Sacred Grounds and Profane Plantations: The Spiritual Landscapes of Barbados

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Sacred Grounds and Profane Plantations: The Spiritual Landscapes of Barbados

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology from The College of William and Mary

by

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Sacred Grounds and Profane Plantations: The Spiritual Landscapes of Barbados

Myles Sullivan
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Introduction

“Listen, I love Barbados,” was how the conversation began with a recently-gained acquaintance I met along a seaside thoroughfare in Speightstown, Barbados. Told with such conviction, I would have had little ground to argue with him if I had thought to disagree. After spending several weeks on the island, this statement was not new to me. Among the street vendors in the port-capital in Bridgetown, at the University of West Indies at Cave Hill, or at gathering spots in Speightstown, Barbadians are quick to express to visitors like myself their love for the island and its people. Yet such acceptance and love for colonized Caribbean areas like Barbados can go underreported by scholars of the African Diaspora who have rightly emphasized the horrors and trauma of the transatlantic slave trade which brought approximately twelve million people to the Americas from Africa (Slavery Voyages Database). Later that day, the Barbadian man I had met picked up an old discarded rum bottle. Showing me the map of Barbados on the label, he flipped the bottle upside down and simply said, “Africa.” While the sun set on us, this quietly profound imagining of Barbados, along with his self-expressed love for the island, raised a number of questions about how Afro-Barbadians (or “Bajans” as Barbadians call themselves) have negotiated their past and understood their presence in Barbados from the seventeenth century through today. How were spiritual beliefs from Africa retained or renegotiated on the island of Barbados? How have Afro-Barbadian’s relationships with their ancestors (both in Africa and in Barbados) shaped the culture on the island over the centuries? The Bajan man’s own expressions of his identity that evening in Speightstown raised such questions, which strike at how historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists should consider cultural formations in the Caribbean.

This Senior Honors Thesis seeks to understand the spiritual landscapes of Barbados. Archaeological excavations and oral traditions indicate that the Barbadian landscape has been
imbued with sacred qualities in the past, and that Barbadian peoples today continue to recognize the spiritual importance of ancestors and special places. Drawing on archaeological and ethnographic evidence, I argue that both natural and cultural features on the Barbadian landscape help reinforce a distinctly Barbadian identity that embraces a creolized African heritage and challenges the “Little England” trope.

**Background**

As the small easternmost island of the Caribbean’s Lesser Antilles, Barbados has a long history as a distinctly English colony (Fig 1). Barbados is often referred to as “Little England” or “Bimshire.” Such labels are not imposed on Anglophone Caribbean islands, such as Jamaica, Trinidad, and Dominica. At only 21 miles and 14 miles wide, Barbados began as an English colony in 1627 and remained continuously under British rule until its independence in 1966. The idea of “Little England” was produced by colonial administrators’ preoccupations and the British
public’s imaginings, rather than the realities of Barbadian identities. As a trope, it has hindered understanding African-oriented traditions that penetrate the history of Barbadian culture.

At the time of English settlement in 1627, the island had no permanent indigenous population. The Amerindian population who had lived on the island for thousands of year had abandoned Barbados sometime in the sixteenth century, probably after Spanish and Portuguese incursions had begun to undermine the social and political structures of indigenous Barbadians. Early planters experimented with tobacco and indigo, but producing profitable crops eluded them. In the 1640s, however, the switch to sugarcane generated great wealth that filled the coffers of the emerging plantocracy. The “Sugar Revolution” transformed the island into a wealthy plantation society and drastically altered its demography and social structure. Sugar plantations required more land, workers, and capital to generate the quantities of sugar needed to earn a profit. Smaller land tracts were consolidated into larger plantations, and the use of enslaved Africans replaced European indentures (and to lesser degree indigenous peoples from other parts of the Americas) as plantation workers (Watson 1977: 5-11). Perpetual African slavery was codified into law, and became the foundation of the Barbadian labor system. From the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, roughly 500,000 enslaved Africans disembarked on Barbados (Slavery Voyages Database). Barbadian slavery differed from other Caribbean islands as slave populations quickly established naturally-increasing populations by the middle of the eighteenth century. By 1817 only 7% of the population was born in Africa (Beckles 2006: 70). After decades of debate, which dominated concerns of British Parliament and Colonial Assemblies in the Caribbean, slavery was abolished in 1834, and followed by a four-year “apprenticeship” period until 1838 (Beckles 2006: 40, 103-137). Emancipation led to gradual alterations in labor relations, and restructured landholdings and settlements across the island as
former slaves left plantation lands to establish tenantries and freeholds up through the first decades of the twentieth century (Marshall 2014).

Since the 1960s, Barbados’s sugar industry has slowly declined, with tourism becoming the main revenue source instead (Gmelch and Gmelch 1997: 51). Remnants of sugar’s power still inhabit the Barbadian landscape. Windmills and smokestacks, which once fueled the industry, stand as landmarks along ridges of Barbados’s successful sugar trade. Windmills and cane carts are depicted on the island’s coinage and stamps. Every August, Barbadians celebrate the end of the sugar harvest with the “Crop-Over” festival, which features joyful public celebrations of music, dancing, and drinking. Although instituted in 1964 as a national holiday, sources date similar practices back to the plantation era slavery (Beckles 2006: 67-71). Today many Bajans can trace their ancestry back to the enslaved Africans that sustained the sugar industry. Recent census data shows that make up Afro-Barbadians 92% of the population, followed by the next largest group self-identifying as “mixed” (3%), and “white” (2.7%) (Barbados Census Data 2010). All together, these current demographic dimensions of Barbadian society have direct links with the historical processes that have occurred on the island.

Research

Two trips to Barbados shaped the direction of this research project. In the summer of 2014, I participated in Professor Frederick Smith’s archaeological field school at St. Nicholas Abbey, a sugar plantation active since the mid-seventeenth century. Located in the northern parish of St. Peter, St. Nicholas Abbey is a far cry from the bustling streets in Bridgetown. The estate sits in a rural area of rolling cane fields, which break sharply into steep gullies, often thick with overgrowth and foliage. The manor house, constructed sometime between 1656 and 1661, today operates as a house museum that highlights early architecture, plantation life, and a history of the
sugar industry and rum-making. Some two hundred meters north of the mansion house, William and Mary students including myself excavated a rocky ridge area sloping into a nearby gully network; the site provided strong evidence of its use as slave village in the late eighteenth century through the nineteenth centuries, as well as continual use by plantation workers well into the mid-twentieth century (Devlin 2008, Chambers 2015) (Fig 2 and 3). The site’s surface was scattered with modern broken bottle glass, ceramics and piles of coral stone rubble used for housing. Workers on the estate described the presence of old “slave houses” standing on the ridge up until the 1950s (Handler et al 1989: 42). The presence of modern materials, at a site where enslaved Barbadians once lived, sparked my initial interest in previous and ongoing memorialization and commemoration of ancestral lands in specific locales in the rural landscape of Barbados.

![Worker’s Village Site at Saint Nicholas Abbey](image)

**Fig 2:** Worker’s Village Site at Saint Nicholas Abbey
Fig 3: Stone pile at the slave village site

Overall, St. Nicholas reflects the larger history of Barbadian sugar industry and slavery, starting with its inception during the start of the Sugar Revolution in the 1640s and 50s, when the estate was established. The earliest proprietors, Jon Yeamans and Benjamin Berringer, owned 60 acres in 1641, which then increased to 195 acres in 1648, and grew to 318 acres in 1693. In the 1710s, the estate acquired the name “Nicholas” after being inherited by Berringer’s daughter who was married to a George Nicholas. By 1822, after passing through other various owners the Cave family acquired the plantation at 404 acres. The Cave family owned and maintained the plantation at practically the same size up until 2006, when local architect Larry Warren purchased the property in order to preservation and restoration as a national landmark. Sparse records indicate variations in its enslaved population over time. In 1686, the estate owned 157 individuals, while more complete records between 1817 and 1832 reflect population ranges between 173 and 202 individuals (Handler et al 1989: 40-44). On the plantation, both men, women, and children were involved with sugar production from working in the cane fields to
grinding cane, in addition to processing sugar by-products on a plantation’s rum-producing still houses (Beckles 2006: 62; Smith 2005: 42-49).

In the summer of 2015, I returned to Barbados to gather ethnographic material to help investigate whether commemorative and memorial practices reflected wider spiritual practices and beliefs surrounding St. Nicholas Abbey’s environs with historical antecedents. From an archaeological perspective, this interest was present in the physical manifestations of such intangible spiritual notions, in terms of sacred spaces and their materials. A key goal was to identify and talk to Barbadians who grew up, lived and worked around the plantation who could testify to the commemorative and spiritual nature of the landscape. From this, I analyze the process of creolization and Afro-Barbadian identity through the lens of “spiritual landscapes.” Considering the history of spiritual landscapes featured in Afro-Barbadians’ perspective reveals the complex cultures created between the African diaspora, colonial governments, and the natural environment. Conclusions drawn from St. Nicholas Abbey reflect its own local geography and ownership history, yet suggest possible broader rural Barbadian plantation regional practices beyond its 400 acres. I begin by reviewing how research into landscape has recently aided anthropologists and archaeologists, followed by an overview of how African diaspora scholars organize and study spiritual practices throughout the Caribbean. From that, I then investigate how enslaved people manifested spiritual landscapes during Barbadian history, which I divide into three broad phases, the last being specifically about the spiritual landscapes of “recent memory” I learned from Barbadians during my time on the island.

