Jalane D. Schmidt

Cachita's Streets: The Virgin of Charity, Race, and Revolution in Cuba. Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2015. xi + 376 pp. (Paper US\$ 26.95)

Cuba's Virgin of Charity goes by many names. To her devotees in Oriente, she is often Cachita, a nickname for Caridad, with an older claim to the Virgin than Ochún, the beloved and sensuous *oricha*. *Cachita's Streets*, an account of five occasions when the Virgin's effigy left her sanctuary, could also go by other titles. The book deals with the saint's pilgrimages from El Cobre, a small copper-mining town in eastern Cuba to Santiago de Cuba and Havana in 1936, 1952, 1959, 1998, and 2012. Drawing from provincial and ecclesiastical archives, interviews, and ethnographic observations, Jalane Schmidt offers a broad-ranging exploration of the spatial and political dimensions of the Virgin's public cult. But she pursues many avenues along the way, tracing the route of creolization and "inventions," telling an "object history" of the Virgin's celebrated effigies, and, finally, detailing the way Cubans have deployed the Virgin in the streets to press claims about their collective identities.

Although Schmidt starts from the premise that the Virgin "has long served as a symbol whereby Cubans interpret themselves and their conditions" (p. 2), her account leaves the usual pieties behind. For her, the Virgin does not embody a harmonious synthesis of races, cultures, and ideologies; nor is she merely a reflection of other more concrete realities. Instead, the Virgin is the protagonist of street performances that must be understood in light of the long history of Catholic devotions as well as carnival and political rallies. When Schmidt writes of the Virgin and creolization, she does not trade in the "brittle syncretisms" that circulate in heritage management agencies. Instead, she favors a model of "societalization" that is temporally and geographically distinct from the ethno-genesis of Lucumí communities in western Cuba in the nineteenth century. Building on research by María Elena Díaz and Olga Portuondo Zúñiga, she shows that devotion to the Virgin was once restricted to a seventeenth-century community of enslaved *Cobrerros* who embraced Catholicism wholeheartedly, albeit not exclusively. The institutionalization of the cult and its rise to national prominence involved church and state officials, lay people, and insurgents, in circumstances that complicate the distinction between popular and ecclesiastical Catholicism.

Schmidt's historicizing is deliberate and illuminating. In attending to the social life of things, she shows that the Virgin has been subjected to repeated race-making. Although *Cobrerros* regarded the Virgin as one of their own, elsewhere she was described as *india*, *morena*, and *trigueña*. These denominations speak to regional variations, but they have to do also with the conventions of

Marian encounters and the intersection of Catholicism with other popular religions. The Virgin's connection to Ochún, which many see inscribed in their shared identification as *mulatas*, is far from immemorial. Santería, Schmidt reminds us, was established in eastern Cuba in the 1930s. Moreover, El Cobre's effigy, said to be the very one found in the Bay of Nipe in 1612, has undergone undeniable "browning." In the 1950s, much of this was the stuff of an emerging and hard-won narrative consensus. But in 1982, when restoration work revealed that the original color of the Virgin's face was *ocre oscuro*, Santiago's bishop had her repainted *morena clara*, a lighter shade of brown. The intent and effects are difficult to untangle, but Schmidt handles the analysis deftly.

Schmidt's approach is panoramic. Reviewing nearly a century of pilgrimages, she finds that "the claims linking the Virgin with her nation were broadcast from ever-larger public stages, employing emergent media technology and new architecture to do so" (p. 10). She highlights three modalities of engagement. In the 1930s, when memories of the *machadato* were still fresh, Cubans celebrated the Virgin as a monarch of the reconstituted republic. By mid-century, however, the Virgin was typically seen as a conquering general, an image that recalled her involvement in the insurgency against Spain. Since the late 1990s, the Church and the government have promoted the Virgin as an advocate of national reconciliation. But after decades of state-mandated seclusion, the Virgin's return to the streets has been halting, and often accompanied by practices deemed "Afro-Cuban" (rather than Catholic), which now vie for national standing and benefit from a measure of government support.

Cachita's Streets is deeply researched and skillfully crafted. If all first books read like this one, fewer authors would seek redemption in subsequent monographs. Students of religion will welcome Schmidt's engagement with well-known interpreters and a roster of excellent Cuban scholars whose work is not available in English. Specialists who follow the spatial turn in cultural studies will find a good deal to consider here, as will undergraduate students interested in race and nationalism in the Caribbean.

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