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## Tracing the Amerindian Influence on the Caribbean Diaspora's Beliefs and Practices: A Study of the African and Indigenous Caribbean Religious Encounter and its Indelible Signs

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

TRACING THE AMERINDIAN INFLUENCE ON THE CARIBBEAN DIASPORA'S  
BELIEFS AND PRACTICES: A STUDY OF THE AFRICAN AND INDIGENOUS  
CARIBBEAN RELIGIOUS ENCOUNTER AND ITS INDELIBLE SIGNS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of

the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

by

Alejandro Casas Reyes

2021

To: Dean John F. Stack, Jr.  
Green School of International and Public Affairs

This thesis, written by Alejandro Casas Reyes, and entitled Tracing the Amerindian Influence on the Caribbean Diaspora's Beliefs and Practices: A Study of the African and Indigenous Caribbean Religious Encounter and Its Indelible Signs, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Date of Defense: March 25, 2021

The thesis of Alejandro Casas Reyes is approved.

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Dean John F. Stack, Jr.  
Green School of International and Public Affairs

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Andrés G. Gil  
Vice President for Research and Economic Development  
and Dean of the University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2021

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

TRACING THE AMERINDIAN INFLUENCE ON THE CARIBBEAN DIASPORA'S  
BELIEFS AND PRACTICES: A STUDY OF THE AFRICAN AND INDIGENOUS  
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by

Alejandro Casas Reyes

Florida International University, 2021

Miami, Florida

Professor Albert Kafui Wuaku, Major Professor

It has been five hundred and twenty eight years since the Spanish colonial presence that occasioned the annihilation of the Amerindians of the Caribbean and portions of Latin America started. Yet, the Amerindian influence is still felt all over the Caribbean and Latin America. Identifying what these influences are and where they are found, however, are questions that have not been fully answered. Passing references have been made in many works to these influences, but there is no comprehensive study on the subject; especially in the Caribbean. In that the scant literature available on the subject matter offers very little insight into the significance of the Amerindian influence on Afro-Caribbean religions, there is an urgent need for a sincere and more comprehensive inquiry into this issue. Following this line of thinking, the focus of this project is on the Taino and Carib religions and the signs of its influence on the Afro-Caribbean Religion of Palo Monte.

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*Nsala Malekum*

*“Igi kan ko si igbo”*

*“Un solo palo no hace el monte”*

*“A single tree does not make a forest”*

*-Lucumi proverb*



## Chapter 1

*“Okufi konso vana kamanikini, ivana mpe kamanunuinanga”*

*“El que es de baja estatura, cuelga y descuelga a su altura”*

*“The one who is short, hang and unhangs his height”*

*-Palo Monte proverb*

### Introduction

Prior to the (in)famous and historical date of October 12 1492, the lands of the Caribbean and Latin America were populated by a diverse and advanced people. These people, the Amerindians, are usually cast aside in the historical (linear) progression and development of the “Americas”, as primitive and backward people that died off during the Spanish colonial expansion. Due to the desire of the Spanish crown to “save” the discovered world under the “universal” power of Christ and Christianity and the rebellion of the Amerindians to being “civilized”, these natives’ influences are ignored in the field of religious studies as insignificant. However, as it is evident today and is popularly recognized, the Amerindian influence is found all over the Caribbean and Latin America. Due to the fact that most of the writing on the Amerindian religious influence on Afro-Caribbean Religions is scant and exists in bits and pieces in larger bodies of literature on related subjects, the project will entail a synthesis of the available information. The project will research, analyze and document the available (to the author’s knowledge) literature on the subject matter for the elucidation of the Amerindian influence found in

the beliefs and practices of Palo Monte, whose origins can be traced back to the African and Indigenous Caribbean Religious encounter.

Hence, the project will be based primarily on archival research and investigative literature review. This will entail an exploration of the available literature on the Amerindian beliefs and practices that existed at the time of the encounter with the Spanish. I will conduct archival research in order to find out more details about the different African ethnicities that were forcefully transported into the Caribbean and their encounters with Amerindian populations there. I will research the various ethnic groups brought to the Caribbean with the intention of locating the proper African-Diaspora and its religious manifestations, directly influenced by the Amerindian religious Habitus. I will then explore the available literature on the Palo Monte religion in order to elucidate the evidence (if there is any) of the Amerindian influence on this Afro-Cuban Kongo-derived religious manifestation. My goal here is to determine the role such influences had in changing the religious Habitus and survival approach of the Kongo Diaspora in Cuba. Lastly, I will investigate the reason for the silence observed from Afro-Caribbean scholars regarding the Amerindian influence. I will investigate this silence through the Decolonial lens; or Decolonial option as explained by Walter Mignolo in his famous *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* where he explains as a delinking from the colonial matrix (of coloniality) of power underlying western modernity in order to build a global and pluriverse future in harmony with the

natural world (which is a central theme of the religious Habitus of the Amerindians and the African Diaspora).<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the study is to provide scholars from fields such as Anthropology, Latin American and Caribbean Studies, Sociology and Religious Studies with a formal body of work of the Amerindian religious influence found in the Palo Monte Religion. This will serve as the base point from which further (and much needed) research will be attempted. The hope is that the resulting manuscript will also serve as a manual and guide for those seeking to do ethnographic field work in this area of study. I will do this by seeking answers to the following questions: What does the available literature on the Caribbean Amerindians tell us about the original Caribbean inhabitants and their religious Habitus? Which Afro-Caribbean ethnic groups were most influenced by the Amerindian beliefs and practices, why, and how? What evidence is available for the Amerindian Influence on Palo Monte? Why is there a silence from scholars who write about Afro-Caribbean Religions on the Indigenous Amerindian religious influence?

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<sup>1</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011),

## Chapter 2

*“Otata kadianga ngulu za fioti ko kadiyeno awana kesanga omu mpasi”*

*“Si el padre no come cerdo vosotros los pequeños van sufrir de no comerlo tampoco”*

*“If the father does not eat pork, you the children, will also suffer of not being able to eat it”*

*-Palo Monte proverb*

### Review of Relevant Literature

#### ***Amerindian Beliefs and Practices as Recounted by Europeans***

The literature on the Amerindian influence on the religious beliefs and practices of the Caribbean Diaspora is patchy. Therefore, when approaching this subject matter, it is best to use a diversity of sources. The first sources of information used will be Edward Gaylord's *Columbus, Ramon Pane and the Beginnings of American Anthropology* and Bartolomé de las Casas *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*. These sources offer the only firsthand accounts of the Caribbean Amerindian religious/cultural Habitus. However, they only serve as a source for their beliefs and does not provide us with possible influences they may have had. Moreover, these writings represent the European (biased) preservation of the Caribbean Amerindian Habitus. For this reasons, these

writings fall under the trope of the Caribbean indigenous extinction and paint a picture of their religious and cultural Habitus marred by coloniality.<sup>2,3</sup>

### ***Amerindian Beliefs and Practices revisited through the Decolonial lens***

Other writings such as Alexander Allen's *Credibility and Incredulity* and Maximilian C. Forte *Extinction: The Historical Trope of Anti-Indigeneity in the Caribbean* have questioned the early colonial writings of writers such as Columbus, Ramon Pane and De Las Casas as biased attempts by the Europeans under the guise of preserving the Caribbean Amerindian religious/cultural Habitus. Allen's paper challenges De Las Casas writings as hidden ulterior motives of persuading the Spanish Royalty from ending the practices of slaving and imposing forced labor tied to the extinction of the Caribbean indigenous people. This, according to Allen, was the "necessary" exaggeration first posited by De las Casas and which was unquestionably accepted by later European historian and anthropologist that led to the historical trope of indigenous extinction in the Caribbean. To this Forte's paper adds that although originally intentioned as such, this trope was then used as an excuse for the unchecked progress of colonialism in the Caribbean. However, this is precisely what informs the impulse behind these scholars in performing a Decolonial revision of these writings which is relevant to my investigation of the Caribbean indigenous influence in the beliefs and practices of the Caribbean Diaspora. Overall, the theme of these sources is to challenge the trope of extinction and

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<sup>2</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906)

<sup>3</sup>. de las Casas, Bartolome, José Miguel Martínez Torrejón, and Gustavo Adolfo Zuluaga Hoyos, *Brevísima Relación De La Destrucción De Las Indias* (Antioquia, Colombia: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 2006)

to show the reader that the cultural and religious identity of the Caribbean Amerindian people has survived through the cultural and religious legacy of the Caribbean inhabitants.<sup>4,5</sup>

Other sources of information focus on the modern reinterpretation of the Caribbean Amerindian religious Habitus as reconstructed through a mixture of historical, anthropological and linguistic data. For example, *Las Culturas Que Encontró Colón* by Cuban Anthropologist Blas Nabel Pérez, Jorge Ulloa Hung y Roberto Valcárcel Rojas' *Indígenas e indios en el Caribe: Presencia, legado y estudio*, Samuel M. Wilson's *The Indigenous people of the Caribbean* and Sebastián Robiou Lamarche's *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal People of the Antilles* are such sources. Moreover, these sources provide a somewhat unbiased reconstruction of the history and social structure of these peoples, as well as their mythology and cosmology and art and their legacy today. Nonetheless, these sources and their investigations focus on the legacy of the Taino as preserved through the surviving Taino descendants of Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico today. Therefore, no reference to the cultural and religious legacy of these peoples in Cuba is given and thus they do not inform the project of this thesis.<sup>6, 7, 8, 9, 10</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>. Allen, Alexander, *Credibility and Incredulity: A Critique of Bartolomé de Las Casas 's A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (The Gettysburg Historical Journal: Vol. 9, Article 5. Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/ghj/vol9/iss1/5>, 2010)

<sup>5</sup>. Forte, Maximilian C., *Extinction: The Historical Trope Of Anti-Indigeneity In The Caribbean* (Issues in Caribbean Amerindian Studies VI (4). <https://indigenouscaribbean.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/forteatlantic2005.pdf>., 2005)

<sup>6</sup>. Pérez, Blas Nabel, *Las Culturas Que Encontró Colón* (Quito, Ecuador: Abya-Yala, 1992)

Another important source of relevance to this thesis is Roberto G. Muñoz-Pando's *Creencias Mortuorias de los Aborígenes Antillanos, Taínos y Caribes: Estudio Etnohistórico y Social*. In this paper, the author provides a synthesis of all the Taino and Caribs mortuary rites preserved in the historical writings. Its importance lays in the fact that it compiles both the Spanish and French writings of the early chroniclers on this section of the Caribbean indigenous religious/cultural Habitus. Hence, by utilizing this paper which compiles the most extensive treatment of the mortuary rituals, cult of devotion to the ancestors and beliefs about death of the Tainos and Caribs we are able to locate and excise any Amerindian influence on the most important subject related to the study of Palo Monte.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>. Ulloa Hung, Jorge, and Roberto Valcárcel Rojas, *Indígenas e Indios en el Caribe. Presencia, Legado Y Estudio. Serie Los Indígenas Más Allá De Colón* (República Dominicana: Editora Búho, S.R.L, 2016)

<sup>8</sup>. Ulloa Hung, Jorge, and Roberto Valcárcel Rojas, *Indígenas e Indios en el Caribe. Presencia, Legado Y Estudio. Serie Los Indígenas Más Allá De Colón* (República Dominicana: Editora Búho, S.R.L, 2016)

<sup>9</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999)

<sup>10</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos And Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019)

<sup>11</sup>. Muñoz-Pando, Roberto G., and Sebastian Robiou Lamarche, *Creencias Mortuorias De Los Aborígenes Antillanos, Taínos Y Caribes: Estudio Etnohistórico Y Social. Análisis de los Taínos y Caribes: etnohistoria, arqueología y literatura oral* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, n.d.)

*Ethnic Composition and African Cultural Differences in the Atlantic Slave Trade in Early the 16<sup>th</sup> Century*

The following sources of information which I engage in my thesis are concerned with the ethnic composition of the African-diaspora at the time of the Spanish slave trade and the African-Amerindian encounter. Linda M. Heywood's book titled *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, Paul E. Lovejoy's academic paper titled *The "Middle Passage": The Enforced Migration of Africans across the Atlantic* and Erwan Dianteill's *Kongo in Cuba: the Transformations of an African Religion* all confirmed the popularly held belief that a greater majority of the first slaves brought the Americas were descendants of the Bantu people (Kongo Empire). Not only did these sources confirm this but Manuel Moreno Fraginals' *Africa in Cuba: A Quantitative Analysis of the African Population in the Island of Cuba* also confirmed that there was a greater Congo presence in Cuba compared to other ethnic African groups well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12, 13, 14, 15</sup> The reason why these papers are relevant for this thesis is that by locating the proper African-Diaspora and its creole religious

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<sup>12</sup>. Heywood, Linda M., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

<sup>13</sup>. Lovejoy, P.E. *The "Middle Passage": The Enforced Migration of Africans across the Atlantic* (York University, Toronto. Available at: [https://educacioncivicamep.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/lovejoy\\_middle\\_passage\\_the\\_enforced\\_migration\\_of\\_africans\\_across\\_the\\_atlantic.pdf](https://educacioncivicamep.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/lovejoy_middle_passage_the_enforced_migration_of_africans_across_the_atlantic.pdf)., 2007)

<sup>14</sup>. Dianteill, Erwan, *Kongo in Cuba: The Transformations of An African Religion* (Archives De Sciences Sociales Des Religions, no. 117: 59-80. doi:10.4000/assr.2480, 2002)

<sup>15</sup>. Fraginals, Manuel Moreno, *AFRICA IN CUBA: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE AFRICAN POPULATION IN THE ISLAND OF CUBA* (Annals of The New York Academy Of Sciences 292 (1 Comparative P): 187-201. doi:10.1111/j.1749-6632.1977.tb47743.x, 1977)



manifestation directly influenced by them. A higher probability of influences can be identified. Consequently, an in depth investigation of the Congo creole religious manifestations, as found in Palo Monte, will be conducted for the excision of Amerindian influence on these beliefs and practices. Hence, for the remainder of the research project the focus will be on the Congo derived religions of the Caribbean Diaspora. Following this discourse, I will unavoidably explore the history of the Bantu speaking people in Cuba.

***Religious Syncretism: Amerindian Contributions to the Afro-Caribbean Congo-Derived Religion of Palo Monte***

The most well-known religions of the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora derived from the Kongo regions are Palo Monte and Haitian Vodou. In Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen. Living Gods of Haiti*, the author offers an extensive treatment of Haitian Vodou from the perspective of an insider. Its countless drawings and photographs and its well-researched (participatory at times) accounts have made this a classic in the subject of Haitian Vodou. For this reason and for the fact that the author provides the only attempt at tracing the Amerindian influence on Haitian Vodou, this book is an invaluable source for the research project.<sup>16</sup> Particularly, I will build upon her description of the dispositions that African religions inculcate on its followers. The reason for this is that it argues in favor for the syncretism between the Amerindian and African religious beliefs and practices. Her description of the African and Afro-Caribbean religious Habitus as pragmatic and responding to immediate needs of survival through empowering means informs the basis

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<sup>16</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004)

from which this project was conceived. Without Deren's insight on the African and Afro-Caribbean religious Habitus an understanding of the Caribbean Indigenous and African religious encounter could not be explained. Notwithstanding, the data is limited in scope to Haitian Vodou so a farther reach has to be made into the Palo Monte tradition.

No book on Palo Monte thus far has provided us with an actual account of the Amerindian influence on the religion (due to its highly secretive nature). Palo Monte is primarily an oral religious tradition, riddled with secrecy and a highly complex liturgy. Hence, there are no books considered classics or central to the Palo Monte religion. However, when investigating Afro-Cuban traditions from an academic stand point, and especially in religious studies, one must necessarily make use of and reference the works by Lydia Cabrera. Although her book *Reglas de Congo. Palo Monte Mayombe* is not considered a classic by Palo practitioners, it is nonetheless so in the academic world. Although most investigators make use of her famous and groundbreaking *El Monte* I will use instead her much later work mentioned above. The reason for this that this later work compiled all the information and data collected by Cabrera, from the time of *El Monte* to much later anthropological and ethnographical works, on the religion.<sup>17, 18</sup> This work is valuable for its historic significance and because of its unparalleled content on the construction and consecration of the *nganga*. Although the information conflicts with newer works written by initiates, I will nonetheless retain what Cabrera wrote about the religion. I do this because her ethnographic data speaks to a much earlier period in time and to a more traditional form of the religion, informed by renowned Palo priests

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<sup>17</sup>. Cabrera, Lydia, *Reglas De Congo Mayombe Palo Monte* (Miami, Florida: Ediciones Universal, 1986)

<sup>18</sup>. Cabrera, Lydia, *El Monte* (Miami, Florida: Ediciones Universal, 2006)

(*nganguleros*) who are still highly respected and invoked in the practice of palo for their license or blessing on the works done by their Godsons and Goddaughters. Moreover, Cabrera's book does a fine job of locating the Congo people and their religion within the much larger context of Cuban culture and politics, which other Cuban writers on the subject avoid.<sup>19</sup>

Another body of writings consists of essays or books published by reputable initiates or ritual experts, a few of whom are trained anthropologists. The first of these sources is Nicholaj De Mattos Frisvold *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* and the second will be the recently published *Palo Monte y La Verdad Esotérica* by Juan Rubio. While Frisvold's book on the subject gives us the fullest (allowed under the secrecy of the religion) account of the religion from the point of view of an initiate, there is a lot of information that is lacking on the religion.<sup>20</sup> Juan Rubio's book will bridge this gap. Juan Rubio manages to compile one of the most complete attempted syntheses of the religion. Coming from the most important place in the practice of the religion (Guanabacoa, Cuba), allowed him to study with the great *nganguleros* (Tatas) of the religion. Therefore, his access to the infamous *libretas* (notebooks) passed down to him from these giants of the religion and which he uses to inform his book, makes his

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<sup>19</sup>. Cabrera, Lydia, *Reglas De Congo Mayombe Palo Monte* (Miami, Florida: Ediciones Universal, 1986)

<sup>20</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011)

synthesis of the religion an unparalleled resource for someone seeking an in depth study of Palo Monte.<sup>21</sup>

Carlos Alberto Rojas Calderon's book *Palo Brakamundo* cannot be overlooked when compiling information of the subject. A *Tata Tatandi*, which is a title reserved for the highest level a priest could receive in the religion, hailing from Guanabacoa, Cuba and descended from a respected lineage of the Reglas Congas, Carlos Alberto Rojas Calderon weaves us tale of the origins of the religion in Cuba while simultaneously tracing it back to its Congo origins. This last point, together with the fact that the author provides us with the only exposition on the use of gunpowder and the calendrical liturgy of Palo, makes the book an invaluable source for studying and understanding the Amerindian influence and the Congo influence on the creole religion of Palo Monte. Thanks to his insights on the *Malongo* ceremony, the *lechuza*, the pact between the Mayombe and Brillumba branch and his investigation of the Cuban *Kimpungulu* in comparison with the Kongo *Kimpungulu*, I have been able to find important commonalities between the Tainos and Caribs and the Kongo Diaspora that are preserved in Palo Monte.<sup>22</sup>

In his books, ngangulero Domingo B. Lage, Tata Entuala Kongo, provides us with the only public exposition of the differences between Mayombe and Brillumba branches of the religion and their cosmologies. Hence, I will utilize his books *El libro de tratados y pactos del Palo Mayombe*, *El que me la hace me la paga* and *Secretos Intensos Del Palo*

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<sup>21</sup>. Rubio, Juan, *Palo Monte y La Verdad Esotérica* (1st ed. Miami: Publicaciones Miami, 2014)

<sup>22</sup>. Rojas Calderon, Carlos Alberto, *Palo Brakamundo (El Palo Monte Cubano)* (Colección de los Congos en los Estados Unidos. Bloomington, Indiana: Palibrio, 2011)

*Mayombe*. Furthermore, Tata Entuala Kongo also provides the only explanation of the highly misunderstood Vititi Congo branch of the religion and delves into what makes it unique among the branches of the religion. His book is full of explanations about the pact or treaty between the Mayombe and Brillumba branch and what makes practitioners of this hybridity highly powerful compared to others branches of the religion. Moreover, Tata Entuala Kongo also provides anecdotal episodes of well-known stories related to the religion that have become folklore in Cuba and grounds their true origin and history in factual events. Furthermore, Tata Entuala Kongo writes about the creation of the Kimbisa branch from the point of view of the older Mayombe and Brillumba branches and how it was and is received by them.<sup>23, 24, 25</sup>

Other sources of information on Palo Monte include those books and essays written by Palo Monte priests. These books, although comprehensive in length or deep in knowledge do offer up the most simple and straightforward presentation of the basics of the religion for interested readers. The First book authored by Josean Rodas and titled *La Guia del Palero* represents the quintessential informative or piecemeal book aimed at the non-initiate or the newly initiated. Therefore, I will use this book in order to situate myself on secure ground before building on more complex and difficult content.<sup>26</sup> The other equally informative and straightforward book is the simply titled *Ngangas* by Yssel

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<sup>23</sup>. Lage, Domingo B, *El Libro De Tratados Y Pactos Del Palo Mayombe* (Bloomington, Indiana: Palibrio, 2011)

<sup>24</sup>. Lage, Domingo B, *Que Me La Hace Me La Paga* (Bloomington, Indiana: Palibrio, 2012)

<sup>25</sup>. Lage Entuala Kongo, Domingo B, *Secretos Intensos Del Palo Mayombe* (Bloomington, Indiana: Palibrio, 2013)

<sup>26</sup>. Rodas, Josean, *La Guia Del Palero* (Puerto Rico: Independently published, 2012)

Prado. The reason why this book is particularly helpful for my investigation of the Palo Monte religion is because it offers the most extensive (aside from Ralph Alpizar's *Nganga: El Caldero Mágico del Mayombero*) and uncomplicated explanation of the foundation or "fundament" of the religion, the nganga. Another reason I will utilize this manuscript is that it will serve as a supporting document for my understanding of Lydia Cabrera's extensive writings on the nganga in her celebrated *Reglas de Congo. Palo Monte Mayombe*.<sup>27</sup>

The following book on the Palo Monte religion which I will make use of is Ralph Alpizar *Nsambia Mpungo: Dios en la Creencia Cubana del Palo Monte Mayombe*. In this small manuscript, Ralph Alpizar, an initiate and advocate of the religion, provides us with the only published book on the subject of God in the religion. According to the religion, Nzambi (a variant of the name, which is of my liking) is a *Deus Otiosus* which does not concern himself/herself with its creation and has left the *Kimpungulu* (the Kikongo plural of *Mpungo*) in charge of this task. Moreover, the book provides us with an explanation for the necessity of the existence of witchcraft and of witches in earth. This last point has not been expounded upon in any previous published manuscript on the religion. Similar in explanation to that of Ifa, the author tells us that they serve as the whip of justice of God; which explains their power and effectivity on the lives on men.<sup>28</sup>

However, the manuscript by Ralph Alpizar mentioned above belongs to a much larger collection of books titled Colección Maiombe. This collection includes the

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<sup>27</sup>. Prado, Yssel, *Ngangas* (Miami: Independently Published, n.d.)

<sup>28</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *Nsambia Mpungo* (Ediciones Maiombe Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

following books (Plus the title detailed above, an original novel detailing his personal encounter with the religion and a Tata and a book on the Bantu language made reference to later on in the literature review): *Nso Nganga: La Cofradía de los Nganguleros*, *Kuna Nkisi: Los Lugares de Culto en el Palo Congo Mayombe*, *El Kimpúngulu: Corpus Santoral del Palo Monte Mayombe*, *Nganga: El Caldero Mágico del Mayombero*, *Nfumbe: El Universo de los Espíritus Como Lenguaje Articulado*, *El Lenguaje Ritual: En el Palo Monte Mayombe*, *Nkunia Ngunda: El Culto a la Ceiba*, *La Nfinda: La Concepción del Ser y del Conocimiento*, *Afroamérica y la Bantuidad en Cuba*, *Patimpembas: Símbolos Místicos y Esotéricos del Palo Congo Mayombe* and *Oráculos en el Palo Congo Mayombe: Mpaka; Cocos; Caracoles y Huesos*.<sup>29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36,</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and, Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *Nsó-Nganga: La Cofradía de los Nganguleros* (Ediciones Maiombe. Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

<sup>30</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and, Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *Kuna Nkisi: Los Lugares de Culto en el Palo Congo Mayombe* (Ediciones Maiombe. Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

<sup>31</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and, Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *El Kimpúngulu: Corpus Santoral del Palo Monte Mayombe* (Ediciones Maiombe. Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

<sup>32</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and, Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *Nganga: El Caldero Mágico del Mayombero* (Ediciones Maiombe. Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

<sup>33</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and, Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *Nfumbe: El Universo de los Espíritus Como Lenguaje Articulado* (Ediciones Maiombe. Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

<sup>34</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and, Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *El Lenguaje Ritual: En el Palo Monte Mayombe* (Ediciones Maiombe. Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

<sup>35</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and, Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *Nkunia Ngunda: El Culto a la Ceiba* (Ediciones Maiombe. Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

<sup>36</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and, Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *La Nfinda: La Concepción del Ser y del Conocimiento* (Ediciones Maiombe. Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

<sup>37, 38, 39</sup> Although the collection is the most recent and encapsulates the most ambitious project on the religion (yet), because of its extensive in scope, it nonetheless serves only as a synthesis of all the available and published material found in other books. The reason I will use this collection will be for the sake of utilizing it as a sort of standard or rule from which to examine the content of all the other books used. Moreover, as an initiate himself Ralph Alpizar goes beyond the already published content and provides his insights on the content from the standpoint of his own experience as an *ngangulero*. For this reason, his books serve not only as a synthesis of all the previous publications, but also serve as a much needed review of these publications, which had not been done before on the religion and which sometimes had led to a cacophony of contradictions.

Consequently, to his books, the next sources of relevance to my thesis are those related to the language spoken in the Palo Monte religion. This *lengua* or *bozal* (language) spoken in the religion consists of an amalgamation of Spanish; broken Spanish and a collection of Bantu languages (some dialects within the religion have been detected). Therefore, I will include these sources for the comprehension of the ritual language spoken in the religion. Although I am a native Spanish speaker and I was born and raised in the island of Cuba and I am able to comprehend the “Cuban Spanish” spoken in the religion, I am not able to comprehend the Bantu used. With this said, I have

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<sup>37</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and, Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *Afroamérica y la Bantuidad en Cuba* (Ediciones Maiombe. Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

<sup>38</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and, Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *Patimpembas: Símbolos Místicos y Esotéricos del Palo Congo Mayombe* (Ediciones Maiombe. Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

<sup>39</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph and, Guillermo Gonzalo Calleja Leal, *Oráculos en el Palo Congo Mayombe: Mpaka; Cocos; Caracoles y Huesos* (Ediciones Maiombe. Madrid: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)



decided to utilize the most serious and important works on the language which include the books *Lengua y ritos del Palo Monte Mayombe. Dioses Cubanos y Sus Fuentes Africanas* by linguists Jesús Fuentes Guerra (whose work were utilized above) and Armin Schwegler<sup>40</sup>, *Vocabulario Congo (El Bantú que se habla en Cuba)* by Lydia Cabrera<sup>41</sup>, a revision of Cabrera's work titled *Lydia Cabrera y la Bantuidad lingüística* by Jesús Fuentes Guerra<sup>42</sup>, *Diccionario de la Lengua Conga residual en Cuba* by Teodoro Díaz Fabelo<sup>43</sup> and the most modern study on the Bantu spoken in the religion *Diccionario Razonado del Léxico Congo en Cuba* by Ralph Alpizar<sup>44</sup>. These sources were of extreme importance on my investigation of the encounter between the Caribbean indigenous population and the African diaspora. In Chapter 5 a whole subsection is dedicated to language and without these sources I would not have been able to trace the Caribbean Amerindian influence on the words Zarabanda and Mayombe.

I will also include in my study the book titled *Kongo Graphic Writing and other Narratives of the Sign* by Bárbaro Martínez-Ruiz. This source will be directed to a very important aspect of the religion, the *patimpembas*. The only book dealing with the

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<sup>40</sup>. Fuentes Guerra, Jesús, and Armin Schwegler, *Lengua y Ritos del Palo Monte Mayombe. Dioses Cubanos y Sus Fuentes Africanas* (Madrid and Frankfurt am Main: Iberoamericana and Vervuert, 2005)

<sup>41</sup>. Cabrera, Lydia, and Isabel Castellanos, *Vocabulario Congo* (Miami, Florida: Ediciones Universal, 2001)

<sup>42</sup>. Fuentes Guerra, Jesús, *Lydia Cabrera Y La Bantuidad Lingüística* (Cienfuegos, Cuba: Ediciones Mecenás, 2006)

<sup>43</sup>. Díaz Fabelo, Teodoro, *Diccionario de la Lengua Conga Residual en Cuba* (Vista Alegre, Santiago de Cuba: Casa del Caribe. Universidad de Alcalá. UNESCO ORCALC. Colección Africanía, 2007)

<sup>44</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph, *Diccionario Razonado del Léxico Congo en Cuba* (Ediciones Maiombe: R. Alpizar Valdés, 2019)

systematic study of the Kongo (and more specifically the Bakongo) system of graphic writing and its survival on the Cuban descendants of this African diaspora as observed through the practice of Palo Monte. The reason I will include this book is because the geometric and pictorial aspect of the religion are extremely important for the practice and belief of it. The semiotic knowledge of these visual drawings is a codified language that cannot be discerned by outsiders and they form an essential and fundamental part of the religion. Moreover, the Caribbean Amerindian religious Habitus consist of petroglyphs which more or less can be argue to represent a sort of similar understanding, which makes the addition of the book by Martínez-Ruiz and invaluable addition. Therefore, no investigation of the Caribbean Amerindian influence on the beliefs and practices of the Palo Monte religion would be complete without a source delving onto this matter. Moreover, due to the secrecy and complexity of this system of graphic writing I was totally dependent on this sources' Chapters 3, 4 and 5 in writing the subsection titled 'Geometric Diagrams and Their Representations'.<sup>45</sup> Nonetheless, the author does not trace the Caribbean Amerindian influence on Palo Monte, which is something I managed with the aid of Lamarche's *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal People of the Antilles* pages 165 through 175<sup>46</sup>.