**Spiritual Landscapes**

Spiritual spaces, which were imbued with liminal characteristics through actions, beliefs, and rituals created tangible social significance in Barbadian spaces for enslaved Africans brought to
the island and for Afro-Barbadians born on the island. Essentially, how Barbadians imbedded meaning into spaces formed a critical component of “creolization,” which gave value to Barbados’s landscape and helped generate a unique idea of “Barbadians” as a people in connection to their island’s landscape.

Investigating such cultural and natural interactions which underpin the concept of “landscapes” is a fairly recent trend for anthropologists. Over two decades ago, Eric Hirsch noted that ethnographers often use landscapes to set the “place” of their research for the “foreground” of details of daily life, but had had yet to provide landscape with an “overt anthropological treatment” like other cross-cultural elements such as ritual and exchange. Anthropological interest in landscape merges several key concepts: nature and culture, inside and outside, image and representation, along with space and place. How certain cultures incorporate natural elements into society, how cultures develop attachment or control of land, how spaces are conceptualized or recreated in art and imagery, and how spaces are given cultural meaning which transform them into places, all reflect a landscape “dependent on the cultural and historical context.” Hirsch concludes that such landscapes are best conceptualized as a “cultural process,” of which there is not one absolute landscape here, but a series of related . . . perspectives, which cohere in what can be recognized as a singular form.” (Hirsch 1995: 1-13). Processual landscapes indicate the active shifts of landscape, meaning landscapes are not static but contain historical forms and meanings over the course of generations.

Where anthropologists have begun teasing out the intersections of cultural landscapes in ethnographic fieldwork, many archaeologists have embraced and emphasized the role of landscape in their own research. In one review article on how the use of a “landscape approach” appears in archaeology, it is stated that cultural landscapes operate in four key paradigms
First, landscapes are not just a culture’s natural environment, but are “synthetic, with cultural systems structuring and organizing people’s interactions with their natural environments.” Second, landscapes are composed of a community’s daily activities which “transform physical spaces into meaningful places.” Third, landscapes are the “arena for all of a community’s activities,” meaning they are “not only are constructs of human populations but they also are the milieu which those populations survive and sustain themselves.” Fourth, Landscapes change as “each community and each generation imposing its own cognitive map” on landscapes features, meaning, and use. Changes over time result in the landscape as a “cultural process” as defined by Hirsch, and also serves a “material construct which communicates information and as a kind of historical text”. In these ways, landscapes provide a large-scale material “artifact” generated over time; it functions like other forms of material culture, yet offers insight into a cultural context through its spatial or geographic quality.

Investigating the history of such a landscape aims to link together the disparate material evidence and worldviews through their shared spatial relationships in a given society or culture.

Thinking in these terms has provided archaeologists with a useful way to connect site research into their larger regional patterns and cultural milieu. When conducting excavations, archaeologists have always been interested in spaces and places, at the most basic level this involves areas of previous activities (living spaces, political spaces), and specific uses of certain spaces (domestic sites, hunting sites, cooking sites). Utilizing a landscape approach connects these places with each other and provides a sense of how they relate to each other and the natural environment. As Anschuetz and his colleagues (2001: 178-181) note, landscapes studies in archaeology generally fall into three overarching themes: settlement ecology, ethnic landscapes, and ritual landscapes. Settlement ecology follows earlier interests in settlement patterns and
culture systems and investigates “archaeologically observed patterns of land use, occupation, and transformation overtime.” In Barbados, a study involving this method might investigate sugar cultivation patterns in relation to plantation units and Atlantic economic trends. Ethnic landscapes are “spatial and temporal constructs defined by communities whose members create and manipulate material culture and symbols to signify ethnic or cultural boundaries based on customs and shared modes of thought and expression that have no other sanction than tradition.” Much like the idea of “culture,” defining the idea of ethnicity remains a complicated procedure in terming what stands as “ethnic” materials as situated on certain landscapes. Again, a Barbadian example might be manifested in architecture, and how whether or not distinct “British” styles were employed in public buildings and homes in relation to “British” styles of gardening, landscaping, agricultural and road building. Finally, ritual landscapes incorporate the “products of stereotyped actions . . . that represent the socially prescribed orders by which communities define, legitimize, and sustain their occupation of their traditional homelands.” “Traditional homelands” provides a problem for colonial societies for both colonizers and African individuals. An investigation into “ritual landscapes” of Barbados would focus on repetitive actions that defined various individuals’ status as “Barbadians.” Such actions, archaeologically they could be uncovered through ritually deposited features/shrines, or through ethnographic details of celebrations like Crop-over.

The idea of ethnic and ritual landscapes presents a useful approach for studying culture in general, because it can illuminate cultural markers of identity and community by contextualizing their cultural activities within a given space. In its organization, however, it can be expanded into a more inclusively by thinking in broader “spiritual” or “religious” landscapes. The concept of a “ritual” landscape exemplifies how archaeologists have primarily focused on ritual studies
without incorporating these practices into the “superstructure” of religious practices and behaviors. In these terms, a critique can be directed at how religious attitudes are often categorized as a distinct aspect of cultural practices rather than how they infuse and inform all other nodes of cultural practice including “ethnicity” or “identity”. Individuals can relate to their social collective through religious terms, not just how scholars have examined “ethnic” terms as a distinct category in itself (Insoll 2004:10-13, 24). Using a landscape approach helps bridge this gap between ritual, identity, and religion by emphasizing how physical places had a role in informing where belief systems connected with humans, artifacts, and nature. In doing so, a broader understanding can be gleaned beyond individual material culture deposits or rituals through more silent connections between a spiritual world and various other sites/spaces surrounding ritual action.

Archaeologists interested in spirituality and religion through a landscape approach are most visibly seen in the work of phenomenological archaeologists such as Christopher Tilley. Tilley’s approach stems from the “post-processual” movement in archaeology, which found cultural systems, categorization, and classification too constraining for interpretations of archaeological sites and materials. It emphasizes the human body’s relationship to landscape features, with the archaeologist using his own body to mediate the sensing and experiencing of landscapes in order to translate how people in the remote past of prehistoric Britain could have experienced these same areas (Barrett and Ko 2009). Describing an “archaeology of the supernatural” in West Penwith, England, Tilley and Wayne Bennett (2001) examined how natural forms such as rock outcroppings were incorporated by prehistoric societies in to both their own monumental architecture, but also their cosmological order. They state “these people are highly likely to have regarded the entire landscape and all of its features as an ancestral creation,” with different
landscape features “could have been variously regarded as the petrified shapes of ancestral beings or . . . may have been regarded as places where the ancestral beings who created the world entered and left it” and “be potent places associated with the ancestors and ancestral powers (Tilley and Bennett 2001: 344). In this example, Tilley’s insights are derived from his own experience of distinct landscape features and the application of ethnographic analogy unto the region.

The idea of phenomenological archaeological and the “hyper-interpretation” of prehistoric societies several thousand years ago, has been met with skepticism from other scholars. A major criticism is the inability to disprove claims made by such archaeologists who argue that such speculative connections should not follow the stricter empiricism of evidence which had been emphasized by earlier processual archaeologists. With that, critics also question the idea that sustained modern field experience can recapture how prehistoric people imagined and felt the world around them (Fleming 2006). The spiritual dimensions of such landscapes, a key cognitive component in these studies, have also been criticized as relying on “too many ancestors,” which are interpreted too generically as honored at monuments and at burial sites, without strong characterizations of these figures other then as “forbearers.” James Whitley (2002) advances this criticism in pointing out alternative views of ancestors, such as foreign entities who created the land also exist, yet not as widely discussed as “typical” post-processualist ancestors. Whitley advocates for a more nuanced understanding of what constitutes an “ancestor” in a specific time and place. In thinking in terms of landscape, this difference might manifest in different connotations between certain landscape features which might hold “ancestral” significance, yet remain foreign in the sense of not generated or associated with a “human” ancestors of that culture.
The theoretical disputes in British prehistoric archaeology offer considerations for understanding spiritual landscape approaches in the much more recent history of the Atlantic world. Archaeologists in the Americas generally do not employ the phenomenological methodology to understanding landscapes and spirituality. One explanation attributes this fact to the prominence of descent groups and unwillingness for archaeologists to make these claims for these groups (Johnson 2012: 275). Historical archaeologists often have access to some form documentary record to serve as the focus for historic accounts describing religious beliefs and practices. Without the archaeologist’s own experience as medium, a question arises of what other mechanism can be used to connect ritual practices into broader sense of spiritual practices across the landscape? Victor Turner’s concepts of liminality and communitas provide a feasible theoretical frame to understand the spatial dimensions of ritual and religion in modern events such as the African diaspora. Communitas describes a sense of communal belonging that promotes and reaffirms a cultural group’s social ties. This state is achieved through an individual’s experience of liminality, as anti-structures removed from the “normal” structures of society. Liminal entities “are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial…and are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions” (Turner 1969: 95). Furthermore, “communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in marginality; and from beneath structure, in inferiority” (Turner 1969: 128). Turner uses the example of rites of passage of the Ndembu people as the transition between these social states, and focuses on how they are embedded with symbols and meaning to delineate a group’s social structure and corresponding anti-structure (Turner 1969: 95-97). These ideas are especially useful because they can be applied not only to isolated ritual engagement,
but also its spatial context, and society as a whole. Furthermore, using these ideas not only describes various practices, but helps explain how they can serve as an engine for cultural and social ties between individuals of a given society.

