISM, POLITICAL PERFORMANCE, AND URBAN SPACE IN THE CUBAN REPUBLIC

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### INTRODUCTION: AFRO-CUBAN SYMBOLISM, POLITICAL PERFORMANCE, AND URBAN SPACE

Ivor Miller's article "Religious Symbolism in Cuban Political Performance" brings to light an interesting phenomenon: twentieth-century Cuban politicians used symbols that were associated with Afro-Cuban religions to communicate multiple meanings in public rituals. Practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions brought most of these connections to Miller's attention during his anthropological fieldwork in Havana in the 1990s. Based on his own research and oral accounts gathered by other twentieth-century anthropologists, such as Lydia Cabrera and Rómulo Lachatañeré, Miller enumerated a list of Cuban politicians who used religious symbolism in political performance, including Gerardo Machado y Morales, Fulgencio Batista, and Fidel Castro. On January of 1959, for example, Fidel Castro gave a televised speech to inaugurate his regime. During his speech two white doves appeared and perched on his shoulder and rostrum. Despite the fact that Castro's emerging communist regime was far from religious, the dove was seen as a divine symbol, perhaps legitimating Castro's new government. For the Afro-Cuban religion Santería, a dove represents the divine spirit of Obatalá, an important *orisha*, or divinity, in the Afro-Cuban cosmos. For Catholics, the dove is a sign of the Holy Spirit. Castro never officially admitted to being a *santero/a*, a priest of Santería, but his political performance indicated an understanding of what Miller referred to as "conflicting mythologies that have found a way to coexist in Cuba."<sup>1</sup>

These "conflicting mythologies," which may be better stated as coexisting and sometimes comingling mythologies, are also evident in President Gerardo Machado's political performance at the 1928 inauguration ceremony for *El Parque de la Fraternidad Americana* [The Park of the American Brotherhood] (Figure 1). The park was dedicated, in part, to the Sixth Annual Pan-American Conference held on January 16, 1928, in Havana. On February 24, 1928, before a crowd of nearly ten thousand Cuban men and women of Spanish and African descent, President Machado and delegates

from twenty other American nations, including the United States, sowed a transplanted ceiba tree that was as old as the Cuban Republic in the center of the *Parque*. It was called the *Árbol de la Fraternidad* [Tree of Brotherhood]. This newly constructed park featured a neoclassical axial design. In its Euclidean circular center, the ceiba was planted on the same transversal axis as the city's neoclassical *Capitolio* [Capitol Building]. The *Capitolio*, which resembles the Capitol building of Washington, D.C., marked the central hub of power in the emerging Republic of Cuba. Though reminiscent of French or American neoclassicism, the building's proximity to local flora and fauna such as the ceiba tree, helped to visually distinguish this structure as a Cuban national form.



FIGURE 1. Roberts & Co., *La Plaza de la Fraternidad*, 1930, postcard, Havana, Cuba. Verso of card reads: "The park built in 1928 has transformed one of the ugliest places in Havana into one of the beauty spots of the city. In the center is the Cuban Ceiba tree, which symbolizes Pan-American Fraternity." Courtesy of the University of Miami Libraries Cuban Heritage Collection, Coral Gables, Florida.

The centrality of the tree in *El Parque*, its spatial relation to the Cuban capitol, and the ceremony Machado performed underneath it at the 1928 inauguration could be viewed as a political performance similar to Fidel Castro's use of doves. It was a performance that acknowledged Cuba's conflicting, but often coexisting and comingling mythologies. The problem, as Miller's article indicates, is that Afro-Cuban religious symbolism in political performance is given little scholarly attention and, as a result,

Afro-Cuban reception of national symbols is often overlooked. To address that issue, this essay engages current discourse by drawing connections between the ceiba as a sacred tree for Afro-Cuban religions and its role as a national signifier. This essay analyzes the tree's multiple meanings in Havana's urban spaces, particularly in *El Parque* and at a late colonial site known as *El Templete* [the Little Temple] (Figure 2). By revealing a link between Afro-Cuban symbolism, urban space, and President Machado's use of the ceiba tree in *El Parque*, I argue that the tree functioned as a multivocal sign intended to create an imagined community for multiple audiences in the Cuban Republic. The Machado administration used the multivocality of the tree, which is associated with Spanish civic traditions, Afro-Cuban cosmology, and national identity, in an attempt to construct a unifying signifier of the Cuban nation.<sup>2</sup>

Machado's performance at the 1928 inauguration of *El Parque* deeply affected the meaning and subjective experience of the surrounding urban space for multiple audiences. The 1928 ceremony was homegrown and deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of Cuba, especially Afro-Cuban culture, which was marginalized in the colonial and early national context. As scholar of Latin American performance Roselyn Costantino notes: "[P]erformance in its multiple styles and manifestations constitutes a fundamental articulation of realities and memories of communities not represented within official, constructed notions of nation."<sup>3</sup>In other words, Latin American performances like the 1928 inauguration often communicate subaltern meanings that are not part of the overt national narrative. These performances are also not objective, but act as a "story" created through popular, embodied discourse. Dwight Conquergood, a pioneer of performance study at New York University, articulates the importance of examining these performative "stories" in his article "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research." Conquergood reminds us that modern culture, "marching under the banner of science and reason, [...] had disqualified and repressed other ways of knowing that are rooted in embodied experience, orality, and local contingencies."<sup>4</sup>

Machado's performance was effective because it utilized "local contingencies" to communicate meaning to multiple identities in Cuba. In addition to the white majority, the ceremony held meaning for Cuba's "margins and minorities," especially for the island's vast Afro-Cuban

populations.<sup>5</sup> The meaning of the *Parque* in Havana therefore emerges from a complex dialog between multiple audiences, whether black, white, local, or international. This dialogic space is conditioned by multiple voices, akin to Mikhail Bakhtin's literary theory of *heteroglossia*; multiple voices condition the meaning of a spatial utterance, such as the *Parque*, according to the particular circumstances of space and time.<sup>6</sup> The performative act of integrating the tree into Havana's urban space during the later 1920s communicated multiple interwoven messages that appealed to multiple subjectivities or states of 'being' in the early republican context. Those subjectivities were affected by various epistemologies, including Pan-Americanism, nationalism, and Afro-Cuban cosmological beliefs.

#### THE *PARQUE DE LA FRATERNIDAD AMERICANA*: INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL MEANINGS

In addition to Machado's 1928 performance, one should consider how the park's recently completed design by French architect Jean-Claude Forestier affected subjective experiences for international and local audiences in Havana. In 1926 President Machado and his Secretary of Works Carlos Miguel de Céspedes, commissioned the architect and a team of local and French engineers and designers to head a massive building campaign in Havana. The administration intended the campaign to transform Havana from a colonial city into a republican metropolis. The French Beaux-Arts and the American City Beautiful and Parks movements evidently influenced Forestier who was famous for fusing nature with architecture and elaborating neoclassical spatial programs. A profound consideration of local traditions affected his designs; Forestier stated that the following doctrine directed his work: "Imagining and inventing, but, in great moments, always obeying solemn tradition."<sup>7</sup> He used French and American styles to communicate progress to an international community, as a way to "imagine and invent" metropolitan Havana. Under Forestier's guidance a number of neoclassical urban spaces were created in the Cuban capital, such as the esplanade of the *Avenida de las Misiones*, the extension of the *Malecón*, the *Plaza del Maine*, the great staircase of the university, and *El Parque de la Fraternidad Americana*. Beyond the international connotation of neoclassicism, Forestier's locally influenced principle of "solemn tradition" becomes evident in the park's general form. Four pathways placed axially according to the cardinal directions define the interior of *El Parque*. Forestier appropriated this design from the square, colonial *Campo de Martí* [Field

of Mars formerly known as the *Campo Militar*—Military Field] over which the park was built.<sup>8</sup> The paths oriented pedestrians to the center of the park where a great ceiba tree was planted. In addition to the “solemn traditions” of colonial Cuba evident in the square design of *El Parque*, the integration of the ceiba into the urban landscape continued a spatial tradition dating back to colonial Havana. The ceiba was a central subject of visual culture, especially in the colonial Roman Doric temple known as *El Templete*, which is discussed in more detail below. The tree in both locations acted as a multivocal signifier for multiple audiences in the Cuban capitol, including Havana’s vast Afro-Cuban populations.

