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## Yemoja

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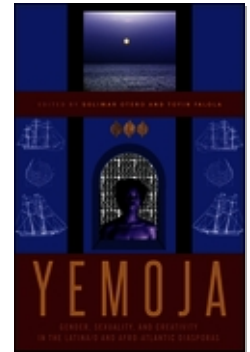
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## Nobody's Mammy

### Yemayá as Fierce Foremother in Afro-Cuban Religions

*Elizabeth Pérez*

In the writing on Afro-Cuban religions, Yemayá has been approached as both the prototype for and the deified paragon of maternal love. According to most accounts, not only does Yemayá birth fellow *orishas* and raise the divine twins, the Ibeyi, as her adopted children, but she also features prominently in the mythology of her son, Changó. Dozens of publications call Yemayá “the universal mother,” implying a uniformity of ideal maternal traits across cultures; they define her sexuality primarily in terms of her desire to engender life as the “marine matrix” of the cosmos.<sup>1</sup> Such texts have cited the variety of creatures in the ocean—her preferred abode in Afro-Diasporic tradition—to illustrate the breadth and profundity of her generative force, as well as the vast resources available to her for supplicants’ material nurturance. With her ample bosom, hips, and abdomen embodying the “eternal feminine,” Yemayá has appeared to lend credence to “mother goddess” as a conceptual category capable of encompassing disparate figures from the Paleolithic period to the present day.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the widespread assumption that deities represent timeless, primordial essences, historical contingencies and culturally specific religious imaginaries have combined to produce the contemporary vision of Yemayá. Many of the images and narratives that dominate conventional understandings of this *orisha* originated in nineteenth-century Cuba, when motherhood was ineluctably shaped by local racial discourses, the practice of concubinage, and slavery as an economic, social, and politi-

cal institution. Yemayá is the *orisha* most often depicted as Black, an identification reflected in and reinforced by her correspondence with the Virgin of Regla, the only Marian icon in Cuba considered to be of direct African descent. Mainstream portrayals of Yemayá as “*de piel negrísima*” and “*negra como el azabache*” have long cried out for analysis, especially bearing in mind that every form of Cuban popular cultural media has perpetuated the caricature of the dark-skinned, thickset “mammy.”<sup>3</sup> Indeed, considering Yemayá’s association with both surrogacy and other physical characteristics attributed to the mammy, it is no exaggeration to say that this *orisha* has been caught between archetype and stereotype.<sup>4</sup>

While the biracial “mulatta” has not only served as the emblem of cultural hybridity for the Cuban nation, but also become something of a fetish for current scholarship, representations of the “negra”—both human and divine—have been left woefully undertheorized. At issue here is emphatically not whether certain women of color merit greater attention than others, but rather, the very fact that the *orishas* have been understood to occupy racialized female bodies, inhabit distinct subjectivities according to them, and privileged differentially. Following on the crucial insights of critical race theory and Black feminist and womanist thought with regard to Yemayá, I invoke Blackness as a quintessentially modern, gendered category of identity for which pigmentation and phenotype act as unstable signifiers. While underscoring Blackness as constituted within communities through shared experiences of racialization, usually entailing exposure to discriminatory practices, I also wish to emphasize the local modalities of Blackness found throughout the Afro-Atlantic world.<sup>5</sup> The multiplicity and “slipperiness” of “Black” can be said to mirror that of Yemayá herself.<sup>6</sup>

In what follows, I argue that analyses of Yemayá in the Black Atlantic world must take more rigorously to task folkloric generalizations about this *orisha* and look for her in the particularity of Afro-Diasporic experience. I begin by examining Yemayá’s emergence in Cuba through her correspondence with Regla in Afro-Cuban Lucumí and Espiritismo Cruzado, as well as with her counterpart in Palo Monte, Madre Agua. I assert that the relationship between Regla and Yemayá has assisted in preserving counter-memories of the Afro-Cuban past, maintained in opposition to the hegemonic “master narrative” personified by the mammy. I contend that within the transnational Afro-Atlantic context, Yemayá is best approached as a fierce “foremother figure,” and I elaborate this claim with respect to two geographically and chronologically distant urban Lucumí communities. As a historian and ethnographer, I proceed methodologically by surveying the pertinent documentary evidence concerning Afro-Cuban traditions, before drawing on several years

of my own research on the South Side of Chicago. I conclude that to be acquainted with Yemayá's fierceness is to examine her manifestation within communities as they negotiate both their transatlantic religious legacies and the meanings of her Blackness.

### Yemayá and Regla in Afro-Cuban Tradition

Four Marian figures from Spain became associated with Lucumí spirits in Cuba during the colonial period: the Virgins of Mercedes (Obatalá), Candelaria (Oyá),<sup>7</sup> Caridad (Ochún), and Regla (Yemayá), the only one to number among the Black Madonnas of Europe. According to legend, the original sculpture of Regla was created in Africa by none other than Augustine of Hippo, and it eventually made its way to Chipiona, near Cádiz—the port of choice for ships sailing to the Americas.<sup>8</sup> Owing to her reputation among priests and sailors, this image of Regla gained followings in several Spanish possessions.<sup>9</sup>

In Cuba, her iconography has stayed relatively consistent for over three centuries; she carries the infant Jesus in her arms, and he grasps a flower in his hand.<sup>10</sup> Regla's head is covered, but the Christ Child's is not. His face and hands are alabaster; hers are ebony. The connection between her Blackness and her power entered the historical record in the mid-eighteenth century when Bishop Pedro Agustín Morell de Santa Cruz visited her sanctuary in the ultramarine town of Regla, across the bay from Havana, built in 1692 on the property of a sugar mill.<sup>11</sup> The bishop wrote, "What distinguished this image as a prodigious effigy was that she had never accepted touch-ups with white color."<sup>12</sup>

Although in calling Regla "*vastantemente moreno*," Bishop Morrell employed the preferred racial term for a person with African ancestry on both sides, history does not record the precise moment at which her color (*negra*) became a sign of race (*Negro*). Nor do the archives assist us in determining precisely when Lucumí practitioners began to associate Regla with Yemayá.<sup>13</sup> Yet the pairing of Virgins and *orishas* was presumably encouraged by the Roman Catholic Church itself, eager to organize slaves and freedmen into the ethnically differentiated religious brotherhoods *cum* mutual aid societies called *cabildos de nación* and to catechize them by fostering bonds to Christian patrons that would replace any attachment to African gods. The use of images such as Regla held out both promise and danger for the Creole clergy: As "texts for the illiterate," pictures could communicate messages and narrate stories to masses of uneducated pagans but could also lead them to misunderstand inanimate objects as the divine presence.<sup>14</sup> While the Spanish

weighed the impact of realistic sculpture in the New World, they eventually resigned themselves to the necessity of multidimensional images as instruments of missionization.<sup>15</sup>

During the early nineteenth century, the town of Regla became, in the words of Miguel “Willie” Ramos, “Africa’s heart in Cuba.”<sup>16</sup> It was arguably also Yemayá’s. Regla proved to be fertile ground for the establishment of *cabildos* and, far from dividing Africans according to geographical origin, language, ethnic affiliation, and legal status—as colonial administrators had intended—these institutions furnished a space for the collective development of innovative diasporic cultural practices. Regla saw the “birth” of the first lodge of the Calabar-inspired male sodality called Abakuá on Cuban soil in 1836. Creoles united with the African born to reconfigure deterritorialized traditions, synchronizing religious structures and consolidating pantheons that had previously assumed a much more fragmentary and diffuse form.<sup>17</sup> Spirits themselves underwent resignification. As David H. Brown has documented, the chromatic and figurative insignia used for Regla, its Marian patroness, and Yemayá developed symbiotically. The town lent its municipal devices and nautical emblems to the Virgin’s iconography; both went on to influence the design of the vestments, vessels, ornamental panels (*pañños*), and consecrated tools (*herramientas*) that today “belong” to Yemayá and her initiates.<sup>18</sup>

The town as well as the Virgin of Regla contributed to Yemayá’s transition from goddess of the Ògùn River to ocean deity. This conflation of attributes has shaped not only Lucumí’s aesthetic regime, but also the musical repertoires of Espiritismo Cruzado and the related ritual genre called Cajón al muerto.<sup>19</sup> Throughout the Americas, participants in ceremonies within the range of traditions collectively called Espiritismo have called upon Regla and Yemayá interchangeably to assist them in navigating the tempestuous seas of their social worlds.<sup>20</sup> Practitioners beseech Yemayá to cleanse them with her water and set the “spiritual current” flowing; one such song among many in Cajón runs, “*A remar, a remar, a remar/ Que la Virgen de Regla nos va acompañar,*” meaning, “Row, row, row/ For the Virgin of Regla will accompany us.” Nolan Warden explains that “*remar* can . . . be translated as *to toil* or *to struggle*.”<sup>21</sup> In line with the idea that the most potent spirits have endured the greatest suffering, these rites stress the efficacy of both Regla and Yemayá with reference to their Africanity. One hymn entreats the *orisha* to ensure supplicants’ victory in a “clarifying mission,” labeling her with the ethnonym *arará*, used to denote Ewe/Fon descent: “*Yemayá africana/ yo te llamo a la misión,/ oye mi voz!/ Oh! misión despejadora/ Yemayá africana/ Yemayá vamos a vencer/ Yemayá arará.*”<sup>22</sup>

In the Bantu-inspired *reglas de Congo*, particularly in the religious formation called Palo Monte, Yemayá's equivalent is the *mpungu*, or spirit, called Madre Agua; she also goes by the names Baluandé and Siete Sayas, among others.<sup>23</sup> Yemayá shares colors, domains, favored objects such as metal pails and earthenware *tinajas*, and, not infrequently, initiates with Madre Agua.<sup>24</sup> Ritual specialists also refer to Madre Agua as Regla and vice versa, raising the question of Yemayá's relationship to the Palo pantheon.<sup>25</sup>

For instance, it has been interpreted in terms of *camino*, or "road," a term that refers to one of several personae manifested by most *orishas*, "born" in a specific divination verse.<sup>26</sup> In an interview with a musician, Nolan Warden writes,

I brought up the fact that many of the songs in Cajón refer to deities almost synonymously, for example, the song that begins "Bendita eres Virgen de Regla, bendita eres mi Yemaya." His response was simply that the Virgen de Regla is the "camino Católico" of Yemaya, just as Madre Agua is her "camino en Palo" . . . [A]re they the same or are they two distinct things? [He] replied casually "dos cosas distintas" [two distinct things] then, after pondering briefly, stated emphatically "dos cosas en una!" [two things in one].<sup>27</sup>

While this does not furnish a definitive answer, it articulates a common understanding of *orishas*, *mpungus*, and their Catholic analogues as coemergent and conceptually convergent. Just as two heads are better than one at solving problems, Yemayá, Madre Agua, and Regla combine to bring complementary forces to bear on the intractable dilemmas of everyday life.