Lastly, I will make use of two books written by Cuban authors who studied the religion as is found in the modern Republic of Congo and Angola. These authors are Palo practitioners who went either on expeditions to West Central Africa in search of tracing

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<sup>45</sup>. Martínez-Ruiz, Barbaro, *Kongo Graphic Writing And Other Narratives Of The Sign* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013)

<sup>46</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 165-175

the roots of the religion or were sent there by compulsory military service. The first is by the already mentioned Ralph Alpizar. His *Palo Mayombe: El legado vivo de África en Cuba* contains an early (in the sense of anthropology on the origins of the Palo Monte religion; it was written 15 years ago) attempt at retracing the origins of the Palo Monte religion in Africa. Although we may be tempted to hail it as a masterpiece and singular tome on the origins of the religion in Cuba, we would be wrong. As has been pointed out by the author himself what appears at first glance as the origins of the religion which look similar to much of what is practice and belief in the religion in Cuba, is nothing more than the process of inverse transculturation. The author explains that much of the signature of *firmas*, as they are known, can now be traced back to the introduction of Cuban Palo practitioners to the territories of Angola during the war of independence. During this war Cuban individuals were sent to Angola to fight for the revolution and some of these Cubans brought their religion with them and diffused it among the natives.<sup>47</sup>

For this reason, Manuel Álvarez Ferrer *Raíces Del Palo Monte en Cuba* will be used as a proofreading manuscript that will serve the purpose of assisting us with locating the true Congo influences on Palo Monte religion and what is the creole manifestations separated from its origins. By separating the creole manifestations from the Congo origins I will be better situated to locate any beliefs and practices which may contain Amerindian influences. A Palo practitioner, Dr. Ferrer visited Cabinda in Angola and the Mayombe forest while serving in the compulsory national service of the army of Cuba during the wars of independence aforementioned above. Hence, by utilizing this book we

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<sup>47</sup>. Alpizar, Ralph, *Palo Mayombe. El legado vivo de África en Cuba* (Madrid: Vision Net, 2006)

would be able to get a window into the process and recognition of this cross-pollination between the creole manifestation of Palo Monte and the Indigenous Congo Religion. This would allow for an even more accurate understanding of pure creole practices in Palo Monte that may derive from Amerindian beliefs and practices.<sup>48</sup>

I will then examine the role that the Lucumi tradition played on the transmission and syncretism of the Amerindian among the Afro-Caribbean religions. The reason for making this excursion in what seems like an unnecessary regression is based on the importance the Lucumi religious Habitus had on the Afro-Caribbean diaspora in general. The most important Lucumi manifestation, Santeria, is the most popular and fully preserved African tradition in the Caribbean and Latin America. The influence of Santeria was so vast that all other African-derived religions of the Caribbean and beyond were undeniably influenced and transformed by it. This is especially so in Palo Monte, where one can spot devotional practices and beliefs barrowed from both Santeria and Ifa (especially in the briyumba branch). With the aforementioned in mind and in order to fulfill and accomplish the need of tracing the cross-pollination of beliefs and practices between the Lucumi and Congo traditions the book by George Brandon *Santeria from Africa to the New World. The dead Sell Memories* will be used as a source for illuminating this purpose. In the book, George Brandon traces the origins of Santeria to Yorubaland and the allied kingdoms, its migration from West Africa with the Atlantic Slave Trade and its subsequent migration to U.S.A and its transformation/evolution across space and time and its syncretization with Catholicism, Arara, Vodou (African origin of

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<sup>48</sup>. Álvarez Ferrer, Manuel, *Raíces del Palo Monte en Cuba* (Unos & Otros Ediciones, 2012)

Vodou), Palo Monte, Spiritism and Abakua (Including Abakua's syncretization with Masons and other European esoteric sects).<sup>49</sup>

Utilizing Edmonds and Gonzalez's excellent *Caribbean Religious History*, I will corroborate my findings of my attempt to trace the already known interaction and encounter of these three continents (and their religions) found on this source. The book offers maps as well as diverse topics on Caribbean religions history. Most important to the scope of my research are Chapters 2, 3 & 5, in which the contact between Amerindians and Spanish Catholicism, Early Colonial Catholicism and Creole African Traditions are investigated (respectively). The most important contribution the book offers to my research is of delineating the complex and exceedingly mixed history all Caribbean religions have had since the Amerindian, European and African encounter. Moreover, the book also traces the influence that each religious Habitus have had on each other; which inherently, represents a quality of Caribbean religions that separates them from the Traditional European and African religions. However, upon further inspection, these Chapters contain introductory information which does not satisfy a serious academic investigation.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, what this book does is support and underline the importance and need of my project in the fields of Religious Studies and Caribbean Studies.

The last source of relevance to this thesis is that of Jorge L. China titled *Diasporic Marronage: Some Colonial and Intercolonial Repercussions of Overland and*

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<sup>49</sup>. Brandon, George, *Santeria from Africa to the New World* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000)

<sup>50</sup>. Edmonds, Ennis Barrington, and Michelle A Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History* (1st ed., NYU Press., 2010)

*Waterborne Slave Flight, with Special Reference to the Caribbean Archipelago*. The reason I will use this academic paper is that the formation of *palenques* in the mountains of Cuba is an important site or locus of cohabitation and fusion between runaway slaves of African and Amerindian descent. The paper by Chinaea manages to reconstruct a history of marronage, maroons and offers some insights on the formation of palenques. Although Chinaea does not offer information on the goal of my investigation, his excellent investigation of the subject does allow for a more complete story of how the Amerindian influence on the Palo Monte religion occurred. By providing a thorough exposition of the data available on the history of the maroons and their palenques, away from the controlling arm of the Spanish and the religious oppression of Catholicism I was able to find to find some causes, such as proximity (marronage that lead to both culture meeting in the wilderness), survival invention (palenques) and creativity (self-fashioning by the Africans after the Caribbean Amerindians) that support the absorption of the Amerindian beliefs and practices by the Congo diaspora on these remote places.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup>. Chinaea, Jorge L, *Diasporic Marronage: Some Colonial and Intercolonial Repercussions of Overland and Waterborne Slave Flight, With Special Reference to the Caribbean Archipelago* (Revista Brasileira Do Caribe, Associação Caruaruense De Ensino Superior Brasil X (19): 259-284. doi:1518-6784, 2009)

### Chapter 3

*“Nlembo ulebele uvolanga nsombe”*

*“El dedo que no está tenso coge la larva”*

*“The finger that is not rigid catches the larva”*

*-Palo Monte proverb*

#### Conceptual Framework

In this study I make three related claims. The first is that the religious mindset of the Africans brought to the Caribbean during the slave trade had a pragmatic and utilitarian quality. The second claim I make is that this mindset is in fact based on the religious foundation of African societies, which emphasizes the survival needs and quotidian worries of its adherents. The third claim I make is that due to the pragmatic orientation of African spiritualities, slaves from Africa brought to the Caribbean must have appropriated symbols of spiritual power from the native Amerindian populations to augment their own indigenous sources as they battled the vicissitudes imposed on them because of their marginal status as slaves. Consequently, there was an amalgam of African and Amerindian ritual practices and religious discourses. Afro-Caribbean religious discourses and practices then offer contexts for the survival or continuity of Amerindian religious beliefs and practices.

These arguments lead me to some theoretical insights, including those of well-respected Afro-Caribbean scholars. I will discuss these insights separately, but also note how we can place them together as a coherent whole body of ideas that can help us to

engage the data I have rallied in this study to demonstrate my themes. The first is the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's theoretical framework will serve as a point departure, because it will offer us leads that will enable us to make some theoretical sense of how indigenous African Religions and the religions of the native inhabitants of the Caribbean became easily integrated. Particularly pertinent to the research is his concept of Habitus which offers us leads in our attempt to explain how elements of African and Amerindian religions became integrated. Habitus is the seat of an individual's dispositions and filter of all that is perceived by him/her: It is a constituent of the Field, rendering it a world of meanings, while reciprocally being informed by the Field, in a sort of paradoxical infinite regress of effects and their causes. Habitus informs the individual's thoughts, actions and feelings throughout the course of his or her social development. However, Habitus is not static, but rather a dynamic process, where social developments get psychologize and in turn inform further social developments. Rather than consisting of a sole Habitus, the Field is informed by a series of Habiti (plural) that structures a nexus of interdependence, interrelatedness, competition and fusion among the agents vying for power.<sup>52</sup> As is the case in the Caribbean, where the Habiti of the Caribbean Amerindian, the African and the Spanish collided and coalesce into a new Habitus syncretized from a pluriverse of Habiti.

Habitus is also not just ideas and intellect. Habitus also includes emotions and desires as well as aesthetics and things non-rational. However, I postulate that aesthetics and affects are best understood through the lens of the civilizing process as posited by Norbert Elias in his *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic*

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<sup>52</sup>. Rey, Terry, *Key Thinkers in the Study of Religion* (2nd ed. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008), 40



*Investigations*<sup>53</sup>, rather than through Bourdieu's theory. Analyzing how psychology and society interact and how both are changed over time, Elias concludes that the driving force behind the change in Habitus on the European continent 11<sup>th</sup> through the 16<sup>th</sup> century was the process of civilization. Roughly, this period of time marks for Mignolo the origin of Modernity and its darker side, coloniality. The civilizing process, for Elias, is the way that emotional and rational impulses of individual people constantly interweave in a friendly of hostile way, which informs the culture that in turn moderates the drives, immediate desires and affects (as well as aesthetics) of the agents vying for power in the Field.<sup>54</sup>

The civilizing process creates a new type of rationality, a new logic of the Royal court as the new center of political negotiation. Where the symbolic power of the King or Queen as the centralization of power leads to new tools weaponized in the jockeying for power, that of civility and proper behavior. This behavior was codified with a myriad of proper/acceptable cultural and religious manifestations, which included aesthetics and affects. And the control of these behaviors was recognized as the mark of civility. Although these represent the sociological processes (and their causes) of the European Royal Courts, these civilizing processes lead to the formation (psychologized) of a new European Habitus. Where, affects and aesthetics were socially and culturally constructed, and to be imposed on society and by extension on those deemed "uncivilized".<sup>55</sup> My

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<sup>53</sup>. Elias, Norbert, and Edmund Jephcott, *Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000)

<sup>54</sup>. Elias, Norbert, and Edmund Jephcott, *Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000)

conclusion is that the unplanned processes of civilization and of becoming “civilized” inform the structural or systematic quality of the process of civilization that moves human society along by forces that they do not control or necessarily comprehend (Mignolo’s colonial matrix of power). Much like the darker side of modernity is coloniality, meaning that there is no modernity without coloniality; equally, there is no coloniality without the civilizing process. The civilizing process represents the secular pillar of the logic of coloniality and its colonial matrix of power, traced to its origin of the royal courts of the 11<sup>th</sup> through the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Maya Deren’s characterization of Vodou, provides a description of a Habitus that is typical of indigenous African Religions and one that lends to African derived traditions, such as Palo Monte, a tendency to appropriate elements from similar traditions, making these traditions, their own, eventually. Offering an illustration of the dispositions a religion such as Vodou inculcates in its adherents, Deren writes: “The man of such a culture [a nation in which daily life is full of acts of endurance] must be, necessarily, a pragmatist. His immediate needs are too insistent, too pressing and too critical, to permit the luxury of idealism or mysticism, and they must be answered rather than escaped from. He has neither time, energy [,] nor means for inconsequential activity. His religious system must do more than rationalize his instinct for survival when survival is no longer a ‘reasonable’ activity. It must do more than provide a reason for living; it

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<sup>55</sup>. Elias, Norbert, and Edmund Jephcott, *Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2000)

must provide the *means* for living. It must serve the organism as well as the psyche. It must serve as a practical methodology not as an irrational hope”<sup>56</sup>.

Although these observations are frequently made and comprehended by most modern scholars in the field of African and African Derived Religions, the way in which Deren manages to encapsulate it, gives rise to the necessity of directly quoting it to drive home her points. The quoted passage by Deren also demonstrates (as mentioned above) why the Habitus of African religions lend to their agents and followers an intrinsic ability to easily absorb similar elements from other religious traditions. I argue that this would explain why upon their encounter with the indigenous religions of the Caribbean and Latin America, these African religions selectively picked elements from these religions and incorporated those that resonated strongly with their religious Habitus. These have remained to be important portions of these Afro-Caribbean religions, even after the decimation the Amerindian owners. But because these Amerindian beliefs and practices are so similar to indigenous African religious beliefs and practices, only a careful investigation can unveil their Amerindian provenance.

The question of the survival of Amerindian religio-cultural elements, which is a theme I develop in this study, leads me directly to Walter D. Mignolo’s Decolonial Option (project). In keeping with the traditions of Decolonial and post-colonial scholars, Mignolo pushes for approaches to Amerindian studies that would reverse the malcontents of the European historical project. He argues that history is written by the winners (in this Case Europeans) and therefore to accept this history is to embrace the First World order

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<sup>56</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 73

and Western Modernity with its growing inherent secularism. My efforts at reconstructing the Caribbean Amerindian religions and investigating the signs of their influences on African derived religions of the Caribbean such as Palo in this project are in keeping with Mignolo's argument and approach. Grounded in this framework we can observe through the Decolonial and post-colonial lens how the silence on, or the lack of scholarly attention to the Amerindian religious traditions, especially their influences on African derived religions stem from hegemonic European narratives about the "other" Amerindian people.<sup>57</sup> Particularly poignant here is the "historical trope of indigenous extinction". This trope was the weapon, which European historians and writers deployed in the process of the elimination or scriptural genocide of the Amerindian Culture. In doing so they were simply promoting their discourses and performances of modernity and coloniality.<sup>58</sup>

Also, the very uncovering and highlighting of these traditions is part of Mignolo's Decolonial option (project). The process of bringing to light and of unearthing the connection of worlds is essential for decolonizing Latin America and the Caribbean. After all, it is not possible to negate the effect and affect colonization had on the Afro-Caribbean religious and cultural Habitus. An example of this is the often quoted rationalization that the African Diaspora suffered the vicissitudes of slavery for the sake of preserving the religion. The Afro-Caribbean Diaspora claims that the observable

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<sup>57</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 101-103

<sup>58</sup>. Forte, Maximilian C., *Extinction: The Historical Trope of Anti-Indigeneity in the Caribbean* (Issues in Caribbean Amerindian Studies VI (4). <https://indigenouscaribbean.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/forteatlantic2005.pdf>, 2005) , 1-2

degeneration of traditional indigenous practices in Africa today, to the religious hegemony of Christianity and Islam, supports their insight. This normalization of the transformations that Afro-Caribbean religious beliefs and practices (such as the borrowing of Catholic saints to depict *Orichas*) underwent, in one such effect colonization had on the Afro-Caribbean traditions. Another important influence colonization had on the Afro-Caribbean Habitus is the syncretic process of transculturation that their beliefs and practices had. The religious encounter between the Amerindian, African and Spanish led to the newly constructed creole religious manifestations observed today. Out of this encounter, Afro-Caribbean practices molded to the needs of the environments and its politics, fusing with Spanish and Amerindian religious beliefs and practices. Although the syncretic borrowing from the Spanish Catholic Habitus has been extensively recorded and demonstrated, the Amerindian transculturation has not. This project pursues this line on inquiry in concordance with Mignolo's project of decoloniality.

These two theoretical frameworks and Maya Deren's characterization of Vodou construct the path from which I will route my discourse of the Caribbean Amerindian influence on the Afro-Caribbean beliefs and practices. So far I have laid the general tracks on, which I will base my thesis and how they inform my three arguments. What follows is a thorough examination of these two theoretical frameworks and Maya Deren's insight as they apply to my thesis.

Firstly, applying the above understanding, posited by Maya Deren, to the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu seems like the logical next step. Since, the theory (as explained by Terry Rey) of Bourdieu and its conceptual tools for explaining

religion theorize successfully the development of the Caribbean Diaspora religious beliefs and practices, taking flight from the Amerindian beliefs and practices. Bourdieu's critical and scientific analysis and of the influence the social structures has on individuals, and his explanation on what they do and why they do what they do, and reciprocally, how what they do affects the very same construction of the social and its influences (as a form of generative structuralism) on the individual<sup>59</sup> is the most applicable theory available to the chaotically complex development of the highly variant and syncretic religious beliefs and practices of the creole manifestations observed in the Caribbean. His use of the conceptual tools Field, Habitus and Capital, as well a Symbolic Violence, in the field of power are particularly instructive in the explanation of the origins from which the religious beliefs and practices of the Caribbean Diaspora emerged and how the Amerindian influence came about.

Where Field is a space of action and a space of struggle over the different forms (depending on the field and what is arbitrarily determined as capital) of capital, and the actions taken towards producing that capital, the consumption of that capital and the jockeying for positions among agents (the consumers of capital) and institutions (which produce the capital sought after) within the field for this structured place of social forces and struggle.<sup>60</sup> The influence of Marx is easily discernible, but while Marx gets stuck on Capital and material needs, Bourdieu moves beyond materiality and cements his theory in a much wider context. Habitus, on the other hand, is the seat of an individual's

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<sup>59</sup>. Rey, Terry, *Key Thinkers in the Study of Religion*. (2nd ed. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008), 40

<sup>60</sup>. Rey, Terry, *Key Thinkers in the Study of Religion* (2nd ed. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008), 40

dispositions and filter of all that is perceived by him/her (a Kantian derived ontology), which constitutes the Field as a meaningful world, while reciprocally being informed by the Field, in a sort of paradoxical infinite regress of effects and their causes (resembling Thomas Aquinas' The first Mover Argument), which occurs to the individual throughout the course of the individual's social development.<sup>61</sup> Capital equals resources, but as mentioned above, the resources are not only material, they are also symbolic and this symbolism is used as a source of power in the Field in which the agents move, which is the side pertinent to our use of this theory when it comes to religious beliefs and practices.

Ultimately, the different forms of Capital determine the location in society of the individual or in some cases a group of individuals, grouped by some arbitrary quality, which ends by defining its position in the power relations that constitute the field of power. The dark or rather, the more subtle form of manipulation in which this take shape is the use of this symbolic power as an instrument of power, while simultaneously being a stake in the struggle for power, with the aim of maintaining the status quo of those in power in the Field it is being used.<sup>62</sup> An important further observation worth exploring before moving on to the actual application of this theory in the Caribbean (which will serve to illustrate the point more clearly later on) is the fundamental paradigm model used by Bourdieu which provided the means by which to support his social theory. This is "Weber's configuration of the religious world as an economic marketplace, in which

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<sup>61</sup>. Rey, Terry, *Key Thinkers in the Study of Religion* (2nd ed. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008) , 46

<sup>62</sup>. Rey, Terry, *Key Thinkers in the Study of Religion* (2nd ed. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008), 50-52

the Church and its specialist seek to establish and maintain a monopoly in the production and administration of salvation goods... but small scale competitors, in the form of prophets and sorcerers, enter the religious marketplace and seek to gain adherents by marketing to them renegade or subversive forms of salvation goods, which the Church identifies as ‘heretical’, and the struggle over capital in the religious Field thus unfolds accordingly”<sup>63</sup> which sets up explicitly, the notion of symbolic capital and Bourdieu’s entire theory as how it applies to this thesis. Consequently, the theoretical frameworks and the intellectual justifications detailed above will be analyzed in the following sections in the context of the Amerindian influence on the religious beliefs and practices of the Caribbean Diaspora, today.

I must necessarily engage the ideas of Walter Mignolo gleaned mainly from his now famous book *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, to offer a theoretical way of understanding why there is a silence on the contributions Amerindian traditions have made to the Creole religions of the Caribbean. However, due to Mignolo’s overall structural approach to the book based on what I believe is a notch to his idea of a polycentric world; all the various theoretical tools borrowed will be delineated rather than linearly engaged. What I mean is that rather than pursuing a coherent and linear logical structure I will borrow those terms that serve my thesis and detail them according to my own research aims. With this understanding in mind I will like then to start with his idea of the logic of coloniality. Nonetheless, rather than simply giving the definition, it is best to engage and force his ideas in dialogues with other discourses in his book in order to understand them. Hence, what follows is a

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<sup>63</sup>. Rey, Terry, *Key Thinkers in the Study of Religion* (2nd ed. London: Equinox Publishing Ltd, 2008) , 51



paraphrasing and reinterpretation of sections of his book that engage these topics in a nonlinear and consequential manner; although these topics are consequently and undisputedly related by a chain of events anchored in the history of western civilization.

According to Mignolo, if we want to understand the historical precedent and spiritual oppression of the colonial matrix of power we need to look back at the period between the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Mignolo claims that this period is the culprit of the conception of the history of western civilization based on the understanding of Western Modernity as the point of arrival of human existence on the planet. The idea was based on the linear understanding of all prehistory and parallel histories being non-consequential and only appearing on this discourse when being influence or conquered by the colonial promise of Catholic Universality and its Christian proselytizing mission. In other words, Western Civilizations have been made the model on which all “other” civilizations have to follow or should be forced to follow through colonial expansion. This history of Western Modernity also appropriated two important ideas of particular relevance to my research thesis of the Caribbean Amerindian influence on the beliefs and practices of the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora. These are the idea or invention of the Middle Ages and the idea or invention of America as “discovered”. Mignolo concludes that we can unveil the darker side of modernity when we begin to understand that it has been materialized in the belief of the logic of coloniality as a necessity or mission of European culture and European Christianity to modernize and proselytize the barbarians, heathens or uncivilized pagans.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 101-103

So who made this distinction and where was it made? According to Mignolo this idea of abstract and arbitrary demarcation of the civilized and the barbarian only formed one of the two pillars constructed by the architects of the Western civilization, Western modernity and Western History. The pillar demarcating the civilized and the barbarian pertained to the space-pillar while the time-pillar pertained (and pertains) to the demarcation of the ancient and the modern. Ironically, Mignolo astutely observes that much was borrowed from these “ancient” civilizations and that meanwhile the discourse remains that Europeans managed to achieve similar success and progress equal and superior to those achieved by them, but in only five hundred years. But how does this apply to in my research on the Amerindian influence on Palo Monte? Well, we must start by understanding that while European modernity has brought its advantages and virtues it has also created a narrative of imperial duty to save the world and to make it an extended Euro-America (but under European hegemony). Nonetheless, although the original interpretation of the colonial matrix of power was to center Europe as the epicenter of this Universal European expansionary unity the world has developed and continues to develop into a polycentric world order under a capitalist economy that serves as the Field (using Bourdieu’s ideas) of competition. This commonality of the global economy and its disputes among First World, Second World and Third World (a cold war idea) players for the control of other domains within the Sphere of Capitalism, leads to the unintended or perhaps intended colonial matrix of power.<sup>65</sup>

The danger with the colonial matrix of power it that is has taken on a life of its own and has even replaced Christianity and its Universal aim of salvation or conversion

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<sup>65</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), xiv-xv

as the driving force or hidden structure behind the colonial matrix of power. Although originally European Christianity (including Protestantism and especially the Protestant variant, according to Mignolo) was what led and allowed for the idea and materialization of Modernity and its logic of coloniality to form. As we know, this is what led to the colonial expansion into the Americas and the Caribbean and led to the mass genocide of the Amerindian populations (especially in the Caribbean) and to the oppression of the natives and later the African Diaspora. However, this alone would not suffice to explain away the observed and felt silence by Afro-Caribbean religious scholars and other scholars engaged in the discourse of the Caribbean Amerindian and the influence these natives had on the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora and even Catholicism itself. Consequently, I believe that this is where the idea of the colonial matrix of power and its autonomous patriarchal hold comes into dialogue with the idea or trope of extinction of the Caribbean indigenous populations.<sup>66</sup>

The historical trope of extinction as explained by Maximilian C. Forte gives us a window into the process of elimination or scriptural genocide performed by European historians aligned with the discourse and progress of modernity. After all, as Mignolo describes it, history is written by the winners and therefore to accept this history is to embrace the First World order and Western Modernity with its growing inherent secularism. As Forte points out, individuals brought up in the Western education system were taught, routinely, that the indigenous people of the Caribbean were wiped out during the 16<sup>th</sup> century and therefore have been extinct for the past five centuries. The driving force behind this discourse is as we have argued (Utilizing Mignolo's work) part

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<sup>66</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), xiv-xv

of the goal to wipe out any hint of survival or presence of indigeneity in the Caribbean for the benefit of the logic of coloniality. Moreover, I would argue that this scriptural genocide by historiographers where they argue that the native populations of Tainos and Caribs were wiped out, except for a few “culturally diluted” and “mixed race” remnants, can be traced back to the early period of colonial expansion and exploitation of the Spanish on the Caribbean.<sup>67</sup>

I believe that this trope of extinction started as a result of the efforts put forth by De Las Casas and other Dominicans who advocated to the Queen Isabella and later to King Philip back in Spain for relief from the deplorable and sinful ways in which the Amerindians were being treated. De Las Casas argues that the decimation and exploitation of the Amerindians in the Caribbean were not the intentional goal of the Queen and that she had sent an order to warrant the better treatment and conversion of the natives and to abandon the exploitation and sinful decimation of them. However, De Las Casas tells us that before the order arrived in “the Indies” Isabella had died and had been replaced by Juana and King Philip. Moreover, he explains that he also died shortly after and was replaced by King Hernando who was kept away from the knowledge of the decimation and exploitation of the Amerindians.<sup>68</sup> Although this may be nothing more than royal reverence and wisdom on the part of De Las Casas (for his own security and to find an amicable reception by the royalty to his cause), and due to many other faults

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<sup>67</sup>. Forte, Maximilian C., *Extinction: The Historical Trope of Anti-Indigeneity in the Caribbean* (Issues in Caribbean Amerindian Studies VI (4). <https://indigenouscaribbean.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/forteatlantic2005.pdf>, 2005), 1-2

<sup>68</sup>. Penyak, Lee M., and Walter J. Petry, *Religion In Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2006), 22-23

explored by Allen on his *Credibility and Incredulity: academic paper*<sup>69</sup>, it is nonetheless enough to provide a plausible explanation for understanding how the trope of extinction may have been so easily accepted, promulgated and unchallenged for so long before being revisited.

However, as Forte point outs, we as Caribbean Amerindian scholars encounter some analytical problems that are not fully satisfied with this trope. As Forte questions: “Does cultural survival have a number? Secondly, do miscegenation and acculturation disqualify indigeneity, rather than admit processes of transculturation in which indigenous peoples were and are present?”<sup>70</sup> And this understanding captures the lead I want to follow in this study. This is the rationale behind the Decolonial approach I want to engage in this study. Driven by the long winded question: How can we justify our complacency and conformity of believing, and hence give power and precedence to, a few select documents and archival manuscripts written by Europeans rather than testimonies by descendants and the latest evidence from archeology, linguistics, physical anthropology and contemporary ethnographies which have challenged these first-hand

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<sup>69</sup>. Allen, Alexander, *Credibility and Incredulity: A Critique of Bartolomé de Las Casas’s A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (The Gettysburg Historical Journal: Vol. 9, Article 5. Available at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/ghj/vol9/iss1/5>, 2010)

<sup>70</sup>. Forte, Maximilian C., *Extinction: The Historical Trope of Anti-Indigeneity in the Caribbean* (Issues in Caribbean Amerindian Studies VI (4) <https://indigenouscaribbean.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/forteatlantic2005.pdf>, 2005) , 2

accounts written by European explorers and religious pioneers (in the Americas)?<sup>71</sup>; I felt obliged to investigate my own culture and to reclaim this part of my heritage.

Furthermore, there are also the epistemic and political objects of the patriarchal systems on which coloniality and Christianity were based (according to Mignolo). These epistemic and political objects can be best observed in the disputes for control of knowledge, authority, the economy of the norms which regulate gender and sexuality and the arbitrary and ungrounded assumptions which regulate the classification of people and regions. More or less, Mignolo approaches this understanding of the system from a quasi-Bourdieuian lens, but does provides us with some avenues of solution to this old dilemma. His solution put simply, the Decolonial option. Mignolo describes more or less his project of Decolonial option or decoloniality in its singular form as a sphere of believers and actions which orient our thinking from a new ground of understanding outside the cartography of the Western history of ideas and development.<sup>72</sup>

The idea behind this approach is the base understanding that the current post-modern world increasingly progresses towards a polycentric world order in which a pluriversal world order composed of a pluriverse of epicenters determine the global future of the Capitalistic system. Hence, Mignolo defines as the defining feature of the Decolonial options “the analytic of the construction, transformation and sustenance of racism and patriarchy that created the conditions to build and control a structure of

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<sup>71</sup>. Forte, Maximilian C., *Extinction: The Historical Trope of Anti-Indigeneity in the Caribbean* (Issues in Caribbean Amerindian Studies VI (4). <https://indigenouscaribbean.files.wordpress.com/2008/05/forteatlantic2005.pdf>, 2005) , 2

<sup>72</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), xv

knowledge, either grounded on the word of God or the word of Reason and Truth. Such knowledge-construction made it possible to eliminate or marginalize what did not fit into those principles that aspired to build a totality in which everybody would be included, but not everybody would also have a right to include.... In a world governed by the colonial matrix of power, he who included and she who is welcomed to be included stand in codified power relations. The locus of enunciation from which inclusion is established is always a locus holding the control of knowledge and the power of decision across gender and racial lines, across political orientations and economic regulations".<sup>73</sup>

Then, according to Mignolo, the Decolonial option projects stems from the objective or assumption that the only way forward and the only way to reclaim our identity as Latin American and Caribbean nations is to decenter the locus of enunciation from its modern or colonial configurations and limit it to its original scope. This then would end up erasing or dispelling the myth of universality which is grounded on the Theo-politics and ego-politics of knowledge.<sup>74</sup> So what are the avenues on which one should start to exchange these old and expired forms of knowledge? Mignolo offers approaches that I believe are highly applicable not only to the Latin American and Caribbean situation but also to my project on the Amerindian influence on Palo Monte. The first approach is that of delinking. According to Mignolo it is not enough to change the content of systematized knowledge, we must also understand the terms of conversation that have been implemented and we must change them if we want to truly

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<sup>73</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), xv

<sup>74</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), xvi

move away from the colonial matrix of power. Hence, we need to explore the geo-historical and bio-graphical configurations set up in the processes of knowing and understanding which would ultimately allow for a truly radical reframing of the original mechanism of enunciation on which the zero point epistemology (in other words the hubris of Eurocentrism and their the right to modernize and colonialize other lesser or less developed nations<sup>75</sup>) has been built.<sup>76</sup>

Next Mignolo urges those willing to enter into the sphere of the Decolonial option to change the terms of conversation by committing epistemic disobedience and purposeful delinking from the disciplinary and interdisciplinary controversies and any of its conflict of interpretations (against the systematize system of Western education) that may arise. The aim of this intellectual rebellion is to call into question the modern or colonial foundation of the control of knowledge. However, as we have seen, in order to do this we must call into question and focus on the knower rather than the known and thus we must examine ourselves and our narratives in the process. Only then, after moving beyond the controversies and interpretations within the realm of rules and terms of conversation (a Wittgensteinian language game), would we be able to reexamine and revalue directly at the very assumptions that have sustained the Western locus of

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<sup>75</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 188

<sup>76</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 122



enunciation.<sup>77</sup> Hence, the need to revisit our Amerindian heritage and to locate it's cultural (not numerical) influence today.