#### AFRO-CUBAN RELIGIONS AND THE CEIBA TREE:

##### A TRANSCULTURAL STEW

Before examining Afro-Cuban reception of the ceiba tree in Havana’s urban spaces and the 1928 political performance in depth, it is useful to review the Afro-Cuban religions themselves. It should be understood that Afro-Cuban religions are not simple belief systems. Anthropologist Melville Herskovits employed the term “syncretism” to define Afro-Cuban cosmology. “Syncretism” attempts to describe the reconciliation of two opposing cultures over time; in the Cuban context, those cultures stem primarily from European Catholicism and African cosmological beliefs. Herskovits, a pioneer of syncretism theory, used the term “acculturation” to describe the phenomenon that emerges when two distinct cultures are exposed to each other for long periods of time. The two cultures combine, although, in the same sense, they remain distinct. Such a viewpoint seems in line with Miller’s notion of “conflicting mythologies.” However, the idea that the two cultures can somehow remain distinct from one another is too narrow to encompass the complex nature of cultural formations in Cuba. Herskovits’ notion of “acculturation” implies that the original European or African cultures remain unaltered. In reality, Afro-Cuban religious belief is an intricate web of interlocking meanings that are affected by both space and time. When looking at Cuban visual culture or Afro-Cuban religion, “African” or “European” elements cannot simply be separated out. According to Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz, a more accurate syncretic model of cultures conflicting, coexisting, and comingling over time can be found in his definition of “transculturation.”<sup>9</sup> Cultural transformation is not merely acquisition of culture, but also entails the loss and uprooting of culture and the formation of a new culture.

Ortiz famously applied the metaphor of the traditional Cuban stew, *ajiaco*, to explain the notion that “transculturation” extends beyond Afro-Cuban religions to Cuban culture as a whole. Cuban culture, like the *ajiaco* stew, is comprised of multiple elements or ingredients that have fused together through years of conflict, coexistence, and comingling. While it may be true that certain fundamentals never fully “cooked out,” as chicken bones at the bottom of the cauldron, Cuban culture largely results from an infusion of diverse ethnicities. These eventually form a new culture that is uniquely Cuban.<sup>10</sup> The visual and spatial use of the ceiba tree in Havana is therefore not rooted in Africa or Europe. Rather, it is a new cultural representation of *lo Cubano*, that which is Cuban. The fact that ceiba trees are venerated in all the Afro-Cuban religions and respected by a wide range of citizens on the island reinforces this notion.

The transcultural context in which symbols of the Afro-Cuban religions like the ceiba tree emerged was closely tied to the history of slavery and the sugar boom between 1790 and 1870. African culture, especially from the Congo and Yoruban West Africa, was introduced to Cuba through the slave trade. Despite the oppressive and brutal reality of colonial society, traditions and religions from particular regions in Africa were somewhat preserved throughout the colonial period. However, as the theory of “transculturation” would remind us, they were altered significantly under these circumstances. Many scholars have traced the emergence of Afro-Cuban religions to the colonial organization of diaspora communities into *cabildos de nación*.<sup>11</sup> *Cabildos* were government-sanctioned aid organizations in the colonial period that were divided according to the distinct African cultures that existed in Cuba’s slave population. The *cabildos* were structured hierarchically, in a manner similar to a European monarchy. Each *cabildo* elected a king and two queens. In 1898, after the Spanish-American War, which is also referred to as the Cuban War for Independence, the *cabildo* system was brought to an end. Nonetheless, Afro-Cuban groups still organized themselves into *casas* [houses] or *casa-templos* [house-temples] during the republican era from 1902 to 1959. The “house temples,” while perhaps still controversial among Cuba’s whites, were places of worship for practitioners of Afro-Cuban religions in the early twentieth century. Within this context we can situate the emergence of what we identify as Afro-Cuban religions today.

## THE CEIBA TREE AS A MULTIVOCAL SIGNIFIER

There are three main Afro-Cuban religious groups: Santería, Palo Monte/Mayombe, and Abakuá. Santería is the best known of these, though it is often conflated with the other two practices and with witchcraft, dark magic, or the occult. The tradition largely originates with the Yoruba people of West Africa. The practitioners of Santería believe in one Supreme Being or, more accurately, a Supreme Trinity which is often referred to as Olodumare. While not worshiped directly, this trinity is manifested in everything that holds *aché*, energy that flows through life. *Aché* is seen in or manipulated by the *orishas*, metaphysical beings that act as mediators between humans and the Supreme Trinity and that are often compared to deities in a pantheon. There are thousands of divinities known in Africa, but in Cuba eight predominate: Elegua, Changó, Obatalá, Oggún, Orula, Oshún, Oyá, and Yemayá. These *orishas* are believed to be capable of both good and evil and it is therefore important to appease them by making offerings or sacrifices known as *ebbó*. Sacrifices to the *orishas* may range from rum and coins to the blood of an animal and the ceiba tree is an important site for these *ebbós*. Evidence of *ebbós* and *bilongos* [spells], which are used to appease and evoke the power of the *orishas*, can often be found at the base of the ceiba tree.<sup>12</sup>

The ceiba tree has a variety of spiritual meanings for *santeros/as*—practitioners of Santería. According to contemporary anthropologist Migene González-Wippler, *santeros/as* have identified six main uses for the ceiba: the trunk is often used to cast spells, particularly those with malevolent intent; the bark is used for tea and medicinal purposes; the shade attracts spirits and gives strength to spells; roots are used for offerings and blood sacrifice; the earth around the tree is used in “black” magic rituals; and the leaves of the tree are often used for medicinal and ceremonial purposes including love spells.<sup>13</sup>

The ceiba is also an important site for sacrifice and magic in Palo Monte/Mayombe, a religion that is believed to have originated via Congolese slaves of the Bantu language family in West Africa. To become a *palero/a*—a practitioner of Palo Monte—initiates must sleep under the ceiba tree for seven days. Palo Monte has two main tenets: the veneration of ancestors and belief in the powers of nature. Both of these tenets pertain to the ceiba tree, which is also considered a home to spirits and a great source of metaphysical power in nature. Palo Monte priests thus perform rituals around the ceiba to manifest its spiritual power.<sup>14</sup> These rituals are detailed in the following section.



Finally, the tree is important for the Abakuá, a fraternity that likely originated from similar organizations in Nigeria. Practitioners of Abakuá, the *Ñañigos*, are often associated with violent rituals. *Ñañigos* are said to sacrifice animals, such as goats, in the shadow of the ceiba tree. They do this because they believe the tree to be a representation *del Omnipotente* [the omnipotent] or *de la Majestad Divina* [the divine majesty].<sup>15</sup> Though information on Abakuá is limited in comparison to Santería and Palo Monte, it is important to note that the ceiba tree carries meanings and uses for each of these traditions.