### "La Negrita" and Yemayá

The inquiry that has yet to be broached is why Yemayá became so intimately associated with Regla. She absorbed qualities associated specifically with Black women, just as the Virgin of Charity, paired with Ochún, became assimilated to the mulatta. The contrast between the two is instructive, for not only are the distinctions between these *orishas* racialized in visual representations; they shape the spirits' very appetites, for the *orishas* are fed items commensurate with their status.<sup>28</sup> Ochún has long been portrayed as a "refined," "high yellow" woman able to "pass" as white and enter otherwise forbidden social spaces, due to her color,

physiognomy, and deportment.<sup>29</sup> Accordingly, Ochún craves caramel, syrup, and honey, a prized commodity, suggesting a life of leisure, while Yemayá receives food offerings strongly reminiscent of plantation rations and the slave diet, most notably unfiltered cane syrup and molasses. In popular cultural texts that owe less to *odu* than to nineteenth-century literary *costumbrismo*, Ochún stoops to the role of frivolous coquette, and Yemayá, that of noble drudge.<sup>30</sup>

The mulatta stereotype has served many masters since the colonial period, and within Lucumí, it has highlighted qualities that Ochún displays in a few of her most highly publicized caminos. But in more mainstream channels of circulation, representations of the mulatta have served to exploit and eroticize women deemed to have light complexions, some “European” facial features, and “good”—straight or curly rather than kinky—hair. Indeed, by the eighteenth century, the mulatta had already become “an ideological construct embedded within the specific cultural, political, and economic history of Cuba.”<sup>31</sup> Born of two continents, the mulatta came to personify the “colorblind” unity among Cubans that independence from Spain would bring. Yet many elites throughout the colonial period cast the mulatta as a tainted, promiscuous agent of contagion, a vampiric figure dedicated to destroying white male youth, not least through venereal disease.<sup>32</sup> Mulattas bore witness to the inherent instability of racial signifiers and disrupted the categories used to determine “legal” color and thereby relegate Afro-Cubans to a subordinate position.

Whereas their cultural and social hypervisibility has historically rendered mulattas’ bodies as sites of sexual abjection and violence, the near invisibility of women judged to be Black has operated to facilitate their abuse and marginalization as well. The hegemonic privileging of *mestizaje*, or racial mixture, often called *mulatez* in the Caribbean, implicitly affirms the value and normativity of whiteness and has militated against the construction of Blackness as a source of national identification for Afro-Cubans by systematically excluding oppositional Black voices.<sup>33</sup> While Blackness in Cuba theoretically encompasses all persons of African descent, it has objectively functioned as a pretext for nonrecognition of Afro-Cubans, more a negation of *mestizaje* as a viable ideological project than a space of enunciation.<sup>34</sup> The absence of Black bodies, especially those of women, from positive representations of *mulatez* underscores the extent to which they have been objectified, silenced, and stigmatized as a metonym for difference. As Alicia Arrizón demonstrates, Blackness has been constructed performatively at times as a means of reclaiming agency for persons of color, through explicit rejection of the imperative to *blanquear*, or “whiten,” oneself, culturally and otherwise.

It is my conjecture that Regla came to represent Yemayá and that she became known as Black because the details of her image seemed to address important facets of Afro-Cuban historical experience. I have previously advanced the argument that Yemayá's mythology in colonial Cuba registered not only the shift in her identity from alluvial to oceanic deity but also the incidence of rape, sexual abuse, and physical violence suffered disproportionately by women of African descent, both enslaved and free.<sup>35</sup> Since female ritual specialists shouldered considerable responsibility for establishing Lucumí ritual protocols and oral traditions in the nineteenth century, I hypothesized that divination verses and other narratives about Yemayá have preserved "countermemories" that were either ignored or actively suppressed by dominant cultural texts.<sup>36</sup> Yet to understand the contemporary construction of Yemayá, it is vital to assess the impact of her longstanding correspondence with Regla on this *orisha's* reception within distinct interpretive communities. For almost two hundred years, this image was situated within a referential field that governed the way this symbol accrued meanings and contributed to the definition of individual as well as collective identities.

Perhaps both the most significant and empirically accessible component of this referential field lies in the history of coerced and meagerly compensated labor performed by women of African descent, particularly the range of domestic activities connoted by the Regla image.<sup>37</sup> During the colonial period, Afro-Cubans routinely entered white households as servants, maids, and nannies, and they were ordered to tend their masters' and bosses' offspring. Female slaves called *criolleras* raised generations of creoles in plantation nurseries, rearing others' children alongside their own.<sup>38</sup> Those designated as "breeders" shouldered a double burden: to toil in fields, mills, and slave quarters along with men—digging irrigation ditches, bundling sugarcane, hoeing soil—as well as to enlarge the population of their estates. The combination of responsibilities regularly resulted in miscarriage or death for pregnant slaves.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the rape of Afro-Cuban women, whether enslaved or free, was not considered grounds for litigation.<sup>40</sup> Elites invariably accused victims of promiscuity, thereby denying the crime its name. They also tried to destroy a possible locus of resistance for caregivers and others perceived to be "privileged" within the colonial social hierarchy, since, according to Paulla A. Ebron, "rape has always involved patriarchal notions of women being, at best, *unwilling* accomplices."<sup>41</sup>

It should not be surprising, then, that Afro-Cuban women often gave birth to children lighter than themselves, fathered by white men, frequently from the same family that owned or had hired them. Hugh Thomas contends that, despite a dearth of statistics on the number of



white men involved in long-term affairs with Afro-Cuban women, “all the evidence of rumor and hearsay suggest[s] that [interracial concubinage] occurred on a lavish scale in both plantations and cities.”<sup>42</sup> In any scandal involving a man and a female slave, it was inferred without fail that the latter had preyed upon the former, and the mother of a bastard sired by her owner became the target of resentment if not outright censure.<sup>43</sup> In the case of impregnation, with or without her consent, an Afro-Cuban woman had little chance of pressuring a white man to propose marriage. In the rare cases in which a white man resolved to wed his companion, his family—invariably opposed—could count on the burden of obtaining an official license for interracial marriage to pose an insurmountable obstacle, unless the couple resorted to elopement or the legal claim of “seduction.”<sup>44</sup> Thus the courts conspired with social mores to push the woman of color onto the margins of society, first as servant, then as “concubine” or mistress, and finally, as head of an indigent household.<sup>45</sup>

Yet Afro-Cuban women had some incentive to enter such arrangements to pursue social mobility through the practice of *blanqueamiento*, or “whitening.” Slavery had not only operated as a brutal system of forced labor but heightened social stratification by creating distinctions between groups on the basis of color, broadly construed.<sup>46</sup> After the abolition of slavery in 1886, color became a measure of one’s proximity to, or distance from, the indignity of bondage.<sup>47</sup> Women of color built matrimonial alliances (and *mésalliances*) with elites in hopes of bearing children so light in pigmentation that they could pass as white and thereby increase their material welfare. The child seen as *casi blanco*, “almost white,” enjoyed more auspicious prospects and, presumably, would be better equipped to fend for his mother in her dotage. The decision to “whiten”—or, in a telling euphemism, to “improve the race”—also had unintentional consequences, for instance, corroding solidarity between Afro-Cuban men and women.<sup>48</sup> In addition, whitening tended to ingrain discriminatory attitudes. For example, the daughter of a former slave, whose family was composed of different-colored members, noted that the fairer children often received preferential treatment from parents and siblings as well as the outside world.<sup>49</sup>

Free women of color supported themselves and their dependents by working as laundresses, food vendors, midwives, shop girls, seamstresses, and prostitutes.<sup>50</sup> According to a travelogue penned by the Countess of Merlin, they strode the streets of nineteenth-century Havana “cigar in mouth,” bare-shouldered, and self-assured, despite inhabiting the hostile masculine realm of the public sphere.<sup>51</sup> But the countess also encountered “many Black women dressed in muslin, with-

out socks and without shoes, carrying in their arms creatures as white as swans.”<sup>52</sup> During the transition to wage labor, slaves' legal status changed irreversibly, but women of color could still not negotiate their salaries or set their own hours.<sup>53</sup> Scores of former field slaves stayed on as cooks and domestics for former owners' families to remain close to male partners; others relocated and became *au pairs* for local whites, receiving visits from husbands still engaged in agricultural labor only sporadically, then cohabiting during the “dead season.”<sup>54</sup> By the early twentieth century, the public sight of Black “shadow mothers” with fair-skinned toddlers on their hips had been naturalized, and it was to childcare work that innumerable Afro-Cuban women turned in lieu of better options.<sup>55</sup>

Most models of racial equality promoted prior to, and after, Cuban independence “systematically elided” the importance of Black women's labor “as an economic and a cultural reality.”<sup>56</sup> Their commercial activity was perennially undervalued, since the occupations open to them paid little, and business concerning food, clothing, and children was mostly transacted within the private “feminine” sphere of the home.<sup>57</sup> In the case of live-in caregivers, the performance of their labor behind closed doors, along with the lack of accurate mainstream representation of it as anything but menial, rendered their drudgery invisible. Considered, according to Kate Haug, “everyone's nanny, granny and auntie,” the nursemaid seldom had a moment's respite.<sup>58</sup> She shared an astonishing degree of familial intimacy with the offspring of the bourgeoisie and upper classes: maids and wet nurses sometimes slept in the same rooms as their wards, suckled them, toilet-trained them, dressed them, and, as Anne McClintock describes, “washed their vaginas and penises . . . punished them . . . told them stories and instructed them in their class ‘manners.’”<sup>59</sup> But the measure of a job well done was, in part, the absence of its traces; with every mistress' claim that her servant was *just* another member of the family, her sweat-encrusted toil was effectively swept under the carpet.