By approaching this project through this lens, I would be able to contribute to the dismantling of what Mignolo terms (borrowing from Quijano) the heterogenous historico-structural nodes, which can be explained as the nodes of logical structure that anchors the colonial matrix of power and which underlines the totality of Western civilization. Furthermore, these heterogeneous historico-structural nodes serve as the system of managerial logic which controls the actions and borders of the actors/agents within the colonial matrix of power. As observed in the paragraphs above, this system has remained, controlled and taken on a life of its own long after the death of its creators and has even replaced its original foundation of European Christianity and its theology of Universal religion to a secularism of Reason. Although these nodes consist of 12 interdependently related matrixes of power and control, all of which my project will not directly influence, it will instead directly revisit and challenge nodes number 8, number 10 and number 11. Node number 10 is phrased as follows: "A spiritual/religious hierarchy that privileged Christian over non-Christian/non-Western spiritualities was institutionalized in the globalization of the Christian (Catholic and later Protestant) Church; by the same token, coloniality of knowledge translated other ethical and spiritual

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<sup>77</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 123

practices around the world as “religion,” an invention that was also accepted by “natives”.<sup>78</sup>

As for node number 10 it is phrased as follows: “An epistemic hierarchy that privileged Western knowledge and cosmology over non-Western knowledge and cosmologies was institutionalized in the global university system, publishing houses and Encyclopedia Britannica on paper and online”.<sup>79</sup> There is also the important factor of language, explored as an important factor of cultural and religious exchange between the Amerindian and the African slave later on in my thesis, which node number 11 calls into question and it is phrased thus: “A linguistic hierarchy between European languages and non-European languages privileged communication and knowledge/theoretical production in the former and subalternized the latter as sole producer of folklore or culture, but not of knowledge/theory”.<sup>80</sup> Then, we must encounter our own border-thinking and we must move beyond it. This idea of border-thinking or border gnosis (borrowed once again from Quijano) constitutes a movement or remapping of the cartography of knowledge beyond the horizon of Western education which constitutes the reshaping of the borders of epistemology, hermeneutics, and any other colonial institutionalized field or subject of education. Moreover, it should also be added that the current colonial wound or the open wound on which modernity and coloniality comes into friction and bleeds through the systematized and institutionalized matrix of power

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<sup>78</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 18

<sup>79</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 19

<sup>80</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 19

anchored in its heterogenous historico-structural node should be remapped (the latter includes the reshaping of bio-graphic, body-politics of knowledge while the former includes geopolitics of knowledge).<sup>81</sup>

The aim of border-thinking, according to Mignolo, then is to serve as an antidote to the former imperial and colonial forms of institutionalized Western education and Capitalism. Border-thinking aims at pluriversality and simultaneously inoculates us against the viral infection of zero point epistemology which ultimately allows for the shift in the geography of reasoning and anchors it as a universal project for the future. Inherently, the desire is to bring this universal project from a post-modern world into a transmodern world order. By standing on the borders where colonial and imperial Western epistemology meets with its global differences, we are finally able to observe the totality and magnitude of the colonial matrix of power. Then thanks to the project of decoloniality I would be able to move away from the comparative methodology to an imperative methodology which is defined as: “The effort at learning from the other and the attitude of allowing our own convictions to be fecundated by insight of the other”.<sup>82</sup> By making this change and maneuvering away from the object of comparative methodology which privileged dialectics and argumentative reasoning, as in systems and architectonics, towards the imperative methodology which focuses on dialogue, praxis and existential encounters (reason from the senses and from the locations of the bodies in the colonial matrix of power) I would be able to appropriately access and reclaim the

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<sup>81</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), xxi

<sup>82</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 208

Amerindian influence on the creole religious manifestation of Palo Monte. After all, I must necessarily move away from the institutionalized 19<sup>th</sup> century comparative methodology which was put in place to ensure that the investigator/researcher and observer of these “anthropological” works would remain uncontaminated and thus would ultimately guarantee the primacy or supremacy of Western epistemology over others by controlling all forms of knowledge and its production.<sup>83</sup>

This aforementioned secularism is what ultimately has replaced European Christianity as the structural foundation of coloniality and the colonial matrix of power driven by the Ideal of Capitalistic progress and freedom which has so undermined any attempts at reclaiming any sort of identity tied to indigeneity and has suppressed any nativist movement. Hence, from this perspective we start to understand the silence of conformity and indifference performed by Afro-Caribbean and Caribbean scholars. This behavior is closely tied to phenomenon created by the agents vying for power in the Field in direct dialectic with the discourse of the colonial matrix of power as a response of its global entanglements and local histories which make this system so dangerous and oppressive. These are managed by the creation of symbolic powers that determine desirable and non-desirable discourses and behaviors within the Habitus of the structural social –economic system (Capitalism).<sup>84</sup>

Therefore, following this understanding we can see how those agents that are nominated as pertaining to the peripheral or to the exteriority of the colonial matrix of

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<sup>83</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 208

<sup>84</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 101-103

power may be coerced to comply and conform to the discourses presented; and any other thought, especially those brought forth by those found on the periphery or exteriority of the colonial matrix of power are labeled as disqualified. Only those agents which are brought up on the arbitrarily designed Western mode of education, focused on technology, and science are deemed qualified and desirable while those that come from “outsider” educations or histories are deemed as dead (as in the past non-relevant to the progress and development of Western Modernity) and sometimes deadly to the homogeneity and sovereign powers. After all, independent thought by the agents (and all agents I would argue) is highly and systemically discouraged by the association of these “deviant” thoughts with the nominal brands of bad ideas and deadly ideas.<sup>85</sup>

Accordingly then we need to rephrase or relocate our thinking on the geography of reasoning within the discourse of decoloniality and to approach ideas and described as follows by Bennabi “A dead idea is an idea whose origins have been betrayed, one that has deviated from its archetype and thus no longer has any roots in its original cultural plasma. In contrast, a deadly idea is an idea that has lost both its identity and cultural value after having been cut of its roots that are left in their original cultural universe”.<sup>86</sup> Only then, will we start to reclaim and to understand our own identities and honor our native heritage and will we start to understand our culture/religions. Based on this understanding, I build on the theoretical foundations of Bourdieu, Deren and Mignolo

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<sup>85</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 101-103

<sup>86</sup>. Mignolo, Walter D, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 101-103

and engage them in dialogue as I explore the Caribbean Amerindian influence on the creole Afro-Cuban religious manifestation of Palo Monte.

## Chapter 4

*“Ka Mayamba kani kayeela ko, ‘Ye Ntoto ka wa mbongo ko”*

*“Ka Mayamba aún no está enfermo, ‘la tierra no produce nada (dice él)”*

*“Ka Mayamba is not (yet) ill, ‘the earth does not produce (says he)”*

*-Palo Monte proverb*

### Caribbean Amerindian Inhabitants and Their Religious Habitus

#### **Historical Background**

The objective of this Chapter is to reconstruct, from some historical resources I consider to be credible, some salient aspects of the indigenous religious beliefs and practices of the Amerindian populations at the time of their first encounter with Europeans as well as modern interpretations of the archeological and linguistic data. The reconstruction will hopefully offer keen insights into the religious Habitus of these populations. Therefore, in order to better elucidate this exposition of the extant and hidden influences of Amerindian beliefs and practices on the beliefs and practices of the Caribbean Diaspora, the Chapter will be subdivided into different sections. First, the common themes across the different geographical regions will be explored. Secondly, the specific geographical remains of the beliefs and practices of the Amerindians found in the creole manifestations of the Caribbean will be analyzed. Lastly, a further subdivision of the geographical regions religious manifestations will be done in order to locate, properly, these specific surviving influences within the context of the whole religious field. Moreover, Maya Deren’s (seminal) *Divine Horsemen, The living Gods of Haiti*,

will be utilized as a guide in discovering these influences, due to her influential Appendix B.<sup>87</sup>

Nonetheless, it is fructiferous and necessary (for the development of the research project) to provide a background of the Amerindian people as a foundation from which to build an understanding of their beliefs and practices before pursuing the remains of said beliefs and practices. Archeological research supports the migration of various people from the mainland to these Caribbean islands as far back as 6000 years ago.<sup>88</sup> However, the earliest evidence of human colonization is in Cuba and the Hispaniola, which date to 3500-4000 B.C.<sup>89</sup> The inhabitants from this time made use of flaked stoned tools just like the Amerindians of the Yucatan peninsula, which serves as evidence of a possible migration occurring from the west, across the Yucatan Channel or via other routes from Central America, to these early settlements in the Caribbean.<sup>90</sup> Furthermore, we see the potential and possible influence of Mesoamerican (Mayan, Aztec and some forms of Pre-Olmec or Olmec manifestations) beliefs and practices on the natives of the Caribbean. The aforementioned should be taken into consideration when analyzing creole beliefs and practices, especially when it does not seem Taino or Carib in nature.

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<sup>87</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004) , 271-286

<sup>88</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 2-4

<sup>89</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 4

<sup>90</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 4



There was another important migration, and not the last, that occurred at around 2000 B.C. that is of extreme importance and was made by Amerindians traveling from the northeast of South America through the Lesser Antilles up to Puerto Rico, and traces of their raw materials persist until the Antilles were colonized by new migrants (the horticultural wave) from South America.<sup>91</sup> The aforementioned horticultural (and ceramic makers) migration wave occurred between 500 -250 B.C. and was done by people originating from the Orinoco drainage and the river systems of South America's northeast coast and was probably composed of more than one mainland group (that is, from a single point of origin), that nonetheless gave rise to a single culture in the Caribbean (the Taino Amerindians of the Greater Antilles). These Amerindian migrants are known as the Saladoid people, due to their white and red painted ceramics, and the distinctive kind of ceramic adornment known as zone-incised cross-hatching which is called Saladoid, after the Venezuelan site of Saladero.<sup>92</sup> The Saladoid people are the originators of the *zemis* (religious objects investigated below) as religious objects, and this belief (and practice) can be seen in the religious manifestation of the Tainos who encountered Columbus when he arrived in the Greater Antilles.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, the Saladoid people introduced both dogs and the *agouti* as well as the very famous and agriculturally important domesticated plant from the mainland, the manioc (*yucca* or cassava), and tended to settle extensively on the Island of Puerto Rico, but also crossed over to the

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<sup>91</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 5

<sup>92</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 5

<sup>93</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 5

eastern end of Hispaniola where they were in contact with the first descendants of the first migrants from Central America mentioned above.<sup>94</sup>

Subsequently, major changes occurred in the population density and settlement of the Caribbean. These changes are seen in the period from A.D. 500-1000, where there seems to be an increase in the number of settlements in the Lesser Antilles (of what the Spanish called the Caribs, that were Arawakan language speakers of a different ethnic group), while the Saladoid people seemed to be pushed to the interior of Puerto Rico, a small Saladoid foothold on the Hispaniola and the Greater Antilles (Cuba and Jamaica). During this time the hunting gathering people found in these places seem to be incorporated into newly emerging societies and the simultaneous colonization of the Bahamas starts about this time; with the ceramics of these groups being named Ostionoid, a name that was later used as the designation of these Amerindian people from this period of migration, colonization and change.<sup>95</sup> However, not all hunter gatherers were merged into the newly forming societies, and the evidence points to the survival of the Guanahatabey/Ciboney (hunter gatherers people that lived in caves and spoke a distinct language from the Arawak Tainos) on the westernmost part of Cuba (Pinar del Rio, Ciudad de La Habana and Provincia de La Habana, which is now Province of Artemisa and the province of Mayabeque) which were never occupied by the ceramic-using

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<sup>94</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 5-6

<sup>95</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 6

Saladoid people.<sup>96</sup> By the time of the Spanish conquest there were only a handful of Ciboney living in the western part of Cuba and the southern peninsula of modern Haiti and like their counterparts (the Tainos and Caribs) they succumbed to the brutality and pressure of the colonizers.<sup>97</sup>

This is what the historical trope of extinction tells us and which will, be revisited/reexamined in the following paragraphs. The main reason behind providing this subsection on the historical background of the Caribbean indigenous people is to expose this trope of historical extinction. As we can see from this subsection, part of the historical trope of Caribbean indigeneity includes this trope of extinction. Although supported by archeological and linguistic data, what I desire to challenge is the assumption made at the conclusion of this historical reconstruction. I mean, the total annihilation or genocide by the Spanish of the Caribbean indigenous population. As is obviously portrayed in the data summarize above, the historical trope of extinction has become the standard and accepted dogma in Caribbean studies. Therefore, parting from this assumptive and erroneous conclusion, the following subsections will be dedicated to investigating and recollecting the Caribbean indigenous religious Habitus as recorded through the lens of the European invaders and through the modern Decolonial lens. The purpose then would be to challenge these assumptions and to locate this beliefs and practices in the religion of Palo Monte in Chapter 5, which in turn will challenge the

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<sup>96</sup>. Brooke Persons, A., *Reconsidering the Guanahatabey of Western Cuba* (Ufdc.Ufl.Edu, <https://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00061961/00914/citation>. Accessed 13 Nov 2019, 2007)

<sup>97</sup>. Edmonds, Ennis Barrington, and Michelle A Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History* (1st ed., NYU Press., 2010), 16

historical trope of extinction so blatantly put forth by established Caribbean scholars in this volume edited by Samuel M. Wilson of the proceedings to the conference held in the Virgin Islands for the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the second Voyage of Columbus to the Americas (and which landed him in St. Croix).<sup>98</sup>

### **Taino and Carib Religious Habitus**

#### *Amerindian Beliefs and Practices as Recounted by Europeans*

The source I will utilize for elucidating the historical, anthropological and European account of the Caribbean Amerindians will be the great antiquarian monograph by Edward Gaylord Bourne titled *Columbus, Ramon Pane and the Beginnings of American Anthropology*. Gaylord Bourne's monograph compiles the only two extant European sources on the Taino and Carib religious Habitus. Moreover, the monograph represents the reconstruction of the Caribbean indigenous' religious Habitus based on a direct encounter with the Amerindian people. Another important reason I have decided to use Gaylord Bourne's monograph is that it contains his own translation of the only surviving Italian copy from Ramon Pane life (the Spanish copy was lost to history) of Fray Ramon Pane's *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians: Chronicles of the New World encounter*. The reason I have decided to use this translation over the modern Spanish editions is that although the manuscript by Pane was originally written in Spanish, as mentioned, the only surviving copy of it was in Old Italian. Since I cannot

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<sup>98</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999) , *xiii-xiv*

read or work on a manuscript written in Italian (especially old Italian) I have decided to use this monograph by Gaylord Bourne.<sup>99</sup>

Furthermore, Gaylord's monograph contains a compilation of the only other two sources of information regarding the indigenous religious Habitus (Columbus own writings on the Tainos; only available in (Columbus's son) Ferdinand's *La vida del Almirante Cristóbal Colón por su hijo Ferdinand* (but extant only in Alfonso Ulloa's 1571 Italian translation known by its first name *Historie*), and Peter Martyr's (Also known as Peter Martyr of Angleria; renowned Italian historian at the service of Spain during the Spanish Age of Exploration) epitome to Fray Ramon Pane's treatise as found in his *De Rebus Oceanicis Et Novo Orbe* (in Latin) ). In fact, these extant manuscripts survived and are known to us today in full thanks to the *Historie* translation by Ulloa published in 1571 Venice. Another important factor in making my decision is the fact that according to De Las Casas, Ramon Pane was born a Catalan and did not speak Castilian perfectly. This begs the question of how could he compose a proper manuscript in Spanish on the Caribbean Amerindians? De Las Casas also adds that he was simple minded and that which he reported to Christopher Columbus was sometimes confused information and of little substance.<sup>100</sup>

Moreover, according to De Las Casas, who knew Ramon Pane, Pane was able to learn and compile this information after he was commissioned by Christopher Columbus

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<sup>99</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 4

<sup>100</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 7

“to collect all their ceremonies and antiquities”<sup>101</sup> by Friar Ramon Pane “who had learned the language of the islanders”.<sup>102</sup> Columbus first sent him to the lower *Macorix*, then to the Vega region and lastly to the region controlled by King or *Cacique Guarionex*. The reason for this motility among these regions is that although Pane knew the language of the lower Macorix it was only spoken in a small territory. On the other hand, the regions of the Vega and the regions controlled by *Cacique Guarionex* had much more population and its language was greatly diffused throughout the island. Moreover, De Las Casas tells us that Pane remained on the island of *Hayti* for two years and this is where he collected, to “his slender abilities” his manuscript.<sup>103</sup> All this was conducted during the second voyage of Christopher Columbus in 1493 on which voyage Ramon Pane came with him to “the Indies” according to De Las Casas’ *Apologetica Historia*.<sup>104</sup>

Hence, by obtaining all these limited sources under the careful scholarship of a well-respected scholar and the singular fortune of having his notes and observations on the original manuscripts make this monograph an invaluable addition and necessity for elucidating the European understanding of the Caribbean Amerindians. I believe that for

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<sup>101</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 4

<sup>102</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 4

<sup>103</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 7

<sup>104</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 4

these reasons it is better for me to use this monograph than any modern Spanish translation of Ramon Pane work. Nonetheless, this monograph only serves as a direct source for their beliefs and practices and does not provide us with possible influences they may have had on the Caribbean Diaspora today. However, because Ramon Pane's work concerns itself primarily with the island of Haiti (although it was populated by Tainos like Cuba) I have decided to start first with Columbus' own observations which includes data from Cuba or the main land as he called it as well.

According to Columbus, the Caribbean Amerindians displayed neither idolatry nor any other sect among their beliefs. The only form of worship and religious veneration he was able to determine in their villages was the worship of wooden images carved in relief, which they called "*cemis*". The *cemis* were placed in independent houses apart from the village, which was reserved exclusively for the objects and their devotion. According to Columbus, this devotional practice consisted of a ceremonial prayer similar to the ones conducted in churches. Moreover, he describes a "finely wrought table" which was round and built like a wooden dish and on which an unknown powder was placed. This powder was then manipulated and placed on the head of the *cemis* during the performance of a ceremony which, he noted, he did not understand. Subsequently, Columbus describes how they proceeded to pick up a cane with two branches, which they placed on their nostrils with the aim of inhaling the powder/dust. Columbus concludes that with this powder they lost consciousness and became drunk like.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>105</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 4-5

Next Columbus describes how these *cemis* received names belonging to forefathers or grandfathers or both and how these *cemis* housed on the separated house sometimes consisted of up to ten per *bohío* (Taino houses).<sup>106</sup> What Columbus describes is the worship of ancestors through devotion and reverence much like the ancestor veneration tradition of Palo Monte. Another curious and perhaps important detail is the description of Columbus of one of the *cemis*, which seemed to speak in the language of the Amerindians. According to Columbus, after a voice was heard coming from one of the *cemis*, a member of the Spanish troops kicked it and found that it was structurally hollowed. Apparently, the *cemi* had been fitted with a trumpet or tube, which ran from its lower part to a dark part of the house which was covered with leaves and branches. Columbus explains further that under the leaf and branch covering there was a person hidden, who was the one that spoke through the trumpet inside the *cemis* with the aim of saying whatever the *Cacique* wanted to say so that he may control the population. Moreover, Columbus tells us that after the *Cacique* found out about the Spanish learning about the deception, he implored them not to say anything to the other Amerindians (Columbus says his subjects) nor to any other person because this was the way that they were able to maintain obedience.<sup>107</sup>

Columbus offers us insights into the privileged and superior role of the *Cacique* in the Caribbean Amerindian's beliefs and practices. Columbus describes how most of the

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<sup>106</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 5

<sup>107</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 5



*Caciques* had three stones, to which the people (and the *Caciques*) payed great reverence. The religious significance of the stones laid in their power to help with the prosperous fecundity of corn and planted vegetables (so agricultural), to help women with their child-bearing (ea. reduce pain) and lastly, to help with invoking rain or the sun when needed; with each stone presiding over only one of these powers. Columbus writes further about the funerary rites of the *Caciques* and the people. He identifies the differences and similitudes of the former and latter rites. Hence, he explains that when the *Caciques* died they were opened up and dried by the fire so that their bodies may be preserved entirely. As for the rest of the people, only the head was preserved. However, Columbus also saw some rituals which diverged from these two forms. He explains that there were others who were buried in a cave with a gourd of water placed on their heads together with some bread. However, other *Caciques* were burned inside the house where they had died but when they thought that they were on the point of death (very confusing explanation, but refers to the *Cacique* who are not yet dead but ill) would not let them finish their life but would proceed to strangle them then. Yet, others (not *Caciques*) are driven out of their *bohíos* or placed on a *hamaca* with a gourd of water and bread at their head and these individuals are abandoned and never returned to (visited) by the people. Lastly, there are other individuals, who are taken to the *Caciques* so that “he may dispense a sentence of being strangled or another command which they performed without hesitation”.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 6

The last piece of information we have from Columbus' writings delves into the eschatological destiny of the *Caciques* and their people. Columbus explains that he obtained the information from a *Cacique* named *Caunabo* which reigned over territories in *Española* (Haiti and Dominican Republic) who was wise, intelligent and of marked years.<sup>109</sup> According to Columbus he was told by *Caunabo* (and others, which he does not mention) that after death they all go to a "certain valley" in which every principal *Cacique* is situated in his/her own country and in which they are able to find their fathers and all their ancestors. Moreover, Columbus explains that the Caribbean Amerindians believed that each individual would have women and all they could and wanted to eat and give themselves as pleasures and recreations without limit or deprivation. Lastly, Columbus concludes this account by explaining that all these beliefs are more fully explained and extensively explored in Ramon Pane' writings on the Caribbean Amerindians. Columbus explains that this was the case because he commissioned Pane to collect this information for these reasons. Moreover, he noted that his personal beliefs was that although the Caribbean Amerindians have a somewhat developed belief on the immortality of the soul, we should take the writings of Ramon Pane as fables from which one cannot extract anything useful or fruitful regarding their beliefs and practices.<sup>110</sup>

Having offered the background information about Columbus and his reasons for commissioning Ramon Pane' work, I will subsequently peruse his work. Then, in the

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<sup>109</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 6

<sup>110</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 6

following paragraphs of this subsection I reconstruct the Amerindian religious Habitus on the basis of Ramon Pane' account. Ramon Pane' manuscript remains to this day the most extensive work by Europeans on the Caribbean Amerindian religious Habitus. Pane begins his treatise by explaining that each individual Amerindian had in his house a *cemi* or various *cemis* which "they worshiped in their own personal fashion and mannerism".<sup>111</sup> This observation could be interpreted to mean that there was no set religious or ritual hegemony, but a multiplicity or pluriverse of practices within the Taino religious Habitus.

Next, Pane explains that they believe God to be located in "heaven" and that they are immortal, but no one can see them (the text is corrupt here so who are they referring to as immortal is not clear). The Taino creator God, named *Iocahuuague Maorocon* (*Yocahu Vagua Maorocoti* according to De Las Casas) had a mother that had no beginning and which was called by either of five names. These names were *Atabei*, *Iermaoguacar*, *Apito* and *Zuimaco* (the Extant Italian text omits one name *Iella* which we recover from Peter Martyr's translations). However, it is worth mentioning that there seems to be an issue with Ramon Pane's collection of the five names used for the mother of the creator god, which arises from the fact that Pane' manuscript contains an almost illegible inscription of the second name of the god.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 11

<sup>112</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 11

Hence, we must include Peter Martyr's list of names for the mother of the creator God as a supplement to this historical loss. Peter Martyr gives the five names of the mother of the creator God as *Attabeira*, *Mamona*, *Guacarapita*, *Iella* and *Guimasoa*. However, the differences in names between Ramon Pane' and Peter Martyr's manuscripts, according to De Las Casas, stems from the difficulty of the illegibility of the original text by Ramon Pane. De Las Casas informs us that Ulloa's misunderstanding of the illegible text which said "*Atabex* y un hermano *Guaca*" (*Atabex* and a brother *Guaca*) which Ulloa copied as *Iermao* instead of *hermano* (brother) was what led to this misspelling, conjecture and misunderstanding.<sup>113</sup>

Curiously, from this revision by De Las Casas we can observe how the Friar Ramon Pane (and De Las Casas himself, since he admonishes the Caribbean Amerindians for confusing the knowledge of the true Catholic God with this understanding) projected his own understanding of the European Christian theology onto the Caribbean Amerindian cosmology. According to these explanations we can easily observe how the Amerindians believed in a dualistic god composed of a brother and sister pair. Among the many unfavorable descriptions of the Amerindian religions, Pane renders their belief as what he describes as nothing but superstition. He writes about the belief that the dead appear on the roadways when the living traveled alone, but that the dead did not appear when people traveled in groups.<sup>114</sup> We can take this circumstantial

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<sup>113</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 11

<sup>114</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 12

detail as either another form of social/religious type of control (as described by Columbus on the use of *cemis* by *Caciques*) or we can see this belief as part of a much larger Cosmovision of the Caribbean Amerindian as an inherently social and group oriented culture/religion. Whatever we make of this notion, it speaks to the thesis of this study that Caribbean Amerindian's beliefs and practices are preserved in the religion of Palo Monte. This is a strongly held belief in Palo

Next, Pane explains the origin myth of the Amerindians from *Española* as starting in the province of *Caanau* or *Caunana* in which there is a mountain called *Canta* or *Cauta*. On this mountain in which there are two caves, one named *Cacibagiagua* or *Casibaragua* and the other *Amaiua* or *Amaisuna*. Pane tells us that the Amerindians believed that the majority of the people who settled on the island came from the former cave. Moreover, from these origin myths we get the myth of *Marocael* (*Machoehael* according to Peter Martyr; considered the proper spelling) who was given the responsibility of keeping watch over the cave at night and who one day delayed in going back to the mouth of the cave. This led to the sun being carried off and *Machoehael* being turned into stone after the others closed the mouth of the cave with him near it. Moreover, the Tainos believed that those who had gone fishing had been turned into trees called *Iobi*, *Jobo* or *hobo*. Others called them *mirabolans* (*ciruela* in Cuba).<sup>115</sup> A good deal of the information provided by Pane is on the mythology of the Caribbean Amerindians. The accounts of these mythologies are extensive, but I will focus only on those that are pertinent to Palo Monte, the focus of this study.

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<sup>115</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 13

Pane also collects the myth of tobacco, how it was created and for what reasons. According to Pane's account, when the four twin brothers, sons of *Itiba Tahuuaua*, who had created the ocean by the accidental destruction of the gourd called *Gaia* (who created the oceans and spread the fish on the oceans) who had gone to the house of their grandfather, *Bassamanaco*, they traded (according to the wishes of their grandfather) cassava bread for tobacco. According to Pane, *Bassamanaco* requested the four twin brothers for the cassava bread to which they refused. This led *Bassamanaco* throwing at the *Caracaracol* a *guanguaio* (a tobacco holding bag) which hit him on the back. This bag was full of *cogioba* (or *cohoba* according to de Las Casas), which *Bassamanaco* had made that day and which according to Pane, the Amerindians had since used for the purpose of purging themselves. The Tainos did so by inhaling the tobacco powder through a cane, which was about a foot in length and which contained two passages at one end. Then, the Tainos would place these two passages on their nostrils, through which they were able to inhale the tobacco, which was placed at an opening at the other end. Interestingly, Pane observes that the myth tells how the brothers were enraged about the fact that their grandfather had asked them for the cassava bread and had had to exchange it for the tobacco. These last observations may point to the fact that although tobacco played an integral part in their religious and ritual practices the cassava bread, eaten throughout the Caribbean, may have played a more prominent role in their lives. This is not found in Palo Monte, where in fact, tobacco plays an integral part but not cassava bread.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 13

Subsequently, the myth explains how, due to the hit of the tobacco bag that *Caracaracol* suffered, the brother started to suffer from swollen scabs and much pain. Out of this swollen skin section (taken out by the other brothers) came forth a female turtle, which they cared for and maintained in a cabin they built for themselves and the turtle. This last addition, which Pane tells us is the only thing he was able to collect about the turtle and the swollen skin, may point to an origin myth for the disease suffered by the *Caracaracoli* and their rough skin, which they viewed as resembling the skin of a turtle. Following this explanation we get the story of the sun and the moon and how it is related to the story told by Columbus of the three stones, which they prayed to in order to obtain help with agriculture, child-bearing pains and rain and sun. According to Pane, the Caribbean Amerindians believed that the sun and the moon came out of a cave, which was situated in the lands of a *Cacique* named *Maucia Tiuel* (but considered to be *Manaia Tiunel* by 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars).<sup>117</sup>

The cave was named *Giououaua* (*Iounaboina* according to Peter Martyr) and was held in high regard among the indigenous population. The cave was decorated by the paintings of leaves and other flora but not containing any figures (including fauna?) and on which rested two *cemis* of stone of about a foot high with their hand tied (may be the origin of the Palo Monte practice of tying the *nganga* (cauldron) with a metal chain for the purpose of not allowing the spirit of the *nfumbe* (the dead) to escape the *nganga* and to manifest only within the *nganga*). These *cemis* looked like they sweated and were prayed to, when it did not rain. According to Pane, when they would pray to these *cemis*,

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<sup>117</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 18

it would rain immediately after, even if there was a drought. Moreover, Pane tells us that these two cemís were named *Boinaiel* (*Binthaitel* according to Peter Martyr) and *Maroio* (Marohu according to Peter Martyr).<sup>118</sup>

The subsequent Chapters of Pane's treatise inform us greatly about the beliefs and practices of the Caribbean Amerindians related to the cult of the dead and the related figure of the medicine men which resonates with the role played by a modern day Palo priest. However, let us start with what these natives believed about the dead, before moving on to the medicine men. According to Pane, the Caribbean Amerindians believed that the dead, after death, went to a place (for the dead) which was called *Coaibai*. This place was found on the island called *Soraia*, which according to Gaylord Bourne's notes, means "west".<sup>119</sup> An interesting observation regarding this point I would like to make is that because this information by Pane was collected on the island of Hispaniola or *Hayti*, this island to the west may very well be the island of Cuba, which had a large and predominantly Taino population. If we take this into consideration then we may conclude that beyond the mythical story behind this belief there was in the island of Cuba a place (a sparse of land) and a monument dedicated by the Tainos as a sacred place for the veneration of the dead or meant to represent *Coaibai*. If this was the case then there would have been a strong presence of the veneration of the ancestors and the most important *Behiques* and *Caciques* would have been present on the island of Cuba. I argue

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<sup>118</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 18

<sup>119</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 18



this because, although there are Kongo beliefs in Haiti (as we will see in Chapter 5) and there are very similar practices when it comes to venerating the dead, there is not such strong survival and preservation of Kongo or Amerindian beliefs and practices when it comes to the veneration of the dead in the Palo Monte religion of Cuba.