Overall, spiritual landscapes can provide an important focus for the history of societies, including Caribbean islands like Barbados. It expands ritual landscapes to incorporate interlocking belief systems tied into larger patterns of broad cultural practices and ideas of ethnicity and identity. Amongst archaeologists, British post-processualists pioneered the study of spiritual dimensions of historic societies, yet often using problematic methodologies such as phenomenology and hyperinterpretation. Turner’s ideas of liminality and communitas provide more tangible frameworks to investigate ritual and religious use in spatial and cultural contexts because it makes sense of the social influence of these beliefs for both individuals and their social groups. A brief overview of trends in African diaspora scholarship illustrates how this framework can expand the understanding of how enslaved people interacted and lived in specific contexts like St. Nicholas plantation on Barbados.

**The Anthropology and Archaeology of Spiritual Practices in the Caribbean**

Overviews of the African diaspora scholarship have been given in general forms (Gomez 2005; Thornton 1998) and as a preface to nearly every publication discussing some aspect of the subject. This section focuses on how this large body of work relates to the idea of spiritual landscapes. Largely, discussions have centered on the question of cultural retentions and transformations of African people enslaved in the Americas. In the 1940s, Melville Herskovits (1941) pioneered the study of the African diaspora by focusing on continued legacies of African culture in islands like Haiti and Trinidad. On the other hand, Sydney Mintz and Richard Price (1992) later emphasized the culture genesis and creative adoptions to deal with slave societies.
Rather than focusing on the retentions of West African practices, these authors presented a cultural history which looked at how enslaved people adapted, resisted, and modified the colonial societies they lived in daily. At the heart of this dialogue is a complexity in assessing how colonial “planter” governments, patterns in the transatlantic slave trade, economic trends, along with resistance strategies and the individual agency of African diaspora people all interconnected to create the societies and cultures in regions like the Caribbean.

A variety of topics in the Caribbean engage with these fundamental arguments when discussing cultural traits, ranging widely from architecture to pottery decoration (Vlach 1978; Meyers 1999). Research about Barbados, and St. Nicholas Abbey in particular, have also featured these themes (Watson 1977: 149-176; Smith 2005: 108-110; Bergman 2010; Finneran 2013; Devlin 2008; Mocklin 2009; Chambers 2015). Religious beliefs and practices in the African Diaspora has been consistently present in discussions about Caribbean cultures, because of how critically belief systems influence how people interact with one another. Loosely “Afro-Caribbean” religious beliefs such as Obeah and Vodou found throughout the region’s history exemplify variations of “West African-oriented” practices and beliefs and have served as the battleground for what can constitutes “Africanims” in Caribbean contexts (Palmie 2008).

Practices defined in similar lexical terms, vary from each island’s own context but share, as described by Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert (2011: 12-13), broad similarities in how they structure the supernatural world. Generally they feature a central creator, other deities, and deceased members of the community who influence the living world. Contact between humans and the spirit world is made through complex rituals (including divination, possession, and healing) that utilize central symbols, music, and dance which can effect a positive or negative change. Ritualized contact demarcates sacred spaces, enacted by religious leaders who maintain such
spaces and rituals without a formal doctrine, but instead are community-based in that “they re-
create the types of family ties and obligations to the deities and to each other that would have
existed in Africa.”

In the Anglophone Caribbean, the term obeah gained widespread recognition among colonial
governments in the late eighteenth century as “a catch-all term for a range of supernatural-related
ideas and behaviors that were not of European origin and which [Europeans] heavily criticized
and condemned” at a time when the investigation and scrutiny of Caribbean slave societies
increased in Britain (Handler and Bilby 2001: 87). Following a slave rebellion in 1760 which
reportedly was organized by African religious leaders, Jamaican lawmakers set a Caribbean
precedent of prohibiting these practices in 1760, which was later adopted by many other English
islands by the abolition of slavery in 1834, including Barbados in 1806 (Patton 2015: 89-95).
From that context, even after Emancipation the term itself inherently imply some alternate
“West-African” traditional way of understanding, often in pejorative sense as evidence that these
islands still lacked level of civilization and was incompatible with self-government (Paton 2015:
130-132). Early twentieth century anthropologists ethnographically documented these traditions
in Jamaica (Beckwith 1929; Williams 1932), and since then, categories like obeah have been
used to engage with the historical record about both how African diasporic people engaged with
these practices in addition to colonial representations and reactions to these religious acts in the
Caribbean (Handler 2000; Brown 2008; Browne 2011; Handler and Bilby 2012; Paton 2015;
Ashie-Nikoi 2005). Eluding clear categorization for scholars, obeah practices have been
thematically described simultaneously as creole, West-African, inherently rebellious, or merely a
retreat into a “black world” which “rested precisely on acceptance of the existing relationship of
forces” (Genovese 1972: 221-222).
The broken bottles, blood, rum, feathers, and variety of other materials documented in obeah materials do not lend themselves easily to historical archaeologists who are interested in physical presence of spiritual practices. In the Caribbean, mortuary practices and other “ritual placement” contexts have proven to be the most effective material evidence for such practices. Burial contexts in the English Caribbean have been excavated at a plantation cemeteries in Barbados (Handler and Lange 1978) and Montserrat (Watters 1994), in a slave house-yard area in Jamaica (Armstrong and Fleishman 2003), and at an urban cemetery site in Bridgetown, Barbados (Crain et al. 2005). Discussions about spiritual materials usually define them as either reflective of general West African practices or as examples of employment of obeah materials found in the documentary record. In one instance, the elaborate grave goods of a burial in Barbados offer evidence of an “African Type Diviner/Healer” (Handler 1997). The seemingly intentional burial of a glass bottle at a Jamaican domestic site can be interpreted as evidence of a protective obeah charm (Reeves 2014). Smith (2008: 112-133) linked the large quantities of bottle glass found at Mapps Cave on Barbados to petit maroonage of enslaved people and their African-influenced drinking practices like spiritually-binding oath drinks which initiated many Caribbean slave revolts. Most recently, Douglas Armstrong (2015) has tentatively prescribed refashioned iron blades cache at a cave site on Barbados as enslaved peoples’ possible implementation of rituals associated with the Yoruba orisha Ogun.

The delicate cultural question in these instances returns to the idea of cultural retentions(transformations, and how to interpret this kind of data, as reflective of broad West-African cosmologies, specific instances of categories such as “obeah” at work, or merely mundane occurrences devoid of symbolic or religious significance? Christopher Fennell’s term ethnogenic bricolage a more accessible way to understand archaeological materials of the
African diaspora in more nuanced setting which is context driven. Fennell defines *ethnogenic bricolage* as “a creative process in which individuals raised in different cultures interact in new settings.” Within these interactions “individuals tend to desist from displaying emblematic expressions of the core symbols of the former culture groups from which they were abducted or compelled to depart. Yet, instrumental expressions of those same core symbols continue with vigor and are employed in private, individual spaces as part of invocations for healing, self-protection, and prayer for the vitality of loved ones.” Through this model, Fennell captures the interactions between individuals and larger cultural communities. He also demonstrates a tangible way of discerning those materials, by looking at core symbols, as both emblematic (broader cultural group’s symbols) and instrumental (individualized implementation) symbols working within both of those settings. In this way, Fennell allows the focus of both the “Old” and “New” World through the practices and deployments of symbols in specific contexts, in his case in “backcountry” Virginia in the early nineteenth century (Fennell 2007).

The spiritual landscape bridges Fennell’s *ethnogenic bricolage* with Turner’s notion of communitas and liminality through the perspective of the physical environment. The relationship between the physical and spiritual world, therefore, forms an important aspect of *ethnogenic bricolage* in how African diasporic people engaged with the new landscapes. This approach has appeal for two main reasons, the first regarding the scholarship of the African diaspora, the second is how it explains diversity of Caribbean cultures like Barbados. As seen from the brief overview of the literature, while the spiritual beliefs and practices of the African diaspora have been widely discussed, it has only tangentially been related in spatial terms with a greater focus on ritual actions and materials of these beliefs as well as possible cultural origins. Essentially, what are and what are not considered “spiritual” materials and beliefs and why these are
considered spiritual materials by defining their cultural antecedents. Over the years, Barbados does not provide the kind of fertile offerings for these kinds temporary ethnographic studies as other Caribbean islands like Jamaica, Trinidad, or Haiti, exemplified in the Barbadian historian Karl Watson’s statement that “one must conclude that no attempt was made to recreate African religious systems on the island” (Watson 1977: 168). Watson (1977: 168-175) does, however, summarizes recorded practices, which have been further ethnohistorically discussed through the sustained efforts of Jerome Handler (2000; 2001) and Frederick Smith (2005:95-117).

Furthermore, the landscape of Barbados appears to be an important element which differs it from other islands like Jamaica. Barbados has been defined as distinct from islands like Jamaica because of its “small size and openness of the island” which largely prevented longstanding maroonage communities developing in the same way as on Jamaica (Watson 1977: 4). Looking at evidence of spiritual landscapes on Barbados, often described as a “Little England” demonstrates how a spatial dimension can reveal subtler manifestations of spiritual beliefs and practices which not immediately apparent in comparison to other Caribbean islands. Additionally, rather than focusing on how various practices fit with distinct categorization of terms like Obeah, looking at landscapes can place less emphasis on defining what these labels did and can mean, and more emphasis on the specific areas and materials connected with spiritual meaning in localized places. Seemingly mundane landscape features conceptualized through spiritual significance can reveal a more complex vision of how enslaved Africans connected with the island of Barbados, leading to their eventual adoption of a Barbadian as their identity.