### From Shadow Mother to Mammy

From this nexus of power relations, economic institutions, and cultural practices arose the stereotype of the “mammy.” Although Spanish stereotypes of North and West African women date from the Renaissance, the disparaging mammy figure became ubiquitous in the nineteenth century.<sup>60</sup> Her “uglified” face, shorn or covered hair, malapropos-peppered speech, and shabbily clad corpulence placed the mammy, at least

rhetorically, outside the realm of desirability.<sup>61</sup> Her exaggerated features, notes Maria St. John, “shor[ed] up the category ‘white’” by exemplifying an essentialized Black phenotype and thereby lending credibility to the fiction of racial difference.<sup>62</sup>

The timing of her emergence in Cuba was no coincidence: the mammy enabled whites to downplay the frequency of interracial rape and other forms of sexual exploitation by insisting on Black women’s unattractiveness, associated through enslavement with masculine brawn, dirt, and bodily impurity. The African-born mammy in particular was “ideologically constructed as essentially ‘non-feminine’ insofar as primacy was placed upon her alleged muscular capabilities, physical strength, aggressive carriage and sturdiness,” according to Hilary Beckles.<sup>63</sup> Yet while the North American mammy figure was depicted steadfast and sexless, the Cuban version was lusty, even wanton, in her appetite for food and men.<sup>64</sup>

The Cuban mammy gained currency in nonverbal and visual forms, through myriad caricatures and in series of lithographs, called *marquillas*, sealed into bundles of cigars and cigarettes from the 1840s onward.<sup>65</sup> In the performing arts, the mammy appeared as a staple of dramatic genres such as zarzuela and blackface minstrelsy, including the one-acts called *negritos* and, later, the more elaborate productions of *teatro bufo*. Robin Moore notes that in the early twentieth century, white actress “Blanca Becerra, for instance, delighted audiences with her impersonation of a *negra lucumí*, or Yoruban [sic] woman from Africa, associated with ‘witchcraft’ and divination.”<sup>66</sup> Plays showcased variations on the coffee-sipping, kerchief-sporting, tobacco-smoking character dubbed Mama Inés, whose grinning visage has continued to appear in theater and advertising in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic well into the twenty-first century as part of a career trajectory that parallels Aunt Jemima’s in the United States.<sup>67</sup> The mammy acquired ever greater heft, both physically and symbolically, through representation in popular musical compositions and literary texts. “The trend of attributing extremely subservient and humiliating roles to the older slave women is perhaps the one most frequently employed in Cuban novels,” writes Dawn Duke.<sup>68</sup>

Within this historical context, the Regla icon recalled not only the statistically significant number of Afro-Cuban caregivers rearing lighter complexioned children, but also the culturally resonant mammy figure. Yet the visual resemblance between the Madonna and the mammy was variously construed by different publics, with divergent agenda and interpretive schema shaped by such factors as their members’ social locations, material conditions, and ideological commitments. For elites and others

with privileged access to dominant discourses that normalized racial and gendered inequalities, characteristic portrayals of Regla and the mammy figure undoubtedly dovetailed. For instance, hegemonic representations cast both as submitting voluntarily and contentedly to their superiors.<sup>69</sup> In Roman Catholic tradition, the Virgin Mary has never declined to serve as “Mother of Perpetual Help” and “Lady of Prompt Succor,” and, according to conventional iterations of the mammy stereotype, neither has she.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, whether enslaved or free, the mammy has occupied a lower place in the social hierarchy than the youngest babe at her breast, an arrangement that parallels the doctrinal subordination of the Virgin to the Infant Jesus.

Regla still retains her sobriquet *la Negrita*, the “little Negress,” among her followers. But while Regla was long implicated within the same structures of domination that the mammy undergirded, the evidence shows that Afro-Cubans saw themselves in the former and adopted her image to contest the racial order symbolized by the latter. To borrow Louis Althusser’s terminology, Regla “interpellated” Afro-Cubans by virtue of her color, interpreted as a sign of race.<sup>71</sup> Regla effectively called on Afro-Cubans to recognize her as sharing the same racialized subject position.<sup>72</sup> For those of African descent or deeply engaged with Afro-Cuban cultural forms, the contrast between Regla’s countenance and that of the mammy became more salient than their similarities. During the colonial period and long afterwards, Regla was one of the only positive, let alone sacred, likenesses of a dark-skinned woman. Regla’s physiognomy was not distorted into a caricature, and perhaps more significantly, her chastity stood beyond reproach. She was thus not depicted as alone of all her sex, but as of all her race.<sup>73</sup> In this sense, she stood for everyone alienated by patriarchal construction of Black femininity epitomized by the mammy.<sup>74</sup>

For Afro-Cubans, embracing the image of Yemayá as Regla, a “fat African woman”—to use the words of one initiated elder—may have served as a means of reappropriating negative imagery and reinvesting it with liberatory potential.<sup>75</sup> Regla brings to mind the related Madama spirit, whose statues are easily confused with mammy figures by those ignorant of her status as an advisor, expert herbalist, and moral authority.<sup>76</sup> For Spiritists, the Madama’s girth connotes not complacency, but formidable vigor and potency; her head tie indicates the binding of sacred power within her crown and forehead; her Blackness signifies sagacity gleaned through vital connection with the land of her ancestors.<sup>77</sup> Superficial comparisons of the Madama with Aunt Jemima may be unexpectedly apt, writes Joyce E. King:

[T]he oral tradition identifies “Jemima women” as caring, commanding spiritual community mothers who descended from Ifá priestesses . . . In various locations, these women (Orixá) are called Yemaya, Yemanya, or Iemoja. According to the oral tradition, once these priestesses learned the truth about what was happening to those who were captured and sold into slavery, they voluntarily allowed themselves to be captured and sold so they could come to the Americas to look after and protect their people.<sup>78</sup>

While the biblical daughter of Job seems a more likely source for the phrase “Jemima women,” King’s point concerning counter-memories of Yemayá’s solidarity with the enslaved sings true and speaks to the development of both the Madama and Regla in the Afro-Atlantic religious imagination.

### Yemayá as Warrior Queen

Perhaps the most famous example of one Afro-Cuban’s interpellation by Regla would be José Antonio Aponte y Ulabarra, putative leader of the “Conspiracy of 1812.” An artisan retired from the freedman’s militia, Aponte featured Regla in his “Libro de Pinturas,” which was discovered after his arrest on suspicion of fomenting a slave rebellion to overthrow the government. Under pressure from his interrogators, Aponte attempted to decipher the pictures found in his illustrated volume. These included a spectacular painting of Regla, depicted atop a column encircled by Afro-Atlantic luminaries: canonized patrons of *cabildos* in Spain and the Americas (such as San Benito of Palermo), saints, biblical figures, and personages featured in Afrocentric Egyptological and Ethiopianist lore. At Regla’s feet, Aponte staged the coronation of Faith by a pair of Black men poised to defend this allegorical figure; on another pedestal to her right, Aponte placed an armless statue personifying Justice, with two dark-skinned men at its base. He also incorporated a lyric from the biblical Song of Songs 1:5 often applied to Black Madonnas, beginning, “Nigra suns [sic].” Then, claiming ignorance of Latin, Aponte translated the phrase in its entirety as, “Black, the most beautiful,” rather than its literal meaning, “I am black, but beautiful.”<sup>79</sup>

It is inadvisable to speculate further concerning Regla’s importance for either Aponte particularly or Afro-Cubans more generally without returning to her correspondence with Yemayá. Aponte was allegedly a member of the legendary Lucumí *cabildo* Santa Barbara, Changó

Tedún. In fact, he may have led and hosted it in his residence or studio.<sup>80</sup> Regla's centrality in his "political theology" typifies Yemayá's position in Lucumí mythology; one may interpret Aponte's image as a royal family portrait, with Regla as Queen Mother, surrounded by her loyal clerical and aristocratic children.<sup>81</sup> Aponte's vision of Regla seems indebted to the *cabildo* tradition of accentuating the *orishas'* status as monarchs by converting their altars into "thrones" and by embellishing their consecrated objects with regal iconography; "Nigra suns" may be read as the motto of a fantastical, yet not wholly fictive, coat of arms.<sup>82</sup> Aponte literally elevates Regla as one to be served above the loftiest of heroes. Designed in part to sacralize and thus confer legitimacy on an alternative sociopolitical order based on Black Atlantic leadership, his incendiary images ultimately sent Aponte to the gallows. However, it would not be the last time that Regla would be rendered to underline her perceived African roots and solidarity with Afro-Cubans.

While countless individuals have borrowed Regla's image to exalt Yemayá, ritual performances may yield the greatest insight into their ability to inspire identification and galvanize Afro-Cuban sentiment. The most consistently documented of ceremonies remain the annual processions of the Regla icon on her feast day, September 7, in the town that bears her name.<sup>83</sup> These processions date from 1714 to 1961 and have recently enjoyed a revival. From the mid-1860s to the early 1890s, Afro-Cubans not only participated in these events, but they also organized them in conjunction with local *cabildos*. The most prominent was the *cabildo* of Yemayá founded by the legendary figure Ño Remigio Herrera, later bequeathed to his daughter, María Josefa "Pepa" Herrera. After a spate of repressive legislation resulted in the suspension of the processions, they resumed in the early twentieth century. At least as early as 1921, "Pepa" Herrera vied with the leader of a rival *cabildo* and daughter of Yemayá, Susana Cantero, for recognition as leader of the most lavish and auspiciously appointed cortège. While a racially diverse audience attended the processions, their organization stayed in the hands of Lucumí practitioners, whose annual public unveiling of their statuary also revealed Yemayá's racialized and gendered contours.<sup>84</sup>

On Regla's feast day, September 7, the *cabildos* paraded her image and those of other Virgins and saints throughout the town. Records of the proceedings leave little doubt that the relationship between Regla and Yemayá was openly indexed, even within the church, for the priests extended a blessing to both of the statues maintained by the *cabildos*.<sup>85</sup> Accompanied by sacred *batá* drums, Lucumí practitioners led fellow servants of the *orishas* as well as tourists and casual participants through the streets, crying, "Oh mío Yemayá!" or "Oh my/oh water Yemayá!"