However, following Pane's recording of *Coaibai* as the place where the dead go after death, Pane's tells us that the first man who went to *Coaibai* was a man named *Machetaurie-Guaiaua*. Moreover, Pane tells us that this man became the lord of *Coaibai* and it became established as the home and dwelling place of the dead. Hence, by this description we get the Taino lord of the dead and *Coaibai* (their Hades, *Sheol* or *Kalunga*).<sup>120</sup> However, much else is not given by Pane, so I am not able to provide any comparisons with *Kuballende*. Next, Pane describes how the Tainos believed the dead to remain shut in during the day and to come out during the night. Furthermore, the Taino believed that the dead went walking about at night and even ate of the fruit *guabazza*, which according to Peter Martyr was *guannaba* and to the modern scholars, Bachiller and Morales, identifies with the fruit named (in Cuba) *guanábana*.<sup>121</sup> In the Afro-Cuban traditions this belief was not preserved, but rather the *guanábana* is utilized and preserved

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<sup>120</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 18

<sup>121</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 18

for the veneration of *Tiembla Tierra* in Palo Monte and *Obbatalá* in Lucumi practices due to its white interior.<sup>122</sup>

Following this detail and the corruption of the text, Pane tells us that the way that the Tainos were able to distinguish the dead from the living at night, especially during festivals and feasts at which time the dead would like to mingle with the living in their celebrations, was by touching their belly in search of the naval. If the Taino did not find the naval they would say that he/she is *operito* (which meant- dead) and thus would know their ancestors would be with them.<sup>123</sup> Although this particular practice has not survived, a somewhat similar practice (although not enough to warrant as an important meeting point to add to Chapter 5) is the Malongo festivities in Palo Monte. The *Malongo Kisonga Kia* or *Toque de Palo* is performed with the aim of dedicating a collective (by the Palo practitioners of the *munanzo* performing it) festivity or party to the ancestors and the current of forces presiding over the magical world of Palo Monte and Palo Mayombe especially. However, where it diverges from the Tainos belief and practices is that it is also used as a confirmatory festivity by which the initiated person participates in a mutual rejoicing with the *Nkisi Malongo* and the *Kimpungulu* in the pact just made between them and the *nfumbe*. Therefore, it serves as a platform on which all the previous consecrations and practices become sanctified and blessed by the spiritual forces and the dead. Any initiation or ritual done for the consecration of fundamentals or foundations (*ngangas*,

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<sup>122</sup>. Enamorado Rodríguez, A. and Barzaga Sablón, O., *Los mitos terapéuticos dentro de la regla conga o palo monte: significación social y aportes a la cultura popular en el municipio Holguín*. (Master en Historia y Cultura en Cuba. Universidad de Holguín. Oscar Lucero Moya, 2013), 60 & 93

<sup>123</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 18

*mpakas, gurunfindas, etc...)* of the religion devoid of this crowning festivity are considered null and not recognized by the spiritual forces and the *nfumbes* or Palo Monte. Another important aspect of the festivity which diverges from the Taino belief is that during the *Malongo* ceremony the establishment of communication between the world of the dead and the living is achieved and one of the most important facets of the religion is that is performed, trance and mediumistic possession by the dead. The importance of this manifestation is that the belief within Palo Monte is that the dead serve as intermediaries in the communication between the living and the celestial forces.<sup>124</sup>

The situation described above is, however, is not the case in all branches of the religion. The Brillumba branch's beliefs are that the *Kimpungulu* are found at the center of the earth or represent the forces of nature. This is very similar to the Lucumi belief in the place of residence of most *Orichas*. Another important observation to be made is that this hybrid form of Palo Monte (the Brillumba branch), borrows much from the Lucumi tradition, a factor that will come into play in the subsection of Chapter 5. Meanwhile, the Kimbisa branch's beliefs are that the *Kimpungulu* are found in heaven and represent the forces of heaven but from a Christian perspective rather than in the Universe as in the Mayombe. It is only in Palo Mayombe that we find this belief preserving the original Bantu beliefs of the Cosmos or Universe and another reason demonstrating that the Mayombe branch is the most traditional and the most worthy of focus in the study of how Caribbean Amerindian influences are manifested in African Derived-Religions of the Caribbean. Nonetheless, I must add that although this is the case in today's practice of Palo Mayombe and Palo Monte in general the inclusion of the four cardinal point cross

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<sup>124</sup>. Rojas Calderon, Carlos Alberto, *Palo Brakamundo* (Bloomington: Palibrio, 2011), 157

inside the circumference of a circle of the Mayombe with the addition of smaller crosses and circles at each quadrant of the cardinal cross represents the pact made between the Mayombe and Brillumba for the unification of powers and mysteries of the celestial forces and the forces of nature. Hence, when *firmas* or *patimpembas* contain these drawings in the Mayombe practices we must understand that we are looking at the manifestation of this pact between the branches and therefore more recent practices.<sup>125</sup>

Now, returning to the Caribbean Amerindian beliefs and practices, we delve into Pane's description of the *Bohuti* (as he calls it) or *Boitius* for Peter Martyr and *Behique* for de Las Casas (which became the accepted and standard form). According to Pane, the popular/cultural/religious belief among the Taino was that the Behique was the individual tasked with communicating with the spirits and of knowing their secrets. Moreover, these individuals were tasked with taking away evil by means of magical incantations. Pane compares this practice with that of the Moors (Muslims) and tells us that their songs were replete with content related to fables and their laws by which they were ruled. Gaylord Bourne notes that these songs are the now famous *areytos* (and which I explore on Chapter 5), which Pane saw in a similar light to the recitation of the *Qur'an*.<sup>126</sup> As described above, these *areytos* or *areitos* as they are known today are not very similar to the Malongo festivities which even used traditional African instruments (three drums and a bell hit with a metal stick).

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<sup>125</sup>. Rojas Calderon, Carlos Alberto, *Palo Brakamundo* (Bloomington: Palibrio, 2011), 160-162

<sup>126</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 18

Ramon Pane then delves into the subject of the observances kept by the Caribbean Amerindians and what these consisted. Pane explains that most individuals had more than one cemi and that these varied in composition. Some were made of stone while others were made of wood. Yet, other spoke (as we saw in the description by Columbus earlier on this Chapter) and others didn't. Moreover, Pane confirms the writings of Columbus when he explains that some of these cemis were implored to for the aid of growing things, while others were used for the purposes of making it rain or of making the winds blow (much like the *ngangas* of the specific *Mpungo* on which is founded and which presides over specific powers of nature). Pane also explains to us that when a *Behique* would be asked to attend to an ill man, he would be required to abstain from food and to make use of the cleansing ritual of inhaling tobacco through the nose (please refer to the section of tobacco on Chapter 5 for further information). Apparently, this was done for the purpose of going into trance and to communicate directly with the cemis to unveil the cause of the illness.<sup>127</sup>

Although at first glance this may seem like the same procedure performed by the *Palero* or *Palera* in Palo Monte, the differences are marked making it difficult for us to conclude that it is an appropriation. The *Palero* or *Palera* uses the tobacco to start and strengthen the communication link between the world of the living and the world of the dead found on his/her *nganga*, but the communication is done through the use of the *chamalongs* rather than directly. In the case where direct communication occurs this is due to the influence of Kardecian Spiritism and the *Palero* or *Palera* most likely

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<sup>127</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 18

developed the gifts of mediumship through involvement with this tradition. Hence, these should not be confused with the traditional Palo Mayombe. Rather, it reflects the latest innovation of Palo Monte, known as Palo Cruzado.<sup>128</sup>

Pané also tells us that another preparatory procedure performed by the *Behique* was to use a sort of soot or pounded charcoal, which they smeared over their faces and which was followed by the introduction of a piece of stringed meats (the plural is used) and bones into their mouths. After this they proceeded to the house of the ill person and entered with only the principal or most important individuals of the household. Once inside the house they would consume *cogioba* again together with another undescribed herb, which then he passed to the members of the family (allowed inside the hut) for them to consume as well. After this and after they had vomited, they would perform another *areito* and would light a torch, which remained lit through the night. After this the *Behique* then moved towards the ill person and would then examine him/her through touching all body parts and by imitating the gesture of drawing out something from inside the person.<sup>129</sup>

While performing this gesture of removing something from the person, the *Behique* would move towards the entrance of the *bohío* at intervals and would have closed the door behind him in order to speak the words “Begone to the mountains, or to the seas or wither thou wilt,” which then he would follow by blowing like one would,

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<sup>128</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 211-212

<sup>129</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 21

dust of particulate matter. Then the *Behique* would turn around once more and would close his mouth by putting his hand together and closing his mouth with them. Pane tells us in detail, how he would pretend that his hands were very cold and would make them tremble in front of the family members and how he would proceed to blow on them again after this performance. After this ritual performance the *Behique* would then proceed to start sucking the ill person all over the body in order to draw the illness from the body through his mouth. At this point, the *Behique* would then start to cough and would start to make a face like he had eaten something extremely bitter/sour. The *Behique* followed this by spitting the materials which Pane had told us the *Behique* would consume before arriving on the *bohío*.<sup>130</sup>

At this point the *Behique* would then tell the person that whatever he brought out of his mouth was the reason why he/she had become ill and if the thing removed from his mouth (apparently the items varied) was eatable, the *Behique* would tell the individual to take notice of the thing he spat out because he/she had eaten something which had brought about the illness. Moreover, Pane tells us that the *Behique* would then tell the individual that whatever he had removed was in fact placed there by his or her *cemis* because he or she had not said her daily prayers to them and had not built them a temple, or had given them something of their possessions. Sometimes, stones were also “removed” from the ill person and these were particularly important for the Caribbean Amerindians. According to Pane, when this was the case the individual was instructed to keep the stone safe and to offer help with child bearing pains. These stones, we are

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<sup>130</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 21

informed, were kept neatly wrapped in cotton and placed in small baskets on which they were given things to eat. Pane tells us that this was not only the case with these stones, but that also it was the same with the *cemis* to which they would bring excesses of fish, meat or bread (and many other food stuffs). They would place all these on the cabin dedicated to the *cemis* and which was separated from the house.<sup>131</sup> The next day they would share all these meals and would eat what was offered. Although this practice is also prevalent in the Afro-Cuban traditions it is not exclusively an Amerindian influence but rather a manifestation of all indigenous or ecologically aware spiritualities.

The following section discussed by Pane is regarding the cases in which the *Behique* is not able to cure a person or he is not able to intervene. In this case the family of the individual would dig the body of the person and would pour over his mouth a liquid made of the *cogioba* (*zachon* is used as the name on this case, but Gaylord Bourne's notes tells us is the same plant) plant, which supposedly had leaves like basil. The Tainos then would pound these leaves with some hair and nails of the dead person into powder. According to Pane, after the family had poured this powder over the mouth and nose of the dead person, the corpse would start responding to the questions of the family about the cause of his or her death. This usually consisted of asking whether it was the fault of the *Behique* or whether the person had not dutifully followed the regimen prescribed by the *Behique*. Pane even tells us that when the corpse is asked if he or she is alive or how he or she is alive it would respond that it was dead. Another way in which they investigate the truth of the dead of the ill person is by building a big fire in which the

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<sup>131</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 21



person is placed once the flames are burning high. Then, the person is covered with earth and is then asked a series of questions related to their death. Pane tells us that when they perform this ritual the corpse only revealed answers ten times and did not answer whether he is dead or alive. Pane compared this ritual process, especially the aspect that involves the burning of the corpse, to the traditional method of making charcoal among the European charcoal makers.<sup>132</sup>

Following the curious ritual of truth seeking, the Caribbean Amerindians believed that if the smoke coming from the furnace made (on which the corpse was placed and questioned), raised high, and a shrill cry came from the fire and turned down, going into the *bohío* of the *Behique*, then the *Behique* was to blame for the death. Pane tells us that when this occurred the *Behique* would be stricken immediately with sores, which would peel, over his whole body. They saw this as a sign that the *Behique* had not followed the proper preparatory procedures before succoring the ill person. In the case of the corpse denouncing the *Behique* through the former means, the family would wait for the *Behique* and would beat him close to death with clubs often breaking his extremities.<sup>133</sup> These means of retaliation tell us that although the magical and religious power lay with the *Behique*, individuals and families also had access to magical powers and made use of these when needed. Unfortunately, I am not able to compare these practices with Palo rituals linked with necromancy since they are necessarily kept secret by *Paleros* and Palo

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<sup>132</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 22

<sup>133</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 22

practitioners and I am not one. Therefore, whether or not there are similar practices in Palo would have to be answered by initiated individuals who would like to contribute to this relatively unexplored field of inquiry.

In Chapter 19 of Ramon Pane's manuscript he explains to us how the Caribbean Amerindians made the *cemis*. The *cemis* made of wood were created when an individual Caribbean Amerindian would be frightened by an "unexplained" phenomenon of a tree, such as the movement of its roots. This individual would then ask the tree-phenomenon who it was and the tree would tell the individual to call the *Behique* to tell him who it was (according to de Las Casas text which cites this event and is considered the authoritative text over Pane's corrupt description). Then the *Behique* would arrive and would make *cogioba* next to the tree and after that he would finish would stand up in front of the tree and would give it all his titles before asking it: "Tell me who you are and what you are doing here and what you want of me and why you have called. Tell me if you want me to cut you or if you want to come with me, and how you want me to carry you and I will build you a cabin and add a property to it."<sup>134</sup> The closest practice to this in Palo Monte is the ritual performed by the *Behique* when approaching and communicating the tree-to-be-*ce**mi*. In Palo Monte, priest must approach the *nganga* and must communicate with it first by providing his *licensias* (licenses), which consist of the individuals and powers that have granted him permission to work with and communicate with the powers of nature and the *nfumbes*. This is done foremost in any ritual or question and is the first process when working with the *nganga*, together with the lighting of a tobacco and the use of its

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<sup>134</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 22

smoke to ritually fumigate the religious paraphernalia. Moreover, plants and trees are also spoken to and their blessings are sought in order to obtain their powers. These incantations and prayers are called *mambos* in Palo Monte and form an important part of the liturgy and repertoire of the *Paleros* and *Paleras*.<sup>135</sup>

These trees then were made into *cemis* which were venerated and used for good and bad charms. Beyond providing sacrifices and food to the *cemis*, these rituals were also used for establishing direct communication in cases of danger or when the clients wanted their futures foretold. The Tainos established this direct communication by making *cogioba* in front of the *cemis*, inside the *bohío* built for them. Then, the Tainos would begin to call the *cemis* in various ritualistic fashions, which would reach its climax in the inhalation of the *cogioba*. This inhalation of the *cogioba* would then established the desired direct communication with the *cemis*, which would lead the Tainos into a trance that would ultimately allow them to see the future or what they wanted to know. The stone *cemis* were consecrated as described by Columbus and Pane. An example of this is the recounted ritual process described, of the “removal” of the stone from the body of the sick provided above. One important note to add is that the leaves which the Caribbean

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<sup>135</sup>. Please see the Cuban documentary “*Soy Tata Nganga*” for references of these practices. Although most books contain *mambos* and information regarding the liturgy, none demonstrate the full process as well as the beginning minutes of this documentary. Moreover, due to the highly personal and secretive process of this opening ritual, most books have abstained from including the use of *licensias* and tobacco smoke opening rituals from published materials. The documentary can be accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tF9n6FGISmY&t=120s>. See also Katerina Kerestetzi’s excellent documentary on Palo Monte titled “*Les morts du Palo Monte*” which does an excellent job of demonstrating not only the use of *Fula* (gunpowder) in Palo Monte but also records important aspects of the religion such as spirit possession. The documentary can be accessed at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_cQHCT9fJIU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cQHCT9fJIU).

Amerindians added to the “talking” *cemis* looked like elm leaves and their purpose was to make the *giuca* (*yucca* in Cuba; cassava) grow.<sup>136</sup>

The following pages of Pane’s manuscript, which I will explore briefly, are dedicated to the different deities and their *cemis*. The first *ce mi* mentioned is *Baidrama* (also *Bugia* or *Aiba* according to Pane and *Vaybrama* according to de Las Casas; de Las Casas spelling remains the standard form). According to Pane this *ce mi* was burnt during war times and was later washed with the juice of the cassava so that it may regrow its arms, its eyes and body, making them anew. Moreover, we are told that when those who had made this *ce mi* did not bring cassava for it to eat it would punish them by making them ill (which was confirmed by the *Behique*). The next *ce mi* Pane tells us about is *Corocote*, which they placed on top of the house of *Guamorete* who was an important individual in the community. The story of this *ce mi* is that whenever it would come into the possession of an individual, it would lay with the women of the house on which it was placed. This *ce mi*’s mark was that it grew two crowns on its head and whenever someone would be seen wearing two crowns it was believed that they were the sons of *Corocote*.

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The following *ce mi* described by Pane is *Opigielguoiran* (*Epileguanita* according to Peter Martyr and the accepted standard form). This *ce mi* was owned by the important *Cauauaniouaua* who had many subjects. This *ce mi*’s recognizable attributes was that it

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<sup>136</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 24

<sup>137</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 24-25

was said to have four feet like a dog and was made of wood (see page 120 of Robiou Lamarche's "Tainos and Caribs"<sup>138</sup>). Moreover, we are told that the *cemi* would like to go out at night and when they would go looking for it in the forest and was found they would bring it back to the house and bound it with cords only to escape again the next night. This *cemi* was in fact, not seen by Pane because as he tells us, the Caribbean Amerindians told him that when the Christians arrived in Hispaniola it broke away from it the cords once more, but this time it went into a swamp and was never found again.<sup>139</sup>

Another *cemi* explored in Pane's manuscript is one called *Guabancex*. This *cemi* was found on the lands of the great *Cacique Aumatex*. The *cemi* was considered a woman, made of stone and was said to be accompanied by two other *cemis*. One of the accompanying *cemis* named *Guatauuu* was a crier while the other was the gatherer or governor of the waters. Pane tells us that *Guabancex*'s power was that when it was angry it raised the winds and brought rain that would destroy houses and topple trees. On the other hand, the role of *Guatauuu* was to cry or proclaim by the order of *Guabancex* to all other *cemis* of the land to help raise a high wind and to bring heavy rain associated with *Guabancex* (most probably talking about hurricanes or norther cold fronts in winter). As for the gather or governor of the waters, its name was *Coatrischie*, and its role or job was

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<sup>138</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 120

<sup>139</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 24-25

to gather the waters into the valleys between the mountains which then he would let loose and it would destroy much of the countryside.<sup>140</sup>

The last *cemi* mentioned in Pane's manuscript is one named *Faraguuaol* (Gaylord Bourne's note tells us that the name *Taragabaol* has been suggested by modern scholars as the most likely correct spelling). This *cemi* belonged to a *Cacique* of Hispaniola and was considered an idol (most likely containing a skull; see Chapter 5 section on *cemis* and *ngangas* for further discussion on this topic). According to the myth related to this *cemi*, its origins dates back to a period prior to the discovery of the island by the Taino. The myth preserved by Pane tells us that the *cemi* was constructed when some hunters ran after an animal that had gone into a ditch and saw a beam or log, which seemed alive. After this, they ran back to the *Cacique*, who was the father of *Guaraionel*. He came back with them and told them to take the log and to build a place for it. Nonetheless, Pane tells us that this *cemi* would also leave the place and would travel back to the same place or near the same place it was collected from. He noted how tying the *cemi* and binding it with harnesses and cords was not enough to keep it in the place they had built for it, for it would leave again.<sup>141</sup>

The next recorded information relates to the great lord who was in the Taino heaven and who was a great *Cacique* named *Caizzihu*. This great *Cacique* had performed a fast in the celestial spheres. This fast was also done in the honor of the *cemi* whose

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<sup>140</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 26

<sup>141</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 26

possession they induced when they needed to obtain a victory over their enemies (most likely the Caribs), or to acquire wealth or anything else they desired.<sup>142</sup> Hence, this fast served as a sort of sacrifice by means of which they demonstrated that what they really wanted was deserving of the blessing of the Great *Cacique* in the sky and of their *cemis*.

The Chapter of the manuscript continues with an account of a curious and important event. Pane tells us that during one of these fasts, a *Cacique* (either *Cazziuaquel* or *Gamanacoel*) had spoken in trance about how after his death those who would remain alive would rule over his lands for only a short time. The reason, according to the *Cacique*, was that they would welcome to their country a people, who would be clothed, and who would rule them and slay them. They would also ultimately die of hunger. Moreover, Pane tells us that the Taino thought originally that these would be the *Canibales* (according to de Las Casas, these was the original name of the *Caribes* (Caribs) given by the Tainos, and which the Spanish initially used as well). After pondering the message and realizing that the people mentioned in the trance (the Caribs) only plundered and fled once they had done so, the Taino came to believe that the visions were referring to other peoples. Only later, they shared, did they realize that the visions and “prophecy” of the *cemi* was referring to Admiral Columbus and the people he had brought with him.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>142</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 26

<sup>143</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 26-27

The reason this narrative is important for my argument is that although we cannot know whether the events described are true or not they inform our assumptions. If we take this event and its “prophecy” as historically and factually true, then we must necessarily accept the historical trope of extinction put forth by European scholars up to today. In evaluating the discourse put forth by European writers about the Caribbean, we must reserve a certain degree of suspicion regarding this type of trope as it promulgates an unescapable finality or Christian apocalyptic understanding of the destiny of the Caribbean Amerindians and their “heathen/pagan” ways. After all, as we have seen in the historical background described at the beginning of this Chapter that the origins of the Taino and Caribs can be traced to South and Central America and this “prophecy” could have been a reference to Taino legend of Maya or of Aztec origin. Equally, this may have been based on information gained through exchange with Mayans from the Yucatan Peninsula or rumors about the Aztecs who wore clothing and other accessories.

Either way, we must be careful when assigning such a deterministic end to the Caribbean Amerindians and this type of belief may be telling us more about the Spanish (and European in general) mindset and their colonial efforts than the Caribbean Amerindian Habitus. I support this position with facts from the following pages of the manuscript. They are dedicated to the efforts and “success” of the friars in baptizing and proselytizing the indigenous populations, and their eventual conversion (in mass) to the “true religion” as ordained in the promise of God instituted in the Christian Catholic faith. With this claim I would like to conclude this section of the Chapter, noting to the readers that the additions and divergences of importance observed in the epitome from Peter Martyr and the quotation by De Las Casas have been noted through the subsection



and do not merit further exploration. Next, I will like to analyze the Amerindian beliefs and practices through the Decolonial lens. Although not equally rich in anecdotal and witness account of their belief and practices, the reliability and unbiased investigation of the archeological and historical data does provide a much needed revisionary retrogression before we spring forward with my investigation of these beliefs and practices as accurate and factual.

*Amerindian Beliefs and Practices revisited through the Decolonial lens*

In this subsection of the Chapter, I will examine the modern data on the Caribbean Amerindians. However, most of these sources use the information provided by Ramon Pane, which I have summarized in the subsection above. Therefore, for the sake of brevity and focus, I will only offer a summary of the hypothesis, theories and conclusions that have been drawn out recently by the well of data collected through archeological and historical means. Any information repeated, or which supports what has already been recorded in the previous subsection will be omitted and only those hypothesis, theories and conclusions that are not reflected in Ramon Pane's manuscript will be included here. In lieu of antagonism, I want to correct and reclaim a proper understanding of the Caribbean Amerindian Habitus. Hence, the conciseness and directness with which I will treat the subject matter in the subsection.

The first important information shared by Robiou Lamarche is that the Taino myth of the creation of the Universe describes how creation occurs in several eras. The myth recounts the start, the beginning or the time of origin of the universe where *Yaya* was the only existing being or entity and its emanation in the Universe. Robiou Lamarche

explains that according to the work of José Juan Arrom, the word *Yaya* is the superlative duplication of '*Ia*,' which in the Arawak language means- spirit, cause, and essence of life. Hence, *Yaya* can be considered a Supreme Spirit (whose name was unknown) and who seemed to have been an equivalent of the continental First Cause for the continental Arawaks. However, as Mircea Eliade had hypothesized regarding original supreme beings (as eventually forgotten and transformed over time into an atmospheric-fertilizing god or god of vegetation), *Yaya* eventually evolved into the practical name *Yúcahu Bagua Maórocoti* which means-Being of the *Yuca*, Sea and Without Male Predecessor.<sup>144</sup>

Next, the book delves into the names of the mother of *Yaya* (however it must be said that the Taino believed that *Yaya* had no beginning and therefore its mother must not be thought as begetting him) given by Pane in his manuscript and explored in the previous subsection of this Chapter. The first name mentioned is Atabey, who is considered to be the Mother of the Waters. As for the other names, they seem to have had lunar-aquatic connotations. The important result of this mythology is that beyond establishing the hierarchy of this powerful feminine deity in the Taino pantheon, it also had the effect on Taino society of establishing a divine order which was based on the feminine principle as the height of its hierarchy. This divine order was projected onto Taino society as the social and cultural practice of matrilineality.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 106-107

<sup>145</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 107

The following myth explored is that of the son of Yaya, *Yayael*. This myth is particularly important due to it representing the first funerary rite observed in the Taino religious/cultural Habitus, that of hanging baskets with the bones of the ancestors. According to Robiou Lamarche's recounting of the story, *Yayael* wanted to kill *Yaya* and for this reason *Yaya* banishes him for four months and ends up killing him when he returns from his exile. Then, we are told, that *Yayael*'s bones were placed inside a *higüero* (the calabash tree-*Crescentia cujete*, which is a variety of gourd) and hung from the roof of *Yaya*'s hut. These bones then (magically) became fish. The gourd was pushed down by accident by the brothers when they were rushing to put back the gourd after they had eaten some of the fish. The gourd then became the ocean and all animals inside of it. Hence, *Yayael* can be considered the first victim of Taino belief and this myth also codifies the meaning of existence being necessarily preceded by sacrifice (as that of the central Amerindians).<sup>146</sup>

The four brothers detailed in Ramon Pane's manuscript and researched above, Robiou Lamarche tells us, can be seen as the four cardinal points of the ceiba (see Juan Rubio's exploration of this myth in Chapter 5 as well as Martinez-Ruiz's exploration of the Kongo belief, as well as the Palo Monte belief of the four winds) . They represent the expansion of space-time in the four cardinal directions. With this myth and the myth of the female turtle spawning from *Deminán Caracaracol*, the first stage of the cycle of

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<sup>146</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 107

Taino creation is complete. This stage can be encapsulated as the quadrant of time prior to the existence of the Taino.<sup>147</sup>

The second stage of the Taino cycle of creation relates to the creation of the Taino universe and its mythical geography. However, as explained in the section reserved for the examination of Ramon Pane's manuscript, these myths do not inform much of my current project and they also represent a retelling of Ramon Pane's work. For this reason I will not include this stage of the Taino creation cycle. However, for a concise representation of the caves, the underworld, and the movement of the sun through the four quadrants of existence, read Robiou Lamarche's representation of the Taino cosmos on page 112. This is also the case for stage three of the Taino creation cycle, with perhaps the only important (but not to my project) addition of the identification of the mythical *Cacique Anacuya* with the Polaris or North Star and its linkage with the Big dipper. This correlation was utilized through the morning cycle of the Big Dipper (excellently depicted by Robiou Lamarche on page 114) around Polaris which the Taino seemed to have used as a sort of climatological calendar.<sup>148</sup>

In Chapter 8 Robiou Lamarche further informs us that although we do not know much about geomancy in the Taino religious Habitus, it informed an important part of their cultural and practical lives. The Tainos used geomancy for the purposes of selecting the proper place for the construction of villages and ceremonial centers in accordance

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<sup>147</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 107-110

<sup>148</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 107-117

with the cosmic forces of nature. Therefore, they sought to keep the harmony of the microcosm with the macrocosm by the utilization and interpretation of markings on the ground which formed patterns which they read as signs in their method of divination. On pages 122 through 132 of Robiou Lamarche's *Tainos and Caribs*, the author describes at length the patterns and behavior exhibited by the Taino in building their dwellings and ceremonial huts directly influenced by this system of divination.<sup>149</sup> I recommend anyone interested in comparing the construction of the Palo Monte munanzo and the Taino construction of its religious, social and spatial structures to do so, since I am not equipped to do so.