**Early Spiritual Landscapes: West African Societies, Ancestors and Homelands**

The seventeenth-century Barbadian planter class institutionalized Anglicanism, as churches and parish divisions were quickly established across the island often through their financial
support (Gragg 2000). Whether or not enslaved Africans desired entrance into the Anglican faith, they were largely excluded from English planters’ organized religious activities. This was partly related to the ambiguous status of “Christian slaves,” and if the adoption of Anglicanism also entailed their freedom. One owner described this dilemma that “being once Christian, he could no more account him a slave; and so lose the hold they had of them as Slaves,” and Africans were thus, “kept out of the Church” (Ligon 1673: 50). However, captive Africans from diverse regions ranging from Senegambia to South-east Africa came to Barbados with their own understandings of the spirituality. While the transatlantic slave trade “randomized” these individuals, many came from the Bight of Biafra, the Gold Coast, and the Bight of Benin regions (Fig 4 and 5), areas which reside in John Thornton’s “Lower Guinea” cultural zone in West Africa. From modern Ivory Coast to Cameroon, societies shared similar linguistic traits and trade networks among groups such as the Akan in the Gold Coast and Igbo. Cultural interactions, including spiritual beliefs, were widespread amongst West Africans; Thornton suggests that the religious process operated dynamically, allowing changes in beliefs systems over time in West African societies through “revelation” acts like divination, augury, and possession. Individual priests maintained their status through continually serving the needs of individuals and state in effectively communicating and balancing relationships between supernatural world and society. Places mattered in these mediated spiritual landscapes, possessed materials such as speaking shrines to convey revelations and the use of grave areas to regularly engage with deceased relations and ancestors. Furthermore, religious beliefs were not exclusive, but could incorporate Christian and Muslim practices, as the Kongo’s adoption of a syncretic Catholicism (Thornton 1998: 189-190, 244, 235-262).
The traumas of the transatlantic slave trade marked a “moment of transfiguration, the height of human alienation and disorientation.” The dissolution of kinship networks and homeland connections like these various religious practices, embarked enslaved Africans into a liminal social structure of colonial societies which codified Africans as subordinates (Gomez 2005: 71-
While the island may have provided a pleasing sight for English, “for as we past along near the shore, the plantations appear’d to us one above another: like several stories in stately building.” The island and its plantation system provided a hostile and even profane environment, causing one slave ship captain to note that Africans held “a more dreadful apprehension of Barbadoes then we do of hell” (Ligon 1673: 22; Gomez 2005: 76). Africans did not uniformly resign themselves to their fate on Barbados, some even fled the island outright and joined native Carib Indians on the nearby St. Vincent island in the 1670s who successfully resisted the expansion of Barbadian colonists there (Beckles 2006: 23-26). On Barbadian plantations, the cultural creativity and perseverance of enslaved individuals ensured that the middle passage did not render religious beliefs obsolete. A former indenture servant in the late 1640s noted that, “Religion [enslaved Africans] know none, yet most acknowledge a God, as appears by their motions and gestures: For if one of them do another wrong, and he cannot himself revenge himselfe, he holds up both his hands, as if the power must come from thence, that must do him right” (Ligon 1673: 47). While dismissing the validity of enslaved Africans beliefs, Ligon’s observation suggest a complex history of an often unspoken spiritual world enacted on Barbados. Facing the subordination of slavery, familiar spiritual beliefs formed a source of power and organization amongst enslaved Africans in the early Barbadian landscape.

Planters designated for plantation life to center around its labor system, yet workers had a different set of social priorities. Enslaved Africans spiritual world in everyday life appears through use of materials within spatial and social context. Describing the plantation he worked at, a former indenture wrote that “around the plantation yard, stand the slave’s small houses. These are made of inferior wood . . . and are covered with the leaves of the tree that they call blandin [plantain?]” (Gunkel and Handler 1970: 92). Such domestic homes provided the
foundations for communities on Barbados, with spiritual connections instilled into these family ties during rites of passage for a family such as the birth of a child. Ligon details this process:

“At the time the wife is to be brought a bed, her husband removes his board (which is his bed) to another room. . . And leaves his wife to God, and her good fortune, in the room and upon the board alone, and calls a neighbour to come to her, who gives little help to her deliverie, but when the child is borne . . .she helps to make a little fire nere her feet and that serves instead of Possets, Broaths, and Caudles”

(Ligon 1647: 47-48).

Ideas of liminality and communitas abound in this important “rite of passage” for a family. The everyday shared space of domestic living transforms into a divided zones where the husband becomes forbidden to enter. While Ligon generalizes this practice, such personal actions would not likely be consistent from person to person or family to family. Yet these personal connections were important for enslaved individuals, in a later example from 1723, Jupiter, an enslaved African who had fled Barbados for a year returned to the estate to face punishment, but was quoted as being “much rejoiced at the opportunity of getting back to his wife and children” (Beckles 2006: 82). From these personal actions displayed, the instrumental implementations of such beliefs created ties between individuals which were then further communally connected in other instances of shared spiritual understandings on the landscape.

When not laboring, various other actions brought individuals helped bring people together through larger communal shared spiritual experiences. Reading in between the lines of accounts is not always easy; as an example, the use of ponds and more generally religious qualities ascribed to water but lacks clear evidence. General plantation layouts suggest that slave quarters were often located near collection pools or ponds; as one of the few sources of water on the island apart from rain collection, enslaved Africans are depicted collectively bathing and cleaning in such ponds (Ligon 1673: 28; Gunkel and Handler 1969: 171; Connell 1957:171). Derided as an unhealthy practice and a waste of a necessity of a commodity “often rarer and
dearer then beer or wine,” is this a simple act of physically cleaning the body (Connell 1957: 171)? Like the domestic spaces transformed at birth, these “mundane” elements can be taken as incorporating some spiritual sense of cleansing? Following the supposed conspiracy of a slave revolt led by a group of Akan men in 1675, an author recounted that prior to confession a suspected conspirator called “for water to drink (which is a Custome they use before they tell or discover anything” (Great Newes 1676: 12). Like the “mundane” pool cleansing, the use of water in this example can be read as another “cleansing” prior to a revelation, while these ideas are intriguing, they cannot be read as anything more than speculation with the available evidence.

A much clearer example resides in the music and dance of enslaved Africans. Described as devil-worship, Sporri noted “idolatrous ceremonies” which included “particular dances, drumming on a hollow tree trunk over which an animal skin is stretched, making clapping noises by knocking two rocks together. . . For these ceremonies they often remain together all night long. However, towards morning, everyone returns to his place of work” (Gunkel and Handler 1969: 7). Ligon also notes the use of varying sizes of drums used, and the frequent dances participated by enslaved people (Ligon 1673: 50). These events offer clear example of what Thornton describes as African “aesthetics” of music and dance in Barbados, which suggest some communicative nature which also functioned socially to bring plantation workers together in a common bond of dance and its interaction with a spirit world. Furthermore, the use of local materials like the wood for drums and stones for percussion in these actions illustrate a willingness to bring Barbadian materials into the sacred spaces of these events (Thornton 1998: 230).

Beyond the plantation grounds, enslaved workers repeatedly escaped to more secluded spaces such as forest areas, as acts of “petite maroonage.” From this, enslaved Africans gained a
more intimate knowledge of the surrounding land in ways that inherently avoided the detection of overseers on an island increasingly “so taken up in Plantations” (Speed 1676: 242). One visitor reported of “many rebell Negro slaves in the woods” (Plantagenet 1648: 5). Ligon noted that enslaved workers often went to “where the Mangrave tree grow,” to make rope, in areas describe as able to “may very well hide a troop of Horses” (Ligon 1673: 50,72). Caves also provided “a refugees and skulking-places of runaway Negro-slaves,” and described as used “for a long time and in the night range abroad the country. . .and feast all day, upon what they stole the night before.” (Speed 1676: 242; Ligon 1673: 74). Similarly, areas such as gullies networks which housed these caves were also perceived as inaccessible and dangerous, their steep sides and dense vegetation proved difficult for movement (Ligon 1673: 49, 58,104). Overall, when enslaved peoples removed themselves from the plantation setting, they also simultaneously removed themselves from the planter’s social structure and resisted against it. In that sense, these areas were liminal spaces which upended the formal labor ties enforced on Africans and created communitas from residing outside these boundaries with other individuals. In this dissolution, the ‘black” and “white” plantation landscapes described by Dell Upton (1988) in colonial Virginia can similarly be seen in the use in the varieties of discrete areas on Barbados. Where the plantocracy engaged with formal roadways and manicured plantation landscapes, how some enslaved Africans sought concealment in the surrounding landscape highlights a distinction between imaginings of the same Barbadian landscape. Where planters saw forests as areas to clear in order to generate more arable land, enslaved Africans could view them as temporary safe havens from the trials of slavery.