### *EL ÁRBOL SANTÍSMO:*

#### ACCOUNTS OF THE CEIBA TREE IN THE AMERICAS AND CUBA

While the ceiba is a multivocal signifier that produces multiple interpretations for all three Afro-Cuban religions, *la ceiba* is symbolic in other parts of the Americas as well. The pre-Columbian meaning of the tree precedes its religious role in Afro-Cuban traditions. For example, in parts of Yucatan and Guatemala, the Maya consider the ceiba to be the Tree of Life. This mythic tree is a common subject in Mayan material culture. Early Spanish settlers were aware of the Native population's reverence for the tree in the Americas. As a result, they began using ceiba trees to mark colonial urban centers which can still be evidenced in colonial villages throughout Guatemala today.<sup>16</sup>

The tree is also directly associated with indigenous populations of the Caribbean. The pre-Columbian Taíno people, who occupied the archipelago prior to Spanish arrival, used the word "ceiba" as a title for the long canoes that they constructed from the tree. Dr. Peynado, a representative from the Dominican Republic who attended the 1928 inauguration, specifically associated Taíno identity to the ceiba in *El Parque*. He stated that upon contemplating the soil he brought from his fatherland to deposit at the foot of the *Árbol de la Fraternidad*, he "expected to discover in its molecules the soul of Hatuey."<sup>17</sup> Today Cubans still celebrate Hatuey, a Taíno Amerindian from Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic), for leading an attempted coup of the Spanish colonial government in the sixteenth century. The pre-Columbian meaning of the tree in Latin America and the Caribbean therefore also conditioned the 1928 inauguration of *El Parque* and its Pan-American connotation. At the Sixth Annual Pan-American conference, held in Havana a month before the inauguration ceremony, delegates from the



## THE CEIBA TREE AS A MULTIVOCAL SIGNIFIER

Americas worked to settle contentious political issues. They addressed the unanimous respect of every nation's independence and the United States' financial support for the military occupation of Nicaragua. Considering the controversial foreign policy of the U.S., in this context, the tree might have acted as a symbol of Latin American unity, as it does not grow in the colder northern regions of North America.<sup>18</sup>

Though the ceiba carried meaning in Latin America and the Caribbean, Cuba's *ajiaco* culture uniquely conditioned its reception when it was planted in *El Parque*. Beginning in the 1930s, Cuban anthropologist Lydia Cabrera recorded Cuban reverence for the ceiba tree during her extensive field work with Afro-Cuban religious groups. In her 1954 text *El Monte*, she opens her chapter on the ceiba tree by pointing out the possible existence of a *culto a la ceiba*, a ceiba cult, which is not just African. She notes that both in the past and present, Catholic and African saints have gone to and lived in the ceiba tree with equal fervor. If you ask a *guajiro*—defined as a white, rural Cuban farm worker—about *la ceiba*, he will invariably say that it is blessed. It is the Virgin Mary's tree and it is the *árbol santísimo*, the holiest tree. He will also affirm that it does not abate, as hurricanes will not fell it and lightning will not burn it.<sup>19</sup>

Cabrera's Afro-Cuban "informants," mostly practitioners of Palo Monte and Santería, equally revere the tree. They associate a vast array of divinities with the ceiba. Iroko, a sacred tree and an *orisa*, an equivalent to an *orisha* in Yoruba-land, is most often linked with the ceiba in Cuba. Both trees have a similar buttressed trunk, which is likely why African descendents in Cuba have elevated the ceiba to a sacred status. Religious practitioners also associated the tree with a lead figure in the Afro-Cuban "pantheon": Changó, the *orisha* of lightning. According to folklore collected by anthropologist Rómulo Lachatañeré in the 1930s, Changó would frequently battle his nemesis Oggún, the *orisha* of war and iron, underneath a ceiba tree. In one of these episodes, Oyá, the *orisha* of hurricanes and the third wife of Changó, dresses Changó in her clothes to trick and defeat Oggún, her former lover. This transgender roleplay is not uncommon in Afro-Cuban mythology and iconography. Changó, for example, is normally represented with the Catholic icon Santa Bárbara. The use of Catholic symbols is a widespread transcultural feature of Afro-Cuban religions and may also relate to the dual nature of the *orishas*, who can often manifest as multiple

genders. In addition to Changó or Santa Bárbara, ceiba folklore is connected to the father and mother of most *orishas*, Obatalá. S/he created a mythic *tablero*—a key implement in divination—from the wood of *la ceiba*. Some even call the base of the ceiba the trunk of Olofi, one form of the Supreme Trinity, which hierarchically stands above all *orishas*.<sup>20</sup>

Beyond its association with the Afro-Cuban “pantheon,” the ceiba is also used medicinally. Many elements of the ceiba are combined with medicinal herbs to create radical cures for ailments ranging from mental illness to syphilis. The sweat of the ceiba, or the water deposited at the base of the tree, is thought to be curative. The roots and leaves of the tree are commonly used to treat venereal and urinary infection. The ceiba is further considered a source of fertility and fecundity. Any woman wishing to conceive would consult a *palero* and drink a decoction made from the trunk of a female ceiba for the next three moons; those not wishing to conceive would drink from a male ceiba instead.<sup>21</sup>

Like many objects and divinities in the religions of the African diaspora, the ceiba possesses a certain duality. Just as it has the power to grant life and protection, it may also cause death and destruction. The true destructive force of *la ceiba* is evoked when one cuts down or defiles the tree. The fear of destroying a ceiba tree is so great that one of Cabrera’s “informants” admits that they would prefer to live a life of misery and leave their children to starve than cut down the tree. Another anecdote relates a tale of a man who felt his own limbs being cut as he cut into the ceiba. Others warn that ceiba trees revenge and never pardon those that cut them down; one who fells a ceiba will witness the deaths of his or her loved ones.<sup>22</sup> Cabrera’s ethnographic data of the tree as a vengeful power among African descendents in the twentieth century is corroborated by travel accounts from nineteenth-century chroniclers such as James Macfayden. Relating to the perception of the ceiba tree in Jamaica, Macfayden observed that, “even the untutored children of Africa are so struck with the majesty of [the ceiba tree’s] appearance that they designate it the *God-tree*, and account it sacrilege to injure it with the axe; so that not infrequently, not even fear of punishment will induce them to cut it down.”<sup>23</sup>

Just as felling the tree will result in condemnation, planting the ceiba is a blessing. An analysis of the sanctimony associated with these planting rituals

seems especially important within the current context, as this will inform our understanding of Machado's 1928 ceremony following the Sixth Annual Pan-American Conference and the tree's use as a central design element in the *Parque* conditioned by Afro-Cuban cosmology. In Palo Monte rituals, for example, the act of planting a ceiba tree is a sacrament.<sup>24</sup> For the ceremonial celebration of this sacrament, four friends of different genders have to bring soil from different territories that correspond to the cardinal directions. They baptize the tree with water and bless the soil with prayers, blood, and eggs. After the tree has been sanguinely planted in blessed earth, the event is then celebrated with drums and dancing.