Following Robiou Lamarche's exploration of the Taino, he delves into the Carib's world and its mythology and cosmology. This section of the book is perhaps the most important contribution of the book to my investigation, since, as we have seen, Ramon Pane did not record any myth or cosmology of these peoples and they remained stigmatized as cannibals and looters with not much sophistication. Although originally they were the inhabitants of the Lesser Antilles and this thesis is concerned with the Caribbean Amerindian influence on Palo Monte, a Cuban creole religious manifestation, these people were transported all across the Caribbean as forced labor (see Chapter 5 for more on this practice by the Spanish). Therefore, if we must truly trace the Caribbean Amerindian influence on the creole religion of Palo Monte, which came about during the colonial period, we must necessarily include information on the Caribs' beliefs and practices. Moreover, since the Kallinago warriors coming from South America, ended up

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<sup>149</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 125

in a transculturation process of incorporating the Taino worldview, there must have been a synthesis of these two systems of beliefs and practices that over time cross-pollinated each other through the common tongue, Arawak. This occurred because during their raids on Taino chiefdoms Caribs kidnapped Taino women, who they took as wives. These women in turn transmitted their language to their sons and daughters and busied themselves with the construction of pottery and domestic utensils which infused Carib culture with the Taino worldview.<sup>150</sup>

However, the first point of divergence between the Tainos and the Caribs was that of the institutionalized social hierarchy. Whereas the Taino chiefdoms legitimized their systems of social hierarchy as models or representations, which reflected the truths of the divine hierarchy, the Caribs had in fact quite the opposite conception. The Caribs did not have a defined social hierarchy, which produced as a consequence, the freedom to not demand in return the existence of a model in their social structures. The Caribs had no ruling class and in fact there were no commonly accepted deities within their worldview. As I explained above, the Caribs social structure consisted of men and women of different ethnic backgrounds, which resulted in a worldview, whose principles laid in animistic and individualistic conceptions of the world. In the Carib religious Habitus, each person had a personal protective spirit, which they claimed as their personal god. Furthermore, there were different words for this god based on gender, with the used of

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<sup>150</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 125

*Ichetriku* and *Nechemeraku*, words for men and women respectively, and which became the namesake of their personal gods.<sup>151</sup>

Further subdivisions were prevalent in the Carib religious culture. Men called the soul *akambue*, while women called it *opoyem*, which seems to have been related to the Taino word for the soul of a person after death, *opia*. There was also a name reserved for the spirit that performed good deeds. This was *Icheíri* if it was for a male and *Chemyn* or *Chemijn* if it was a female spirit. The word for women's beneficial spirits derives from the Arawak word for the Taino cemi of that name. On the other hand, the word for the spirit that caused chaos and performed malevolent deeds such as disruptions and upsets was called, for both men and women, *Mabouya*, *Mapoya* or *Maboya*. However, much like Africans, the Caribs did not believe in evil spirits, but rather saw spirits as being potentially good or bad and were only defined as such when their behavior corresponded to one of these extremes.<sup>152</sup>

The Island-Caribs as they became known in order to differentiate them from the South American Caribs due to their ethnically diverse social constitution (I will use Caribs from here on as the name for these Island-Caribs) believed that the human body had three "souls". *Maboya* was one of these and was considered the third of these souls. It originated in the arms and was considered to move, after the death of the person on whose body it was residing, to the woods in order to become the spirit of the forest. This,

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<sup>151</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 216

<sup>152</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 216

third soul of the body, the Caribs believed, transformed into the “evil spirits to which they attributed everything sinister and ill-fated”. The second spirit or “soul” present in the human body was called *Uméku* and it was located in the head. This spirit went, after the death of the individual in which it resided, to the edge of the sea to wreck boats. The first spirit or “soul” of the human body was called *Yuanni* or *Lanichi* and it was considered the main spirit of the human body. This spirit resided in the heart and it moved to the other world after the death of the persons in which it was residing. This other world for the Caribs was a place found in the distant West, much like the Taino belief of *Coaibai* (*Coaybay* for Robiou Lamarche).<sup>153</sup> Once more, I claim that the representation on earth of this place most likely should have been located on the island of Cuba, the farthest West of the Islands found in the Antilles, underscoring the importance of the cult of the ancestors and the cult of the dead on the island of Cuba. Moreover, the Caribs believed (much like the Vikings) that if the deceased person had been a courageous warrior in life, his main spirit would go to idyllic islands where there was abundant food and they would spend their time in dances, games and parties with Arawak slaves serving them. On the other hand, if the deceased person had been a cowardly or timid warrior in life, his main spirit would go to a desert region where the Arawak enemies reigned.<sup>154</sup>

Although there was no social structure and no ruling class, the Caribs had a *Behique* type figure in their communities. Their shamans (to use the modern terminology

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<sup>153</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 216

<sup>154</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 216



for these indigenous medicine men) were called *Bóyez*, *Boyez* or *Boye* and were in charge of the spirit world, for which they earned much respect. In fact the *Boyez* was a very distinguished and well-known person among the Caribs. The process of initiation and selection occurred while they were quite young and was a voluntary process by which the young man would decide that he wanted to dedicate his life at an early age. This consecration occurred in the Carib *carbet* (big huts where the Caribs used to meet when to celebrate festivities and to welcome non-Carib representatives of other villages and European nations<sup>155</sup>), where a small opening (called *tourar*) was left in order to allow the Coribib Chemin (a type of smaller owl found in the Caribbean; scientific name-*Spéoyto cunincularia*) which was seen as a messenger of the afterlife (see Chapter 5 subsection titled ‘Maboya, Ndoki, the Coribib Chemin and the Lechuza’ for more on this topic).<sup>156</sup>

Another festivity or ritual which was performed in the Carib *carbet* was the *caouynage*. This ritual or festivity had much in common with the Taino *areito*. However, although it was also used to mark important milestones in the lives of the Caribs, it also served as a tool or platform in which internal discords and tautness were balanced out among the Carib. Caribs in fact celebrated a multiplicity of milestones and socially significant events. Examples of these events were the celebration of a male firstborn, the initiation of a warrior or the cutting of their son’s hair, celebrations due to the preparation of a type of orchard they planted, the capture of a turtle (curious in the

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<sup>155</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 213-214

<sup>156</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 217

face of the Taino myth of the Caracaracol and the female turtle springing from his wound) and the construction or the launching (for raids) of canoes. These *caouynages* sometimes lasted as much as eight days in which case it was used to celebrate the appointment of a captain (naval captain) the formation of a council to go to war or due to their return from war.<sup>157</sup>

The *caouynage* was summoned by the *ubutu* (chief) of the village (not to be confused with the *Caciques* that owned vast lands and were seen as powerful semi-divine entities) which led to the gathering of about two hundred to three hundred people. These people were led by the performance of songs and the playing of flutes of bone or wood (called *couloura*) and were accompanied by *maracas* and drums made from hollow trees. Moreover, when the *ubutu* had called for the *caouynage*, the women would be tasked with organizing the tableware and the preparation of the cassava and of an intoxicating drink called *uicú* which they drank for this purpose. Meanwhile, men were tasked with bringing fish and iguana to eat and both men and women painted their entire bodies with different colors and designs. However, men also adorned themselves with crowns of feathers, *caracolis* (adornments made of shell) and necklaces. Also, there were other men who smeared themselves with some sticky liquids so that loose feathers could be blown over them and they would stick all over their bodies.<sup>158</sup> As we can see from the description of the *caouynage*, these ritual performance or festivity shared some

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<sup>157</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 213-214

<sup>158</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 213-214

similarities with the Taino *areito*. However, the Carib ritual seemed to have been much more complex and to have been a more useful tool in Carib society than in the Taino.

Meanwhile, inside the *carbet*, the Caribs placed offering of fresh cassava and *uicú* over a small table called *matutu*. These offering were part of the ritualistic veneration of the family spirits. As for the *Boyez*, the elder among them was tasked with conducting a ceremony in the dark of night in which he sang mournful songs, blew tobacco smoke and entered into a trance in the center of the *carbet*. This *Boyez* invoked a god who seems to have been a much purified god that required of the *Boyez* and the community to conduct rigorous fasting before calling upon him. Moreover, the *Boyez* presented the offerings while lying on a hammock. If the person for whom the sessions were being conducted was a man, then this god presented itself as male, but if a woman then this god would present itself as a goddess. Beyond these practices there are no reported religious activities among the Caribs. Along with the lack of temples and sacred figures, there was an overall lack of sophistication or elaborate performance of religious belief among the Caribs (according to Robiou Lamarche). The only religious offerings in nature by the Caribs as recorded by the French chroniclers of the Lesser Antilles was that of the cassava, which they called *anacri*, and of the first fruit harvest that each villager could perform in the privacy of their own homes.<sup>159</sup>

Perhaps the only communal ceremony that united the main ideological values of the Caribs was the sacrifice of an enemy warrior. The Carib anthropophagic rite of an enemy warrior was the central ritual around which and for which Carib society revolved.

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<sup>159</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 217 & 219

Moreover, it was acknowledged (even by the early French chroniclers) that this rite was the apex of an annual cycle of festive rituals performed by the Caribs and thus informed their feast of feasts. For the Caribs all social activities were oriented towards this rite, which in their eyes manifested a communal climax of celebratory festivities. As mentioned in Ramon Pane's manuscript this explains the lengths to which the Caribs went in order to capture enemy warriors (sacrificing their lives in the process). Nonetheless, the anthropophagic rite of the Caribs should not be understood as a practice aimed at purely consuming human beings but as a complex ideology which was informed by multiple religious and socio-cultural values. These can be condensed to the memory of their myths of origin, the commemoration of their ancestors by avenging past enemy insults (due to the Caribs lives lost in battle by which they redeemed through consuming, the enemy) and to reaffirm traditional values and maintain the social cohesion of the Kallinago warrior lifestyle. Although I have included this paragraph in order to address their most important religious ritual and simultaneously address the misconceptions about the Caribs (as their observed their amicability with French and other villager representatives<sup>160</sup>) cannibalistic practices, this ritual does not merit further discussion because it does not seem to have any expression in Palo Monte.<sup>161</sup>

The Carib *Boyez*, as a tribal shaman, was concerned with controlling the spirits rather than concerned with gods. He played four roles within Carib society. The

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<sup>160</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 213-214

<sup>161</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 226-230

intervention of the *Boyez* was sought when he was needed to cure an illness, he was needed to avenge a wrong received by someone seeking his consultation, to seek his inspired decision about the appropriateness of pursuing war and lastly to seek his powers over the spirits in order to expel an evil spirit tormenting a villager. Unlike the Taino, the Caribs did not go to see the ill man or woman, for fear of exacerbating his/her illness. Therefore, the services of the *Boyez* played an essential role in the religious lives of the Caribs. The healing ceremony performed by *Boyez* was much like that of the *Behique*, but with the difference being that an extraction of either stones of particulate matter (bound together) was not performed. Although they rubbed the skin of the sick person and blew and sucked on it like the *Behique* did, they were only aiming at extracting or removing the spirit that had caused the disease. They also did not make use of the *cohoba* or *güeyo*. Instead, they used the tobacco smoke as a *panacea*.<sup>162</sup>

The rest of the preserved information on the Carib worldview (its mythologies and practices) is directly related to the cosmic forces and the celestial bodies. Due to the high complexity (in my view and which goes against Robiou Lamarche's opinion of Caribs' religious beliefs and practices being less sophisticated than Tainos) of these belief systems and their focus on the celestial bodies and primacy of these forces as the center of their practices and views I will not delve deeply into their cosmology. Although the Palo Mayombe branch sees the origin of the supernatural forces giving life to the *nganga*

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<sup>162</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 217 & 219

and the *nfumbe* as celestial<sup>163</sup>, their cosmologies differ greatly (although equally advanced and scientifically admirable) on their explanation and outlook on these forces.<sup>164</sup> Hence, what follows is a short summary of their religious Habitus provided for the benefit of the scholar reading this thesis, in case there are commonalities that I may have missed.

First, we must keep in mind that due to the syncretic process by which Carib society was built over time, there are shared beliefs between the Taino and the Caribs. However, due to the second wave of migrating of Kallinago warriors from South America, who brought with them their traditional views (with some modifications that seemed to have occurred over time) the Carib systems, ended up being the first syncretic experiment of the Caribbean. Overall, they shared an animistic religious Habitus but with a highly developed cosmological basis for them. Although there was a belief in the spirits of nature (as we have seen) there was also a critical role played by other beliefs. An example of this was the belief by the Caribs that the Great Serpent of the celestial spheres found in the constellation of *Bakámo*.<sup>165</sup> This constellation is what today is referred to as the constellation of Scorpius. Although in its entirety it stretched from Scorpius through

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<sup>163</sup>. Rojas Calderon, Carlos Alberto, *Palo Brakamundo* (Bloomington: Palibrio, 2011), 160-161

<sup>164</sup>. For a further and more thorough explanation of these cosmological belief systems see Robiou Lamarche's "Tainos and Caribs" pages 231 through 261 for the Caribs cosmological belief system and Kimbwandende Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau's "African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kongo: Tying the Spiritual Knot, Principles of Life & Living" for the Bantu-Kongo and Palo Mayombe cosmological belief system.

<sup>165</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 262

Sagittarius ending in Capricorn, which constituted the head, body and tail of the Great Serpent they refer to as *Bakámo*.<sup>166</sup>

The importance of these cosmology for understanding the beliefs and practices of the Caribs is directly tied to the *Boyez*. According to the Caribs, the Great Serpent was associated with the *Boyez*. For this reason it received veneration and tobacco offerings. Moreover, the Caribs believed that the Great Serpent was the bearer of the magic *toúlála*. According to their beliefs, they were able to acquire this magic plant (the arrowroot-*Maranta arundinacea*; a small and edible tuber), from which they were able to make an antidote against poisonous arrows as wells as an amulet which they wore as protection against the malignant forces of the *Maboya*. Moreover, the location and movement of the celestial bodies and stars informed and directed the social life of the Caribs. The main idea shared by the Caribs was that these celestial bodies and the cosmos in general was the place of residence of the spirits of earthly things. Hence, they saw these celestial bodies as analogous to objects, plants, animals and their ancestors. Therefore, when these celestial bodies were visible from earth they saw them as spirits descending to earth to visit them.<sup>167</sup>

This religious Habitus focused on the origin of things in the celestial bodies, constellations and stars informed and governed the social structure and life of the Carib people. For example, the presence of the Celestial Turtle (*Catáluyuman*) was the source

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<sup>166</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 248-249

<sup>167</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 262

of the spawning ability of the sea turtles. Another example of this was the departure of the Big Dipper, Celestial Canoe (*Lukúni-yáruba*), which marked the beginning of their expeditions and their raids to enemy villages.

Nonetheless, the Carib religious Habitus contains a contradictory and yet interdependent system of beliefs which played a complimentary role in their social life. This can be seen in the Carib belief in the absence of these celestial bodies. An important example of this is when the absence of the *Isúla* in the sky meant to the Carib that the ban on demolishing the ceiba for the purposes of building a canoe was lifted and the ceiba can be cut once it had lost all its leaves. Another important contradictory and complementary belief within their religious Habitus is the Carib myth of the *Maboya* eating the moon or a piece of the sun. According to the Caribs the *Maboya*, which had a human origin went through a transformation in the forest once it had left the human body, and from there it elevated itself to the sky or celestial spheres in order to produce an act of cannibalism in which it ate pieces of the moon. This in turn brought about a cosmic imbalance, epitomized by an eclipse, which represented the negative aspect of cannibalism with its antisocial potential.<sup>168</sup>

Nonetheless, although the ceiba was seen as the World Tree by the Caribs and was much respected as in the Taino and Mayan society, the Caribs differed in their beliefs about it. Mainly, the ceiba was seen in connection with *Acáyouman* (Cayman), which was in turn inherently related with the Milky Way. *Acáyouman* was the mythical character, which provided the basis for the anthropophagic rite of the Caribs. This

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<sup>168</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 262



mythical character in turn is based on the first Kallinago naval captain who arrived in the Eastern Antilles and who exterminated all the natives of these islands. After his death at the hands of his own children and his children's children, via poisoning, which they did for his cruelties, he became a monstrous fish called *Akeuman*. This means he still lives in a river full of life. The word "*Akeuman*" (this story is from Dominica; the place where he was said to reside and which seems to have had a dialect of the Kalinago language) corresponds to the word *acáyouma* (which meant Cayman). Through this mythical cycle, the historical ancestor became the mythical character *Acáyouman*, which became known as the father of the Kallinago lineage and who was visualized as a monstrous fish in the celestial vault. The river full of life, on which the mythical character was said to reside was none other than the Milky Way. The Caribs conceptualized as the Celestial River that connected and communicated with the sky and the earth.<sup>169</sup>

Thence, *Acáyouman* (the Celestial Cayman and the Spirit of the Old Father, which represented the Milky Way and which was seen in the sky during the months of September and October was likened to the established anthropophagic rite practiced by the Caribs during these months. Moreover, the Caribs called this month (the two months were seen as one) *mubé*, which was the name they gave to the West Indian *jobo* tree, because it was the month in which it bore fruits. The *jobo* tree also had an important mythological basis in the religious Habitus of the Caribs since the myth of the *jobo* tree was used by *Acáyouman* to sculpt his daughter. Moreover, the *jobo* tree in Taino mythology was the tree from which asexual beings descended and which were later

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<sup>169</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 231-232

carved by the *Inriri* (woodpecker) into women. For these reasons, Robiou Lamarche concludes that the anthropophagic rite practice by the Caribs can be traced back to the legend of *Acáyouman*, which, as his name may suggest, was the father of the lineage that established anthropophagy as well as the beginning of warrior expeditions in canoes across the Caribbean Ocean.<sup>170</sup>

In this respect, the ceiba was associated with *Acáyouman*, since, as we have seen in the paragraphs above, the canoes they used during the months of September and October were made from the ceiba when *Acáyouman* was not in the sky. These canoes then served as the vehicle by which the Caribs could purposefully conduct raids across the Antilles for the sole purpose of capturing enemies in order to perform the cannibalistic ritual for which they became so famous and stigmatized. However, the ceiba was also seen as the abode of the Great Spirit of the Trees and was much respected and guarded for this reason.<sup>171</sup> Notwithstanding, these were not the only sources of contradiction in the Carib religious Habitus.

Other interdependent, contradictory and complementary belief systems were manifest through the variations of Carib worldview recorded among the different Islands of the Lesser Antilles. An example from Dominica and which demonstrates the differences in the dialect of the Kalinago language is that of *Olubera*, the Great Serpent, which was beneficial but could also kill if specific terms of devotion and sacrificial

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<sup>170</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 231-232

<sup>171</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 262

propitiation were not followed by the Dominica Caribs. Other examples include the *Juluca* (rainbow), which was interpreted as evil if seen on land because it could cause death but was beneficial if seen at sea because the navigation season of the Carib naval warriors followed the Atlantic Hurricane season; the solar and diurnal birds *guaraguao* (the red-tailed hawk) and the *yeretté* (hummingbird; of importance due to the myth of the ascendancy of *Luna* (the Moon) to the sky and the hummingbird bringing its daughter *Híali*, a product of an incestuous relationship with her brother, which is rewarded by Luna's father<sup>172</sup>) was also seen as a contradiction to the *Coribib chemin*, the messenger bird of the afterlife and a nocturnal animal. Yet, another important contradictory opposition placed in the worldview of the Caribs was between the *toúlála* plant and what they considered its rival, the poisonous plant, *mancenillier* or *manchineel* (scientific name- *Hippomane mancinella*) which informed the war and peace aspects of the Carib worldview and its complex practices.<sup>173</sup>

I will also make use of Roberto G. Muñoz-Pando's paper on the mortuary beliefs of the Tainos and Caribs. Although the paper contains high amount of good information, there are a few things the author was able to compile about their mortuary beliefs that were not yet included above. Once again, instead of providing all the information found in his paper, I will only add those details that are relevant to my investigation and which have not been discussed above. Since the paper was supervised by Sabastian Robiou

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<sup>172</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 254

<sup>173</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 262-263

Lamarche and deals solely with the mortuary beliefs and practices of the Tainos and Caribs, which Robiou Lamarche addressed superficially in his book, exploring this paper was the logical next step in my investigation of the Caribbean Amerindian influence on Palo Monte. Also, since the topic of the cult of the dead ancestry and mortuary rituals are an integral part of the Palo Monte religion, this paper will be used as the last source of information on the Caribbean Amerindians before we move to their influence on the Palo Monte religion.

The first important piece of information provided by Muñoz-Pando not yet investigated above is his archival recovery of Dr. Agustín Stahl's investigation about Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo Valdés, known simply as Oviedo, who related that there was a *Cacique* (necessarily Taino due to his title) who died and was interred with two of his wives alive. This was done against their will. Although I have this book in its original form<sup>174</sup>, it is rather illegible due to its font and archaic form Spanish, which I am not able to comprehend fully (which is why I abstained from working directly with it). However, as Muñoz-Pando tells us, Stahl believed that we should not trust this story as credible. He believed it represented a joke on the gullible Oviedo. Moreover, Stahl believed that this story was nothing more than the weaponizing of a false story by the Spanish as a propaganda tool in order to exterminate the supposedly savage and barbaric Caribbean Amerindians. I agree with this observation rather than the first, because it falls directly into our Decolonial project of disentangling the historical trope of indigenous extinction

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<sup>174</sup>. Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés, G., *Sumario de la Natural Historia de las Indias* (Toledo: Biblioteca Nacional de España, 1526)

in the Caribbean (remarkable for a work published in 1889; Agustín Stahl *Los Indios Borinqueños. Estudios Etnográficos*<sup>175</sup>).<sup>176</sup>

Muñoz-Pando writes about another finding by Stahl. In this case, we are told that the *Caciques* were wrapped in cotton fabrics from head to toes in a tightfitting when they died. Then the Tainos would make a hole in the earth with wooden walls as support, where they would sit the dead *Cacique* in a small bench. This was made of wood as well as victuals, armaments (which included *macanas* (a surviving Taino word), bows and arrows), and adornments (which included lithic rings and jewels) for the journey or life after death. Apparently, the Tainos did this so that the body of the *Cacique* would be interred in a sort of funeral vault, which they would ceremonially follow with areitos. Although this is recorded as a ritual done for a *Cacique* (both men and women), the fact of the matter is that it is not known whether this was a practice that was reserved for them only or it included *naborías* (common man or woman), *nitaínos* (a sort of royal or noble class of warriors) and the *Behiques*. Nonetheless, Stahl concludes that the most likely scenario was that these social classes within the Taino social hierarchy probably had simpler and less elaborate burials done on the outskirts of the *yucayeque* (the Taino villages). A practice we can say with absolutely certainty (according to Stahl), was not part of the Taino religious and cultural Habitus was the practice of cremation. Although there are no known Taino cemeteries, a practice such as cremation would have been too

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<sup>175</sup>. Stahl, A., *Los Indios Borinqueños. Estudios Etnográficos* (Puerto-Rico: Impr. y Libr. de Acosta, 1889)

<sup>176</sup>. Muñoz-Pando, Roberto G., and Sebastian Robiou Lamarche, *Creencias Mortuorias De Los Aborígenes Antillanos, Taínos Y Caribes: Estudio Etnohistórico Y Social. Análisis de los Taínos y Caribes: etnohistoria, arqueología y literatura oral* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, n.d.), 6

scandalous (according to Stahl) for the early Spanish Chroniclers (because it went against the Christian funerary practices of the epoch<sup>177</sup>).

The following information important for the thesis deals with the Caribs. Their funerary rituals were apparently more preserved through multiple documentations by the French chroniclers than the Spanish chroniclers did of the Tainos. For example, it was recorded by the French chroniclers that when a Carib warrior died in battle, his compatriots would do everything humanly possible to recover his body so that it is not eaten by the enemy. Rather, they would bury the body in their own lands. Beyond the worry of cannibalism of the dead warrior, the Caribs also practiced a highly complex funerary ritual, which fortunately has been preserved. First, the Caribs would make a pit in the middle of the *bohío*, which was three feet in depth. Then they would wash the body, the feet and the head and they would rub it with oil as well. Later, they would wrap the body in a newly made cotton bed put it in the pit in a fetal position with the feet pointing down toward the center of the earth. Apparently, unlike the Taino, the Caribs did not place victuals or armaments in the tomb of the deceased. After the corpse was placed inside in the aforementioned way, a big plank of wood was placed over it.<sup>178</sup>

The Carib funerary rituals also consisted of a cultural display, which included crying by the women as their husbands would console them. Gloomy songs would also

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<sup>177</sup>. Muñoz-Pando, Roberto G., and Sebastian Robiou Lamarche, *Creencias Mortuorias De Los Aborígenes Antillanos, Taínos Y Caribes: Estudio Etnohistórico Y Social. Análisis de los Taínos y Caribes: etnohistoria, arqueología y literatura oral* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, n.d.), 6-7 & 9

<sup>178</sup>. Muñoz-Pando, Roberto G., and Sebastian Robiou Lamarche, *Creencias Mortuorias De Los Aborígenes Antillanos, Taínos Y Caribes: Estudio Etnohistórico Y Social. Análisis de los Taínos y Caribes: etnohistoria, arqueología y literatura oral* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, n.d.), 6-7, 9 & 14

be sung by the women, with some of them even throwing earth with their hands over the pit. Lastly, the Caribs would construct a fire over the pit, which had been closed by then. This served as the fire in which the clothes of the deceased were burnt if they were not given away by the family. Moreover, these family members, but those close to the deceased, would cut their hair as a sign of mourning. If the deceased had slaves, they would either be killed or freed by the discretion of the family. Another important practice, which the Caribs performed, was that of fasting. Apparently, this was not done for the benefit of the deceased, but for the benefit of the living so that they may keep having good fortune.<sup>179</sup>

In case there was a family member, who was not able to attend the funeral, it was obligatory for them to visit the tomb later (in order to pay respect and attract good fortune). In the anniversary of the death of the individual and once the corpse had decomposed, they would have gathered together again in order to cry and hit the floor once more, but with the addition of their ceremonial and intoxicating drink *uicú*, which they did for the purpose of ailing their miseries and memories of the deceased. Although the Carib cultural and religious Habitus was based on a Gerontocracy based on oral traditions much like the Taino, this seems to have been the only recorded tribute or veneration of the ancestors performed by the Caribs.<sup>180</sup> In conclusion the funerary beliefs

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<sup>179</sup>. Muñoz-Pando, Roberto G., and Sebastian Robiou Lamarche, *Creencias Mortuorias De Los Aborígenes Antillanos, Taínos Y Caribes: Estudio Etnohistórico Y Social. Análisis de los Taínos y Caribes: etnohistoria, arqueología y literature oral* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, n.d.), 6-7

<sup>180</sup>. Muñoz-Pando, Roberto G., and Sebastian Robiou Lamarche, *Creencias Mortuorias De Los Aborígenes Antillanos, Taínos Y Caribes: Estudio Etnohistórico Y Social. Análisis de los Taínos y Caribes: etnohistoria, arqueología y literature oral* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, n.d.), 11 & 13

and practices of the Tainos and Caribs consisted of highly elaborate rituals infused with codified cultural and religious meanings that we are not able to decipher today. Although in the Palo Monte religion there is a funerary rite reserved for the *Tata Nkisi* or *ngangulero*, a ritual named *llanto* (crying), these funerary and mortuary rites do not resemble the Caribbean Amerindian practices, but rather seems more like a Kongo preservation (see Ana Stela de Almeida Cunha's *Muerte, muertos y "llanto" palero* for a somewhat extensive treatment of these ritual of Palo Monte<sup>181</sup>).

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<sup>181</sup>. Cunha, A., *Muerte, muertos y "llanto" palero* (Ateliers d'anthropologie, [online] (38). Available at: <<https://journals.openedition.org/ateliers/9413>> [Accessed 8 February 2021], 2013)



## Chapter 5

*“Maza matia keyokanga nlele ko”*

*“Agua hirviendo no quema la ropa”*

*“Boiling water does not burn clothes”*

*-Palo Monte proverb*

### Religious Syncretism: Amerindian Contributions to the Afro-Caribbean Congo-Derived

#### Religion of Palo Monte

#### **Introduction**

For a study of the Amerindian influence on the religion of Palo Monte to be complete it is essential to begin with a historical reconstruction of the context in which these two communities encountered each other. This should lead us to a history of the African and Amerindian marronage and the creation of *palenques* as alternative societies or counterhegemonic cultures offering opportunities for both communities to preserve their traditions in colonial Cuba. By communicating and cohabitating freely and away from the preying eyes of the Spanish and their Catholicism the African runaway slave and the Amerindian native were able to share and exchange their religious Habitus with one another with the purpose of finding similar ground from which to build their codependent survival. Based on the elements of the religious Habitus of the African and the Caribbean Amerindian, it is not difficult to comprehend how the most important contributions to the Afro-Cuban religion of Palo Monte from the Amerindian natives should have unfolded in the bowels of these self-contained *palenques*.

Confronted with the present need for survival and adaptation to the new flora and fauna, and the new socio-political context, the Congo maroons most likely saw refuge in the cosmogony, cosmology and Cosmvision of the native Amerindians. My hypothesis is that the Congo maroons fused the Caribbean Amerindian religious Habitus with their traditional beliefs and practices, especially where these did not equip them or serve them with the appropriate tools for dealing with life and its new demands in the Caribbean landscape. Following this line of thinking and based on information provided by Chinaea in his excellent academic paper I have identified some signs of the Amerindian influence on Palo Monte and its contemporary expressions among descendants of the Kongo maroon in Cuba. It would seem to be a profitable approach if we start with the history of the maroons and their *palenque* societies as spaces of dialogue and fusion of religious and cultural goods.

### **Common Themes**

*Cimarronaje, Cimarrones, Palenques, Behiques, Boyez, Paleros and Santeros*

The phenomenon of marronage was a common tool used by both communities in the Caribbean and the Americas. The Caribbean Amerindians and the African slaves brought to the Caribbean used this form of resistance as a last resort attempt to reclaim their freedom. This Diasporic marronage (as Chinaea names it) constituted an important part of the colonial era, both for the Spanish (in a negative sense) and for the Indigenous and African slaves (in a positive sense). The phenomena of marronage across the Caribbean challenged the Spanish hegemony (in both religious and authoritative terms)

via the establishment of *aldeas/palenques* on the outskirts (most times in the mountains and forest) of town in which they created social and economic networks with slaves, pirates, contrabandists and representatives of other competing colonial and rival nations.<sup>182</sup> Most interesting and informing about these rebel societies is the etymology of the word *cimarrón* (maroon) itself. This word originates from the amalgamation of the Hispanicized Taino expression *cima* (which was used for undomesticated plants and animals) and the Spanish word for the peak of a mountain.<sup>183</sup> Hence, by the utilization of this word we can perhaps conclude that the cohabitation and establishment of these *palenques* by both the Caribbean Indigenous and African maroons was a common feature of the Colonial era.