The idea of a “black” landscape, as opposed to a “white” landscape, suggests the creation of a common identity through similar views of surrounding lands. This process is furthered in
active engagement with landscape through the development of a Barbadian medicinal knowledge and healing culture, in addition to how these spaces could become imbued with a spiritual world generated on Barbados. Overtime, Barbados’s ecology shifted and changed through the introduction of various plants and animals that goes beyond the scope of this paper. Yet it is important the development of healing practices drawing on plant medicine and other materials promised relief from physical ailments and both European’s and African’s belief in the spiritual afflictions responsible for them (Handler 1997: 59-63). Little is known directly about these practices, but again Ligon provides some clues. In one instance he describes seeds from the physik nut tree which provided a “Vomit and Purge” when ingested (Ligon 1673: 68). He also notes the use of “negro-oil” (today known as castor oil) as an “outward” medicine, for “when enslaved Africans feel themselves ill, they call for some of that, and anoint their bodies, as their breasts, bellies, and sides, and in two daies they are perfectly well”. Ligon also described “inward” ingested medicine taken with “a dram or two of kill-devil [rum] revives and comforts them much” (Ligon 1673: 51; Handler and Jacoby 1993: 92). Ligon’s account provides the earliest record of rum making in the Caribbean, but alcohol use has a documented history in West Africa in the seventeenth century in both social and spiritual capacities which offered the means to communication with the spirit world; enslaved people’s consumption of rum in a medicinal context suggests both the drawing on this knowledge but an innovation as a product of their own labor in the plantation setting. In the midst of beliefs on healing, rum’s consumption invested a spiritual world in Barbados as a link between spiritual landscapes from West African societies with the plantation society of slavery which produced the material rum and further invested by plants from the surrounding environment (Smith 2005: 17, 95-117).
The remains of the “African Type Diviner/Healer” buried at Newton Plantation illustrates the importance of spiritual leaders in navigating spirituals worlds among Africans living in Barbados. Estimated to have been interned sometime in the late 1600s and early 1700s, the man’s associated grave goods contained the most abundant collection compared to the other 100 individuals buried from the seventeenth century through the nineteenth century. Grave goods in the burial included metal bracelets, an iron knife, a clay pipe, and necklace made of money cowrie shells, canine teeth, European glass beads, and a carnelian bead. The clay pipe itself unique example of West African material uncovered in the Americas, with possible origins from the Gold Coast (Handler and Norman 2007). Drawing on a number of ethnohistorical materials across West Africa, Handler suggests that the high amount of grave goods suggest a positive view of the interned individual, and that the necklace itself signifies an elite individual with supernatural influence, like a priest, diviner, medicine man. In this context, the necklace served as a protection against evil influences, and had spiritual properties embedded into its meaning and function (Handler 1997: 98-123). Considering Thornton’s discussion about the dynamic nature of spiritual belief in West Africa, and the need for religious figures to sustain over time provides an insight into how this man worked in Barbados up until his death at around fifty years old. The high regard given in his burial suggests the man’s ability to successfully “navigate” the spiritual and physical needs of other enslaved Africans on Newton Plantation. Through possible actions including healing, both spiritual and physically, or divination, enacted through material objects like the necklace, he garnered a respect in his community translated into his burial. In terms of spiritual landscapes, the man would have been a key figure in the enacting liminal spaces in which he connected with the spiritual world, which then was acted out to the aid of an individual, family, or entire community.
The material evidence of spiritual power and organization in relation to the Barbadian landscape also manifested during the distinct historical event of the unsuccessful Akan Rebellion of 1675 mentioned earlier when discussing the possible spiritual connections with water. Historians remain divided about whether the plot was real or simply hearsay, Barbadian historian Hillary Beckles (2006: 48-50) readily accepts it as an example in the larger trend of enslaved people’s resistance. Kwasi Konadu (2010: 132), however remains skeptical, saying “an actual plot seems doubtful, though not improbable, for the ‘conspiracy’ . . . was based on the bold talk of a ‘Young Coramantee Negro’ indirectly overheard and reported by another enslaved African”. Allegedly, a group of “Coramantee” slaves planned for simultaneously attacks against planters across the island and would then install an “ancient gold-Coast Negro” as a king of Barbados “in a chair of state” (Gerbner 2010: 65). Several days before the revolt, another enslaved person overheard the details of the plot and informed the authorities. Over 100 people were arrested in connection with the plot and forty-two slaves were publicly executed. In its aftermath, lawmakers blamed Quakers who promoted converting slaves to Quakerism, which met in the “meeting house” style that lacked the formal liturgy of Anglicanism. The Quaker Negro Act of 1676 was passed explicitly prohibiting Quakers meeting with enslaved people. The links between Quakers and the revolt is intriguing, as Gerbner (2010: 67) notes, the Quaker missionaries offered a form of worship that would resonate understanding through revelation. In the words of George Fox that they emphasized Barbadian slaves “to meet together, to wait upon the Lord.” With that, for those involved in the plot, the coronation of a king on Barbados suggests both a political and spiritual attempt at assuming control over Barbados. While fundamentally subversive in its attempt to overthrow the status of slavery enforced on them by the elites, the groups supposed willingness to establish a ruler of Barbados instead signifies an
acceptance with the region of Barbados, just not under the social system imposed by English colonists. Despite that, it is also important to note that such visions were one not accepted uniformly by all enslaved people, seen in the actions of the young woman who reported the incident.

The spiritual dimensions of Barbadian landscape are lastly reflected in the other mortuary practices and the archaeological findings at Newton Plantation’s burial ground. Burials served as a communal activity, localized on the plantation burial ground where “they dig a grave, and at evening they bury him clapping and wringing their hands, and making a dolefull sound with their voices.” Like in the earlier descriptions of daily life, the “rite of passage” in burying an individual also utilized the rhythms of music. Furthermore, the middle passage did not strip individuals with their remembrances of the societies they came from, as Ligon again illustrates, stating that enslaved Africans “believe a Resurrection, and that they shall go into their own Countrey again, and have their youth renewed” (Ligon 1673: 51). Uchteritz’s account also echoes mentioning the belief that “they say [a slave] has returned to his homeland and friends and is doing well,” after death (Gunkel and Handler 1969: 94). Considered alone, the belief in a return may be read as exemplifying a disconnected spiritual understanding on Barbados. Death removed individuals from their position on the island back to West African society they came from. Yet, in light of all the other documented spaces and practices, from birth, life, medicine, and planned revolt, it suggests a connection between practices enacted on Barbados and its environment with the societies and spirituality in West Africa. The grave goods found at Newton Plantation provides support for this concept; while frequent in many of the site’s internments up into the nineteenth century, whole pipes with median date ranges of 1690 1705, 1700 indicate this practice in the early period (Handler and Lange 1978: 117,123). As Handler notes (1997:
162), grave goods could function in a variety of ways “as gifts to the ancestors the deceased were about to meet, as necessities to assist them on their journey and residence in the spirit world” or “to ensure that they would not be ashamed at having insufficient possessions in their new home.” With that, the inclusion of these pipes indicates not only that they were valued but that they would be accepted in that afterlife. Barbadian material goods like pipes forged a physical link between those living on the island and the spiritual world which included West African societies own spiritual world. Rather than distinct regions far removed from one another, these regions were connected through the “cross-over” enslaved Africans with their buried materials into the afterlife.

In the initial period of the Barbadian “sugar and slave” society, a number of points emerge. First, West Africans enacted spiritual beliefs and practices on Barbados in both daily life and during distinct historical events. These spiritual actions offer insight into how individuals formed important bonds with each other in spiritually meaningful ways from communal experiences of liminal areas. As Thornton (1998: 219) notes, in West African religious institutions provided “a good set of flexible organizational principles outside the bounds of kinship,” which explains how these spiritual understandings brought enslaved Africans together who had lost kinship ties through the transatlantic slave trade. On Barbados, such spiritual landscapes reflect how Turner described liminality as “necessarily ambiguous” but frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness. . . ., to the wilderness” (Turner 1969: 95). The early period of slavery from the seventeenth century into the mid-eighteenth century demonstrates early examples of spiritual engagement with Barbadian plantation landscapes that embraced these characteristics to resist the system of slavery and maintain spiritual connections in healing practices, births, and burials. These experiences invoked the close interaction between a spiritual
and physical world, which generated potent Barbadian liminal spaces which brought individuals together on these communities. The subsequent generation of Afro-Barbadians would continue these liminal spiritual landscapes but in more subtle ways and with stronger connections both to the previous generations of enslaved Africans in addition to their ties to Africa which preceded them.

**Barbadian Spiritual Landscapes: Liminal Spaces in a “Creole” Slave Society**

“The negroes in general are very tenaciously addicted to the Rites, Ceremonies, and Superstitions of their own Countries, particularly in their Plays, Dances, Music, Marriages, and Burials. And even such as are born and bred up here, cannot not entirely be weaned from these customs”

(Hughes 1750: 15)

Griffith Hughes, an Anglican minister and natural historian in the rural northernmost parish of St. Lucy, establishes a marking point when he distinguished between enslaved people brought to Barbados and those born there, while noting broad similarities in the kinds of religious practices that they participated. With a century of sugar production and a plantation society, the rural Barbadian landscape by the mid-eighteenth century differed from Ligon’s account nearly hundred years earlier. From this history, enslaved people’s spiritual landscapes took on different meanings with shifting demographics and historical contexts leading up to Emancipation in 1834. Between 1750 and 1834, Barbados “had a larger percentage of Creole blacks in the population than any other sugar colony in the West Indies,” and by 1832 the percentage of African-born individuals was almost 3% (Beckles 2006: 64, 70). The landscape changed too; while Ligon spoke of going “into the woods, to cut Church ways [roads]” navigating around “impassible” gullies, and was “compelled to make traverse up and down in the wood,” Hughes noted no “large forests of trees” on the island, and a later writer described the island as in “want of wood” (Ligon 1673: 49; Hughes 1750: 3; McKinnon 1806: 27). George Pinckard (1806: 279), a medical doctor visiting the island in 1796 vividly describes the island’s landscape: “there appeared a degree of nakedness from the want of wood, of which there is not a sufficiency to
give a general richness to the landscape, although about the great Backra-houses [plantation houses] there are several fine groves of the coco-nut and the majestic mountain cabbage trees”.