They reinscribed the topography of the town with Yemayá's origin myth, beginning at the bay, then moving toward the town's two cemeteries, recalling the myth that the graveyard was originally Yemayá's domain and rendering tribute to its current owner, Oyá, as well as the "saltwater" Africans buried in the oldest plots. Senior *cabildo* members periodically threw pieces of coconut in divination to determine the acceptability of their actions and paused to pay homage at the homes of prominent priests. Lydia Cabrera writes of these processions as turning Regla into Yemayá, and while both public and private ritualization imbued the icon with divine power, the processions also succeeded in transforming their performers into receptacles for her sacred energy, or *aché*.<sup>86</sup>

This was not only the case for bearers of handbarrows mounted by *orishas* in possession as they carried statues of their saintly alter egos. The processions also transformed individuals into Regla's interpellated subjects. Casual attendees no doubt taught each other about Regla's qualities by trading stories about her miraculous cures, intercessory feats, and unique character. Yet among the most influential voices in the oral transmission of her lore came from the queens of the *cabildos*, whose transformative pedagogical practices conveyed the vision of Yemayá recognized within Lucumí communities. Pivotal figures such as "Panchita" Cárdenas remained invested in the *orisha*'s worship and Regla's display in her sanctuary throughout the year; the same seamstresses hand-embroidered the finely wrought garments worn by the Virgin and the *orishas*' satiny *paños*.<sup>87</sup> And their influence on local understandings of Regla and Yemayá did not stop at appearances. As ritual specialists, they transmitted Odu recounting Yemayá's remedies for affliction and sacred authority. Many of these women had served as maids in white homes, and accounts of the processions indicate that while they praised Yemayá as the mother of all, they also conveyed the message that she was nobody's mammy.<sup>88</sup>

The historical record strongly suggests that Regla was used to counteract the fantasy promoted by the mammy image of Black passivity and consensual servitude, particularly after the so-called "race war" of 1912. This conflict pitted insurgents from the first Afro-Cuban political party, the outlawed Partido Independiente de Color (PIC), against not only the Cuban army but also the American Marines. Small-scale acts of agitation by the PIC for Black political representation and amnesties for jailed leaders incurred a brutally disproportionate response; at least three thousand people of color were slain in May and June 1912, mostly in the southeastern Oriente province. When the carnage reached Regla, Afro-Cuban families fled white militias on midnight ferries to Havana. The refugees included Pepa Herrera. "With tears in their eyes, they had

to abandon the piece of Cuban land on which they had been born and that held the beloved remains of their ancestors,” wrote Regla historian Francisco M. Duque in 1925.<sup>89</sup> Racist violence again hit Regla's Afro-Cubans—an ever-smaller minority in the town, according to census records—in 1919, followed by a “brujo craze” in Havana and Matanzas that persecuted Blacks suspected of “witchcraft.”

The annual procession for Regla was suspended in 1912, and only recommenced in 1921 after Pepa returned to her hometown.<sup>90</sup> The archival evidence supports an interpretation of these processions as rituals of resistance, public ceremonies that temporarily invert the social structure and constitute redressive, symbolic action.<sup>91</sup> To the consternation of some residents, many forced out after the “race war” returned for the processions and brought along other Black visitors; as the white Cuban journalist Eduardo Gómez Luaces wrote in a 1945 pamphlet on Regla, every year, his town was “invaded” by “strange faces” intent on adoring the Virgin “in their own manner or [according to their own] religion.”<sup>92</sup> The processions furnished an opportunity for residents to reclaim the streets that had been the site of bigotry and racist violence, including lynching. They also gave participants a chance to cement ties with their allies, such as the liberal-populist mayor Antonio Bosch y Martínez, elected mayor in 1920, to whom Regla may owe its reputation as a haven for Afro-Cuban traditions.<sup>93</sup> The processions amounted to a public display of both sacred and secular power, unfurled before the *orishas'* watchful eyes.

### Multiplicity and Motherwit

The regal and defiant vision of Yemayá offered by Aponte and the *cabildos* is seldom noted in mainstream publications; these writings exhibit a tendency to pigeonhole her as maternal—narrowly construed—and frame her color as a sign of domesticity and willing surrogacy, undoubtedly a conceptual residue of the “mammy” stereotype. Ironically, the earliest scholarly accounts of Yemayá in Cuba give a more varied impression of her attributes. Authors such as Fernando Ortiz and Rómulo Lachatañeré recognize her relationship with Regla, and they privilege her motherhood, yet they also allow for other character traits and attributes recognized by Lucumí initiates to influence their narratives. Ortiz writes, “She is a virtuous, chaste, and wise mother, but at the same time happy and charming [*sandunguera*], because the gods of the African Olympus do not deem virtue, wisdom, and charm [*sandunga*] incompatible.”<sup>94</sup> In truth, the connotations of the term “sandunga” are difficult to convey



without reference to the dance of the same name; Alan West-Durán translates the term as “funky grace” to capture its sensuality and coolness.<sup>95</sup> Ortiz himself defined *sandunga* with reference to its etymology, writing that the term combined *sá*, Andalusian white salt, with *ndungu*, African black pepper; the vision of Yemayá he offers is, correspondingly, spicy.<sup>96</sup>

Lydia Cabrera’s Yemayá was similarly mixed; in *Yemayá y Ochún: Kariocha, iyalorichas y olorichas*, she provided dizzyingly distinct stories of the *orisha*’s emergence. Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley notes that Cabrera “spends several pages detailing Yemayá’s many paths—as motherly, warriorly, feminine, masculine, indulgent, vengeful, stormy, calm—without explaining the *logique métisse* behind such plurality.”<sup>97</sup> Cabrera expected her readers to draw the conclusion that Yemayá is not singular, but multiple, depending on her path and ritual variations between lineages. The exponential increase in publication of “Santería” exposés and “how-to” manuals for a wide audience, however, has rapidly accelerated the process that David H. Brown has dubbed “pantheonization,” progressively systematizing the relationships between the *orishas* and condensing their features into rationalized mythobiographies.<sup>98</sup> In the interest of rendering Lucumí accessible and promoting it as a “world religion,” contradictory aspects of the spirits have been artificially reconciled and inconveniently divergent “paths,” paved over.

If in popular writings, a Yemayá materializes that often owes more to the mammy stereotype than has been previously recognized, among practitioners she assumes the role of a fierce foremother. Theorist Jacqueline K. Bryant builds on Alice Walker’s concept of the literary foremother to describe fictional characters designed to subvert racist travesties of Black women through their integrity, wisdom, linguistic mastery, and embrace of African cultural forms. They are based on innumerable real-life figures known to have transmitted, according to Diane M. Spivey, their “mother wit,” or practical judgment and intelligence, “through duties performed such as companion . . . housemaid . . . healer, cook, teller of tales, guide, and ‘housegirl.’”<sup>99</sup> They turn their negative racialization and de- or hypersexualization around to their advantage; capitalizing on the low expectations of elite white interlocutors, they eventually prevail with grace and aplomb. Depictions of the foremothers identified by Bryant frequently show them grappling with an imperative completely elided in representations of the mammy—namely, to protect children of African descent not only from isolated instances of discrimination motivated by prejudice but also from the pernicious effects of structural and institutional racism.<sup>100</sup>

The “creative genius” of the foremother lies in finding means of combating oppression in a manner that ensures her charges’ well-being and furthers the cause of their collective liberation.<sup>101</sup> Accordingly, Lucumí practitioners have credited Yemayá with delivering African captives safely to the Americas during the transatlantic slave trade, protecting them from fatal illnesses on voyages that frequently lasted many months.<sup>102</sup> Jean Stubbs writes that in the province of Oriente, Yemayá’s foremotherly ferocity recalls that of Mariana Grajales, the mother of the Maceo brothers slain in the cause of Cuban independence; the *orisha*’s warrior aspect comes explicitly to the fore in such paths as Okute, in which she fights battles—armed with a cutlass—beside Ogún.<sup>103</sup> In oral tradition, even Yemayá’s maternity acquires a belligerent cast, as it emphasizes her impatience with wayward children, moodiness, exacting standards, and talent for punishment, rather than the acquiescence and docility conjured for some by the image of a Black woman in a head wrap holding a white baby. But the message sent by such stories remains consistent: whatever this foremother does, it is for her children’s own good.

In 2003, I began to become acquainted with Yemayá as a fierce foremother in the context of an ongoing ethnographic research project. Ilé Laroye is a predominantly Black North American, working-class Lucumí community on the South Side of Chicago. Ilé Laroye is based in the private home of Nilaja Campbell, initiated in 1986 as a child of Elegguá, the deity of communications, master of the crossroads, and messenger of the *orishas*.<sup>104</sup> Nilaja had ordained nearly thirty “godchildren” as Lucumí priests at the time of this writing and garnered recognition as a praise singer for drum ceremonies, Spiritist medium, and elder in Palo Monte.<sup>105</sup> Nilaja has led the Ilé alongside her son Santi almost since the moment of his ordination at the age of thirteen. Santi lives and breathes through his mother in “*ocha*,” Yemayá; while slender, graceful, and aquiline, he soon establishes himself as the most maternal presence in any room he enters. His patroness has been a conspicuous presence in the Ilé due not only to Santi’s carefully wrought azure and cerulean living-room altars for her, but also to the many convivial children of Yemayá that number among his and Nilaja’s protégés.

In crucial respects, Ilé Laroye’s approach to Yemayá mirrors that of historical Cuban and Puerto Rican communities, reflecting its cooperation with local as well as Miami-based Latino houses of *ocha*. In the Cuban-style Espiritista rituals called *misas blancas*, African American mediums hewed to convention, referring to Yemayá as “Regla” when delivering advice from the spirits and singing such hymns as “Corre agua, Yemayá” and “O mí Yemayá, quítame lo malo, y échalo al mar.”