The overall picture of the maroons today is a split one, with some writers declaring these individuals as heroes, warriors, masters of the wilderness, freedom fighters and keepers of African spiritual values and others, especially European writers, describing them as harassers, kidnappers, killers and robbers who stuck stubbornly to their “primitive” ways in their *palenques* and in complete disconnection from the rest of the civilized world.<sup>184</sup> Chinaea observes that, as a mode of survival, much of the

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<sup>182</sup>. Chinaea, Jorge L., *Diasporic Marronage: Some Colonial and Intercolonial Repercussions of Overland and Waterborne Slave Flight, With Special Reference to the Caribbean Archipelago* (Revista Brasileira Do Caribe, Associação Caruaruense De Ensino Superior Brasil X (19): 259-284. doi:1518-6784, 2009), 259-262

<sup>183</sup>. Chinaea, Jorge L., *Diasporic Marronage: Some Colonial and Intercolonial Repercussions of Overland and Waterborne Slave Flight, With Special Reference to the Caribbean Archipelago* (Revista Brasileira Do Caribe, Associação Caruaruense De Ensino Superior Brasil X (19): 259-284. doi:1518-6784, 2009), 263

<sup>184</sup>. Chinaea, Jorge L., *Diasporic Marronage: Some Colonial and Intercolonial Repercussions of Overland and Waterborne Slave Flight, With Special Reference to the*

dissemination of African culture in the Caribbean across vast regions of lands occurred thanks to the efforts by the black maroons to throw off the scent of Europeans by traveling long distances of land and water and setting up communication networks with different members of the strata of society (including so sympathizing whites). Moreover, this diasporic marronage include the curious phenomenon described by David Waldstreicher as “self-fashioning”, which consisted of African maroons impersonating free blacks, mestizos and (more importantly for our research) Amerindians. According to Rubén Silié, this included adopting the cultural markers of these individuals and hence through performance, integrated these cultural beliefs and practices through embodied cultural performance (See Yolanda Covington-Ward’s introduction to her book *Gesture and Power* for a full discussion of this theory as applied to African and Afro-Caribbean religions and the Congo religious-landscape in particular<sup>185</sup>).<sup>186</sup> Hence, if we take performance theory as a foundation for understanding the diffusion and survival necessity of the African maroons in escaping the European attempts at eradicating marronage together with the fact that they had set up establishments in conjunction with Caribbean Amerindians it would not be a stretch to conclude that the adoption and fusion of Amerindian beliefs and practices was much more pervasive than we would like to imagine.

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*Caribbean Archipelago* (Revista Brasileira Do Caribe, Associação Caruaruense De Ensino Superior Brasil X (19): 259-284. doi:1518-6784, 2009), 263

<sup>185</sup>. Covington-Ward, Y., *Gesture And Power* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018)

<sup>186</sup>. China, Jorge L., *Diasporic Marronage: Some Colonial and Intercolonial Repercussions of Overland and Waterborne Slave Flight, With Special Reference to the Caribbean Archipelago* (Revista Brasileira Do Caribe, Associação Caruaruense De Ensino Superior Brasil X (19): 259-284. doi:1518-6784, 2009), 265

We also need to know something about the nature of these *palenques*. According to George Brandon, *palenques* consisted of scattered cabins with attached plots of cultivated land (resembling the *conucos* of the Amerindians). These hidden communities hidden in the belly of the wilderness depended on the defense strategy of set ups of pits full of hardwood poles sunk in the ground of the pit, which were deliberately forked and sharpened to the sharpness of a knife. The maroons also depended on their ability to secure pistols and rifles from white contrabandists, pirates and representatives of other colonial nations, which wanted to support the insurrection of these runaway slaves against their former masters. Following this, Brandon tells us that although some *palenques* may have constituted an ethnically homogeneous community, the majority of them seem to have been populated by a varied and heterogeneous set of culturally diverse inhabitants who were seeking refuge away from the common evil of Spanish slavery. Nonetheless, Brandon believes that it is difficult to conclude which form and what level of acculturation were achieved within these *palenques*. Hence, the religious practices and beliefs of the maroons cannot be elucidated. The nature of this religiosity remains a mystery with the only historical (and biased) note on the structural system of these communities arriving via the works of Francisco Perez De la Riva which tell us that these *palenques* were constituted by “Men and women [who] lived in absolute promiscuity and were dominated by their leaders (who they called Captains [Capataz in Spanish]) and by the sorcerer or santeros, who would at times function as witch doctor.”<sup>187</sup>

However, Brandon points out that the use of the word “*santeros*” here points to an anachronism, and that De la Riva himself proclaims that this word was not in fact used by

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<sup>187</sup>. Brandon, George, *Santeria from Africa to the New World* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000), 65-66

the maroons themselves to describe their priest, doctor or sorcerer. Brandon traces this usage of Santeria in Cuban historical/anthropological works to an umbrella term for all Afro-Cuban religious forms. We must conclude that the religious landscape of these *palenques* was dominated by these types of ritual specialists. A *Santero/Santera* did not necessarily denote specifically a Yoruba, a Congo or Arara priest/doctor/sorcerer but an indigenous and traditional form of religious medicine, as embodied in the medicine man. Therefore, as we have seen in Chapter 4 of the Caribbean Amerindian religious Habitus, we can include the practices and beliefs of the Tainos and Caribs to this admixture. Since, the only thing that can be concluded about the religious landscape of these *palenques* is that beyond the fact that they were utilizing a traditional or “primitive” form of religious manifestation we are not able to determine the origin or its form.<sup>188</sup> After all, the intercessions, prominence, similarities in role and function, which the *Behique*, the *Boyez*, the *Palero* and the *Santero* manifested/performed within the community of their respective societies are overwhelmingly parallel to each other and point to the most easily marked meeting point of these cultures.

#### *Language, Maracas, Baobab and the Ceiba*

According to Deren, the meeting ground (beyond the spatial location) between the imported Africans and the Amerindians was the Spanish language.<sup>189</sup> The aforementioned observation makes sense on the grounds that being enslaved and

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<sup>188</sup>. Brandon, George, *Santeria from Africa to the New World* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2000), 66

<sup>189</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 271

conquered by the Spanish would lead both groups of people to seek the opportunity to communicate in the mutually enforced language of the conqueror. Furthermore, due to the common hatred of the oppressor both groups would have felt the need to work together in order to fight and survive under the yoke of the Spanish colonizers. Spanish then, would be a good indicator of the remains of Amerindian beliefs and practices on the surviving creole manifestations of the Caribbean Diaspora. Since, as Deren rightly claims that even though the French (in Haiti) began importing Africans after 1677, Spanish would have still remained the sacred and ritual language of their religious practices (as contributed by the Amerindians) because of the fact that they were almost extinct by the time the French period of colonization began.<sup>190</sup>

The legacy of the Amerindian language in the Caribbean today is too extensive to cover in this study, and it merits an independent study. However, since the goal of this study is to trace the influence that the Amerindian beliefs and practices had on the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora, it becomes more manageable. In Cuba, the tradition of Palo Monte is full of Bantu and Spanish language words and songs and on first inspection we would be led to believe that the absorption of the Amerindian beliefs and practices by the Central African Diaspora in Cuba would be restricted to the Spanish portions. However, on further investigation we start to see some signs of the Taino and Carib language legacy. The name of the *Mpungo Zarabanda*, which is the name of one of the 7 *Kimpungulu* (the pure or ideal form of the nkisi (force, spirit or energy)),<sup>191</sup> seems to be

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<sup>190</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 271-272

<sup>191</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 44

one of these borrowings from the Amerindian language directly related to their beliefs. While the rest of the *Kimpungulu* have Spanish or Bantu names (*Lucero*, *Vence Bataya* (also called *Watariamba*; its Bantu name), *Siete Rayos* (also called *Nsasi*, the bantu name), *Mama Chola*, *Centella*, *Baluande* (bantu in origin), *Cobayende* (also called *Koballende* or *Kuballende*), *Gurunfinda* (bantu in origin), *Lukankazi* (bantu in origin) and *Nganga Kissi* (bantu in origin<sup>192</sup>), *Zarabanda* seems to be an amalgamation of the Amerindian word *zara*-meaning corn<sup>193</sup> and *banda*, the Spanish word for band or the Bantu word, *banda*-meaning to go up or goes up.<sup>194</sup>

In Palo Mayombe, *munansos* are also called *bateys*, like the Taino courts for playing ball.<sup>195</sup> The *batey* was the central plaza in the village, where ceremonial practices such as the ceremonial ball game called by the same name and *areitos* took place. *Areito* consisted of the entire community joining in singing, dancing and chanting the religious repertory of the tribe (see page 121 of Robiou Lamarche's *Taino and Caribs*<sup>196</sup>).<sup>197</sup> The

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<sup>192</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 81-126

<sup>193</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 280

<sup>194</sup>. Cabrera, Lydia, and Isabel Castellanos, *Vocabulario Congo* (Miami, Florida: Ediciones Universal, 2001), 159

<sup>195</sup>. Tukuenda, *NSUNGA, TABACO*. NSUNGA, (TABACO,caribbeanspiritualityandunderstanding.blogspot.com/2010/11/nsunga-tabaco.html, 1970)

<sup>196</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 121

<sup>197</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 166



practice of *Espiritismo del Cordón* (a form of Spiritism, which derives its name from its central ritual, where participants move in a circle or chain called the *cordón*)<sup>198</sup> in the east of Cuba, has elements of the Taino *areito* practice.<sup>199</sup> Although, the inclusion of the *maiohauau* (or *Maiouauan* according to Brasseur de Bourbourg), which was a sort of drum of about 45 inches long and 22.5 inches in breadth that was played in a part that resembled “the shaped of the pincers of a farrier” and had at its opposite end a club shape form, was lost; this was not the case with the *maracas*.<sup>200</sup>

The *maracas*, which the Caribbean Amerindians used, the gourd with a long neck<sup>201</sup> (as Ramon Pane described it), and the plant seeds inside, have become a staple of Afro-Cuban religions and forms an essential part of the ritual paraphernalia and process of the Palo Monte practitioner, *Santero* and *Babalawo* in Cuba when calling and working directly with the *Kimpungulu* and the *Orichas*. The African form of the percussive instrument used in a similar fashion in music, called *axatse* in Ghana, and *shekere*, more generally throughout Africa, was made using a hollowed calabash. It was dressed with a lattice work of Jobs Tear seeds (or other seeds of similar composition; beads and cowrie

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<sup>198</sup>. Ayorinde, Christine, *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution, and National Identity* (University Press of Florida, 2004), 20-21

<sup>199</sup>. Morejón, Jorge Luis, *From the Areíto to the Cordon: Indigenous Healing Dances* (Revista Brasileira De Estudos Da Presença, vol. 8, no. 3, pp. 563–591., doi: 10.1590/2237-266069826, 2018), 564

<sup>200</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 19-20

<sup>201</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 19-20

shells are also used sometimes) and to which a thick and rather short handle was glued.<sup>202</sup> Although they may sound similar, the composition and sound of these instruments are rather different and the Caribbean Amerindian *maracas* are much louder, much more versatile and deeper sounding than the African equivalent. This can be observed in the note made by Ramon Pane himself when he describes the *maracas* (although he does not use this Amerindian term preserved in Cuba) as “so loud a sound that it is heard a league and a half [away]”<sup>203</sup>. In the same vein, the *ceiba*, a Taino word meaning the giant silk-cotton or kapok tree (a word completely transferred to other languages today),<sup>204</sup> and which was also the tree of life for the Mayans of the Yucatan Peninsula and the region of Guatemala is another example of the ritual objects African-Derived traditions of Cuba made their own. The belief in the sacrality of trees or plants in general in the indigenous Americas is equally prevalent on the African continent. For example the *Carabalí* and their descendants in Cuba with their Abakua practice incorporated into its own beliefs and ritual praxis the ceiba and the royal palm as sacred trees that are fundamental for their religion. Moreover, the African *baobab* is equally important for the Yoruba and the Fon of Dahomey.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>202</sup>. Africa Heartwood Project | West Africa grassroots Non-Profit, *Axatse or Shekere* ([online] Available at: <<https://www.africaheartwoodproject.org/product/axatse-or-shekere/>> [Accessed 2 February 2021], 2015)

<sup>203</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 20

<sup>204</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 160

<sup>205</sup>. Rubio, Juan, *Palo Monte y La Verdad Esotérica* (1st ed. Miami: Publicaciones Miami, 2014), 365

The ceiba, known in Palo Monte as *sanda naribe* or *sanda fumandanda*<sup>206</sup> (and *Pikinako Ofuma Ndoki* in the east of Cuba, *el oriente de Cuba*<sup>207</sup>), is the *axis mundi* of Palo Monte and it is essential for the training of the initiates in the tradition, since they have to sleep 7 days under it when initiated<sup>208</sup>. Overall, the views by the Bantu speaking people and their descendants in Cuba are that the ceiba or *baobab* (as is known in Africa) is a sacred tree. Some believers even declare that it was planted on earth by the gods themselves. This is so that it may guide the human race and its ethnic roots as it were its own roots because in the ceiba or *baobab* is found the secrets of creation (according to Bantu beliefs). Moreover, for the ancient *Pángolas* it was the temple of the gods and where they lived. More importantly for our study of Palo Monte, is the belief that the ceiba marks the four cardinal points of the Universe (*Kizimbi*-north, *Kimbundo*-South, *Bukulu*-east and *Nganga*-west<sup>209</sup>) or the four winds as they are known. We will revisit the importance and significance of this in the section on ‘Geometric Diagrams and Their Representations’ below.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>206</sup>. Rubio, Juan, *Palo Monte y La Verdad Esotérica* (1st ed. Miami: Publicaciones Miami, 2014), 365

<sup>207</sup>. Rojas Calderon, Carlos Alberto, *Palo Brakamundo* (Bloomington: Palibrio, 2011), 166

<sup>208</sup>. Hartman, Joseph, *The Ceiba Tree As A Multivocal Signifier: Afro-Cuban Symbolism, Political Performance, And Urban Space In The Cuban Republic* (University of North Texas, 2011), 22 & 26

<sup>209</sup>. Rojas Calderon, Carlos Alberto, *Palo Brakamundo* (Bloomington: Palibrio, 2011), 162

<sup>210</sup>. Rubio, Juan, *Palo Monte y La Verdad Esotérica* (1st ed. Miami: Publicaciones Miami, 2014), 365-367

For the Tainos, the ceiba was the sacred tree which presided over the forest and had as its job to be the sentinel of the forest. It was the daughter of *Yaya* and the sister of *Yocahú* and faithful maid of *Atabey*, who knows her secrets and mysteries. Even the indestructible *Guabancex* with its strong winds cannot harm the ceiba. They also believe that *Guataba*-the god or spirit of lightning, did not dare strike the ceiba in order to not provoke the fury of *Yaya*. The Tainos also believed that the *ceiba* served as the vehicle or the link between the underworld and heaven. This was based on the belief that its roots went all the way down to the kingdom of the dead and the ancestors, its branches lead to the kingdom of the great celestial spirits and it is located in our world, so it would allow for direct communication of the three planes of the Universe. The Tainos would also place their hands over its trunk, branches and roots (superficial ones) in order to obtain strength and resistance when needed (such as in illness or in war) and they would also place their foreheads on it so that they may obtain answers to their questions and problematics.<sup>211</sup>

Juan Rubio also provides an extended discussion of the Maya in which he touches on their beliefs and practices. My sense is that he uses this account as an opportunity to discuss the mysteries of the religion, which he is not able to discuss. I based this on the observation that as explored in the historical section, there were continuous contacts between the Yucatan Peninsula and the Caribbean which lasted right up to the Spanish colonial invasion and the fact that the colors and beliefs of the four cardinal points by the Maya are extremely similar to the Bantu explored in the ‘Geometric Diagrams and Their Representations’ section below. Nonetheless, Juan Rubio focuses on certain aspects of

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<sup>211</sup>. Rubio, Juan, *Palo Monte y La Verdad Esotérica* (1st ed. Miami: Publicaciones Miami, 2014), 365-367

their beliefs and omits others that are equally important, which suggest to me that these are the pertinent ones to his book on Palo Monte and its esoteric teachings (which had not visited the Amerindian religious Habitus until then in the book).<sup>212</sup> Also, because much is not known about the Taino and Carib beliefs on the ceiba beyond the points explored above and because similarities in religious and cultural Habitus have been found between the Maya and the Taino and Caribs I will venture to use his observations to demonstrate the Amerindian influence on Palo Monte.

The Mayans, according to Juan Rubio, believed the cosmos to be structured and divided in three levels. The superior level was composed of 13 celestial realms, the middle realm consisted of the world in which we live and was represented by the sacred mountain *Ritz*. The inferior level, which is generally considered to be inherently related with the aquatic world and its 9 realms, resembles the Bantu and Palo Monte belief of *Kalunga*. The concept of *Kalunga* meant the ocean and the means for the middle passage; as the passage to the kingdom of death and ancestry and represented a metaphor of death and the fluid immanence of death itself<sup>213</sup>. The duality of the middle level (where we live) as the place that sustains life and where the sacred corn was cultivated as food was the opposite of the inferior level. The role of the inferior level as the place where the dead go, was also explored in these beliefs. Moreover, the Mayans believed that the branches of the ceiba supported the weight of the heavens or celestial realms, while its roots served as means of communication between the world of the living and the underworld. This

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<sup>212</sup>. Rubio, Juan, *Palo Monte y La Verdad Esotérica* (1st ed. Miami: Publicaciones Miami, 2014), 365-367

<sup>213</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 2

aspect was explored in the *Malongo* ceremony in the previous Chapter and which I claim cannot be lost in the reference to a new initiated person as a *pino nuevo* and to branches of the religion as *ramas*<sup>214</sup>. Furthermore, Juan Rubio explores the funerary rites of the Mayans and explains that they exhibited a high degree of respect and reverence for the dead. The Mayans were accustomed to placing funerary offerings which they considered to be of utility in life after death. These offerings varied depending on the social status of the individual, but usually consisted of polychrome ceramics and sacred objects such as jade, obsidian and shells, which were interred with the individual, whose body was placed in the ground in an extended position, with its head turned towards the north.<sup>215</sup>

Following the explanation by Columbus on the *Caciques* being venerated through the *cemis* explored in Chapter 4, we learn that the Mayans interred their leaders in tombs which were placed inside their temples (which mirrored *Ritz*, the sacred mountain). They did this to obtain their continual support and blessing after death by serving as mediators between the gods and its people (like the cotton idol with the skull and which Juan Rubio is most probably referencing here as the practice of placing the *kiyumba* on the *nganga*). Meanwhile, caves were considered essential for communicating with the underworld and the bodies of the dead were placed, with their offerings, in the cavities of limestone, where they were supposed to start their journey on the passage through the underworld and its 9 realms to their final destinies. This last reason explains why time and space are of extreme importance for Amerindians and I will venture to say, the Congos in Cuba as

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<sup>214</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 52-53

<sup>215</sup>. Rubio, Juan, *Palo Monte y La Verdad Esotérica* (1st ed. Miami: Publicaciones Miami, 2014), 365-367

well.<sup>216</sup> Since, the belief is that by seeking the assistance of the dead from the world of the dead we would be able to find out and receive truly vital information about our lives and the world from them due to their remoteness from the limitations of time and space imposed on corporeal beings. Also, it is worth remembering that as people who had at one time lived on earth their familiarity with conditions of the living also enables them to make very well informed decisions or offer good advice. This last point is my own and should be taken with a grain of salt since I am neither an initiated person nor one who communicates with the dead.

The last point of similitude pointed out by Juan Rubio, and which I want to explore is that of the sacred cycle of corn, the colors identified with each of the cardinal points located on the ceiba, and the cycles of human life and its stations. These perceptions of the world formed an integral part of the belief system of the Mayans, and I believe, the Kongos in Africa and their Diasporic descendants, the Congos in Cuba. Although fusion between these far flung communities cannot be determined, I conclude that it informs rather the cyclical conception of the Universe prevalent in “primitive” communities. Only with the advent of the Abrahamic religions and their eschatology of the messiah, do we get the first transformation of the understanding of time from a cyclical Universe to a linear one. According to the Maya worldview and its cosmogony, this point is a part of the Mayan myths of creation. This religious system was tied the celestial bodies, which in turn were tied with supernatural deities with which they coexisted and played devotion to (usually through sacrifice). The Mayans associated the color red with the East, white with the North, Black with the West and yellow with the

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<sup>216</sup>. Rubio, Juan, *Palo Monte y La Verdad Esotérica* (1st ed. Miami: Publicaciones Miami, 2014), 365-367

South, thus representing the cycles and the four cardinal points located on the *ceiba*. As explored on the section ‘Geometric Drawings and Their Representations’ below, these colors assigned to each of the cardinal points of the four winds by the Kongo traditional religious system and Palo Monte practitioners in Cuba resemble in meaning, form, and cosmogony, the views, beliefs and practices of the Mayans.<sup>217</sup> Hence, this semblance demonstrates another point of contact that can lead us to conclude that through contemporary Palo Monte practices some Amerindian beliefs and practices have survived.

Lastly, I want to focus on what will be a controversial theory for some, but at least from my viewpoint, will be as equally valid an interpretation of the name Palo Mayombe as those accepted by the majority of Palo Monte practitioners and scholars. There are three *reglas* (rules; also known as branches) in the Palo Monte tradition; these are *La Regla Mayombe*, *La Regla Brillumba/Vriyumba* and *La Regla Kimbisa*. The *Regla Kimbisa* (formal name: *La Regla Kimbisa del Santo Cristo del Buen Viaje*) was a truly syncretic creation of Andres Facundo Cristo de Dolores Petit (Known as Andres Petit or Andres Quimbisa) in that it combines elements of *Abakuá*, *Espiritismo*, Masonry, *Regla de Ocha* (Santeria), and Christianity with a center stage and omnipresent Congo religious foundation. However, the name itself derives from a more arcane *Kimbisa Rama* (branch) related to the Abakua secret society. The *Brillumba* or *Vriyumba Rama* derives its name from the Kikongo word *yumba*, meaning, “spirit of the departed one” and the Kikongo word *vili*, which both denotes a native of Angola, but also means “works”. Subsequently, that leaves us with the *Regla Mayombe*. The popular and scholarly consensus is that the

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<sup>217</sup>. Rubio, Juan, *Palo Monte y La Verdad Esotérica* (1st ed. Miami: Publicaciones Miami, 2014), 365-367



Mayombe branch is a continuation of a particular tradition from the hills of Mayombe in the areas of Cabinda and Calabari in Kongo that was brought to Matanzas, La Habana and Pinar del Rio in Cuba. However, as Lydia Cabrera and Natalia Bolivar had suggested, the meaning of the word Mayombe is rather, superior or chief, in the sense of someone who is dominating the cult, nature and the *nfumbe* (spirit of the dead), while replicating the status of the *manikongo*.<sup>218</sup>

Following the insights of the two ethnographers of the Congo tradition in Cuba, I will posit an alternative theory of the meaning of the name Palo Mayombe. *Palo* is the Spanish word for stick (can also be interpreted as tree) and as we have seen, it is present in all the *Ramas* of the rules and the general name for the *Reglas Congas* (Congo Rules), Palo Monte. Mayombe, although the name of the Maiombe Hills in the Northern delta of the Congo River in the province of Cabinda in modern day Angola<sup>219</sup>, could also be a derivation of the Carib word *mayombo* which means a stick which could magically beat any other stick<sup>220</sup>. The meaning of the Carib word not only reflects the insight expressed by Lydia Cabrera and Natalia Bolivar, but also shares the belief in the Mayombe *Rama* being the center stage *Regla*. Although Cuba was a Taino geographical settlement, Amerindian multitudes from every shore and atoll of the Caribbean were carried in slave ships to all parts of the Caribbean where labor was needed and a fusion of the various Amerindian cultures occurred in these territories. Caribs (the word cannibal comes from

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<sup>218</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 49-51

<sup>219</sup>. Álvarez Ferrer, Manuel, *Raíces del Palo Monte en Cuba* (Unos & amp; Otros Ediciones, 2012), 9

<sup>220</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 285

Carib) were specially affected by this, since Spanish law permitted enslavement in the new world only of “cannibals”, while the other Amerindian groups became serfs on their own land.<sup>221</sup> Therefore, the possibility of the Carib word, *mayombo*, being used as the name for this creole reinterpretation of the Kongolese beliefs and practices in its new creole manifestations (with Amerindian beliefs and practices) is not implausible.

*Proximity as Catalyst for Cultural Encounter between Caribbean Amerindians and West Central Africans*

Consequently, this leads us to the following similitude across the Caribbean Diaspora, which was the swift extermination and subjugation of the Amerindian population on the Caribbean. The heinous and unforgivable practices and ideology imposed on the natives of these islands, together with the decimation of the rest of the surviving population due to European diseases introduced on these populations are vividly recorded in the writings of Bartolome de Las Casas. De Las Casas’ (now) seminal works, such as the *Brevísima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* and *Historia de la Indias* are exemplars of the recorded atrocities committed by the Spanish in their colonies. Because of this complete decimation, our only recourse would be to examine the earlier African diaspora communities in these Caribbean spaces, as these communities had encounters with the native inhabitants of the Caribbean and appropriated aspects of their cultures. Through a reconstruction of the histories of these earlier African diasporic communities in the Caribbean we hope we can identify Amerindian cultural and religious

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<sup>221</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 67 (includes footnote)

survivals in creole religions of the Caribbean and the processes through which the African communities appropriated them.

The data from the colonial period can be accessed in the work done by Linda M. Heywood. Heywood's Appendix 1<sup>222</sup> is particularly informative with regards to the light it shines on the ethnic composition of the slaves traded during the slave trade through the decades, starting from the 16<sup>th</sup> century (right after the discovery of the West Indies). In table A. *Slaves boarded from Central Africa, by Decades*, found on pages 64 and 65<sup>223</sup>; we are able to see that the predominant ethnic group being exported at the beginning of the slave trade was from Central Africa. The West African population slave trade was not significant until the period between 1690-1699 (although it only looks at the Portuguese records). On the other hand, table E. *Slaves from Central Africa (Embarked) as Proportion of Total Atlantic Trade, By Quarter Centuries* found on page 67<sup>224</sup> gives us a better understanding of the composition of the slave trade during the early colonial period of the Americas. From 1519-1600, 82.7% of The Total Atlantic Trade was from central Africa and from 1601-1650 that number increased to 92.8%. Lovejoy's academic paper puts these numbers into perspective by providing a percentage of the total number of enslaved Africans (identified) as 409,000 or 3.6% (of the total known population of slaves brought during the slave trade) for the 1450-1600 period and 1,348,000 or 11.9%

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<sup>222</sup>. Heywood, Linda M., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64-69

<sup>223</sup>. Heywood, Linda M., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64-65

<sup>224</sup>. Heywood, Linda M., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 67

(of the total known population of slaves brought during the forced Atlantic migration).<sup>225</sup> This data sheds greater light on the Kongo diaspora in Cuba and the Amerindian religious influence on Palo Monte in particular.

Moreover, Lovejoy puts the composition of West Central Africa during the period of 1601-1650 as 51, 775 or at 73.38% (of the total known population of slaves brought during this period).<sup>226</sup> Rather, Lovejoy's account establishes that the West Central African Diaspora was the biggest source of enslaved Africans brought during the early period of the transatlantic slave trade. Moreno Fraginal's account puts the number of enslaved West Central Africans working in sugar plantations during the 1760-69 period at 30.30% (of the entire ethnic compositions of slaves working in the sugar plantation) or as 1,305 Congo in origin and at 25.31% or 1,090 as *Carabalí* in origin, with the rest of the ethnic groups forming only circumstantial amounts. This data points to the fact that not only did the West Central African diaspora represent the largest source of slaves during the first century of the transatlantic slave trade, but also that their presence and prominence extended into the 18<sup>th</sup> century (which points to continuity and preservation of beliefs, no matter how fragmentary).<sup>227</sup> The above information, together with the writings of De Las Casas and Deren's observations about the decimation of the Amerindian

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<sup>225</sup>. Heywood, Linda M., *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 64-69

<sup>226</sup>. Lovejoy, P.E., *The "Middle Passage": The Enforced Migration of Africans across the Atlantic* (York University, Toronto. Available at: [https://educacioncivicamep.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/lovejoy\\_middle\\_passage\\_the\\_enforced\\_migration\\_of\\_africans\\_across\\_the\\_atlantic.pdf](https://educacioncivicamep.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/lovejoy_middle_passage_the_enforced_migration_of_africans_across_the_atlantic.pdf)., 2007), 2-3

<sup>227</sup>. Moreno Fraginals, Manuel, *AFRICA IN CUBA: A QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE AFRICAN POPULATION IN THE ISLAND OF CUBA* (Annals of The New York Academy Of Sciences 292 (1 Comparative P): 187-201. doi:10.1111/j.1749-6632.1977.tb47743.x, 1977), 190

populations in Haiti by 1667, point to the fact that if there are any surviving Amerindian beliefs and practices in the Caribbean (and beyond) it would be found in the religious beliefs and practices of the creoles of central African descent (Kongolese descent). Any surviving beliefs and practices outside of Kongolese religious beliefs and practices, must have been transferred via syncretism with the creole manifestations of these Kongolese practices in the Caribbean.

*Ancestral Dead, Cult of the Dead, Cemís, Hanging Calabash, Gurunfinda, Cotton Idols and Ngangas*

Perhaps, beliefs and practices surrounding the dead represent the greatest point of contact of the African Diaspora and the Amerindian religious Habitus. The beliefs among the Arawaks (Tainos) and Caribs was that the dead returned to a valley in their own country, in the Orinoco Guiana homeland, and would settle at the bottom of the waters of a lake.<sup>228</sup> This belief can find its mirror in both the Palo Monte and Haitian Vodou traditions. The Palo Monte tradition has the concept of *Kalunga* (the abysmal waters and the dead liquid of space, which it is itself a Kongo belief) that comes to mean a multiplicity of things, but centrally, the ocean, the passage to the kingdom of death and ancestry. *Kalunga* was both a metaphor for death and the fluid immanence of death itself, and since humans are composed of water, where we act as carriers of this ancestral

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<sup>228</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 277

memory and it is inside of us, this created the perception of a shared materiality between the dead and the living under the collecting force of *Nzambi* (God).<sup>229</sup>

The Taino belief in the ancestral veneration of the dead through the *cemis* and the hanging of dried out calabash or common fig with the bones of the ancestors, and the placement of the bones of *Caciques* and great men in baskets or in plaited cotton fetishes are also particularly important in these trends of similitude between the two cultures.<sup>230</sup> An example of this Taino practices can be seen on page 180 of Robiou Lamarche's *Taino and Caribs*<sup>231</sup>, which depicts photographs and x-ray photographs of a cotton idol with a human skull on its head. Nonetheless, this point of contact then reflects another avenue for the easy fusion of these cultures and not the factual absorption of these practices by the African Diaspora. After all, we have seen that Africans came with similar ideas ingrained in their beliefs and practices and direct influence cannot be determined just from the scholarly record. Further ethnographical and empirical work would determine the level of influence this Taino practices had on the beliefs and practices of Palo Monte.