During this period, a strong articulation of ties of community existed between members and its surrounding environment manifesting in observable liminal spaces and practices similar to those described by earlier enslaved Africans, yet more discrete in such an open landscape. The idea of a “Barbadian” identity comes to clearer fruition during this time period from this set of spiritual relations to their landscape.

While Handler comprehensively reviews burial practices in the eighteenth century on plantations, highlighting these practices’ spatial aspects illustrates the relations between the living and the dead in slave communities. Plantations generally contained their own burial ground, with few enslaved buried in church grounds (Handler and Lange 1978: 176). The funeral procession reveals a communal “rite of passage” displaying the “betwixt and between” quality as described by Turner. Griffith Hughes describes such an event, saying:

“The Bearers, in carrying the Corpse of such a one to the Grave, when they come to, or in Sight of the House of the Person who is supposed to have bewitched the Deceased, pretend to stagger, and say, that the Corpse is unwilling and will not permit them to carry it to the Grave, until it is suffered to stop near, or opposite to, that House: After this is compiled with for a few minutes, the Corpse is, as they think, appeased, and then the Bearers without Difficulty, carry it to the Grave”

(Hughes 1750: 15).

As in previous generations, music and dance accompanied this transition into a liminal spaces, as Hughes noted that “Most young People sing and dance, and make a loud noise with Rattles, as they attend the Corpse to its Internment,” while Pinckard (1806 I: 271) also described a burial he saw featuring “an African air, and the multitude joined her in chorus”. Overall, these practices reflect a communal “movement” from the living area to the burial ground which housed the dead. Prior to the deceased physical remains being removed from the domestic area, the grievances between the deceased and the living community are “settled” by lingering shortly near the dwelling of a group who injured the deceased (physically, spiritually, or both), with the
body then allowed to move on to be buried. At the burial site itself, the dead still had sway among the living and the surrounding landscape, “If likewise, in digging a Grave, they find a Stone, which they cannot easily get out, they immediately conclude, that the Deceased is unwilling to be buried there; therefore they dig elsewhere, until they find a Place more propitious to the supposed Inclination of the Dead” (Hughes 1750: 15). While enslaved people may have not always had complete agency in where their deceased on the plantation, yet such imaginings suggest that the land itself was also influenced by deceased in the “burial practice” context within their own community. Thus, in funerary practices, when relations between the living and dead were most clearly intertwined in the transition from life to death, the landscape too was incorporated into these groups with the death of an individual and his entrance into the afterlife where they still interacted with the Barbadian landscape and the plantation community there.

Grave sites were not just solely receptacles for the dead, given meaning during an internment alone, but also an active site on the plantation landscape. Ongoing material connections between enslaved people and the deceased members are evident in practices such as “some days after [a burial], especially on their Feasts, they strew at Night some of the dressed Victuals upon the Graves of their deceased Parents, Relations, or Friends” (Hughes 1750: 15), echoed in similar examples provided by Handler and Lange (1978: 205-206) and Watson (1977: 171-172) through the end of the eighteenth century. Grave offerings linked the material needs of the living with those of deceased individuals, and memorialized physical spaces for known family members. Furthermore, such an action “populated” Barbados’s spiritual world by linking relations to specific places its material such as grave dirt. Africans and their descendants’ use of grave dirt became associated with rebellion and spiritual power for colonial lawmakers in the late nineteenth and early second century and offers a clear drawing upon spiritual power. Oath drinks
of rum or water mixed with grave dirt were featured in major revolts in Antigua in 1736 and in Jamaica multiple times (Paton 2015: 36) In Barbados, Hughes noted that grave dirt bound enslaved people in holding to their word: grave dirt was taken from “the nearest Relations, or Parents, if it can be had; if not from any other Grave. This mingled with Water, imprecating the divine vengeance to inflict an immediate punishment upon them; but in particular, that the water and mingled grave-dust which they have drank (if they are guilty of the crime) may cause them to swell, and burst their bellies. Most of them are so firmly persuaded that it will have this effect upon the guilty, that few, if any (provided they are conscious of the imputed crime), will put the proof of their innocence upon the experiment” (Hughes 1750: 15-16). The use of this material in the court proceeding of two enslaved workers indicted for theft, as described in a newspaper editorial in 1789 (cited in Watson 1977: 173-174; see also Handler and Lange 1978: 207-208).

Contemporary observations show that even with increasing number of enslaved people born in Barbados, West African-influenced burial practices remained present on plantations in the eighteenth century. Those practices came with spiritual understandings of spaces like burials and its associated materials. In the case with the burials at Newton, the long chronology of burials at the site from the late seventeenth century to the early nineteenth century suggest the ongoing legacy and use over several generations. With these physical spaces nearby, enslaved peoples could gain “a sense of lineage” from “the particular estates on which their parents and grandparents were born and buried,” which one commentator described as a “local and filial attachment” to their surroundings including their burial grounds (Beckles 2006: 72-73; Dickson 1814: 209). As in earlier accounts, sacred Barbadian sites also were spiritually bridged with a return to West Africa. In talking with the grave digger following a funeral, Pinckard was told of a continuing belief that the mourners of Jenny, the deceased individual had undergone a
“transmigration to meet her friends at her place of her nativity,” but “they confidently expected to hear from poor Jenny, or to know her influence, in the way they most desired, before morning” (Pinckard 1806 I: 274). Such an understanding illustrates not only that deceased were able to enter a West African spiritual world but that they were able to come back to the Barbadian spiritual world and that these two were not mutually exclusive or disconnected in the minds of enslaved Africans and their descendants.

Enslaved people’s spiritual beliefs entered the larger debates engulfing the British Empire by 1800, which also involved the question of the transatlantic slave trade, then emancipation, and conversion to Christianity. While Barbadian planters were open to the abolition of the slave trade in 1807, efforts to abolish the institution of slavery were less well-received on the island. With increasing scrutiny on planters, the early nineteenth century has been described as the amelioration period as planters “alleviated” slave populations through improving their material conditions in an effort to stave off criticism and keep slavery as a viable labor system (Beckles 2006: 116-119). Within these debates, Diana Paton focuses on the visible spiritual feature of “Obeah” in colonial documents, and argues the connotations amongst colonial lawmakers and elite planters were derived from a Jamaican understandings, mainly Bryan Edwards widely read descriptions of the practices on that island and Jamaica’s earliest anti-obeah law enacted after Tacky’s Rebellion in 1760 (Paton 2015: 43-76). While Hughes (1750: 15) described an “Obeah” man in 1750, Barbados did not prohibit obeah until 1806 during the amelioration period at a time when other colonies enacted similar legislation. While considered as anti-obeah legislation, it is noteworthy that the law prohibiting any person “pretending to any supernatural power, or by the practice of what is called obeah” and was punishable by death or transportation off the island (Handler and Bilby 2012: 54). With that, any spiritual world enacted by enslaved people in the
nineteenth century was one that was dangerous one to display publically on the island, and risked the life of those who did so.

Missionary activity steadily increased on the island as part of this amelioration period, yet often received indifferent receptions by enslaved people. As a 1790 report to Parliament on the status of slavery indicates, “very few” enslaved people were baptized in the Anglican faith, and Moravian preachers were met with an audience which paid “little or no Attention to the Preachers” (Great Britain 1790: 5). Methodist missionaries received equally lukewarm reception, and outright hostility from presumably Anglican Barbadians protesting their presence on the island. Thomas Coke, a prominent leader of the Methodist movement, wrote of the inability of their preachers to firmly establish themselves in the rural areas and were confined to low turnout at services in Bridgetown. His frustration of the inability to spread Methodism to enslaved people is clear when he reflected that the “Negroes of Barbados, for some reason which I cannot explain, are much less prepared for the reception of genuine religion than in other islands in the West Indies” (Coke 1808: 141). Overall, that conversion of enslaved people did not truly become successful until the emancipation era suggests the well-established connections slave communities held to their spiritual world on Barbados without the need of Christian missionaries. The conversion of enslaved people only rapidly increased when it provided tangible social skills through education opportunities of reading and writing. Joseph Sturge and Thomas Harvey (1837: 128-149) met and saw the widespread educational opportunities through both the Anglican, Moravain, and Methodist churches during the apprenticeship period, in stark contrast to Coke’s negative reports three decades beforehand.