*Paleros/as* treat the matured ceiba tree as an *axis mundi*, a world axis that is used to manifest spiritual power in the physical realm. In particular, the tree is a site for casting *ngangas*, spells frequently made in cauldrons and meant to violently harm an intended victim. During these rituals, *paleros/as* leave sacrificial rum and coins at the base of the tree. They then stab the ceiba on all its cardinal points and chant the victim's name three times for ritual efficacy, as this is an important numerological quantity in the Afro-Cuban cosmos.<sup>25</sup> For *paleros/as* the best day to plant these trees is November 16, the day of Aggayú, who is the *palero* father of Changó.<sup>26</sup> Interestingly, the day for planting the tree in Afro-Cuban tradition corresponds to the date that Cubans ritually circumambulate a famous ceiba tree in front of *El Templete*. Tradition prescribes that this tree be encircled counterclockwise three times while coins are thrown at its base in order to honor the founding of Havana. This act displays interesting cultural parallels that suggest a convergence of African and Spanish traditions in Cuban civic rituals. These parallels likewise inform the cultural practices of early republican Cuba, Machado's 1928 ceremony, and the design of *El Parque*.

#### LOCAL HISTORICISM FOR THE CEIBA IN HAVANA:

##### *EL TEMPLETE, RACE, AND URBAN RITUALS*

Since *El Templete* and the civic rituals practiced at its site appear to have been an important model for the design of *El Parque* and Machado's inauguration ceremony, it seems advisable to analyze this colonial site. *El Templete* was constructed in 1828 to honor a ceiba tree located within the *Plaza de Armas*, or Arms Square, in colonial Havana (Figure 2). It was under this tree that the city was putatively founded on November 16, 1519. Moreover, the first mass and *cabildo*, or town council meeting, were allegedly held here as well.

FIGURE 2. *Columbus Memorial Chapel- El Templete, Habana, Cuban Card Co. No. 28, c.1930, postcard, Havana, Cuba. Building constructed 1828. Courtesy of the University of Miami Libraries Cuban Heritage Collection, Coral Gables, Florida.*



Though the veracity of this origination myth is dubious, the tree in *La Plaza de Armas* was fashioned into a powerful symbol of the Cuban nation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This process becomes evident in the neoclassical art and architecture created for *El Templete* during these periods. Jean Baptiste Vermay, a student of French neoclassical painter Jacques-Louis David and the first director of Cuba's Art Academy of San Alejandro, created three paintings between 1826 and 1828 that visualize the tree as a civic and religious symbol. Located along the three inner walls of the cella in *El Templete*, Vermay's neoclassical paintings reflect the importance of the ceiba tree in Havana's urban history. The two smaller paintings, entitled *La Primera Misa (The First Mass)* and *El Primer Cabildo (The First Cabildo)*, feature the ceiba tree as a central design element. Both paintings represent European leaders positioned didactically over Cuba's now mostly extinct Native population. Scholar of Cuban visual culture Paul Barrett Niell has noted that the Spaniards in the paintings, including the conquistador Diego Velázquez, appear to be bringing civilization to the Native people of the Americas.<sup>27</sup> In Vermay's paintings, the ceiba tree is positioned as a civilizing meeting point for Havana's civic and sacred traditions, a place where the city and its social dynamics were conceived.

In the third painting entitled *La Fiesta de la Inauguración (The Inauguration Party)*, the tree is not included in the composition. Instead, the inauguration of *El Templete* in 1828 is depicted. The building in the image is surrounded by a newly constructed iron fence that features rectangular stone pillars adorned with bronze pineapples that are symbolic of Caribbean abundance.

## THE CEIBA TREE AS A MULTIVOCAL SIGNIFIER

The composition includes white slave owners, a black slave, a freed black man, and important Cuban officials such as Bishop Juan José Díaz de Espada, who influenced the site's design and the creation of similar neoclassical spaces throughout Havana. The painting therefore offers an account of social and racial dynamics during the nineteenth century. In dialog with Vermay's other paintings, which are displayed to the left and right of this work, colonial leaders of the nineteenth century appear to draw legitimacy from the early conquistadors. They civilize the non-white citizens and perfect nature, the ceiba tree, through art.

The only reference to the ceiba tree in the *Fiesta de la Inauguración* painting is a pillar commissioned in 1754 by then Governor Francisco Cagigal de la Vega. This pillar, which resembles a stylized ceiba, still stands in front of *El Templete* today. It was erected nearly one hundred years before *El Templete* to honor the original ceiba in *La Plaza de Armas* which has died and been replaced several times. A natural ceiba still grows at the site presently in honor of this long tradition.

Though social dynamics during the twentieth century changed dramatically, the motifs embedded in the visual culture surrounding *El Templete* could have provided a foundational narrative for the Machado regime. The planting of the tree in *El Parque* marked a shift of power away from the colonial government inside the old city walls [*intramuros*] where *El Templete* is located, to a new republican space outside the colonial city [*extramuros*] where the Cuban Capitol stands. The historic role of the ceiba tree as a national symbol explains its use as a signifier of shifting power dynamics in the later 1920s.

Sociologist Fernando Ortiz has suggested that the colonial tree in front of *El Templete* has a national connotation. I argue that this affected the tree's meaning in the republican *Parque*. When José Antonio Aguirre, the first Autonomous Community President of the Basque Country, saw the ceiba and *El Templete* in 1942, he noted a striking similarity to the Tree of Guernica and its accompanying architecture in Spain (Figure 3). Like the ceiba tree of Havana, the Tree of Guernica symbolized the foundation of civic history in the Basque region. Given this fact, Aguirre perceived the ceiba tree and *El Templete* as a symbol of and monument to Cuban independence in Havana. He drew a visual parallel to the Tree of Guernica and the neoclassical *Sala*

FIGURE 3. Papamanilla, *Árbol de Gernika* [Tree of Guernica], 2009, photograph. Building constructed c. 1826, permission is granted to copy, distribute and/or modify this document under the terms of the [GNU Free Documentation License](#).



*de Juntas* [Meeting Room], a Doric temple built in the nineteenth century to honor the mythic Basque tree. Bishop Espada, who had initiated the construction of *El Templete*, was a Basque descendant. Therefore, it appears likely that he was playing a *jugarreta* [a dirty trick] on the captain generals of Cuba when he inaugurated the site in 1828: he was using the ceiba as a signifier whose meaning was attached to the Tree of Guernica and the liberty it represented.<sup>28</sup>

When the tree's nationalistic connotations are taken into consideration, it is not surprising that it was used as a central element within the design of *El Parque* and its inauguration ceremony in 1928. The architect of the *Parque*, Forestier, was highly aware of local traditions when he conceived of its arrangement. Forestier lived in Havana between 1925 and 1930 and must have become well acquainted with Havana's urban history, art, people, and culture in this period.<sup>29</sup> He likely would have witnessed the transcultural ritual of circumambulating the tree in front *El Templete*, a Cuban practice that evolved from African and European traditions to honor the origin of Havana. It is therefore probable that this local ritual affected the spatial organization of the twentieth-century *El Parque*.

The influence of this ritual is evident in the design of *El Parque*. The rectilinear stone pathways and the circular center of the park encourage pedestrians to move from one end of the space to the other in a straight line. Yet, in the center of *El Parque* one must, at least partially, circumambulate

## THE CEIBA TREE AS A MULTIVOCAL SIGNIFIER



FIGURE 4. Secretaría de Obras Publicas, *Árbol de la Fraternidad* dedicated 24 February 1928, 1928, photograph, Havana, Cuba. Courtesy of the University of Miami Libraries Cuban Heritage Collection, Coral Gables, Florida.

the ceiba tree planted by Machado in 1928, which is positioned on a stone platform elevated by three steps and surrounded by a bronze palisade fence. The latter is reminiscent of a Spanish neoclassical palisade fence, similar to the one surrounding *El Templete*, and the tree's plinth is made of marble from *Isla de los Piños*, an isle south of Cuba's mainland (Figure 4). The bronze fence was designed by the architect Cesar E. Guerra and was cast by the American company Darden-Beller Bronziers. The emblems of twenty-one American nations were created to adorn the top of the fence and a quote from Cuban historian, poet, and independence hero José Martí was also etched around the upper edge of the fence's circumference.<sup>30</sup> The twenty-one emblems of the American nations and the entirety of José Martí's quote cannot be seen or read without circumambulating the tree on the central axis of the *Parque* counterclockwise. This design feature connotes the ritual, counterclockwise circumambulation of the ceiba tree in the *Plaza de Armas*. As social historian Eric Hobsbawm would suggest, the ceiba tree acted as an old form that was given a new purpose in the early Cuban Republic and it is therefore a living monument to Cuban national identity.<sup>31</sup> According to Ortiz's theory of "transculturation," identity in the Cuban Republic was based on multiple epistemologies, especially those from Africa, Europe, and America.