Moreover, like the Kongo Diaspora, the Tainos respected their ancestors and their beliefs and practices were passed down orally from generation to generation. This informed another aspect of the respect payed to the dead and ancestors. The Taino believed that it was important to listen to elders and to venerate them after death in order

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<sup>229</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 2 &51

<sup>230</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 278

<sup>231</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 180

to obtain their blessing, knowledge and wisdom that they may need. The practice of placing the bones of ancestors in dried calabash or dried vessels made from the common fig, which were then placed in a special location inside the *bohío* in order to pay them respect, was an important Taino tradition.<sup>232</sup> This practice of veneration resembles the Palo Monte practice of *Gurunfinda*. *Gurunfinda* is the power that provides the materials that make possible the animation of the corpse and there is not one *Palero* who expects his corpse to work without the blessings of *Gurunfinda*. *Gurunfinda* is the only one that sanctifies the herbs and sticks used in the practice of Palo Monte, which includes the construction of the *ngangas* itself. *Gurunfinda* is considered the lord of the forest or the *Mpungo* of the forest and he has the secrets and mysteries of it and of Palo Monte for that matter. This *Mpungo* is placed in a hanging dried out *jicara* (dried out calabash) in the middle of the *munanzo* and has been filled with bones (unspecified as it is the most guarded secret of the religion) together with all sorts of things from the mineral and vegetal kingdoms.<sup>233</sup> This reflects a Taino influence.

The BaKongo had (including the Angolan and Congolese people as well) three ways of utilizing ancestral bones, together with the power of a specific *nkisi*. The three forms or manifestations involve the *ntende* (*cesto*=basket), the *nzungo* (*cazuela*=casserole) and the *makuku* (*caldero*=cauldron<sup>234</sup>), which are elements linked

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<sup>232</sup>. Muñoz-Pando, Roberto G., and Sebastian Robiou Lamarche, *Creencias Mortuorias De Los Aborígenes Antillanos, Taínos Y Caribes: Estudio Etnohistórico Y Social. Análisis de los Taínos y Caribes: etnohistoria, arqueología y literature oral* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Centro de Estudios Avanzados de Puerto Rico y el Caribe, n.d.), 8

<sup>233</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 117-118

<sup>234</sup>. The translations into English were performed by the author.

with Taino traditions of ancestral worship.<sup>235</sup> These parallels in the Taino and Palo practices in connection with the veneration of ancestors offer another example of the Taino influence on Palo Monte. Consequently, the Palo Monte ritual use of the *nganga* and the bones (including the skull called the *kiyumba*<sup>1</sup>) of the ancestor or enslaved spirit bolsters my position.<sup>236</sup> As we have noted above, the inclusion of the skull in both the Palo Monte *nganga* and the cotton idol of the Tainos formed and forms an integral part of these religious manifestations. In the Kongo tradition there were wooden statues containing *nkisi* (in the case of beneficent spirits) or *ndoki* (in the case of maleficent spirit), which the *Yombe* people used to materialize the spirits in order to seek healing, protection or revenge. These wooden statues, which were anthropomorphic figures, charged by the *bilongos* (works) of the *nganga* (priest)<sup>237</sup>, share much in terms of meaning and practice with the Taino *cemis*. The Taino *cemi* was made of stone or wood (hollowed out and containing speaking tubes when made of wood) and was said to be the receptacle of the spirit of the ancestral dead and the intermediary between the living and the divine. The *cemi* was addressed by the name of the father or other ancestral dead and in return for their veneration it would speak out oracles and advice, as it is done in the Palo Monte practice of throwing the *chamalongs* for the purpose of directly addressing

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<sup>235</sup>. Álvarez Ferrer, Manuel, *Raíces del Palo Monte en Cuba* (Unos & amp; Otros Ediciones, 2012), 45

<sup>236</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 278

<sup>237</sup>. Tollebeek, Jo, *Mayombe: Ritual Statues from Congo* (Lannoo, 2011), 71



the dead found in the *nganga*, in order to obtain their advice and wisdom.<sup>238</sup> My sense here is that this Palo practice demonstrates a strong Taino flavor.

The traditional Kongo power figure, *nkisi n'kondi* did not include the skull in its entirety, but rather a medicine pouch in its belly, which was composed of the magically charged bundle prepared by the *nganga*, the name for the Kongo indigenous priest in the African Kongolese practice. In Palo Monte, the cauldron, which I argue, was an inheritance from Taino traditions, has assumed the identity and the term, *Nganga*, which was associated with the priest in Kongo religion. This medicine bundle included varied compositions, depending on the needs of the individual or community. Generally however, it contained various trees or plants without their barks, various types of earth, and a horn with a mirror, some “primitive” tools, money, cranial bones, as well as the phalanges and metacarpals of human. Animal bones were also included as symbolic representations of particular animals. The horn with the mirror was used for the purposes of divination, like its counterpart in Palo Monte, the *mpaka vititi menzo*. The addition of the cranial bones as well as the phalanges and metacarpals of humans and animals varied from *Nkisi n'kondi* to *Nkisi n'kondi*. Sometimes these bones were grounded into an *mpolo* (powder) and sometimes the bones as well as the cranium was added as a whole. The idea behind this practice (as in the construction of the *nganga* in Palo Monte) was to reconstruct a microcosm of the Universe for the *nkisi* (the dead and the *bakisi banene* (the powers of nature) empowering the dead, the specific *Mpungo* working with that venerated dead) so that his/her power would be manifested in all the forces of the Universe. This was achieved by providing the *minkisi* with material representations of the

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<sup>238</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004) , 278

animal, mineral and vegetal kingdom.<sup>239</sup> The construction of the *nganga*, the foundation of Palo practice, is informed largely by Amerindian beliefs and practices in connection with the veneration of ancestors, especially, the inclusion of the skull, cotton idols, and hanging gourds. The *nganga* as we find it in Palo as an object and practice is nothing but a performance of Kongo and Amerindian memory.

### *Tobacco*

The ritual use of tobacco in Palo Monte also reflects another point of contact of the Kongo and the Amerindian religious Habitus. The Taino word for tobacco was *cohoba*. *Tabaco* (tobacco in Spanish) meant the bifurcated tube from which the hallucinatory powder was inhaled. Due to the confusion of the Spanish there was a loss of the original meaning and the misapplication of the latter, which has since become the name of the plant in many languages.<sup>240</sup> The Taino *cohoba* rite, was enacted by the *Cacique* (chief) or *Behique* (shaman) and it consisted of inducing vomiting for the purposes of purification, then the inhalation of *cohoba* (in a powdered form) as explained above, with the aim of falling into a trance in order to communicate with the *cemis* (the spirit forces in the other world). The goal of this communication is to bring back a message with from the spirit world containing instructions for the living community.<sup>241</sup>

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<sup>239</sup>. Álvarez Ferrer, Manuel, *Raíces del Palo Monte en Cuba* (Unos & amp; Otros Ediciones, 2012), 45-46

<sup>240</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 163

<sup>241</sup>. Wilson, Samuel Meredith, *The Indigenous People of the Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1999), 167

The aforementioned practices seem to be in harmony with the shamanistic practices seen in the Americas by other Amerindian groups.

As for the Caribs, the use of tobacco seemed to have played an even bigger role in their religious rituals. In fact, unlike their Taino counterparts, the Caribs did not (according to the early French chroniclers) use any other hallucinogenic substance than tobacco for their religious rituals. Moreover, the effects exhibited by the Taino *cohoba* seemed to not have been the same effect exhibited by Caribs when using their tobacco. Rather, they used tobacco as a communication tool through which they established links with their personal gods. This invocation by the *Boyez* (the Carib medicine men) consisted of them singing songs while they blew up smoke in accompaniment with the singing. The *Boyez* would also manipulate the tobacco by squeezing it in his hand and blowing in it out with both hands (the smoke not the tobacco), during this ritual performance. Moreover, the *Boyez* would take the smoke in his mouth and blow it in puffs into the air.<sup>242</sup> These practices by the Carib *Boyez* are more closely aligned with the ritualistic performances of the *Paleros* in Palo Monte. I would suggest that if there was a direct influence of the use of tobacco on the religious rituals of Palo Monte it must have been directly borrowed from these practices of the Carib *Boyez* rather than the usually thought Taino *cohoba* ritual, which seems to have been more complex and sophisticated than the Carib practice. Another important detail recorded by an early chronicler

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<sup>242</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 217 & 219

described how one of these *Boyez* had inherited one of two gods from his father.<sup>243</sup> This is also a common practice among Palo Monte practitioners. When an *ngangulero* dies his *nganga* or *ngangas* is/are inherited by either a family member or one of his godsons (it could also be disarmed if the *nfumbe* desires it).<sup>244</sup>

In the case of the ritualistic use of tobacco, we find that not only was this incorporated by the Kongolese Diaspora, it was also incorporated into the West African creole religious manifestations. The Caribbean Amerindians cultivated tobacco for recreational use, but it was also incorporated into religious practices. Ritual specialists blew off smoke over ritual paraphernalia (such as images of *cemis*) during their ceremonies.<sup>245</sup> This practice can be observed across all Afro-Cuban creole religions today. This does not seem to be a ritual practice in Kongo religion and even the Yoruba religion (the available literature demonstrates a conspicuous absence of this ritual practice)<sup>246</sup>.

In Palo Mayombe, (the most traditional, of the Kongo derived religions in Cuba) and in Palo Monte in general (the Kongolese creole religious manifestation in Cuba) we

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<sup>243</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 217

<sup>244</sup>. Cunha, A., *Muerte, muertos y “llanto” palero* (Ateliers d'anthropologie, [online] (38). Available at: <<https://journals.openedition.org/ateliers/9413>> [Accessed 8 February 2021], 2013)

<sup>245</sup>. Edmonds, Ennis Barrington, and Michelle A Gonzalez, *Caribbean Religious History* (1st ed., NYU Press., 2010), 18

<sup>246</sup>. Lugo Aikulola Iwindara Fewehinmi, N., *Diferencias entre Santería Cubana y la practica de Nigeria* ([online] Asociacion Cultural Yoruba de Canarias "ACYC." Available at: <<https://yorubacanarias.com/3/post/2014/07/diferencias-entre-santeria-cubana-y-la-practica-de-nigeria.html>> [Accessed 7 February 2021], 2014)

see the use of tobacco smoke, named *Nsunga*<sup>247</sup>, in various ritual forms. These include the blowing of the smoke directly on the *nganga* (the cauldron containing the garden of blood and bones), as shown in figure 4 of *Making a Nganga, Begetting a God. Materiality and Belief in the Afro-Cuban Religion of Palo Monte* by K. Kerestetzi<sup>248</sup>. This represents the composite body of the *nfumbe* (the disincarnate intelligences and spirits and the “unique material representation of cosmic and terrestrial powers adorning the resurrected dead”<sup>249</sup>), the pure or ideal forms of *nkisi* (*minkisi* plural), and the *Mpungo* (*Kimpungulu* in plural). These are the forces behind the natural manifestations and powers that the *Palero/Palera* (*Tata/Yaya* that works the *nganga*) works with.<sup>250</sup> There is also the use of tobacco smoke in the ceremonial drink<sup>251</sup>, smoking it while performing works in order to help the *ngangulero* achieve the trance state that enables

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<sup>247</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011) , 206

<sup>248</sup>. Kerestetzi, K., *Making a Nganga, Begetting a God. Materiality and Belief in the Afro-Cuban Religion of Palo Monte* (Ricerche di Storia Sociale e Religiosa. Nuova Serie, [online] 87. Available at: <[https://www.academia.edu/22295918/Making\\_a\\_nganga\\_begetting\\_a\\_god\\_Materiality\\_and\\_Belief\\_in\\_the\\_Afro\\_Cuban\\_Religion\\_of\\_Palo\\_Monte](https://www.academia.edu/22295918/Making_a_nganga_begetting_a_god_Materiality_and_Belief_in_the_Afro_Cuban_Religion_of_Palo_Monte)> [Accessed 20 February 2021], 2015)

<sup>249</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 44, 69 & 222

<sup>250</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 44, 69 & 222

<sup>251</sup>. Tukuenda, *NSUNGA, TABACO*. NSUNGA, (TABACO,caribbeanspiritualityandunderstanding.blogspot.com/2010/11/nsunga-tabaco.html, 1970)

him to communicate with the spirits<sup>252</sup>. The *nganga* is also fed with tobacco and alcohol, and tobacco is also used when performing the pact with *Cobayende* in order buy the *nfumbe/nfuri*.<sup>253</sup>

The living dead of the Caribbean Amerindians were known for their particular like of tobacco while they strolled about at night and in Haitian Vodou a cigar or cigarette is the essential item of *Ghede*<sup>254</sup> (the spirit of the dead)<sup>255</sup>. Moreover, in Santeria cigars are used by the *Santeros* (Lucumi or Santeria Priests) to achieve a trance-like state, and are also used as offerings to the ancestors, known as *Egun* and as well as a tool in various *Ashé* bringing rituals.<sup>256</sup> The use of tobacco is also present in *Espiritismo Cruzado* (Crossed Spiritism), where *Santeros* or *Paleros* place cigars on the *Boveda Espiritual* (spiritual vault) as an offering and way of contacting the dead.<sup>257</sup> <sup>258</sup> Moreover, in Jamaica we see the practice of interring the dead with tobacco pipes by Obeah

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<sup>252</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 157

<sup>253</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 74 & 157

<sup>254</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 282

<sup>255</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 102-114

<sup>256</sup>. TuBrujo.com., “USOS DEL TABACO DENTRO DE LA SANTERÍA E IFA.” (TuBrujo.com, [tubrujo.com/santeria/usos-del-tabaco-dentro-de-la-santeria-e-ifa/](http://tubrujo.com/santeria/usos-del-tabaco-dentro-de-la-santeria-e-ifa/), 2014)

<sup>257</sup>. Ayorinde, Christine, *Afro-Cuban Religiosity, Revolution, and National Identity* (University Press of Florida, 2004), 21

<sup>258</sup>. DeVito, Joey, *Cigars Vital to Religious Practice in Cuba* (Mario's Cuban Cigars, 1:30:58 PM, [blog.marioscubancigars.com/blog/cigars-vital-to-religious-practice-in-cuba](http://blog.marioscubancigars.com/blog/cigars-vital-to-religious-practice-in-cuba), 2016)

practitioners.<sup>259</sup> Therefore, the widespread acculturation and appropriation of tobacco for religious practices is significantly represented across the Afro-Caribbean religious diaspora, demonstrated by the imprint of Amerindian ritual forms on the African indigenous religions rooted there.

### *Geometric Diagrams and Their Representations*

The symbolic designs used in the African religious Diaspora of the Caribbean are perhaps the most magnificent and complex forms of religious artistry preserved, of what seems like admixture of Kongo and Amerindian original forms. Since, these specific geometric, artistic and ritualistic designs have not (yet) been identified as purely originating from Africa<sup>260</sup>, it has been assumed that they represent Amerindian contributions. When we look at the *vevè* of Haitian Vodou and the *patimpembas* of Palo Monte and their center stage use in the religious beliefs and practices of these African diaspora groups (both which have origins in the Kongolesse diaspora) there is no denying the plausible influence of the Amerindian petroglyphs representing their beliefs and practices. Their similarities and the fusions of the intricate drawings of the Kongo and Caribbean Amerindians are particularly enlightening.<sup>261 262</sup> In this way we can see how

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<sup>259</sup>. Handler, Jerome S., *Slave Medicine and Obeah in Barbados, circa 1650 to 1834* (New West Indian Guide / Nieuwe West-Indische Gids, vol. 74, no. 1-2, pp. 57–90., doi:10.1163/13822373-90002570, 2000), 70

<sup>260</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 276

<sup>261</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 276

<sup>262</sup>. Deren, Maya, *Divine Horsemen. The Living Gods of Haiti* (Kingston (N.Y.): McPherson & Co, 2004), 276

the structured visual language of the BaKongo (and Bantu speaking people in general) plays an integral role in the inherent system of communication of daily life directed at establishing interactive communications channels between humans and the natural and spiritual worlds. The purpose of the evolution of forms of visual writing was to preserve and transmit cosmological and cosmogonical beliefs systems.<sup>263</sup> This is particularly evident in the Congo Diaspora in Cuba today as seen through the practice of Palo Monte and its complex structured visual code system.

Similarly, Taino art with its various manifestations is directly tied to the Taino Mythology, Cosmology, and Cosmogony. The Taino artistic manifestations related to their beliefs and practices go beyond just pottery making and decoration. Taino craftsmen worked their religious/cultural art into their work with stones, bone, and shell materials and these were replete with their beliefs and practices. These materials were necessarily infused with the magical power of the *Behique* and his knowledge of the spiritual world represented through the hands of specialized Taino, who worked on these materials. These “artists” made use of bone chisels, natural abrasives and flint and fiber threads that were mixed with water and sand in order to carve their beliefs and practices into rock. Their goal was to construct with these materials and these instruments petroglyphs and *cemis*, their ultimate source of veneration and power.<sup>264</sup>

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<sup>263</sup>. Martínez-Ruiz, Barbaro. *Kongo Graphic Writing And Other Narratives Of The Sign*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 1

<sup>264</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 165-166



Nonetheless, these forms of visual representation did not include the codified language of the geometric drawings. The Taino geometric visual language is tied by modern scholars to the symbolic code associated with the religious worldview of the chiefdoms (the *Caciques*). According to Robiou Lamarche, this Taino geometric system of codified language consisted of a canon of writing, which was systematized with some rules and proportions that gave it its characteristic Taino quality. Overall, Taino geometric designs contain a symmetrical quality to them, which is laid out in geometric patterns that formed labyrinth-like complex styles. Some curious conclusions that have been unraveled are the commonly utilized motif of a circle at the center point of the pottery or sculpture, which contained these geometric designs.<sup>265</sup>

According to Robiou Lamarche, this center most likely demonstrated the religious beliefs of the Center, associated with Divinity itself. Other appropriately related details (to my research) that have been observed in this geometric system is the group of parallel lines or a line with a point at both ends, which was carved in a horizontal, vertical or inclined position (see page 94 of Frisvold's *Palo Mayombe*<sup>266</sup> for similar patterns on the *firmas* of the *Kimpungulu* ). There is also the use of the "S" in an inclined or intertwined form, which curiously resembles the "S" utilized in the *patimpembas* of *Zarabanda* which as we have seen in the language section, possibly derives its name from an amalgamation of the Taino word "*Zara*" and the Bantu or Spanish word "*banda*" (see

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<sup>265</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 165-166

<sup>266</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 94

Frisvold's *Palo Mayombe*<sup>267</sup> page 94 for a pictorial representation of the *firma* containing this "S"). There is also the consistent use of semicircles (see page 102, 110 of Frisvold's *Palo Mayombe*<sup>268</sup>), circles (others than ones allude to above) (see pages 80, 86, 91, 94, 99, 112, 116, 120 and 124 of Frisvold's *Palo Mayombe*<sup>269</sup>) concentric circles (see page 105 of Frisvold's *Palo Mayombe*<sup>270</sup>), the triangle (see Pages 80, 91 and 124 of Frisvold's *Palo Mayombe*<sup>271</sup>) or the "V" inverted with or without a characteristic point (see page 102 of Frisvold's *Palo Mayombe*<sup>272</sup>). Unfortunately, beyond this archeological understanding (only recently reconstructed) there has not been a satisfactory reconstruction of the codified language and its meaning. Hence, the original purpose of this geometric system of codified language, which was to transmit the message codified in the meaning behind these geometric drawings as the totality of Taino belief, has not

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<sup>267</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 94

<sup>268</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 102 & 110

<sup>269</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011) , 80, 86, 91, 94, 99, 112, 116, 120 & 124

<sup>270</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 105

<sup>271</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 80, 91 & 124

<sup>272</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 102

been decoded and the key for deciphering remains elusive (see Robiou Lamarche's *Tainos and Caribs*<sup>273</sup> pages 171-176 for pictures of these geometric drawings).<sup>274</sup>

Since the Amerindian (especially the Taino) visual language has not been deciphered and its codified language has not been unraveled, we must look to the Kongo influence on the *firmas* of Palo Monte. By reverse engineering the preservation of Kongo symbols and graphic writing system preserved in Palo Monte, I will be able to determine whether the similarities observed above truly derived from an Amerindian background or whether they just represent similarities. According to Ruiz-Martinez, the historical archeology of graphic and pictographic writings of the BaKongo extends back to ancient times (specific timeline cannot be concluded due to its antiquity) and played an essential role of communication in the early period of the Central African motility across the forests and savannas of West Central Africa of these pioneering Bantu settlers. Another important aspect of the BaKongo graphic writing system was the fact that it served an important tool of universal language among the BaKongo, which included written symbols, religious objects, oral traditions and body language integrated under one structured system of graphic writing.<sup>275</sup> Hence, the Kongo graphic writing system contains the most integrated and the most important source of information regarding the cultural and religious beliefs of the Kongo and their descendants. This last point is

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<sup>273</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 171-176

<sup>274</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 170-171

<sup>275</sup>. Martínez-Ruiz, Barbaro. *Kongo Graphic Writing And Other Narratives Of The Sign*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 72-73

particularly poignant to the creole religion of Palo Monte, since the *firmas* or *patimpembas* graphic visual system is considered the most important tool of communication between the *nganga*, the spiritual world, the dead, and the Palo Monte practitioners.

Moreover, these highly complex drawings are said to contain the secrets of the religion as well as its power, and are jealously guarded from non-initiated people and even other *munanzos* of the religion due to their supreme value to the *Palero*. This evidence builds on the fact that when *Paleros* write books on the religion and they include the *firmas* of works or the *Kimpungulu*, they never include the complete *firma* and leave important details out of the published drawings. Another important phenomenon related to this is the fact that when an initiated person is given the *Firma* of the dead person he/she has made the pact with, it remains the knowledge of only the person receiving the *nganga* and the Godfather *Palero* from whom his *nganga* was born. The secrecy of these *firmas* is so important to the initiated that practitioners believe that showing other practitioners these *firmas* would mean the loss of the dead with which he/she has made the pact and the complete control of their dead due to other *Paleros* taking control of his/her dead via the secret *firma*. This last point is also used as a mechanism by some godfather *Paleros* to control godchildren, who are considered as manifesting deviant and rebelling qualities of this highly traditional religion.<sup>276</sup>

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<sup>276</sup>. This information was not obtained directly from any book but rather forms my synthesis of many videos by Osvaldo Sesti, Tata Iraka who has delved into this topic many times throughout his 10 year project towards preserving the traditional Palo Mayombe religion via audiovisual teachings. These teachings are aimed at showing initiated and non-initiated individuals the way to perform *nsaras* or *bilongos* while providing a vast amount of knowledge on all things Palo Monte. As a side note, his

Martínez-Ruiz's interpretation of the data regarding the Kongo influence on the Palo Monte *firmas* is based on his use of Gerhard Kubik's term, graphic writing systems, for this kind of visual language together with his subdivision of the unit composing these codified graphic systems (Ideograms<Pictograms or Pictographs<Cosmograms). Moreover, the author also seeks to provide a continuation to Robert Farris Thompson's work while providing a more thorough and detailed understanding of the Kongo system of graphic communication in both Africa and the Caribbean. The first link Martínez-Ruiz establishes between the Palo Monte *firmas* and the Kongo graphic writing system is that of the *dikenga*, which is the Cosmogram depicting the conception of all living beings in the universe as well as the energy of the universe and the force of all existence and creation. This is also known, when represented in a form similar to the Christian cross, as the *yowa* or *kilisu*, and it is almost always present (at least the *yowa* form; the cross of the four cardinal points) in the Palo Monte *firmas*. However, the *dikenga* is also used in Cuba and is called by *Paleros* as *nkuyu* or "the abstract thing from Congo" and has a more or less equal codified meaning to its representation (as described above).<sup>277</sup>

Moreover, the circular shape of *nkuyu* has been transmuted in Cuba and has come to represent the world of the ancestors, while symbolizing protection, time, perfection, and the receipt of energy, balance and existence and the realm of initiation. This circular

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contributions for the preservation of the religion and his openness (to an allowed degree that does not show the mysteries of the religion) in showing the practice of the religion within the confines of his *munanzo* is unparalleled and should be nominated as the representative of Palo Monte practice for the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. You can find his YouTube Channel at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/OsvaldoSesti>

<sup>277</sup>. Martínez-Ruiz, Barbaro. *Kongo Graphic Writing And Other Narratives Of The Sign*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 71-72

representation is seen as the frontier between the living and the dead and as the pathway through which the initiated person has to travel in order to complete the spiritual transformation to a new life. Martínez-Ruiz also delves into the meaning of the cross within the *nkuyu* within the Palo Monte religion. He explains that the cross is best understood as a map of the forces of the universe which divide space into four parts representing the cosmos, nature, the atmosphere, and human beings and human creation. The four winds, as they are known, also serve as symbols, with the north point representing God or the almighty forces of creation, the south point, the animals, the east point, the plants and trees and the west point, the minerals of the earth.<sup>278</sup> Hence, the use of the four winds across almost all *firmas* demonstrates that this graphic form of the religion was preserved from the traditional Kongo belief system, which is consistent with the archeological data recovered about the Caribbean Amerindian's geometric system.

Another important connection Martínez-Ruiz makes is between the philosophical cosmology of the Kongo and the four points of the *dikenga*. This is understood as the four points of the sun across the sky and the colors used in the drawing of the *lucero* (another name used for *nkuyu*) *patimpemba* in Palo Monte needed for the corresponding type of work to be performed. The Kongo *dikenga* understanding is as follows: “*Musoni* sun (yellow sun)-sun of perfection; *Kala* sun (black sun)-sun of vitality; *Tukula* sun (red sun)-sun of warning or danger and *Luvemba* sun (gray/white sun)-sun of death and change”<sup>279</sup> and in Palo Monte, the color utilized for completing the *nkandu* (contract)

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<sup>278</sup>. Martínez-Ruiz, Barbaro. *Kongo Graphic Writing And Other Narratives Of The Sign*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 73-74

<sup>279</sup>. Martínez-Ruiz, Barbaro. *Kongo Graphic Writing And Other Narratives Of The Sign*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 70

with the spirit world so that the *bilongo* works effectively are described as follows: “South: Yellow-fresh water, the river or *Simbi* spirit; North: Red-change, transformation, dangerous situation; West: White-purity, perfection; East: Black-underground or death and Center: Blue- (*Egáno*) indestructible, pure energy, such as morning dew or rays of the sun, and wholesomeness. It marks the beginning of the motion of energy and the spiritual journey in the circle”.<sup>280</sup> Furthermore, Martínez-Ruiz tells us that overall the beliefs system codified in this image is the same for both the Kongo and the Palo Monte practitioners in Cuba, that of the representation of the sun and its stages across the sky. Martínez-Ruiz even points to the Palo Monte Loango branch practiced in Pinar del Rio and Matanzas, in Cuba, which includes *firmas* depicting representations of the sun in its five critical stages.<sup>281</sup> Hence, this is a Kongo preservation and I will also venture to conclude that the addition of the sun and the moon in some *firmas* are Kongo preservations. I make the aforementioned conclusion, because although the Taino and Carib cosmological, cosmogonical system was highly developed, their geometric system of graphic representation and the religious objects did not portray the sun and the moon and even less, in their stages.

The following piece of important information provided by Martínez-Ruiz is in regards to the beginning of the Kongo system of graphic writing, which can be traced back to the rupestrian drawings found at Lovo, Mbanza Kongo, Angola. When we compare these early signs, which he provides in a table that compares the different forms

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<sup>280</sup>. Martínez-Ruiz, Barbaro. *Kongo Graphic Writing And Other Narratives Of The Sign*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 76-77

<sup>281</sup>. Martínez-Ruiz, Barbaro. *Kongo Graphic Writing And Other Narratives Of The Sign*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 76-77

of the same drawings at these locations as well as some similar drawings found in Palo Monte (pages 81 to 87) we can see how this codified systems was truly preserved in Palo Monte. After, reviewing the large amount of drawings presented on Table 4 we can come to the conclusion that the vast majority of the Kongo Graphic writing system is a codified language of culture and religion, and which was preserved with the Afro-Cuban religion of Palo Monte as practiced by their Congo descendants. Moreover, the similarities alluded to above seem to be nothing more than this, similarities. The majority of geometric similarities observed while investigating Taino art in comparison with the *firmas* are also found the in the codified graphic writing system of the Kongo people since the migration of the Bantu people across the Western Central African savannas through their establishment by the *manikongo* of the Kingdom of Kongo and beyond the incursion of the Portuguese and the capuchins with their brand of Portuguese Catholicism.<sup>282</sup>

We cannot conclude that the geometric visual language of the Taino was borrowed by the Kongo Diaspora. Rather, we must understand it as a meeting point between beliefs and practices of the Tainos and the Congo slaves, which informed their cooperation, cohabitation and fusion in the Caribbean. My claim then, is that this should be viewed as a universal language which allowed for a better crosspollination of Taino and Congo ideas and religious beliefs (as well as cultural) for their purpose of surviving and obtaining power against the common enemy. This is particularly demonstrated by the Taino story recounted by Ramon Pane in which he tells us that on one occasion six Tainos stole several Christian images and threw them on the ground for the purpose of

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<sup>282</sup>. Martínez-Ruiz, Barbaro. *Kongo Graphic Writing And Other Narratives Of The Sign*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 81-88



what seems like borrowing its power. Pane tells us that they “covered them with earth and then urinated on them, saying: ‘Now your fruits will be good and great’<sup>283</sup> apparently because they had buried them in a *conuco* or a farming field. This can be understood by utilizing Robiou Lamarche’s insight in which he tells us that most likely this behavior by the Taino demonstrates a religious *Habitus* or a cultural mindset, which allowed for the ready adoption of spiritual symbols based on their utility. Then, by performing the fertility ritual in this way the Taino were most likely thinking that the religious symbols which the Christian priest had brought were more powerful than their *cemis* and thus readily borrowed their spiritual power for the purposes of their survival and power.<sup>284</sup>

*Caracaracol, Kuballende, Babalú-Ayé and San Lazaro*

In this subsection of the Chapter I want explore the nature of one of the twin brothers, the *Caracaracol* and the *Mpungo Kuballende*. The reason for investigating this is that there appears to be a point of commonality between the mythical Caribbean Amerindian *Caracaracol* and the *Mpungo Kuballende*, the *Oricha Babalú-Ayé* and the Catholic Saint *San Lazaro*. According to the Caribbean Amerindian myth of the four twin brothers, the brother, who was named *Dimiuan* and who was designated with the title of *Caracaracol* (which means scabby) was the first brother to be taken out of her mother (*Gaia*). Moreover, this brother, beyond the myth of creation, also played an important role in the myth cycles of the Caribbean Amerindians. The name *Caracaracol* was recorded previously, in the story of the re-creation of women among the Amerindians of

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<sup>283</sup>. This is obtained from Ramon Pane’s manuscript Chapter XXVI.