Anti-obeah laws damning and punishing the practice of spiritual acts, the increasing missionary activity, and their subsequent education opportunities combine to suggest a dramatic
suppression of the Afro-Barbadian’s religious beliefs, practices, and relations to the landscape during the amelioration period and eventual post-emancipation period. James Thome and J. Horace Kimball visited the island to observe the state of the island under the apprenticeship period, they noted the larger number of individuals receiving instruction on reading, the singing of hymns in place of “heathen songs” (Thome and Kimball 1838: 217, 223). According to Handler and Lange (1978: 206), the fact that by the late 1820s “open performance of gravesite rites appear to have waned,” strengthens that idea. While grave sites offer clear evidence for enslaved people’s spiritual beliefs and practices relationship to the Barbadian landscape, turning to the “slave village” on St. Nicholas Abbey estate provides an opportunity to examine other spaces not immediately associated with spiritual practices at a time when enslaved people’s clear associations with supernatural world were punishable by law. Despite Handler’s own efforts to locate the burial ground at St. Nicholas, that site eluded his survey, so that the materials uncovered at the slave village site and its surrounding landscape offer the only available material evidence to interpret this time period (Handler et. al 1989: 68-75).

After Camille Chambers (2015) cataloged all the excavated materials, the Digital Archaeological Archive of Comparative Slavery (DAACS) computed a variety of statistical analysis from the dateable materials which indicate that the site was occupied throughout the nineteenth century, with a terminus post quem (TPQ) date of 1820. The site’s development fits in with the amelioration movement as its development can be linked with John Gay Alleyne, the plantations prominent owner who defended the institution of slavery, and in response, “improved” enslaved peoples living conditions through the stone houses found at the ridge site (Bergman and Smith 2014). Further improvements are visible in the presence of ink-well pots uncovered at the site from late slave period through post-emancipation era. While their use can
be seen as embracing Christianity through missionary efforts, Sean Devlin argues they instead reflect the individuals’ redefining themselves as “free” through the ability to read and write, after centuries of being denied those abilities (Devlin 2008).

From these general patterns, the domestic site at first appears devoid of any explicit spiritual practices seen earlier in Barbados’s history apart from the growing acceptance of Christianity through the educational opportunities it afforded. Additionally, it also coincides with Turner’s understanding of the relationship between structure and liminality. Domestic spaces, as areas of everyday living, encapsulates the “structure” which dissolves into the liminal spaces made apparent in burial practices. With that, however, it also represents an area of “reforged” community ties by the sense of communitas generated within liminal spaces. As evident in Hughes’s funeral descriptions, the Barbadian spiritual world did not reside solely in the burial ground, but also connected with place it began in the village area, as seen in the funeral procession which mediated the deceased with individuals in the village before being buried. Through these relationships, the spiritual world in the burial ground was threaded into these domestic spaces, which require further investigation.

General descriptions of slave villages at the turn of the nineteenth century offer some sense of privacy, inclusivity, and possible sacred notions. George Pinckard described “negro yards” constructed both by enslaved workers or commissioned by the planters. While overzealous in his argument that planters provided enslaved people with their every need, leaving them “free from every care”, Pinckard did note evening activities in “smoking and singing together” in the village area (Pinckard 1806 I: 288). On another plantation, Pinckard “begged to see the negro-yard, and to extend our visit into some of the huts, which the elite planter host replied that slaves were “tenacious of their home, and disliked to have their huts exposed to the prying eye of strangers”
The planter did concede to Pinckard’s curiosity which resulted in his rich description of a variety of activities:

“At the negro yards it is common for the slaves to plant fruit and vegetables, and to raise stock... [which] not only afford them occupation and amusement for their leisure moments, but create a degree of interest in the spot... the negro yard comprises all the little huts intermixed with, and more or less concealed by the variety of shrubs and fruit trees which kindly lend their shade; likewise the many small patches of garden ground around them, and the different species of stock, some appearing in pens, some tied by the leg, or the neck, and some running at large; and if it be evening you have also the crowd of negroes, male and female, as they chance to be seen, at rest, or moving in busy occupation, some passing from hut to hut, some dancing to their favorite music, some sitting at the door with the pipe in their mouths, and others smoking their loved sagar [cigar] under the broad leaf of the plantain.”

(Pinckard 1806 I: 368-369).

While not as richly described, Thome and Kimball (1838: 223) provides a similar description of a plantation village “crowded thickly together and almost concealed by the cocoanut and calabash trees”. In the context of coerced labor extending beyond slavery into the tenantry period, the leisure moments in the evening at the domestic site provide an intriguing links to concepts of leisure seen through a possible sacred dimension as a respite from the continued oppression of the Barbadian social structure. Rather than buried with their cane machetes, enslaved people at Newton plantation brought with them to the afterlife the leisurely materials of the smoking pipes used daily in the village. At the Saint Nicholas slave village, excavations uncovered these leisure items such as pipe stems and bowls, as well as a variety of refashioned circular ceramic shards. Historical archaeologists describe these ceramics as “gaming pieces” (Fig 6) and often attribute to games that like Wari that were widespread in West Africa and the Americas (Handler 2009). Furthermore, the garden areas surrounding areas in Barbadian domestic sites afforded the opportunity to engage in the local economy, while asserting an independence from the planter elite. As similarly described by Mark Leone and his colleagues (Ruppel et al 2003) in the Chesapeake region in North America, garden areas around domestic sites could provide “hidden landscapes” of spiritual significance in plain view. Garden areas
could function as both areas of “mundane” economic benefit, while serving to connect the domestic area with a site where spirits could enter through the plant life there. Tying both the leisure activities and gardening together, the reluctance for active viewership by whites suggest in these areas and desire to protect these spaces suggests some level of sanctity, as a “release” area from coerced labor and the larger social structure.

![Fig 6: “Gaming” Pieces from the slave village site](image)

The ridgeline village site as a haven with leisure practices and guarded nature, it can also be viewed as a healing site offering protection from the ills and ailments found in life on Barbados. The presence of pharmaceutical glass at the site, opened up Kathleen Mocklin’s (2009) interpretation of medicinal practices at the slave village site, which she noted the difficulty in discerning such material as “secular” medicine in its original intent, as a “spiritual” use in the form of “obeah” bottles, or simply a recycling practice. Ultimately, preferring a similar manner to how Mark Leone considered the garden features, Mocklin settles for the duality of such spiritual and mundane archaeological evidence that can reflect multiple meanings simultaneously. Considering how the surrounding gully network was utilized in these healing
practices suggests further connections through spatial and spiritual relationships with the surrounding landscape.

Whether it was classified as “obeah” or not by enslaved individuals on Barbados, the development of a Barbadian pharmacopeia appears early on, as seen in Ligon’s noting of enslaved people’s “inward” and “outward” medicine. Handler and Jacoby (1993) compiled substantial documentary evidence for the variety of methods which combined plant materials to cure an assortment illnesses and ailments. Plants used medicinally and having “duppy” (a ghost or spirit) used as a descriptor in their names as in duppy basil, duppy gun, or duppy needles, hints at the spirit world’s clear manifestation through the properties and use of these materials. This makes sense when considering the belief that ailments were afflicted by spiritual forces and thus, spiritual power was needed to treat such illness. Other plant medicine names like gully plum, gully root, wild basil, wild honey tree, and wild purslain indicate the location of where these materials were located on the Barbadian landscape. Thus, in the thickets of gullies or other dense foliage areas which Barbadians refer today as the “bush,” the spirit world connected with living in providing aid to ailments for those able to locate them and administer them properly (Handler and Jacoby 1993: 89-95; Cohall 2014). Gully spaces, as areas unable to be cultivated, would have served key areas which provided the collection of plants for the medicines. On St. Nicholas, with the slave village adjacent to a large gully network and otherwise surrounded by cultivated farmland, it would have had a large role in both healing practices and the larger social and spiritual space, which enslaved Barbadians imbued in gully areas (Fig 7). The use of these unnamable areas in itself suggests a rejection of planter society emphasizing the wealth in the cane fields in favor of areas that inherently resisted such cultivation.
A salient liminal quality to gully spaces in their associated beliefs and practices enacted in them suggests their continued incorporation into the spiritual landscapes of both white and black Barbadians in divergent way. Compared to the formal visible roadways traveled by both whites and blacks, the gully networks provided a more discrete mode of mobility used by Afro-Barbadians, but which were negatively depicted by whites in the case of such a ravine leading to Cole’s Cave as “a melancholy hideous Gully . . . where above nothing is to be seen but the Tops of high Rocks, and impending Cliffs, thro’ the gloomy branches of lofty Trees” (Hughes 1750: 56). As noted by Smith and Bassett (under review), such a gully network at Saint Nicholas Abbey allowed the travel of individuals with one another surrounding plantations together and allowed covert gatherings in cave spaces within these gullies. As spaces between various plantation villages, they provided as a central avenue of engaging in maroonage by traveling to another nearby plantation (Beckles 2006: 73). They were a connecting space between people in disparate domestic village sites separated by the formalities of land and slave ownership, and enslaved peoples use of gullies reflects a dissolution of the status of slavery in its disregard for the formal social order imposed by planters. Traveling through the uncultivated gullies did not provide smooth transitions between these areas, however, as Hughes describes one such tricky passage through these spaces with “a steep craggy Precipice of great Height, where your Security from a fall depends much upon the good Hold you take of the Roots of Trees, and Branches of Underwood” (Hughes 1750: 56).
Danger was not exclusive for white Barbadians who visited the gully areas. Theodore Easel recounted a tale told to him by a former enslaved man named Paul, who spoke of traveling through a gully onwards to another plantation on errand to collect money from the planter to his own planter. In the gully, he met a group of blacks who were stationed at a well-provisioned cave who hoped to take his money on his return trip. While Paul recounted his ability to successfully outwit these individuals, Easel’s recorded account offers several key points about the use of gully networks in Barbados at this time (Easel 1840:25-29). First, Paul’s decision to travel to another plantation via a gully suggests it as common, even normal, means to navigate through the Barbadian landscape among enslaved people. It also provides evidence of maroonage in caves areas, and the uncontrolled social environment that these spaces provided, meditated solely by Afro-Barbadians rather than the planters. The caves found in gullies acted as important social spaces within these gully networks as evident by the previously noted growing
archaeological evidence of their use by enslaved people on the island (Smith 2008: 112-133; Armstrong 2015). In the St. Nicholas Abbey gully, two caves have been identified with historic materials, but have not undergone further archaeological investigation (Smith and Bassett under review).