### EARLY TWENTIETH-CENTURY CUBA AND AFRO-CUBAN SYMBOLISM IN NATIONAL DISCOURSE: REFORM AND REPRESSION

The ceiba tree's multifaceted historical significance for the Cuban population presumably affected President Machado's inauguration ceremony and I would suggest that the tree's Afro-Cuban connotations particularly informed the way Cubans of all backgrounds perceived it. Machado used the tree as a



means to construct a national identity for Cuba, a desire for which emerged after the country had gained independence from Spain only decades earlier. In the early period of independence, the country suffered from corruption and economic and political turmoil, a situation that eventually required socio-political reform. During the presidential elections of 1924, the liberal candidate Machado ran on a platform of reform that appeared to be in touch with issues that also concerned artistic and intellectual movements of the time period, such as the Cuban Vanguard or the elite black social club Atenas.<sup>32</sup> The Cuban Vanguard, a modern group of primarily male painters and intellectuals that was active between 1927 and 1950, visually articulated a wide range of social and political concerns that had emerged in the 1920s, including: a recently gained national independence, the rejection of old colonial models, an affirmation of modernity, and an increased attention to neglected groups such as peasants and Afro-Cubans.<sup>33</sup> The use of Afro-Cuban cosmological symbols such as the ceiba tree resulted from the desire for an authentically Cuban culture that would express the national identity and the reform-minded attitude of the early Cuban Republic. In other American nations, like Mexico, the concept of the indigenous served as a symbol of the ancient past that legitimated the nascent republic. Unlike other American nations, however, most of Cuba's Taíno Amerindians had been killed by disease and forced labor during the Spanish occupation. In lieu of a living Native culture, black modes of expression became a vehicle to protest against colonial narratives and foreign domination in the early twentieth century. It is in this context that the global rise of the *afrocubano*, *negrismo*, and *negritude* movements took place.<sup>34</sup> These movements affirmed African heritage despite the prejudice of many whites on the island who considered Afro-Cuban culture to be backwards.

Though Afro-Cuban symbolism was prevalent in the visual culture of the early twentieth century, it is important to note that, simultaneously, misgivings existed about Afro-Cuban influence in the socio-political sphere. Fear of Afro-Cubans was articulated in the criminological studies of Fernando Ortiz, who warned of the danger associated with Afro-Cuban influence in the political sphere. He specifically alluded to the power of "witchcraft" among rural populations that might be used for political ends. He acknowledged that *brujos*, or witches, had already infiltrated themselves in political contests, using their sway to win votes.<sup>35</sup>

## THE CEIBA TREE AS A MULTIVOCAL SIGNIFIER

Ortiz voiced a concern held by many white elites. As a result of these fears, Afro-Cubans were deprived of a voice in Cuban politics during the early part of the twentieth century and political organizations such as the *Partido Independiente de Color* (PIC) were systematically repressed. The PIC had been formed in 1908 to address the gross underrepresentation of Afro-Cubans in Cuban politics. Despite having fought for the island's independence in large numbers, Afro-Cubans were for the most part denied political representation. There were attempts to outlaw the PIC because it was formed around racial lines, a fact that was deemed ideologically unacceptable in the early Republic. Political elites regarded acknowledging race, let alone racial inequality, as un-Cuban and itself an act of "racism." Thus Afro-Cuban political concerns were repressed during the twentieth century, despite organizations such as the PIC that protested this disenfranchisement. The intense repression of Afro-Cuban political influence culminated in the massacre of nearly three thousand protestors at a PIC-organized demonstration during the "race war" of 1912.<sup>36</sup>

The fear of Afro-Cuban influence in Cuban politics and culture is apparent in the urban history of the *Parque de la Fraternidad* as well. The *Parque*, formerly known as the *Campo de Martí*, was a historic gathering point for the working class in the late nineteenth century. Despite a lack of group organization and oppressive conditions in colonial society, Cuban workers gathered secretly in the *Campo* to celebrate the first *Día Internacional de los Trabajadores* [International Day of Workers or Labor Day] in 1890. A few years later, as separatist sentiments grew and eventually exploded into full-scale revolution, colonial authorities prohibited large gatherings throughout Havana. As a result, workers who had previously gathered in the *Campo* were forced to meet in secret locations. David H. Brown, a scholar of Afro-Cuban material culture, noted that during this period, the persecution of black social groups, especially those associated with the controversial Abakuá fraternity, was integral to "the state program of union busting and worker repression."<sup>37</sup> The greatest growth in non-black initiations into the Abakuá occurred during this early period and was apparently owed to the empowering function of the Abakuá lodges, which offered safe meeting places for the growing dock labor movement during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As proletarianization intensified, Afro-Cubans and the labor movement found a common interest: protecting Cuban jobs from foreign workers. To address concerns voiced by sugar plantation owners about labor loss following the War for Independence, the Cuban government sought immigrant workers in order to avoid compromising the sugar harvests of 1900 and 1901. Two migration policies emerged as a result: the use of temporary black West Indian labor or the immigration of white families from Spain and the Canary Islands. The Cuban government sponsored the latter as a way to “whiten” the island. The use of white immigrants was seen as a solution to two separate, but intimately related “threats”: those of blacks and labor. These two groups, consequently, shared a common interest that blurred racial boundaries in Cuba. Among the working class, the notion of “race” was often understood as a line that separated Cuban from foreign workers versus blacks from whites. Furthermore, given that Afro-Cubans dominated the city’s skilled and semi-skilled jobs from the eighteenth century onward, it is logical that Afro-Cuban religious groups would share a concern for the Cuban labor market in the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> The *Campo/Parque*, as the first gathering point for the labor movement of that time period, was strongly associated with labor reform and, in turn, Afro-Cuban identity.

Acknowledging this urban history, Machado’s ceremony for the inauguration of the *Parque* in 1928 was intended to legitimate his apparently reform-minded government, not just for Cuba’s whites, but for Afro-Cuban populations as well. Machado’s evocation of tradition and authority through the ceiba tree was not solely reliant on Spanish Catholic and European visual signs. Rather, Machado was intimately aware of the island’s diverse populations. Afro-Cuban traditions were very much a part of Cuban national identity and Machado used that fact to his advantage in the 1928 ceremony. It is not surprising that twentieth-century anthropological accounts, such as those by Lydia Cabrera, Rómulo Lachatañeré, and Ivor Miller, indicate that the ceiba tree in *El Parque*, its soil, and the architectural elements in the surrounding urban landscape design communicated meaning to the Afro-Cuban populations of Havana.