In “Congo parties,” Madre Agua danced alongside the other *mpungus*. The Ilé’s African American priests declared, echoing their Latino counterparts, that children of Yemayá have a propensity to gain weight, because she wants those crowned with her *aché* to be well fed. Yet Black Lucumí practitioners have seen Yemayá through their own history as well, marked by the peculiarities of North American slavery and the Great Migration. Members of the Ilé sometimes remarked that her favorite foods—pork cracklings, sweet potatoes, black-eyed peas, salt-cured meat, grits—resemble Southern “soul food” to a greater extent than that of other orishas and bring to mind slaves’ accomplishment in building a cuisine from their paltry, monotonous provisions, larded with scraps from the master’s table.<sup>106</sup>

### Yemayá Speaks

Fierceness is power. It is not, however, destructive power or deadly force—it is not savage, violent, ferocious, or terrible. Taken from the wordplay of African American Gay men in the Ballroom scene, fierceness is often expressed as charismatic authority that demands admiration.<sup>107</sup>

Yemayá has been understood, like soul food itself, to make the most of what is at hand, with a mighty flourish. Just as she allowed followers to substitute the Bay of Havana in Cuba for Yorùbáland’s Ògùn River, and New York Harbor in Manhattan for the Bay of Havana, she has judged Lake Michigan—a body of water so vast that it bounds four states and resembles the ocean in its horizon-filling breadth—to be an acceptable proxy for the Atlantic. This is where, since 1997, Yemayá has received offerings from her landlocked children in an annual summertime celebration that rounds out the ritual calendar in Ilé Laroye. Originally conceived as a private event for Nilaja and Santi’s godchildren, it now attracts members of other houses of *ocha*, not only in Illinois, but from throughout the Midwest. When the Ilé began holding the lakeside ceremony, Nilaja’s husband ‘Tunde would build a small wooden boat to fill with offerings, but in the last few years, the community has opted to create a large raft-like wreath by nailing together wooden boards and weaving leaves and flowers between the slats the previous night.

In 2007, the offering held for Yemayá at dawn resembled the others I have attended. Most participants brought flowers, as specified in the announcement sent via email and word-of-mouth by Ilé Laroye: lilies, carnations, multicolored daisies, chrysanthemums, roses, irises, feather-

duster-shaped hydrangea, and—appropriately—baby's breath. During the singing of praises to the *orishas*, priests arranged the flowers on the body of the wreath, wafted smoking incense over the center, then decorated it with pieces of mango, banana, fritters made from black-eyed-pea flour (*akará*), yam balls, a pineapple, and a small watermelon, its innumerable tiny seeds symbolic of Yemayá's fecundity. Nilaja and two other elders led over fifty participants in a round of praise songs for Yemayá as they danced slowly in a counterclockwise ring; unlike in a *batá* drum ritual, wherein only initiates would be welcome to join the circle intended to bring the *orisha* spinning into their presence, everyone at this event was urged to move in the human whirlpool. One African American man raised his voice to thank Yemayá for protecting both his ancestors during the Middle Passage and the efflorescence of the tradition that brought him to the water that morning.

Six men had volunteered to carry the raft out into the frigid current as far as they could go, and they led the procession across the sand as participants chanted. From the shore, one could see the outlines of the men entering the water, then, as well-defined yet featureless as paper dolls, their arms united in dispatching the craft. While the priests danced at waters' edge, Yemayá arrived in the body of a young male priest, whose cries of possession soon gave way to prostrations. She saluted, hugged, and caressed her devotees, calling them *omo mi*, "my children." Yemayá personally addressed them, referring to battles that will be won only after they are fought. She brought two women to her bosom and requested *asho*, or cloth, with which to cleanse them. Handed a white terry-cloth towel, she covered their heads, and the fabric trembled. Priests thronged around her as she dispensed advice, and some elders recommended that everyone else commence their retreat from the water in preparation for the communal meal. To their surprise, Yemayá sharply reproved them and ordered the uninitiated participants to return, protesting that the day was hers.

She pressed them to draw close, and as if teaching a master class, instructed two more priests with a raised index finger in full view of the gathering. Yemayá counseled self-preservation through defensive maneuvers and the tactical performance of cleansings called *ebó*, tailored to their different situations. She then delivered a stern lecture to the crowd, jotted down later that day in a combination of direct quotation and paraphrase:

Health is most important. Health is most important. Sickness is all around! Clean. Clean. *Sara yeye bo kun lo, sara yeye ikú n'lo*. Those who have tools, use them. Those who know

how to use water, clean with water. Those who know how to clean with fruit, clean with fruit. Those with orishas, take the offerings to the *orishas*; the rest, to *ilé Eshu* [the trash or the forest]. Remember the *egún*, they brought you here today. Remember: family, community, and ourselves, because if we don't take care of ourselves, no one will.

The first Lucumí words above are lyrics from a song to remove illness, premature death, and misfortune.<sup>108</sup> Because Lucumí mythology extols her witchcraft-medicine, instincts for communal self-preservation, and valor in defense of the vulnerable, Yemayá has been entrusted with the most intractable emotional, social, and physical problems; her possession mount seemed to be in the presence of several crises that day.

Similar in purpose to the ritual cleansings that occurred in the Espiritista ceremonies held in Nilaja's home, the type of personalized *ebó* that Yemayá advised were intended to eliminate negative energies caused by ruptures in social relationships, sorcery, and the influences of "purposive spirits," such as disgruntled ancestors nursing antique grudges.<sup>109</sup> It seems significant that Yemayá's list of ancestral, familial, and social commitments presented a vision of the world as structured by the obligation to honor agentive beings, primarily through commemorative action: "Remember." Yet the martial terminology used by her mount reinforced the hierarchical division of the world into allies and enemy forces, activating the dormant social critique in the statement, "if we don't take care of ourselves, no one will," one that confirms the self-image of practitioners as part of an oppositional group. In possession, she demonstrated that she not only bears witness to the suffering of her children, but also offers practical strategies for overcoming "sickness," including ailments caused by economic exploitation, racial discrimination, and patriarchal oppression.

Indeed, Yemayá is lauded as "fierce" in the contemporary "queer" sense of the term: intense, bold, and exceptional.<sup>110</sup> Fierceness—"charismatic authority that demands attention"—characterizes both the temperamental orisha as depicted in her mythology and the comportment and self-presentation of her human children, according to many practitioners. Yet it is important to emphasize that fierceness carries cultural weight not only as a personal trait or matter of idiosyncratic style; its flamboyant embodiment may be seen as a subversive act. Analyzing "fierceness" among the ethnically, racially, and sexually marginalized "as a disruptive strategy of performance," Madison Moore writes, "Because of its transgressive potential and deep connection to showmanship, fierceness allows its users to fabricate a new sense of self that

radiates a defiant sense [of] ownership through aesthetics, and in this way fierceness becomes a social, political, and aesthetic intervention.”<sup>111</sup>

As in the ethnographic vignette above, Yemayá exercises her command of space to advocate for her listeners' self-possession and enhance their ability to heal themselves, however low their levels of religious training and limited their experience within Lucumí.

That Yemayá should be fierce well befits a spirit noted for her unwavering acceptance of gays and lesbians. As J. Lorand Matory writes, “Cuban and Puerto Rican adherents of Ocha have told me of the affinity of the goddesses Ochún and Yemayá with *addodis*, or penetrated men.”<sup>112</sup> While some elders may dismiss any suggestion that the *orishas* could align themselves with humans on the basis of their erotic and affective proclivities, the popular understanding of Yemayá among practitioners maintains that she is not only tolerant but especially protective of her queer sons and daughters.<sup>113</sup> Anecdotal evidence abounds of Yemayá's protection of those ostracized for their sexuality or compelled to flout gendered norms. This aspect of her patronage became clear to me one afternoon, when a young woman in Nilaja's house was advised by a female peer to remove some “unsightly” body hair, and she rebuffed the suggestion in the following terms: “This is the way Yemoja made me. . . . This is my body; I have hair all over it; I'm not going to wax it!”<sup>114</sup> Yemayá gives her children license to be unapologetically fierce concerning their choices—and no one can ever be orphaned by her.<sup>115</sup>

Perhaps surprisingly, Yemayá can be severe toward even her most loyal servants. Although it has long been commonplace in initiates' narratives that their *orishas* forced them to pursue ordination, I found in my research that those initiated to Yemayá claimed to have undergone ordeals throughout their priesthood and felt the rough side of her tongue repeatedly in divination. One *iyalocha* related in an interview, “I can tell you: Yemayá's one of those *orishas*, she tests you hard. She wants to say, ‘Yeah, you really want this?’ For me—everybody's path is different. ‘You really want this?’ you know . . . I have to suffer for everything I get. I don't know why. My godmother always said, ‘Just think if you didn't have the *orishas*,’ and she's probably right . . . It's nothing but struggle for me.”<sup>116</sup> Such testimony may seem ironic in light of Yemayá's reputation as nurturing and compliant. However, her behavior conforms to a parenting strategy often pursued by sociopolitically disadvantaged women: preparing children for the world's hardships by “toughening them up” at home.<sup>117</sup> One may consider this as another gauge of Yemayá's distance from the type of motherhood held up as universal and another point in favor of rooting any interpretation of her

actions in the historical situation of Afro-Diasporic religious actors. Her ferocity, like her tongue, is double-edged.

### Conclusion

Over the last century, the icon of the Regla has overlapped to such a degree with the image of Yemayá that to gaze on one has been to catch a glimpse of the other, as in the case of superimposed transparencies. For this reason, I launched the preceding inquiry by delving into the Virgin's correspondence with the *orisha* in Lucumí, Espiritismo, and Palo Monte. I argued that both figures have contributed to Afro-Cubans' racial and gendered subject formation, not least by challenging the attitudes sedimented in the "mammy" stereotype. I contended that the mammy has obscured not only the domestic and maternal labor of Afro-Cuban women, but the vision of Yemayá as a fierce foremother conveyed through oral tradition; using the examples of Aponte's portrait and the Regla-based cabildos' annual processions, I limned a picture of Yemayá that is more majestic and militant than generally advanced. Finally, I reviewed salient features of her veneration by a contemporary African American community to demonstrate her continued development within the Afro-Atlantic world. Her Blackness there, as elsewhere, extends far beyond her iconography into mythology and ritual praxis, requiring us to seek her worshippers' histories if we aspire to see her face.