<sup>284</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 138-139

the Island of *Hayti*. According to this Taino myth, the *Caracaracoli* (the plural form) were sent to the island of Martinique, with the responsibility of grabbing the non-sexually differentiated “women”, which stood in the form of eagles. The myth tells us that these *Caracaracoli* were assigned with this task, because the nature of their skin (it was scabby and hard).<sup>285</sup>

The Taino myth informs us that (as mentioned above) that these *Caracaracoli* had their hands rough, which allow them to hold tightly onto these sexually undeveloped women. Pane then explains that these *Caracaracoli* derived their name from a disease which creates scabs that make the body very rough. The origin of this disease for the Caribbean Amerindians, derived from the myth of the four twin brothers who visit their grandfather in his *bohio* (recorded in Chapter 4). The genesis of this disease for the Taino was then based on the encounter between their grandfather and *Caracaracol*, who is hit with their grandfather’s bag of *cogioba* from which disease spring forth. Another story of importance for tracing the Caribbean Amerindian influence on the Afro-Cuban deities of *Kuballende* and *Babalú-Ayé*, and the Catholic Saint *San Lazaro* is the story of *Guahagiona*. The Taino mythical story of *Guahagiona* tells us how this king was suffering from ailments from which he could get no respite. This king who was very rich

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<sup>285</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 13-17

and respected could not get rid of the disease ailing him. Only a woman he encountered on the ocean was able to help him, by washing his ailments with an unknown plant.<sup>286</sup>

Pane informs us that this mythical *Guahagiona* suffered from a body full of sores. Pane then observes that the most likely explanation for this mythical disease was an infection he saw among the Caribbean Amerindians when the Spanish arrived. Pane tells us that he believed the origin of this myth and the origin of this infection to be the “French disease”. Gaylord Bourne notes that this was a translation by Ulloa of the Spanish *las bubas* (syphilis), which was the name for the disease.<sup>287</sup> Therefore, I conclude that this disease was endemic to the Caribbean and had appeared on the geography long before the Spanish arrived (with their endemic illnesses). The prominent role of the *Caracaracol* (as well as the *Caracaracoli*) in the myth of the Caribbean Amerindians, together with the development of this myth before the arrival of the Spanish begs the question about the influence of this mythological figure and its disease on the Afro-Caribbean religions in Cuba. My conclusion is that the figure of the saint *San Lazaro*, the *Mpungo Kuballende* and *Oricha Babalú-Ayé* were directly influenced by this Taino myth and character.

The saint *San Lazaro* was viewed by the Catholic Church as not being Catholic in origin, but as a Caribbean colonial invention. The Catholic Church expounded that this saint, *San Lazaro*, had originated from the distortion and fusion of the two Lazarus stories

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<sup>286</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 13-17

<sup>287</sup>. Bourne, Edward Gaylord, Christopher Columbus, and Ramón Pané, *Columbus, Ramon Pane, And The Beginnings Of American Anthropology* (Worcester, Mass.: [American Antiquarian Society], 1906), 13-17

found on the Christian bible. Considering that after the Spanish colonial period in the Caribbean and the Catholic encounter with Afro-Caribbean creole religious manifestations we see the emergence of the image of *San Lazaro* venerated today. Ultimately, they concluded that this religious encounter led to the syncretization of both biblical Lazarus on one image, which were developed in close connection with the African imagery of the god *Babalú-Ayé* or *Kuballende*. My informed hypothesis is that this syncretic process may have had its origin from the Taino mythical figure of *Caracaracol* and its prominent position among the Caribbean Amerindians. This is especially evident in the fact that after the colonial expansion and the syncretization of the Catholic and Afro-Caribbean religions in Cuba, we see the manifestation in Spain of the same saint with the same imagery on the church of *San Nicolás* in Bilbao; although, as the Catholic Church had decreed, this *San Lazaro* did not appear in the Bible. After all, *San Lazaro* plays a prominent role in the lives of the Afro-Caribbean believers and is seen as a particularly miraculous saint, with equally potent spiritual qualities.<sup>288</sup>

Although there is the equivalent god of diseases in the Yoruba Pantheon (*Babalú-Ayé*) and the Congo pantheon (*Koballende*) the role they play in the traditional forms of these religions is as minor god; although they are much feared and respected.<sup>289</sup> Even more interestingly, is the primacy (only second in devotion in Cuba to *Osun*) with which *Kuballende* (the Cuban name of the god/force of nature) is venerated in Guanabacoa, La

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<sup>288</sup>. Noticias Cubanas | Coronavirus en Cuba, *Conozca Acerca De La Devoción A San Lázaro En Cuba* ([online] Available at: <<https://www.dimecuba.com/revista/noticias-cuba/conozca-acerca-de-la-devocion-a-san-lazaro/>> [Accessed 26 January 2021], 2020)

<sup>289</sup>. Ellis, A. B., *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples Of The Slave Coast Of West Africa; Their Religion, Manners, Customs, Laws, Language, Etc. With An Appendix Containing A Comparison Of The Tshi, Ga, Ewe, And Yoruba Languages* (London: Chipman and Hall, Ltd., 1894), 73-74.

Habana Cuba. This region of Cuba is considered one of the epicenters of the religion in Cuba, which even declares *Kuballende (San Lazaro)* as the king of the religion. In Matanzas, the other epicenter of the religion, *Nzasi Sasi* or *7 Rayos* is the supreme *Mpungo*.<sup>290</sup> *Kuballende* is considered to have the absolute dominion over the dead, night and the religion of Palo Monte, with its cult of the dead. *Kuballende* is also considered the inseparable friend of *7 Rayos*, who is considered the father of the four human twins who redeem humanity.<sup>291</sup> However, this is not the case in the Kongo traditional religion, where the origins of humanity can be traced back to three siblings named *Kuiti Kuiti*, *Nkunda Mbaki Nranda* and *Mboze*.<sup>292</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that the Palo Monte belief of the four twins who redeem humanity is a direct Caribbean Amerindian influence.

*Maboya, Ndoki, the Coribib Chemin and the Lechuza*

Much like the idea of the *ndoki* in Palo Monte, the Caribs believed that there was a malevolent spirit/force named *Maboya* (as well as the less commonly used *Mabouya* and *Mapoya*). This spirit, they believed, caused upsets and disruptions in all aspects of their lives. The *Maboya* resided in the arms and moved after the death of the individual in which it resided, into the woods to become the Spirit of the Forest. Caribs believed that *Maboyas* dwelled in the *guano* or balsa tree (*Ochroma pyramidale*). These spirits, they

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<sup>290</sup>. Noticias Cubanas | Coronavirus en Cuba, *Conozca Acerca De La Devoción A San Lázaro En Cuba* ([online] Available at: <<https://www.dimecuba.com/revista/noticias-cuba/conozca-acerca-de-la-devocion-a-san-lazaro/>> [Accessed 26 January 2021], 2020)

<sup>291</sup>. Rojas Calderon, Carlos Alberto, *Palo Brakamundo* (Bloomington: Palibrio, 2011), 39 & 43

<sup>292</sup>. Álvarez Ferrer, Manuel, *Raíces del Palo Monte en Cuba* (Unos & Otros Ediciones, 2012), 31-33, 36 & 57

believed, was the third of the three spirits, which inhabited the human body, and constituted one of the three souls of humans that was transformed into the “evil spirits to which they attributed everything sinister and ill-fated.”<sup>293</sup> To add to this similarity, the second spirit or “soul” present in the human body and which was located in the head and was called *Uméku* was also considered to be mischievous and somewhat malevolent after death. This spirit went, after the death of the individual on which it resided, to the edge of the sea to wreck boats. These second spirit which was found in the head also resonates with the idea of *ndoki*, which although found in the human psyche and constitutes the attributes of both spirits two and three, does resemble tremendously the idea of *ndoki* found in Palo Monte.

The concept of *ndoki* in Palo Monte is reserved in Cuba for something that is evil or bad. More importantly, this idea of *ndoki* is also an important part of the human psyche and is something that all humans have, to varying degrees or rather to various degrees of occultation. *Ndoki* is also used as a reference to the ancestors (*Bakulu*), in which it is called *bakulu ndoki*, but this category of ancestors are considered bad or powerful (in the sense of a *brujo* or sorcerer). Overall, in Cuba, the concept of *ndoki* is seen also as the veiled aspects of ancestry, or what is termed the night of the ancestors. Palo practitioners say that we all carry these elements within ourselves and that they form an integral part of our unique composition, which defines our actions. Moreover, these night or dark forces are seen as the source of power from which acts of transgression, violence and miracles are expressed. *Ndoki* then is the powerful part within humans that remains hidden from

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<sup>293</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 216-217

light and can be used for good or for evil depending on the context and wisdom of the individual.<sup>294</sup>

Furthermore, there are some Palo Monte lineages such as the Changani lineage, which segregates a place in the *nganga*, dedicated solely to the manifestation of *ndoki*. These lineages see this separate part of the *nganga Christiana* and refer to it as *Chicherichu* or *Chicherikú*. These *Chicherikú* are usually wooden images, which isolate the *ndoki* part of the *nganga*. This isolated portion is enlisted when the *Palero* desires to perform important and powerful rituals. Represented by maggots and termites and the decay of offerings which are left in the *munanzo* after sacrifice or offerings, this *Chicherikú* represents wickedness in humans. However, although the *Chicherikú* represents that which is aggressive and tense, it also, paradoxically, carries great protective potency and raw power (which can be used for good).<sup>295</sup>

The traditional Kongo belief of *ndoki* and the underworld are a bit different than the current conceptualizations of the Cuban Palo Monte beliefs (and its related practices) as explained above. The term *ndoki* was used often to refer to the underworld, as in *Ku'mpemba* (not *Kalunga* as some think), where the dead are living, and which is guarded by *Luvemba* (translated as threshold or door). However, *Luvemba* is also, sometimes, referred to as *nsila* (as we saw in the subsection titled 'Geometric Diagrams and Their Representations'), which means a crossing or pathway. It is also worth mentioning that for the BaKongo, *Kalunga* means the vastness that is continuously

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<sup>294</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 11 & 30

<sup>295</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 73

moved by *Nzambi*, the creative and fertilizing agent of creation. *Nzambi* acts through its fire of creation as an active principle which comes into duality and dynamics with the cooling waters of *Kalunga* manifested in the interplay of degeneration and generation of the *minkisi*. *Ndoki* then, is nothing more than knowledge from *Ku'mpemba* that humans bring with them to life. This is said to be strong in some and weak in others. It also leads to differences in the potential of these forces manifesting in the lives of humans. However, like the Palo practice of *Chicherikú*, the Bwiti of Gabon try to remove the shadow aspect or the shadow portion of this knowledge that comes with us through the initiation rites of *Iboga*. The *Iboga* rite focuses on removing these shadows so that the raw protective potencies can be focused towards flourishing in a centered and benevolent manner, which can bring health to the community and to the individual person.<sup>296</sup> This last point is in close connection with the Palo Monte belief of *ndoki* as some force that is powerful and capable of performing miracles for the good of the community, as noted above.

For the *BaKongo*, the term *ndoki* was reserved for those individuals who had become devoted to the dark arts of evil. These men were feared by the *BaKongo* and were considered assassins and devourers of souls. Moreover, these men did not make use of the *minkisi* but rather sought the powers and fury of malevolent spirits of hate and vengeance called *Nkonde* or *Nkose*. The *ndoki* (the men) made use of these malevolent spirits through the use of conjures, which excited these restless spirits (resembles the idea of the *nfuri*, restless spirits in Palo Monte), which were charged with causing maladies

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<sup>296</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 73



and ailments of all kinds.<sup>297</sup> In comparison with the traditional Kongo view of *ndoki*, the aforementioned creole beliefs and practices I believe, have been influenced by the Carib belief of the three souls found in the human body and their roles after the death of the individual.

Another important commonality observed and one I have not found evidence of, in the traditional Kongo belief system is that of the owl as the messenger of death and the otherworld. More precisely, the Caribs believed that the *coribib chemin* (the *lechuza*, which is a type of owl endemic to Cuba and which goes by the scientific name *Spéoyto cunicularia*), was the messenger bird of the afterlife and of the ancestral spirits. The Caribs believed that its song was a bad omen or a sign of death itself. On the other hand, the Caribs believed that the presence of bats flying inside their homes was a good omen. The Caribs believed that the bats, which they called *bulliri*, were *cemis* that had come to protect them and that anyone, who did harm to the bats would become sick.<sup>298</sup>

The *coribib chemin* was also an important animal for the *Boyez* and it played a significant role in the consecration ceremony of the young and aspiring newly volunteered *Boyez*. During the ceremony of the consecration of the soon-to-be *Boyez*, which was done in the *carbet* (see page 218 of Robiou Lamarche's book *Tainos and*

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<sup>297</sup>. Álvarez Ferrer, Manuel, *Raíces del Palo Monte en Cuba* (Unos & amp; Otros Ediciones, 2012), 37-38

<sup>298</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 217

*Caribs*<sup>299</sup> for an artistic representation of the *coribib chemin* and the *Boyez* initiatory ritual), a small opening called the *tourar* was left intentionally so that the *coribib chemin* could be allowed to enter during the nocturnal stage of the ceremony due to its significance in the life of the newly consecrated *Boyez*.<sup>300</sup> In Palo Monte, *nfuá* (death) is important and the *yimbe* (*brujo*; warlock) is its faithful ally and for this reason *nfuá* pacts with the life of practitioners and protects them. *Nfuá* is believed in Palo Monte, to translocate or move itself through the *lechuza* (the smaller owl known by the scientific name *Spéoyto cunicularia*), which lends its body to *nfuá* so that it may use it as its only mode of transportation on earth.<sup>301</sup> This Palo Monte belief, I conclude, was a direct borrowing from the Carib belief in the *coribib chemin* as the messenger of the death and the underworld.

*The Mpungo Watariamba or Vence Bataya, Ochosi, Zarabanda and Ogun*

By the way of conclusion, I would like to seal this Chapter with a discussion of the *Mpungo Watariamba* and the *Mpungo Zarabanda* as formalizing the fusion of Caribbean Amerindian beliefs by the African Diaspora in Cuba. The *Mpungo*, which is known in Palo Mayombe as *Watariamba* (*Wa tári a mbá* means-stone of fire in Kikongo) or as *Vence Bataya*, is syncretized in the Brillumba branch with the *Oricha Ochosi*. Both the *Mpungo* and the *Oricha* symbolize the spirit or power (in the case of Palo Monte) of

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<sup>299</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 218

<sup>300</sup>. Robiou Lamarche, Sebastián, and Grace M Robiou Ramirez de Arellano, *Tainos and Caribs. The Aboriginal Cultures Of The Antilles* (San Juan, Puerto Rico: Editorial Punto y Coma, 2019), 217

<sup>301</sup>. Rojas Calderon, Carlos Alberto, *Palo Brakamundo* (Bloomington: Palibrio, 2011), 54

the hunt, the hunter, and hunting in general. *Watariamba* is also considered the spirit or power that symbolizes war and justice. Other names of this *Mpungo* include *Nkuyu Buenco*, *Saca Empeño*, *Lupokuyo*, *Santisi* and *Cabo Ronda*. When *Nkuyu* is found in the name of the *Mpungo*, as one of the examples above, it gives the added meaning of “the errant spirit of the fiery stone” to the name.<sup>302</sup>

What is important to this thesis, however, and what constitutes the most important aspect of this *Mpungo* in my investigation of the Caribbean Amerindian influence on the beliefs and practices of the Palo Monte religion is the fact that the *Mpungo Watariamba* epitomizes the syncretic process of assimilation and integration explored so far. *Watariamba* then, is the *Mpungo*, which exemplifies the Amerindian Contributions to the Afro-Caribbean Congo-Derived Religion of Palo Monte. An important observation we must underline, before we delve into the formalization of this syncretic process is the fact that the following information applies to the Brillumba branch of the religion and the Lucumi tradition in Cuba, but not the much older and traditional branch of Palo Mayombe. With this observation, supported by the fact that no similar *Mpungo* is observed in the Kongo pantheon<sup>303</sup>, I conclude that beyond being the quintessential Caribbean Amerindian assimilation into the Kongo Diaspora in Cuba, the *Mpungo Watariamba* also holds the keys to understanding all the aforementioned syncretic process. If we observe the mythology/legends associated with the *Mpungo* or the *Oricha*,

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<sup>302</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 91-93

<sup>303</sup>. Álvarez Ferrer, Manuel, *Raíces del Palo Monte en Cuba* (Unos & Otros Ediciones, 2012), 25-57

which were incorporated with it in the Afro-Cuban pantheon, then we can deduce a direct preservation describing this syncretic process.

Although the *Mpungo Watariamba* and the Nigerian *Orisha Oshoosi* refer to the same spirit or power described above, their representations and myths vary from those of the Brillumba branch and the Lucumi tradition in Cuba.<sup>304 305</sup> Therefore, I will focus on the Brillumba and Lucumi explanation of this spirit or power, rather than the Palo Mayombe and Traditional Nigerian *Orisha* and Ifa tradition. This rationale will become apparent once the conceptions of the former creole manifestations are explored. *Vence Bataya* or *Palo Fuerte* as he is also known (due to it being the main *palo* (stick or tree) used for his constructions) is conceived as the *Mpungo* or *Oricha*, which gives the power or gift of astral travel. He also endows the hunter with the ability to merge with both the wild and the soul of the animal he is hunting. This gift, given by *Vence Bataya* or *Ochosi* allows the hunter to approach his prey in silence, so that he is not detected. This ensures success in hunting. He also holds the secrets of *Ntoto* (the Earth) and the *mpolos* (powders) of wilderness, since this is where his domain lies and where he is resurrected.<sup>306</sup>

This parallelism, of *Gurunfinda* and *Vence Bataya* is a fact I will explore as my next project, in which I trace the genesis of Palo Monte's *Gurunfinda* to the primordial

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<sup>304</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011) , 91-93

<sup>305</sup>. Wright, M., *WORKING OSHOOSI* ([online] Oshoosi.com. Available at: <<https://oshoosi.com/oshoosi-details.html>> [Accessed 15 February 2021], 2015)

<sup>306</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 91-92

societies or cultures of the West Central African Pygmies. Much like my argument regarding the absorption of Caribbean Amerindian beliefs and practices as a tool of survival in the wilderness of the Caribbean lands, the Bantu speaking people seem to have depended on the Pygmies because of their perceived supernatural powers over the untamed and unknown wilderness of the lands of West Central Africa. I take this point of convergence to denote that the Kongo belief system was based on a sort of cultural/religious model, which saw the primacy of the first-comers (to the lands which they eventually inhabited; as laid out by Igor Kopytoff in his *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*<sup>307</sup>) as primordial beings, who had a privileged position as experts of the religious sphere. This was based on an understanding that they had mastered these lands through their supernatural powers and thus needed to be respected. In this vein these spirit forces or powers can be interpreted as representing the much older and much respected cultures of the first-comers, which they eventually integrated into their pantheon.

In the case of the Caribbean Amerindians, the *Mpungo Vence Bataya* (in Palo Brillumba and the Lucumi tradition) is conceived as having a pact with the *Mpungo Zarabanda*, who is believed to execute his potency. The *Mpungo Zarabanda* is the spirit or power of iron and fire, and represents or symbolizes the force behind the blacksmith. Beyond being the *tronco mayor* (major trunk) of the Brillumba branch and the owner of the *mbele* (the machete; an icon of the religion) the *Mpungo Zarabanda* is also historically significant. The historical significance of the *Mpungo Zarabanda* lies in the fact that the histories of the BaKongo and Bantu speaking people of West Central Africa

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<sup>307</sup>. Kopytoff, I., *The African Frontier: The Reproduction of Traditional African Societies* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1989)

are intimately tied with the practice of metallurgy. This practice, reflected in the name of their kingdom (*kongo* means iron in Kikongo) and the wealth it brought them would eventually make them important players on the African continent, while securing them a respected position as a technologically advanced and powerful kingdom.<sup>308</sup> Hence, on the basis of this understanding we could take the *Mpungo Zarabanda* to represent or symbolize the BaKongo or Bantu speaking people.

On the other hand, the creole attributes of *Vence Bataya* and the *Orisha Ochosi* paint him as an Amerindian, who lives in the woods and is a great hunter and fisherman. This force or spirit is believed to possess shamanistic powers, which allows him to induce powerful visions. He is also considered to be, by Palo and Lucumi practitioners, a warrior and a magician. Another important attribute of this spirit, force or power, is the fact that it is believed to wear an intricately created headpiece with horns and feathers, while carrying a bow and arrow. He is also known as the protector of all wild animals and is seen as the patron of those who work with dogs (much like *Zarabanda* and *Ogun*).<sup>309, 310</sup> From this information we can reconstruct Amerindian beliefs and practices as well as values, codified in the myth and representation of the *Mpungo Vence Bataya* and the Lucumi version of the *Oricha Ochosi*. Moreover, the fact that this spirit, force or power is represented (most of the time) as an Amerindian conclusively supports the hypothesis

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<sup>308</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 91-92

<sup>309</sup>. AboutSanteria, *Ochosi* ([online] Available at: <<http://www.aboutsanteria.com/ochosi.html>> [Accessed 15 February 2021], 2021)

<sup>310</sup>. Original Botanica, *The Orishas: Ochosi* ([online] Available at: <<https://www.originalbotanica.com/blog/orishas-ochosi-santeria/>> [Accessed 15 February 2021], 2021)

that this *Mpungo* or *Oricha* denotes the formal absorption of Caribbean Amerindian beliefs and practices by the Afro-Cuban pantheon.

I see in the modern practice of placing the bow and arrow, representing *Vence Bataya* and *Ochosi*, inside the cauldron of *Zarabanda* and *Ogun* the culmination and formalization of the syncretic process arising from the Caribbean Amerindian and African Diaspora religious encounters in the Caribbean wilderness. I support this by the *Pataki* (Afro-Cuban sacred story; in the traditional Ifa these stories are not called *Pataki* and this particular one is not recorded), which tells us that although *Ogun* and *Ochosi* are currently inseparable spirits within the Afro-Cuban pantheon; they originally were not on friendly terms with each other. However, the *Pataki* tells us that soon after, both realized that they needed each other. This realization arose from the fact that, because although *Ochosi* was a great hunter, who never missed his mark, he had a hard time getting through the untamed forest to find his prey in the newly formed earth (perhaps referring to the “New World”). This was so, because there were no paths or clearings in this newly formed earth, which was somewhat similar to what *Ogun* was experiencing during his hunts. Although *Ogun* had a similar problem (he had no food to eat), his problem was that he was not able to trap or catch anything in his traps which he made of metal. Compared with *Ochosi*, *Ogun* was able to set his traps in the wilderness by clearing it and making paths to hunt with his machete. Unfortunately, unlike *Ochosi*, *Ogun* was not able to catch any prey on this newly formed land. Therefore, one day while going to the forest (to take a sacrifice *Òrúnmìlà* had told them to take to the forest) they ran into each other and started to talk about their problems. This allowed them to realize that together they

could achieved much more than either of them could, alone.<sup>311, 312</sup> Together with the language investigation of the name *Zarabanda* detailed above as an amalgam of Taino and Bantu words (plus all the common themes investigated), we can observed how traces of the Caribbean Amerindian and African religious encounter and its indelible signs are located in the creole religion of Palo Monte.

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<sup>311</sup>.AboutSanteria, *Ochosi* ([online] Available at: <<http://www.aboutsanteria.com/ochosi.html>> [Accessed 15 February 2021], 2021)

<sup>312</sup>. Frisvold, Nicholaj de Mattos, *Palo Mayombe: The Garden of Blood and Bones* (1st ed. [Dover]: Bibliothèque Rouge/Scarlet Imprint, 2011), 91-92



## Chapter 6

*“Kana kuyila, kya kukya”*

*“Por mucho que llegue la noche, se hará de día”*

*“Does not matter how often night comes, it will always dawn”*

*-Palo Monte Proverb*

### Conclusion

In the amount of time allowed for the compilation, investigation and synthesis of the scant amount of sources available (known to the author), I have discovered a well-spring of helpful sources. The popular belief not only seems to be well founded, but the influence of the Amerindian beliefs and practices on the beliefs and practices of the Caribbean religious Diaspora has only begun to be properly understood. Due to the larger number of Kongolese slaves at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, coupled with the rapid decimation of the Amerindian at about the same time, the Amerindian influence is traced to the Afro-Cuban Palo Monte religion, as a creole manifestation. Although not apparent at first sight, the research into this religion elucidated the indelible signs left by the Amerindian Religious Habitus. Further research on other traditions such as the Lucumi, also located the influence of the Amerindian beliefs and practices. However, these influences migrated from Palo Monte to these later creole manifestations, rather than directly from the Caribbean Amerindians. Moreover, viewed through the lens of the Decolonial option the silence of the Amerindian influence is linked to the powerful

influence of the Catholic hegemony on the religious Habitus of the Afro-Caribbean descendants in Cuba.

This, coupled with the utilitarian emphasis of the African's religious Habitus as explained by Maya Deren, gives us a hint for understanding the silence observed by Caribbean and African scholars. This silence most likely occurred from the need by the Afro-Caribbean Diaspora to keep the Amerindian influence unacknowledged from the Religious hegemony. Also, due to the pressure felt by the established academic hegemony of continuing the historical trope of Caribbean indigenous extinction this influence was also lost to the Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean scholars of academia. I pinpoint this unfortunate process to the gradual forgetting of the Caribbean Amerindian influence by the African-Diaspora in Cuba due to it not being openly discussed. This most likely occurred over the passage of time through generations of Afro-Caribbean religious practitioners. The result of this process can be observed in the ambivalent nature of the acknowledged Caribbean Amerindian influence on the Caribbean religious Diaspora today. With the popular belief that there is indeed a Caribbean Amerindian influence in the cultural and religious Habitus of the Caribbean religious Diaspora, juxtaposed with the complete negation by Afro-Caribbean religious practitioners of the Caribbean Amerindian influence to their creole religious traditions

Then, Deren's insight into the African religious Habitus of utility detailed in Chapter 3 above leads to the conclusion that both the Taino and the African slaves had a similar mindset, which allowed for their cohabitation and the understanding of each other much more readily than the Spanish. This religious and cultural meeting ground would have constituted the foundation from which a steady exchange of ideas and religious

powers would have occurred. Gaps in power or knowledge would have been filled by the incorporation of each other's beliefs systems, aiding in each other's survival. I believe that this phenomenon is the reason why when we look at the creole religion of Palo Monte, we discern many beliefs and practices, which have no Kongo origin, but rather demonstrate a multiplicity of voices (Amerindian beliefs, Spiritism, Lucumi tradition, Arara tradition and Catholicism) which speak to us today through the religious manifestation of Palo Monte.

In this thesis I have focused on the Amerindian influence on Palo Monte and as we have seen in Chapter 5 this influence, although difficult to trace and difficult to proclaim with absolute certainty does demonstrate a proliferation of Amerindians beliefs and practices and a bevy of other Amerindian influences quite distinct from the African origins of the religion. Nonetheless, since I am not an initiated person in the Afro-Cuban religion of Palo Monte and I am by no means an expert, I decided to include in Chapter 4 all the available information, from both European and modern Decolonial projects, about the beliefs and practices of the Caribbean Amerindians. By providing this information I hope to provide leads for others with more knowledge about the religion to locate further plausible influences that may have escaped my limited awareness. After all, as the Lucumi proverb at the beginning of my thesis communicates, I am not the only voice in the field and only through the extensive collaboration of all these voices within the field would we be able to plant the seeds of a future discourse on the subject.

I hope that by completing this study I have contributed not only to the Decolonial project, but to Latin American and Caribbean indigenous studies as well. I also hope that this project serves as an invitation to all Africanist and Afro-Caribbean scholars to start a

dialogue about this much understudied and undervalued area of study in need of resuscitation. Lastly, I also challenge ethnographers to pursue fieldwork on these observations utilizing my thesis project as a rough guide. The leads I have provided can be properly and empirically explored. I also encourage all Africanist and Afro-Caribbean scholars of other traditions to pursue similar scholarship in their religions of expertise. Only then will the true extent of the Caribbean Amerindian influence as it survives in the cultural and religious ethos of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora will be understood and the yoke of coloniality with its matrix of colonial power will be lifted. This then would mean the first steps in approaching the goal of border-thinking for a creation of a pluriversal world that allows for the trope of indigenous extinction to make room for a multiplicity of voices, which would speak something new. This last point I believe, is an important factor in the future of Caribbean scholarship, since the cultural and religious landscape of the Caribbean with its dynamic and multicultural populations can only be properly comprehended through the Decolonial lens of pluriversality and multiplicity of truths.

*Malekum Nsala*

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