**AND IT WILL COST A LOT OF BLOOD: THE 1928 INAUGURATION CEREMONY, AFRO-CUBAN RECEPTION, AND THE POLYSEMIC CITY**

Let us return to the case of President Gerardo Machado and the ceiba tree

in *El Parque de la Fraternidad Americana* to consider how his political performance at the 1928 inauguration was uniquely conditioned and received by Afro-Cuban audiences. Local newspapers visually and textually documented this political performance in the form of articles, collages, and photojournalism (Figure 4). The Cuban press affected the intended meaning for the park's inauguration by promoting the act visually. These images prove that one did not have to actually be on site to witness the ceremony. The visual nature of these images also indicates that the message was available to literate and illiterate audiences, thus affecting a wide array of Cuban citizens.

In addition to the public message presented in the press, anthropologists, such as Cabrera, Lachatañeré, and Miller recorded Afro-Cuban oral accounts of the performance. These oral histories reveal the embodied, popular discourse of *El Parque*, especially for Afro-Cuban audiences. First, it was observed that Machado was always dressed in white. While this is a common style in the Caribbean, it is worth noting that initiates of *Santería* must also dress in white clothes for one year. The reception of his costume is further significant according to early twentieth-century accounts of Rómulo Lachatañeré. Cuban *santeros* informed Lachatañeré that Machado was baptized as a son of Changó.<sup>39</sup> As an alleged son of Changó, symbols of that *orisha* appeared in the inauguration ceremony for *El Parque* and its landscape design. The green space of *El Parque* was lined with palm trees and ceiba trees, often associated with Changó. Also, on the day of the inauguration, Machado ceremonially sowed the transplanted *Árbol de la Fraternidad* in the center of the *Parque* with earth from the twenty-one republics present at the Sixth Annual Pan-American conference. The soil that the American delegates brought was taken from important places related to American independence, predominantly from places where battles had been fought. Therefore, the soil samples were essentially baptized with the blood of American revolutionaries. This gesture was effective as a symbol of Pan-American fraternity, but it also held metaphysical meaning for Havana's Afro-Cuban populations. For the latter, earth, and especially earth that has been blessed with a blood sacrifice, is full of mystical power. Moreover, as outlined above, soil presented by compatriots from different geographical regions is common practice in *palero* tree planting rituals.

In addition to these sacred connotations, the soil that was used to represent Cuba in the 1928 ceremony held civic implications for Afro-Cubans. The

earth was reportedly taken from the base of the *Jagüey de Yara* tree, also known as *El Árbol de la Guerra* [Tree of War]. On October 10, 1868, Don Carlos Manuel de Céspedes uttered the first *grito* [cry] for independence underneath a jagüey tree in the region of Demajagua, after freeing his black slaves.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the fistful of Cuban soil Machado kissed before depositing it at the foot of the ceiba evoked a complex of sacred and civic meanings for Afro-Cubans. In an anthropological study of these multifaceted significations, Lachatañeré asked *santeros/as* what they thought of the 1928 ceremony. Among those he consulted, the general conclusion was that Changó had ordered the president to perform the magic ritual in order to gain protection from his enemies.<sup>41</sup>

A *palera*, a female practitioner of Palo Monte, shared a more sinister interpretation of the 1928 ceremony with Lydia Cabrera. She claimed that the prominent officials at the *Parque* had entered *macutos* beneath the ceiba tree. *Macutos* refer to the sacks in which *paleros/as* store their sacrifices and religious implements. These sacks are used in many ceremonies, including exorcism, but are also seen in “dark” magic rituals. Twenty years after Machado’s performance, the ceiba tree planting ritual continued to hold power over Cuba. The *palera* warned:

There will be no tranquility or order in this country until they remove and dismantle the *nganga* [a spell and/or cauldron central in Palo rituals] that General Machado entered [into the earth] some twenty years ago. This *Prenda* [another word for *nganga*] is so strong, and it is so wounded that it has everything wrapped up [troubled] even though it doesn’t look like it, and it will cost a lot of blood.<sup>42</sup>

Other “informants” assured Cabrera that the *prenda* or *nganga* would revenge its owner for the ingratitude of the Cuban population.

According to Cabrera’s “informants” the entire 1928 ceremony had an air of magic and the urban design of *El Parque* displayed a wide range of Afro-Cuban religious significations. The arrows of the bronze palisade fence that surrounds the tree in the *Parque* are said to be those of the *orishas* Oggún, Eleggua, Ochosi, Allágguna, and Changó; they are also symbols of the *palo*, or stick, of Palo Monte’s god Nkuyo—the deity of woods and roads. The

twenty-one different soils and gold coins placed at the tree's base acted as signifiers of ceiba tree rituals in Afro-Cuban tradition. Also, Cabrera's sources noted the presence of a famous *palero* at the 1928 ceremony named Sotomayor, a friend to some influential politicians of that era. Historian Alina Helg has observed that the Machado regime was famous for "tokenism," using a few Afro-Cubans in highly visible positions in order to appear racially equal. All of these factors, Cabrera notes, are eloquent indications that Afro-Cuban symbolism was prevalent at the 1928 performance; there may be, as Cabrera's "informants" claimed, "una Mañunga muy fuerte" [a powerful spirit that resides there today].<sup>43</sup>

Following these findings, the 1928 ceremony and its attendant symbolism informed the multivocal signification of the ceiba tree in the urban landscape design of *El Parque*, especially as it relates to Afro-Cuban subjectivity. While it would be difficult to prove that Machado intentionally used Afro-Cuban symbolism, it cannot be denied that the inauguration ceremony, the design of *El Parque*, and the ceiba tree planted on its central axis, reveal the polysemic nature of the Cuban city. The tree, intended as a unifying symbol, brought different cultural threads in Havana together by communicating multiple meanings to multiple citizens. The Machado regime benefited from this powerful symbol and used it to construct a unified national identity in Havana.

#### CONCLUSION: THE *PARQUE* AS A DIALOGIC STEW

If we consider the meaning of an urban space to emerge from a complex, socially conditioned dialog, then the meaning of Havana's *Parque* becomes clearer when the various epistemological structures that affect the Cuban audience are taken into consideration. The production of meaning in Havana's urban spaces is not a binary relationship between black and white or local and international significations. Instead, it is a complex of interlocking meanings that are affected by both space and time. As Ortiz noted, Cuban society cannot be separated into distinct elements; it is an *ajiaco*, a stew. Cuban culture is enriched with time and transformed through the process of embodied discourse. What was once African or European has shifted to become Cuban. Considering Cuban visual and spatial evidence, Forestier and Machado were apparently aware of the tree's multivocal significations and its ability to affect Cuban subjectivity. For the architect Forestier, the tree was a symbol of "solemn tradition," which he could use

to “imagine and invent” the new republican landscape. For the politician Machado, the tree functioned as a salient symbol of the diverse Cuban nation, rooted in Spanish civic traditions, Afro-Cuban cosmology, and, above all, national Cuban identity. The tree’s religious and civic symbolism was used to convey multiple local and international messages in Machado’s political performance; to create a “story” that would affect various audiences, including Afro-Cuban populations. Employed as part of a larger political strategy to reify national and civic solidarity, Machado’s use of the ceiba tree should be seen as one element in a multivalent, visually textured ritual, reflecting the diverse audiences of modern Cuba.

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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup>Ivor L. Miller, “Religious Symbolism in Cuban Political Performance,” *The Drama Review* 44, no.2 (2000): 30-55. His quote appears on page 32.