### Notes

I owe my most sincere thanks to the members of a community I call Ilé Laroye in this chapter, especially those given the pseudonyms Nilaja and Santi Campbell, and to the *iyalocho* Yomí Yomí for their material assistance and extraordinary generosity.

1. Needless to say, the "universal mother" depicted in these texts is consistently cisgender-centric; that is to say, these texts do not entertain the possibility of men as mothers and assume that the only human mothers worthy of the name remain identified with inhabiting norms of feminine behavior and the gender they were assigned at birth (invariably female). Among recent citations, see Miguel Barnet, *AfroCuban Religions* (Princeton: Wiener, 2001), 50; Margarite Fernandez Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santería to Obeah and Espiritismo* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2003), 52; Alka Pande, *Ardhanarishvara, the Androgyne: Probing the Gender Within* (New Delhi: Rupa, 2004), 66; Owen Davies, *Paganism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 83; Guillermina Ramos Cruz, "La

otra cara de Eva: diosas, sacerdotisas, sibilas, orishas: La mujer y lo sagrado,” *Oráfrica: revista de oralidad africana* 5 (April 2009): 176; Radams Molina Montes, *Cuentos afrocubanos. Patakines*. (Barcelona: Linkgua Ediciones, 2007), 15; Armando Ferrer Castro y Mayda Acosta Alegre, *Fermina Gómez y la casa olvidada de Olókun* (La Habana: Editorial José Martí, 2007), 17; Antonio Núñez Jiménez, *Un mundo aparte: aproximación a la historia de América Latina y el Caribe* (Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre, 1994), 167; Tabaré A. Güerere, *Los babalawos: Curanderos, adivinos, dueños de los misterios* (Caracas: Los Libros de el Nacional, 1998); Edwin Barbosa da Silva, *Presença africana em religiões brasileiras* (Recife: FIDA Editorial Comunicação Especializada, 1980), 62; Pedro Iwashita, *Maria e Iemanjá—Análise de um Sincretismo* (S. Paulo: Ed. Paulinas, 1991), 194; and Rosa María Lahaye Guerra and Rubén Zardoya Loureda, *Yemayá a través de sus mitos* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1996), 66. For a more extended critique of the category of “mother goddess,” see Rachel McDermott, “The Western Kali,” in John S. Hawley and Donna M. Wulff, eds., *Devi: Goddesses of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 281–313, and Cynthia Eller, “White Women and the Dark Mother,” *Religion* 30 (2000): 367–78.

2. Robert Farris Thompson writes in *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and the African Americas* (Museum for African Art and Prestel, Munich, 1993), 272–73, “Cuban poems underline her link with crockery (*Yemoja, mo mi Awoyó*), her queenly status (*ayaba*), her corpulence.”

3. Mercedes Cros Sandoval, *La religión afro-cubana* (Madrid: Playor, 1975), 218; Miguel Barnet, *Cultos afrocubanos: La regla de ocha, la regla de palo monte* (La Habana: Ediciones Unión Artex, 1995), 55. “Azabache” not only denotes jet, a variety of lignite, but also the jet pieces worn as charms—typically on gold chains, along with crucifixes or Marian medals—to protect against volt-sorcery and the “evil eye.”

4. For instance, quoting Agún Efundé’s *Los secretos de la Santería* (Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1978), Michaëlle Ascencio writes, “Para los devotos, Yemayá es una orisha negra con el pelo chicharrón, pegadito, pegadito: ‘Yemayá es negra como el carbón y su pelo es pura pasa.’” Also see *Las diosas del Caribe* (Editorial Alfa, Caracas, 2007), 48.

5. See *White on White/Black on Black*, ed. George Yancy (Lanham, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005); Norman Whitten and Arlene Torres, *Blackness in Latin America and the Caribbean: Social Dynamics and Cultural Transformations*, 2 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); Manning Marable and Vanessa Agard-Jones, eds., *Transnational Blackness: Navigating the Global Color Line* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Percy C. Hintzen, Jean Muteba Rahier, and Felipe Smith, eds., *Global Circuits of Blackness: Interrogating the African Diaspora* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Stuart Hall, “Minimal Selves,” Identity: “The Real Me”; Postmodernism and the Question of Identity (ICA Documents, No. 6, Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1987); Jalane D. Schmidt, “Locked Together: The Culture and Politics of ‘Blackness’ in Cuba,” *Transforming Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2008): 160–64; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the*



*Politics of Empowerment* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988); Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

6. E. Patrick Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 2.

7. In Brazil, the *oricha* Oyá is considered to have two distinct personalities: the seductive queen of lightning, represented by Our Lady of Candlemas, or *Candelaria*, and mistress of the dead, depicted as St. Teresa of Ávila. See Judith Gleason, "Oya in the Company of Saints," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68, no. 2 (2000): 266.

8. For a fairly standard retelling of the medieval legend, see Rubén Vargas Ugarte, *Historia del culto de María en Iberoamérica y de sus imágenes y santuarios más celebrados* (Madrid: Editorial Talleres Gráficos Jura, 1956), 322–23; and Eduardo Gómez Luaces, *Historia de Nuestra Señora de Regla. Sus fiestas, los cabildos, con datos inéditos y juicios críticos sobre Regla* (Regla, 1945).

9. In the Philippines, a version of the Virgin of Regla is venerated in Opon, but her child is also depicted as dark-skinned.

10. David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 120.

11. David H. Brown places the date at 1690 in "Garden in the Machine: Afro-Cuban Sacred Art and Performance in Urban New Jersey and New York" (PhD diss., Yale University, 1989), 339.

12. Quoted in María Elena Díaz, *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre: Negotiating Freedom in Colonial Cuba, 1670–1780* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 371n41; and Pedro Augustín Morell de Santa Cruz y de Lora, *La visita eclesiástica: Selección e introducción de César García del Pino* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1985). See also Verena Martínez-Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 11–17.

13. He uses "Moreno" rather than "pardo," a term employed to describe a person with white ancestry on one side, a subset of which was mulatto. According to lettered clergy such as Fray Antonio de la Cruz, author of a hymn to Regla published in 1795, her color was not accidental; it was intended as an allusion to a famous line from the Song of Solomon, "Nigra sum sed formosa." Fray Antonio de la Cruz, *Novena de Nuestra Señora de Regla* (Cádiz, 1795), 49–60.

14. Pope Gregory the Great famously described paintings in churches as the "books of the illiterate." See Lawrence G. Duggan, "Was Art Really the 'Book of the Illiterate'?" *Word and Image* 5, no. 3 (1989): 227–51.

15. Where early colonists strove to eliminate the cults of goddesses and female spirits, as in Mexico and Peru, the Virgin Mary acquired great importance for impoverished and racially marginalized peoples. In the words of Nicholas Perry and Loreto Echeverría, *Under the Heel of Mary* (London: Routledge, 1988), 31, "Hispanic colonization was Marian colonization."

16. Miguel "Willie" Ramos, "The Empire Beats On: Oyo, Bâta Drums, and Hegemony in Nineteenth-Century Cuba" (M.A. thesis, Florida International University, 2000), 9.

17. Andrew Apter, "Herskovits' Heritage: Rethinking Syncretism in the African Diaspora," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 3 (Winter): 235–60; Kamari Maxine Clarke, *Mapping Yorùbá Networks: Power and Agency in the Making of Transnational Communities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 97.

18. David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 218.

19. Cajón al muerto may also be called *cajón para los muertos*, *cajón espiritual*, or simply Cajón.

20. For more concerning Espiritismo, see Racquel Romberg, *Witchcraft and Welfare: Spiritual Capital and the Business of Magic in Modern Puerto Rico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003); and Romberg, *Healing Dramas: Divination and Magic in Modern Puerto Rico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009).

21. Nolan Warden, "Cajón pa' los Muertos: Transculturation and Emergent Tradition in Afro-Cuban Ritual Drumming and Song" (M.A. thesis, Tufts University, 2006), 167.

22. Carmen María Sáenz Coopat and María Elena Vinueza, "Oral Traditions of Cuba," in *Music in Latin America and the Caribbean: Performing the Caribbean Experience*, ed. Malena Kuss (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 39.

23. Jesús Fuentes Guerra and Armin Schwegler, *Lengua y ritos del Palo Monte Mayombe: Dioses cubanos y sus fuentes africanas* (Frankfurt and Vervuert/Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2005), 170; Martín Lienhard, "Kalunga o el recuerdo de la trata esclavista en algunos cantos afro-americanos," *Revista iberoamericana* 65, no. 188/189 (1999): 595–617.

24. Claire Garoutte and Anneke Wambaugh, *Crossing the Water: A Photographic Path to the Afro-Cuban Spirit World* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 72. In "Garden in the Machine," 296n64, Brown writes that the identity of Lucumí practitioners' main Kongo patrons tends to be synchronized by *orisha* so that "Madre de Agua [is received by] Yemayás."

25. For example, in the song, "Bendita eres virgen sagrada/ Virgen de Regla reina del mar," Warden writes, "Bendita can be substituted with *Gloriosa*, and *reina del mar* can be substituted with *mi Yemaya*," 169.

26. In Lucumí, the metaphor of roads is privileged; for the different manifestations of *orishas*, the West African Yoruba use the image of rippling pools in a river, or *ibú*, that are named extensions of the same body of water. Karin Barber, "'Oríki,' Women and the Proliferation and Merging of 'òrìsà,'" *Africa* 60, no. 3 (1990): 313–37. The word "avatar" would seem at first glance to be a suitable translation, but the meaning of "descent" (specifically that of Vishnu into terrestrial form) would be misleading for gods that ascend into the body during possession and other ritual contexts.

27. Warden, 53. Among other statements made by practitioners, this comment recalls that of *santero*, *palero*, and Espiritista Charley Guelperin: "*Muerto pare Santo*: Death gives birth to the saints. All of the *orishas* are spirits . . . Madre Agua, Isn't she Yemaya? . . . It's not important what you call them. Bones are bones and bones are life." Quoted in Donald Cosentino,

“Conversations with Congo Manuel: Kings and Slaves in the Eschatology of Espiritismo,” in *Activating the Past: History and Memory in the Black Atlantic World*, ed. Andrew Apter and Lauren Derby (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 420.