White Barbadians also ascribed religious significance to these spaces, as a religious leader like Hughes suggests that Barbados’s gullies “were originally the Effect of the Deluge,” the biblical flood which Noah’s Ark withstood in the Old Testament (Hughes 1750: 15). While certainly not applicable to every English person’s view, Hughes belief that gullies as evidence of God’s power and wrath on Earth and was noted nearly a hundred years later in Theodore Easel’s own commentary on Barbados’s landscape (Easel 1840: 22). Pinckard (1806 I: 336-339) also recounts related spiritual imaginings of cave spaces. While exploring a cave with a plantation owners, the torches used to guide the party accidently were extinguished, so Pinckard and his companions stayed in the cave "while Col. William and the Negores, who had been often in the cave, felt their way at great hazard to the opening" to bring back a light. On the return "watching carefully as the negroes approached, we at one moment saw the rays of light gleam upon their dark skins, gilding them with as it were with fire and giving them the appearance of the sons of Satan." He goes on, "in such a situation, buried in darkness and and sepulchral silence, you will agree that it required but little aid of our fancy to create pictures of horror" and admits that at first sight he thought they were "spirits of darkness" and "demons of darkness," entering the "mansions of the wicked" of the cave (336-339). Such imaginings might have further empowered enslaved villages in their drinking practices in areas like Mapps Cave. If there was some level of shared understanding of caves amongst whites and blacks, such liminal spaces might be viewed as potent, but dangerous spaces for both whites and black Barbadians to enter, use, and connect
to the spiritual world with through the archaeological evidence of drinking gatherings or storing of iron tools in possible ritual contexts.

Thinking about how spiritual beliefs are translated unto a landscape demonstrates the instillation of sense of community and idea of a “Barbadian” through that tangible and maintained relationship with landscapes beyond grave sites alone. The spiritual understandings enacted in both domestic sites, surrounding social gully networks, and caves intertwined the understandings of the afterlife into everyday realms of the living in these others areas, which merged the “mundane” with the spiritual. With that, the use of gullies and caves can be viewed as a rejection of the social order ascribed by the sugar industry, in favor of spaces unarable, hidden, and liminal in the larger Barbadian society. The protection available in these areas, the associated drinking practices, all provided a spaces which offered spiritual connections to the land beyond the grave sites alone. Such connections help explain why enslaved people became, as Barbadian Reverend H.E Holder described in 1788 “at the present attached to the soil” (Holder 1788: 19), and why Pinckard (1806 II: 76) noted a common phrase on the island of “Neither Charib [Carib Indian], nor Creole, but True Barbadian, and which is participated even by the slaves.” Crucially, within the liminal spaces enacted at this time, it also suggests that with the dissolution of social structures amongst the enslaved people, there was also a dissolution of the status of slavery, in addition to the formation of community in the shared experiences of these spaces.

**Spiritual Landscapes of Recent Memory**

The post-emancipation gradually rendered yet another landscape. One where newly-freed Afro-Barbadians asserted their status as free individual through changes in domestic sites, while often still engaging in the same work on plantations during slavery. On Barbados, the ties to
plantations settlements slowly eroded following the establishment of these tenant relations, to be replaced with the iconic mobile chattel houses, which allowed Barbadians to move from different rentable lands on a temporary basis, while still owning a house but given more options to choose where to work on the rural landscape. Such efforts by Barbadians to better their position eroded the substantial ties to specific plantation areas into more “mobile” landscapes (Bergman 2010).

Ties to the old plantation landscape still exist in how Barbadians talk about landscape and life in Barbados. From that, spiritual landscapes of “recent memory” are formed in how sugar plantations like St. Nicholas Abbey still retain historic connections with Barbadian.

In many instances, older Barbadians spoke about Barbados in a similar way describe in George Gmelch and Sharon Gmelch’s (1997) ethnographic study of rural Barbadian life, especially regarding the younger generation who are not willing to “tough it” out in the cane fields and would rather not do anything at all. Rather than as a point of national pride regarding the sugar industry as a whole, this seems to be more a lamenting the fact that younger kids could not understand the way of life they grew up in or how well the current generation has compared to the previous generation. In general, Barbadians were open to talk about what they knew about the past, especially those who grew up and worked near the plantation. Yet, as one older man noted, the generation before them knew much more and that he had grown up hearing about stories from people who spent their whole life working on the plantation but that he had paid little attention to them growing up and he now could not remember what his elders told him about the “bad days” as he described it. While I present how the places and instances that landscape features are still commemorated and associated with the past, it is also important to consider this process of forgetting as well.
My research project was initially interested in looking at the specific possible commeroration practices at the slave village site. Based on the three weeks I spent on the island last summer, beyond the material evidence, I found only circumstantial testimonies to ascribe a continuing spiritual connections at the site. One worker at the St. Nicholas, who walks along the cart road past the site everyday on her way to work, stated that she did not know about such practices at the site other than as a convenient spot to drink. Similarly, another plantation worker noted that the site served as a site where people could stop to drink and not be seen. Regarding drinking practices in regards to commemoration and spirituality, another elderly man noted that rum is still poured out for the dead. Some still ascribed healing qualities to alcohol, in one case a very elderly man well into his 90s, testified his well-being to advice given to him by his doctor in the 1950s, to drink a small glass of liquor once every day. At a national level, the celebration of Emancipation Day and the subsequent Kadooment Day offer the clearest enacting of a yearly ritualized dance documented and discussed throughout the historical record which features all the qualities of liminal spaces seen in earlier documents. The march features constant music, often excessive drinking, and family members gathering along a several-kilometer long parade route to watch and partake in the festivities. As the culmination of “crop-over’ and the end of the sugar harvest, the event serves as both a national commemoration of the past and national celebration of what it means to be “Bajan,” yearly codifying the idea of liminal spaces as a generator of the Barbadian identity through what is now a government-endorsed event.

On a more individual level, the acceptance of Christianity in Barbados did not lead dissolution of other belief systems, yet negative connotations of “obeah” still exist for Christian Barbadians. For one elderly white Barbadian, he reasoned that obeah practices which draw influence from the spirit world stem back to the time of Adam and Eve, and when all the evils
were let loose upon the world. In talking with one man a few days after a friend had passed away, he spoke about how the younger generation does not express the same fear for duppies or spirits, and that they are not afraid to go anywhere at night or approach a body at a funeral. When describing funerals growing up, he noted that wakes were generally held at the family’s home, which would feature food and drink and considered a celebration, which he liked going to more so than weddings.

Where obeah tended to lead to curt statements and sometimes nearly uncomfortable silences, Barbadians were much happier and more willing to talk about the island’s plant life surrounding us and its uses as medicine. Growing up in the 1950s and 60s, while doctors were used, Barbadians often described their parents going out to fetch herbs and medicines to heal headaches and other ailments. The “bush” and the gully areas were generally positively associated as sites which provided healing and represented their own past. Many older Barbadians spoke about traveling through the gully areas, eating fruit like mangoes in these spaces. The use of gully areas and their associated plants provided a defining quality of how the “old-time” people lived in Barbados in direct comparison to the island today. Again, the decline in use of gully spaces was again seen amongst older Barbadians as a changing state of Barbados, as they were less frequently used then they were in the past. At St. Nicholas Abbey, Barbadians described the gullies there as once with clear paths, with sites to catch water, which are now overgrown (Fig 8). As Kadooment day approached, one Bajan man informed me about how the popular acai tree’s fruits were associated with being ripe near crop-over time. For those identify as loosely as a Rastafarian, the notion of the healing power of natural world is an obvious fact. One man spoke of the idea of “Ire-nation” or “Ire-nature,” where a person travels into remote areas like the gullies in order to experience nature removed from human developments and
become closer to God. Similarly, another man self-identifying as a Rastafarian asserted how herbal medicine provided a healthier way of treating one in that it was more natural healing, and that one man’s poison was another man’s medicine. The natural areas and the plants they offered provided a defining quality for Barbadians describing to me what makes the island truly theirs.

For the older generation I talked with, the Barbadian landscape today represented a powerful, yet often neglected landscape in the dwindling use of gully areas and the variety of plant life found there, seen as a less active space since when they grew up but one that offered connections in how their elders once engaged with the land. Significantly, Bajans who grew up near St. Nicholas rarely discussed the fine manor house which attracts visitors all over the world, instead favoring the discussion of other features of the St. Nicholas Abbey’s landscape like the plants found in the area and occasionally where the old slave houses resided. Returning to the concept of Africa within the land of Barbados itself as first introduced by the Bajan man’s reimagining of the rum bottle’s label, these natural features and their often healing qualities are the legacies inherited by Bajans which provide areas of historical remembrances, and helps identify
themselves in relation to island of Barbados and their ancestors who worked there, rather than
the plantation houses formerly owned by those that bought their ancestors generations ago.
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