<sup>2</sup>According to Benedict Anderson’s analysis of national anthems, the imagined traditions of the nation bring separate elements together in order to create a unified voice (unisonance) or, I might argue, a unified image (univalence). Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1983), 145; planting this symbolic tree in the park was well advertised in local newspapers of Havana. A synopsis is available online at Jorge Oller, “Grandes Momentos del Fotoreportaje Cubano: La inauguración de la Plaza de la Fraternidad Americana,” available at <http://www.cubaperiodistas.cu/fotorreportaje/26.html> (accessed October 3, 2010). Newspaper articles that covered the 1928 event include *Diario de la Marina*, “Los Veinte Países se Asociaron Ayer al Homenaje de Nuestras Efemérides de Gloria,” February 25, 1928; *El Heraldo de Cuba*, “Plantado El Árbol de Concordia,” February 25, 1928.

<sup>3</sup>Roselyn Costantino, “Latin American Performance Studies: Random Acts or Critical Moves?” *Theatre Journal* 56 (2004): 461.

<sup>4</sup>Dwight Conquergood, “Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research,” *TDR* 46 (2002): 146.

<sup>5</sup>See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 302-308. Bhabha describes the “margins and minorities” as the borders of the nation that circumscribe its formation.

<sup>6</sup>The city as a dialog emerges from the author’s consideration of Roland Barthes’ theory that the city is writing. Roland Barthes, “Semiology and the Urban,” in *Reading Architecture:*



## THE CEIBA TREE AS A MULTIVOCAL SIGNIFIER

*A Reader in Cultural Theory*, ed. Niel Leach (New York: Routledge, 1997), 146. The meaning of the city is conditioned by multiple "readers." One can nuance this textual metaphor with Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of *dialogism*. In his study of the novel, Bakhtin notes that the world is defined by multiple voices in dialog, a phenomenon he refers to as *heteroglossia*. Dialog, as a physical act, is a more comfortable metaphor when considering the performative nature of these spaces. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (University of Texas Press: Austin, 1994), 423-434.

<sup>7</sup>Forestier's role in transforming Havana is discussed in Jean-François Lejeune, "The City as Landscape: Jean Claude Nicholas Forestier and the Great Urban Works of Havana, 1925-1930," trans. John Beusterein and Narisco G. Menocal, *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 22 (1996): 150-184. The quote appears on page 153. An overview of Beaux-Arts and American City Beautiful influence in Havana is discussed in Rachel Carley, *Cuba: 400 Years of Architectural Heritage* (New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1997), 128-182.

<sup>8</sup>A review of this colonial space can be found in Joaquín E. Weiss, *La Arquitectura Colonial Cubana* (La Habana: Letras Cubanas, 1979), 205-208; the *Campo* is mentioned in relation to the *Parque*, which was also known as *La Plaza de la Fraternidad* in Yamira Rodríguez Marcano, "La Plaza de la Fraternidad Americana", available at <http://www.somosjovenes.cu/index/semana20/vincammart.htm> (accessed December 10, 2010). The *Campo* is also noted in George Ripley and Charles A. Dana, ed., *The New American Cyclopaedia: A Popular Dictionary of General Knowledge* (New York: Appleton, 1857), 519.

<sup>9</sup>Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco & Sugar* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1947), 97-103. Ortiz' theory of "transculturation" developed largely in opposition to Melville Herskovits' theory of "acculturation." See Melville Herskovits, *Myth of the Negro Past* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1941).

<sup>10</sup>Fernando Ortiz, "La Cubanidad y los Negros," *Estudio Afrocubanos* 3, no. 1 (1939): 4-5; also noted in Juan A. Martínez, *Cuban Art and National Identity: The Vanguardia Painters, 1927-1950* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1994), 37.

<sup>11</sup>George Brandon, *Santería from Africa to the New World: The Dead Sell Memories* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), 52. The notion of Yoruban and Congo influence due to the slave trade is discussed by numerous authors. These Yoruban- and Congo-derived practices vary greatly in Cuba and accounts may differ. For more information consult Christina Ayorinde, "Santería in Cuba: Tradition and Transformation," in *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, ed. Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 209-231; Miguel Barnet, *Afro-Cuban Religions*, trans. Christine Renata Ayorinde (Princeton: Markys Wiener, 2001); Judith Bettleheim, ed., *Cuban Festivals: A Century of Afro-Cuban Culture* (Kingston: Ian Randle and Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2001), 1-39; David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro Cuban Religion* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003); Mary Ann Clark, *Santería: Correcting the Myths and Uncovering the Realities of a Growing Religion* (London and Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 31-44, 95-115; Mercedes Cros Sandoval, *Worldview, the Orishas, and Santería: Africa to Cuba and Beyond* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 83-92; Arturo Lindsay, ed., *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art in the Twentieth Century* (London: Phaidon, 1996), 120-135.

<sup>12</sup>Migene Gonzáles-Wippler, *Powers of the Orishas: Santería & the Worship of Saints* (New

York: Original Publications, 1992); Migene Gonzáles-Wippler, *Santería: the Religion* (New York: Harmony Brooks, 1982), 145; I observed evidence of ebbó at the foot of the tree in *El Parque* while visiting Havana in November 2010. A similar observation is found in Miller, "Religious Symbolism," 34.

<sup>13</sup>Gonzalez-Wippler, *Santería: the Religion*, 135.

<sup>14</sup>These *palero* practices are described in Lydia Cabrera, *Reglas de Congo: Palo Monte, Palo Mayombe* (Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal, 1986), 1; and Gonzáles-Wippler, *Santería: the Religion*, 242.

<sup>15</sup>Lydia Cabrera, *El Monte: Igbo, Finda, Ewe Orisha, Vititi Nfinda: Notas Sobre las Religiones, la Magia, las Supersticiones y el Folklore de los Negros Criollos y el Pueblo de Cuba* (Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal, 1975), 205.

<sup>16</sup>Gregory Stephen Guest, "A Tree for All Reasons: the Maya and the 'Sacred' Ceiba" (master's thesis, University of Calgary, 1995); Katharine Anderson points out the use of the tree in colonial Guatemala in her work *Nature, Culture, and Big Old Trees: Live Oaks and Ceibas in the Landscapes of Louisiana and Guatemala* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003).

<sup>17</sup>Literally, *pretendía descubrir en sus moléculas el alma de Hatuey*. The entire speech is recorded in "Los Veinte Países se Asociaron Ayer," *Diario de la Marina*, 10; for more on the origin of the word "ceiba" in terms of Cuba's Taíno Amerindians see Marshall Avery Howe, "Some Photographs of the Silk-Cotton Tree (Ceiba Pentandra), with Remarks on the Early Records of its Occurrence in America," *Torreya* 6 (November 26, 1906): 217-231.

<sup>18</sup>For more on the conference see Orestes Ferrara, *El Panamericanismo y la Opinión Europea* (Paris: Editorial Le "Livre libre," 1930); the author's observation comes from discussion at Florida State University's 28th Annual Graduate Student Symposium, September 2010.

<sup>19</sup>Cabrera, *El Monte*, 149. Even Chinese workers in colonial Cuba called the tree a throne of Sanfán Kón. Sanfán Kón is the equivalent to Santa Bárbara in China, a saint associated with the *orisha* Changó.

<sup>20</sup>Cabrera, *El Monte*, 150, 163; Romuló Lachatañeré and Christine Ayorinde, *Afro-Cuban Myths: Yemayá and Other Orishas* (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2006), 35-41.

<sup>21</sup>Cabrera, *El Monte*, 177, 183-184; and Gonzáles-Wippler, *Santería: the Religion*, 135.

<sup>22</sup>Cabrera, *El Monte*, 192-193.

<sup>23</sup>James Macfadyen, *The Flora of Jamaica; A Description of the Plants of That Island, Arranged According to the Natural Orders* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman; [etc.], 1837), 92.

<sup>24</sup>Cabrera, *El Monte*, 179; the text literally reads: *se sacramenta con la ceiba*.