28. John Mason, *Ìdáná Fún Òrìsà: Cooking for Selected Heads* (Brooklyn, NY: Yoruba Theological Archministry, 1999), 52.

29. An adage from colonial Brazil sums up the purported sexual division of labor in Cuba: “White women are for wedlock; African women, for working; and mulattas, for fucking.” Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1964), 20.

30. Shloma Rosenberg, “Oshun,” accessed April 5, 2007, <http://mystic-curio.tripod.com/oshun.htm>.

31. Vera Kutzinski, *Sugar’s Secrets: Race and the Erotics of Cuban Nationalism* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 1993), 165. Raquel Mendieta Costa, “Exotic Exports: The Myth of the Mulatta,” in *Corpus Delecti: Performance Art of the Americas*, ed. Coco Fusco (Routledge: London, 2000), 45, describes the Creole mulatta, not the African-born woman, as “the antithesis of the white woman; the latter being the very image of prudishness and virtue, to whom the male-dominated and racist Cuban society reserved the role of faithful wife and mother of the family.”

32. Mercedes Rivas, *Literatura y esclavitud en la novella cubana del siglo XIX* (Sevilla: Imprenta E.E.H.A., 1990). See, for instance, the “great Cuban novel,” Cirilo Villaverde, *Cecilia Valdés o la Loma del Ángel: Novela de costumbres cubanas* (New York: Imprenta de El Espejo, 1882).

33. See Alicia Arrizón, *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Nancy Morejón and David Frye, “Cuba and Its Deep Africanity,” *Callaloo* 28, no. 4 (2005): 933–51.

34. See Lourdes Martínez-Echazabal, “Mestizaje and the Discourse of National/Cultural Identity in Latin America, 1845–1959,” *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (1998): 21–42; Alejandro de la Fuente, “Race, National Discourse, and Politics in Cuba: An Overview,” *Latin American Perspectives* 25, no. 3 (1998): 43–69.

35. Elizabeth Pérez, “The Virgin in the Mirror: Reading Images of a Black Madonna through the Lens of Afro-Cuban Women’s Experiences,” *The Journal of African American History* 95, no. 2 (2010): 202–28.

36. On women’s contributions to *orisha* worship in Cuba, see Miguel “Willie” Ramos, “*La división de la Habana*: Territorial Conflict and Cultural Hegemony in the Followers of Oyo Lukumí Religion, 1850s–1920s,” *Cuban Studies* 34 (2003): 38–70.

37. See Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language* (London: Routledge, 2003 [1975]).

38. Flora González Mandri, *Guarding Cultural Memory: Afro-Cuban Women in Literature and the Arts* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), 12. Díaz in *The Virgin, the King, and the Royal Slaves of El Cobre* writes, “In Cuba, during the nineteenth century, slave women returned to work forty-

five days after childbirth and the children were placed under the care of an older slave woman, while mothers worked in the fields," 398n98.

39. Manuel Moreno Fraginals, *The Sugarmill: The Socioeconomic Complex of Sugar in Cuba, 1760-1860*, trans. Cedric Belfrage (New York and London: Monthly Review, 1976), 143. In the words of Hazel Carby, "Black women gave birth to property and, directly, to capital itself in the form of slaves, and all slaves inherited their status from their mothers" (quoted in Joan Martin, *More Than Chains and Toil: A Christian Work Ethic of Enslaved Women* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 94.

40. Documents from the period portray women of color as having no virginity to lose. Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba*, 115.

41. Paulla A. Ebron, "Enchanted Memories of Regional Difference in African American Culture," *American Anthropologist* 100, no. 1 (1998): 101; emphasis added.

42. Hugh Thomas, *Cuba, or The Pursuit of Freedom* (New York: Da Capo, 1998 [1971]), 173.

43. K. Sue Jewell, *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond: Cultural Images and the Shaping of U.S. Social Policy* (London: Routledge, 1993), 40.

44. Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba*, 116. See also Gema R. Guevara, "Inexacting Whiteness: Blanqueamiento as a Gender-Specific Trope in the Nineteenth Century," *Cuban Studies* 36 (2005): 105-28.

45. Martinez-Alier, *Marriage, Class, and Colour in Nineteenth-Century Cuba*, 128.

46. *Ibid.*, 11. In early nineteenth-century Cuba, elites formulated a complicated set of categories to contain the threat to the dominant order posed by the inherent instability of racial signifiers. For both Spaniards and Cubans of the colonial period, bodies had "phenotypical" as well as "legal" color. The term "phenotypical color" was meant to refer to physical appearance, genetically as well as environmentally determined, although one could always attempt to "pass" for white. As a synonym for "race," phenotypical color, in principle, performed a synecdochal function so that one could determine the socioeconomic status of any Cuban at a glance. However, phenotype eventually became an unreliable criterion since African blood mingled so frequently with the European. Recorded in baptismal registers as mandated by Spanish authorities, legal color theoretically established the racial status of both infants and parents, but in cases of interracial marriage and concubinage, the identity of the offspring would be far from certain. Initially imposed by Spanish administrators, the category of legal color became the alternative criterion by which Cubans determined racial status (in a court of law, for instance) when physical traits such as hair texture did not seem to match complexion—when, in short, the body failed to serve as "an unambiguous guide."

47. As an ideological effect of the transatlantic slave trade, whiteness came to connote ownership of property, whereas brownness signified that one's

ancestors had served as the property of others. Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *Empire and Antislavery: Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, 1833–1874* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 8.

48. Barred from moving “up” and across racial barriers through marriage or informal relations, many slaves and freedmen of color routinely faced rejection from otherwise available women “holding out” for white men.

49. Barbara Potthast-Jutkeit, “The Slave Family in the Caribbean: A Research Review,” *Ibero-Amerikanisches Archiv* 24 (1998): 295. See María de los Reyes Castillo Bueno and Daisy Rubiera Castillo, *Reyita: The Life of a Black Cuban Woman in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

50. Pedro Deschamps Chapeaux, “People without a History,” in *Afrocuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics, and Culture*, ed. Pedro Pérez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs (Melbourne: Ocean, 1993), 58–59, writes, “In Havana during the period 1820–1845, midwifery was in the main carried out by women of color, principally those classified as free *pardas* (mulatto women).”

51. Quoted in Luis Martínez-Fernández, “Life in a ‘Male City’: Native and Foreign Elite Women in Nineteenth-Century Havana,” *Cuban Studies* 25 (1995): 30.

52. Quoted in Reynaldo González, *Contradanzas y latigazos* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 1992), 168.

53. Martin, *More than Chains and Toil*, 4.

54. These configurations frequently proved unstable, however, and drove many to become Janes-of-all-trades, moving from site to site in the pursuit of employment. Rebecca J. Scott, *Slave Emancipation in Cuba: The Transition to Free Labor, 1860–1899* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 242–43.

55. Cameron Lynne Macdonald, *Shadow Mothers: Nannies, Au Pairs, and the Micropolitics of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

56. Kutzinski, *Sugar’s Secrets*, 168.

57. Félix V. Matos-Rodríguez, “Street Vendors, Pedlars, Shop-Owners and Domestic: Some Aspects of Women’s Economic Roles in Nineteenth-Century San Juan, Puerto Rico (1820–1870),” in *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Verene Shepherd, Bridget Breton, and Barbara Bailey (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995), 176–96.

58. Kate Haug, “Myth and Matriarchy: An Analysis of the Mammy Stereotype,” in *Dirt and Domesticity: Constructions of the Feminine: June 12–August 14, 1992*, Whitney Museum of American Art at Equitable Center (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1992), 39.

59. Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (Routledge: New York, 1995), 85. For a late twentieth-century account of the mammy’s role in teaching white children about the *orichas*, especially Yemayá, see Migene González Wippler, *Santería: The Religion* (St. Paul: Llewellyn, 1999), 301–14.

60. Baltasar Fra-Molinero, “The Condition of Black Women in Spain during the Renaissance,” in *Black Women in America*, ed. Kim Marie Vaz (London: Sage, 1995).

61. Haug, "Myth and Matriarchy," 48.

62. Maria St. John, "'It Ain't Fittin': Cinematic and Fantasmatic Contours of Mammy in *Gone with the Wind* and Beyond," *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 2, no. 2 (2001): 138.

63. Hilary M. Beckles, *Centering Woman: Gender Discourses in Caribbean Slave Society* (Kingston: Ian Randle, 1999), 10.

64. Daniel E. Walker, *No More, No More: Slavery and Cultural Resistance in Havana and New Orleans* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 115.

65. These scenes also appeared on cigar and cigarette wrappers "at least since the 1840s" (Kutzinski, *Sugar's Secrets*, 44). See also Antonio Núñez Jiménez, *Marquillas cigarreras cubanas* (Havana: Ediciones Tabapress, 1989).

66. Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness; Afro-Cubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920–1940* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 49.

67. Lisa Maya Knauer, "Consuming Slavery, Performing Cuba: Ethnography, Carnival and Black Public Culture," *Ethnicity and Race in a Changing World: A Review Journal* 1, no. 4 (2011): 3–25.

68. Dawn Duke, *Literary Passion, Ideological Commitment: Toward a Legacy of Afro-Cuban and Afro-Brazilian Women Writers* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2008), 49. A number of composite fictional characters have had names and internal references tying them to both the *orisha* and the Virgin, from Cirilo Villaverde's María de Regla, to Regla the maid in Antonio Orlando Rodríguez's *The Last Masquerade: A Novel*, trans. Ernesto Mestre-Reed (New York: Rayo HarperCollins, 2005), Chantel Acevedo's *Love and Ghost Letters* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2006), and Ruth Behar's novel-in-progress *Nightgowns from Cuba* (forthcoming). See Ruth Behar, "Honeymoon Nightgowns That a Black Woman Saved for a White Woman: A Perilous Journey into the Cuban Historical Imagination," *American Studies* 41, nos. 2, 3 (2000): 287–302.

69. Beckles, *Centering Woman*, 14. Kenneth W. Goings, *Mammy and Uncle Mose: Black Collectibles and American Stereotyping* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 64.

70. Jewell, *From Mammy to Miss America and Beyond*, 43.

71. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes toward an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971), 174.

72. *Ibid.* In Althusser's hypothetical street scene, Regla plays the part of the authority figure, calling out, "Hey, you!" and waiting for the subjects within "earshot" to "turn around." In *Peau noire, masques blancs*, Frantz Fanon used a vicious slur as his point of departure for perhaps the most famous statement on the racial component of interpellation. Drawing on the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois and others, Fanon declared that the person of African descent is daily "battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism [sic], racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho' good eatin'." *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove, 1967 [1952]), 113.

73. See Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Random House, 1983).

74. Juan Antonio Hernández writes that “the Virgin was associated, without a doubt, by Afro-Cubans with their racial identity” (“Hacia una historia de lo imposible: La revolución haitiana y el “libro de pinturas” de José Antonio Aponte” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2005), 241n190).

75. Interview with Latina Lucumí priestess, Chicago, May 29, 2001.

76. Angela Jorge, “La madama francesita: A New World Black Spirit,” in *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, 2nd ed., ed. Joseph E. Harris (Washington, DC: Howard University Press, 1993), 205–22; Derric Moore, *Maa Aankh: Finding God the Afro-American Spiritual Way, by Honoring the Ancestors and Guardian Spirits* (Liberal, KS: Four Sons, 2010). See also J. Lorand Matory, “Free to Be a Slave: Slavery as Metaphor in the Afro-Atlantic Religions,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 37 (2007): 398–425.

77. Carol B. Duncan, “Aunt(y) Jemima in Spiritual Baptist Experience in Toronto: Spiritual Mother or Servile Woman?” *Small Axe* 9 (2001): 97–122.

78. “If Justice Is Our Objective: Diaspora Literacy, Heritage Knowledge, and the Praxis of Critical Studyin’ for Human Freedom,” in *With More Deliberate Speed: Achieving Equity and Excellence in Education*, ed. Arnetta F. Ball (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 352–53.

79. This was allegedly drawn from a compilation of Marian prayers.

80. Stephan Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists: Explorations in Afro-Cuban Modernity and Tradition* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 90.

81. Hernández, “Hacia una historia de lo imposible,” 249.

82. David H. Brown, “Thrones of the Orichas: Afro-Cuban Altars in New Jersey, New York, and Havana,” *African Arts* 26, no. 4 (1993): 44–59, 85–87.

83. Early sources such as Gómez Luaces, *Historia de Nuestra Señora de Regla*, 11, Lydia Cabrera, *Yemayá y Ochún: Kariocha, iyalorichas y olorichas* (Madrid: C and R, 1974), 17, and Vargas Ugarte, *Historia del Culto de María*, 322–23, cite the date of the processions as September 8, while later research—that of Brown, among others—insists that it was September 7. Each source is internally consistent.

84. Carrie Viarnes unpacks the term “a mi manera” in the course of documenting the contemporary Cuban processions for Regla. “All Roads Lead to Yemayá: Transformative Trajectories in the Procession at Regla,” *E-misférica* 5, no. 1 (2008): [http://hemi.nyu.edu/journal/5.1/eng/en51\\_pg\\_viarnes.html](http://hemi.nyu.edu/journal/5.1/eng/en51_pg_viarnes.html).

85. The *cabildos* rejected the image housed in the church, in favor of their own, laid to “sleep” in the sanctuary the night before the processions. Luis Alberto Pedroso, “La memoria de un cabildo,” in *El último cabildo de Yemayá: Roberto Salas*, ed. Luis Alberto Pedroso and Rafael Acosta de Arriba (La Habana: *Oficina del Historiador* de la Ciudad, 2008), 2.

86. Cabrera, *Yemayá y Ochún*, 17.

87. Brown, *Santería Enthroned*, 221.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Francisco M. Duque, *Historia de Regla. Descripción Política, Económica y Social, Desde su Fundación Hasta el Día* (La Habana: Rambla, Bouza y Ca., 1925), 127.

90. By 1945, Regla's processions attracted more than a hundred thousand pilgrims to a town with a resident population of just over twenty-three thousand.

91. For comparisons, see William Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, and William E. French, *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1994).

92. Gómez Luaces, *Historia de Nuestra Señora de Regla*, 19.

93. City hall was one of the sites visited by the *cabildos* in procession. Palmié, *Wizards and Scientists*, 343n35.

94. "Es madre virtuosa, púdica y sabia pero a la vez alegre y sandunguera, pues por el Olimpo africano no creen que sea incompatible la virtud, la sabiduría y la sandunga." Fernando Ortiz, *Los bailes y el teatro de los negros en el folklore de Cuba* (Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, [1985] 1951), 247.

95. Alejo Carpentier, *Music in Cuba*, trans. Alan West-Durán (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001 [1946]), 192.

96. Fernando Ortiz, *La africanía de la música folklórica de Cuba* (La Habana: Editora Universitaria, 1955), 71.

97. Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley, *Thiefing Sugar: Eroticism between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 212.

98. Joseph M. Murphy notes that anthropomorphic representation of the *orishas* "has theological and social implications," for instance, when Yemayá is included in galleries of female deities around the world as an "avatar . . . of a single goddess" (477). Murphy also writes, "The most common context for discussion of Òṣun or Yemoja was among other goddesses of the world, often with expressions of a faith that the òriṣà were African names or avatars of a universal goddess who is also called Hathor or Artemis." Murphy, "Òriṣà Traditions and the Internet Diaspora," in *Òriṣà Devotion as World Religion: The Globalization of Yorùbá Religious Culture*, ed. Jacob K. Olupona and Terry Rey (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2008), 478.

99. Diane M. Spivey, *The Peppers, Cracklings, and Knots of Wool Cookbook: The Global Migration of African Cuisine* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 190.

100. Jacqueline K. Bryant, "The Literary Foremother: An Embodiment of the Rhetoric of Freedom," in *African American Rhetoric(s): Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Elaine B. Richardson and Ronald L. Jackson II (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 2004), 73–85. Representations of Yemayá that draw upon Lucumí mythology as well as ritual practice to depict her, such as Cirilo Villaverde's María de Regla in *Cecilia Valdés o la Loma del Ángel: Novela de costumbres cubanas* (New York: Imprenta de El Espejo, 1882), unwittingly constitute exemplars of the foremother figure.

101. Bryant, "The Literary Foremother," 74.

102. Mason, *Ìdáná Fún Òriṣà*, 52.



103. Jean Stubbs, “Social and Political Motherhood of Cuba: Mariana Grajales Cuello” in *Engendering History: Caribbean Women in Historical Perspective*, ed. Verene Shepherd, Bridget Brereton, and Barbara Bailey (New York: St. Martin’s, 1995), 296–317; Miguel “Willie” Ramos, “Afro-Cuban Orisha Worship,” in *Santería Aesthetics in Contemporary Latin American Art*, ed. Arturo Lindsay (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 68.

104. Laroye is one of Eleggua’s praise names, and Nilaja’s house is viewed as his abode, as much as his devotees’.

105. A hierarchy of ritual descent relates “godparents,” or the senior ritual sponsors of initiates, to their “godchildren” through a process called *apadrinación*.

106. Mason, *Ìdáná Fún Òrìsà*, 52.

107. Mickey Weems, *The Fierce Tribe: Masculine Identity and Performance in the Circuit* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2008), 29.

108. The term “*saraye*” may be used as a noun or a verb meaning “cleansing.” “Tools” referred to consecrated objects that may be replenished to improve the condition of their owners.

109. Raymond Prince, quoted in Roberto Nodal and Miguel “Willie” Ramos, “*Let the Power Flow: Ebo* as a Healing Mechanism in Lukumi Orisha Worship,” in *Fragments of Bone: Neo-African Religions in a New World*, ed. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 167.

110. Salvador Vidal-Ortiz, “Sexuality and Gender in Santería: Towards a Queer of Color Critique in the Study of Religion” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2005); Randy P. Conner, “Rainbow’s Children: Diversity of Gender and Sexuality in African-Diasporic Spiritual Traditions,” in *Fragments of Bone: Neo-African Religions in a New World*, ed. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2005), 148.

111. Madison Moore, “Tina Theory: Notes on Fierceness,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 24, no. 1 (2012): 72.

112. J. Lorand Matory, “Sexual Secrets: Candomble, Brazil, and the Multiple Intimacies of the African Diaspora,” in *Off Stage/On Display: Intimacy and Ethnography in the Age of Public Culture*, ed. Andrew Shryock (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 171.

113. Randy P. Conner and David Hatfield Sparks, *Queering Creole Spiritual Traditions: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Participation in African-inspired Traditions in the Americas* (New York: Harrington Park, 2004), 71–72; Terry Rey, “The Virgin’s Slip Is Full of Fireflies”: The Multifarious Struggle over the Virgin Mary’s Legitimierende Macht in Latin America and Its U.S. Diasporic Communities,” *UC Davis Law Review* 33, no. 4 (2000): 955–72. Rey writes, “The Virgin Mary’s assimilation in Cuban Santería of Ochun (as Caridad del Cobre) and Yemaya (as Our Lady of the [sic] Regla) opens a discursive locus of legitimacy for homosexual men in popular Cuban Mariology” (969).

In an address to the American Academy of Religion, African American scholar Ibrahim Farajá-Jones boldly stated, “I call upon Yemaya, orisha of the sea and maternal compassion, mother of gay men, bisexual men and transgendered men[,] and of all persons living with HIV/AIDS.” Elias Ibrahim

Farajaje-Jones, "Piercing Analysis/or In-to-body Travel/ or What Is All That Piercing Stuff?" unpublished lecture, American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting (Philadelphia, Fall 1995), quoted in Kenneth Lewis Hamilton, "The Flames of Namugongo: Postcolonial, Queer, and Thea/ological Reflections on the Narrative of the 1886 Ugandan Martyrdom" (PhD diss., Union Institute and University, 2007), 305.

114. Fieldnotes, April 14, 2005.

115. See José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

116. Personal communication, August 13, 2007. See Fiona Buckland, *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

117. A number of scholarly volumes address this phenomenon as it influences African American family dynamics; for a relatively brief review of the state of research on this issue, see Ellen E. Pinderhughes, Kenneth A. Dodge, J. E. Bates, and Arnaldo Zelli, "Discipline Responses: Influences of Parents' Socioeconomic Status, Ethnicity, Beliefs about Parenting, Stress, and Cognitive-Emotional Processes," *Journal of Family Psychology* 14, no. 3 (2000): 380–400.