<sup>25</sup>Gonzáles-Wippler, *Santería: the Religion*, 246-248. In addition to this African derived practice, the tree as symbolic of an *axis mundi* has a long tradition in Europe. This dates back at least to the medieval period. The cross, or the *lignum vitae*, was considered akin to the Tree of Life. It was an interlocutor between this world and the next, including earth, the heavens, and the underworld. For more on tree semiotics during this time period and its formation in modern culture see Gerhart Ladner's influential article "Medieval and Modern Understanding of Symbolism: A Comparison," *Speculum* 54, no. 2 (1979): 223-256; and Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1996), 214-240.

<sup>26</sup>Cabrera, *El Monte*, 179.

## THE CEIBA TREE AS A MULTIVOCAL SIGNIFIER

<sup>27</sup>These paintings and the monuments surrounding the tree in *La Plaza de Armas* are discussed in depth by Paul Barrett Niell, “Bajo su sombra: The Narration and Reception of Colonial Urban Space in Early Nineteenth-Century Havana, Cuba” (Ph.D. diss. University of New Mexico, 2008); and Paul Barrett Niell, “The Emergence of the Ceiba Tree as a Symbol in the Cuban Cultural Landscape,” *Cultural Landscapes* 1, no. 3 (2009): 100; the paintings are also described in Martha de Castro, *El Arte en Cuba* (Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal, 1970), 41-43, 46; and Adelaida de Juan, *Pintura Cubana* (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1980), 31-32, 43-45.

<sup>28</sup>The Basque President’s observation is recorded in Cecilia Arrozarena, *El Roble y la Ceiba: Historia de los Vascos en Cuba* (Tafalla: Txalaparta, 2003), 151; for more on the Tree of Guernica and other trees with religious and civic meaning in the Basque region of Spain see Julio Caro Baroja, *Ritos y Mitos Equívocos* (Madrid: Ediciones Istmo, 1974), 339-393; for more on Bishop Espada see Cesar García Pons, *El Obispo Espada y su Influencia en la Cultura Cubana* (La Habana: Publicaciones del Ministerio de Educación, 1951); and Eduardo Torres-Cuevas, ed., *Opispo de Espada: Papeles* (La Habana: Imagen Contemporanea, 2002).

<sup>29</sup>Lejeune, “City as Landscape,” 153. Forestier visited first from December 1925 to February 1926, then from August to December 1928, and finally January to March 1930.

<sup>30</sup>The provenance of the marble, the name of the architect, and the name of the American company is taken from Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, *Colección facticia #18*: bustos (Biblioteca del Museo de la Ciudad de Havana, date unknown.) The Darden Bronzier’s emblem is also etched into the side of the fence’s gate. The Martí quote etched around the fence reads as follows: *Es la hora del recuento y de la marcha unida y hemos de andar en cuadro como la plata en los raíces de los Andes. Los pueblos no se unen sino con lazos de amistad, fraternidad, y amor.* (It is time to recount and walk united; we have to walk bound together like silver in the roots of the Andes. [For] the people will not unite unless there are bonds of friendship, brotherhood, and love.) Author’s translation.

<sup>31</sup>Eric Hobsbawm, “Introduction: Inventing Traditions,” in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 5. I am not the first to compare the tree in *El Parque* to a monument. Art historians from France and Cuba have also concluded that the tree acts as a living civic monument in Havana. See Lejeune, “City as Landscape,” 151; and Fernando Dávalos and Arnaldo Santos, *Mi Habana querida* ([La Habana, Cuba]: Editorial SI-MAR, 1999), 103. I witnessed the importance of the ceiba as a transcultural symbol in Havana while participating in the ritual circumambulation of the tree near *El Templete* on November 15-16, 2010. The city-historian of Havana, the esteemed Dr. Eusebio Leal, gave a televised speech when the space was opened to the public on November 15, 2010. He noted that the civic ritual is not something that can be scientifically explained, but rather it is an aspect of Cuban culture connected to an unquantifiable notion of identity in Havana.

<sup>32</sup>A good synopsis of these historic events can be found in Louis A. Pérez, Jr., *Cuba: Between Reform and Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 97-237; for more on the Cuban Vanguard and Afro-Cuban influence see Martínez, *Cuban Art and National Identity*, 74 -92; for racial politics and the early Republic see Tomás Fernández Robains, “Marcus Garvey in Cuba: Urrutia, Cubans, and Black Nationalism,” in *Between Race and Empire: African-Americans and Cubans before the Cuban Revolution*, ed. Lisa Brock and Digna Castañeda Fuertes (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1998), 120-129;

for reference to black social club Atenas and the role of Afro-Cuban intellectual groups in the early Republic see also Aline Helg, "Race and Politics in Cuba," in *Contemporary Caribbean Cultures and Societies in a Global Context*, ed. Franklin W. Knight and Teresita Martínez-Vergne (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 183-207; and Alejandro de la Fuente, *A Nation for All: Race, Inequality, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

<sup>33</sup>Martínez, *Cuban Art and National Identity*, 10.

<sup>34</sup>Eugenio Matibag, *Afro-Cuban Religious Experience. Cultural Reflections in Narrative* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), 86-119; it is possible that the international rise of African symbolism in modern art and culture in the later 1920s, also known as "negro fashion," affected Forestier as well. For more on "negro fashion" in France and its influence on Cuban Vanguard artists, such as Eduardo Abela, see Martínez, *Cuban Art and National Identity*, 85-87; an art historical analysis of the indigenous as a symbol of the nation is found in Stacie G. Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 78-122

<sup>35</sup>Fernando Ortiz, *Los Negros Brujos: Apuntes para un Estudio de Etnología Criminal* (Miami, FL: Ediciones Universal, 1973), 177-178.

<sup>36</sup>For a good synopsis see Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 66-78; and Pérez, Jr., *Between Reform and Revolution*, 166-168.

<sup>37</sup>Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, 59; Marcano, "La Plaza de la Fraternidad Americana," single page; Joan Casanovas, *Bread, or Bullets! Urban Labor and Spanish Colonialism in Cuba, 1850-1898* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998), 161, 184, 205, and 211.

<sup>38</sup>Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, 31; the association between Afro-Cuban groups and the labor movement is examined in depth by Fuente, *A Nation for All*, 99-105.

<sup>39</sup>Rómulo Lachatañeré, *El Sistema Religioso de los Afrocubanos* (Havana: Ciencias Sociales, 2004), 113-114.

<sup>40</sup>The soil of the jagüey tree is discussed in "Los Veinte Países se Asociaron," *Diario de la Marina*; it is also discussed in "Plantado El Árbol de Concordia," *El Herald de Cuba*; for the cultural and historic meaning of the *Jagüey de Yara* in Cuba see Alberto Boix, "Cuba y su Jagüey de Yara" from "Asi es Cuba" in *Cosas de mi Tierra* (1950), available at <http://www.guije.com/cosas/cuba/yara.htm> (accessed October 3, 2010).

<sup>41</sup>Lachatañeré, *El Sistema Religioso de los Afrocubanos*, 113-114.

<sup>42</sup>Cabrera, *El Monte*, 192-193. Author's Translation. The text reads as follows: *No habrá tranquilidad ni orden en este país hasta que no se saque de allí y se desmonte la nganga que el General Machado enterró hace unos veinte años. Está tan fuerte esta Prenda, y tan herida que todo lo tiene revuelto aunque no lo parezca, y costará mucha sangre.*

<sup>43</sup>Cabrera, *El Monte*, 192-193; for reference to "tokenism" see Helg, "Race and Politics in Cuba," 183-207.