Queering Apocalypse: Queer Latinx Approaches to History and Hope in the Unending End Times of Western Modernity

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Queering Apocalypse:

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A dissertation presented

by

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is about apocalypse and modernity in the lands that European colonial powers renamed "América," or "the Americas." Departing from the intersection of queer theories, de- and anticolonial thinking, ethnic studies, transnational feminism, and theology, this dissertation examines the deep relationship and history between apocalypse, utopia, and the colonial foundations of Western modernity, as well as how this colonial history and its apocalyptic legacy continues to shape our lives. Apocalypse and utopia, within this context, provide fertile ground for the exploration of the inner workings of Western modernity as an historical and spatial-geographical project particularly concerned with "the human" and "human progress"—and therefore with white supremacy, misogyny, and heteronormativity. To engage with queer, anti-colonial approaches to utopia and apocalypse is to engage with colonial history and imperial, expansionist uses of apocalypse and utopia; consequently, it is the goal of "Queering Apocalypse" to further explore and reveal how apocalypse and utopia have shaped the historical and spatial project that is Western modernity as well as how they can provide the creative and discursive tools for feeling into the past, critiquing the present, and imagining liberation in the future.

The methodological convergence guiding "Queering Apocalypse" establishes a dialogue between queer and affective approaches to temporality and history, on the one hand, and queer, feminist, Latinx, and Latin American theologies and religious experiences on the other to approach the racialized, gendered, and transnational body as the interface between the distant colonial past and the horizons of the future. Therefore, the dissertation studies the literary, artistic, and performance creations of three women to highlight queer, Latina/x, Chicana/x, and migrant women's voices and contributions to our understanding of temporality, history, borders, and the body. The first chapter looks at how Rita Indiana's engagement with Dominican Vodou, spirit possession, and colonial history in her 2015 novel, *La mucama de Omicunlé*, challenges the literary conventions of science and speculative fiction regarding time travel and the location of subjectivity. The second chapter studies Alma López's 1999 digital print *Our Lady* as a spiritual and relational act of undressing the Virgin of Guadalupe that challenges the misogyny and heteronormativity built into Mexican and Chicano national imaginaries. And finally, the third chapter approaches the colonial history of paradise and utopia from within Josefina Báez's concept of El Nié and poem *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* (2008) to elucidate how both paradise and utopia are implicated within the processes of European colonialism, Western imperialism, and the creation of the nation-state. "Queering Apocalypse" therefore takes the spiritual labor of these women seriously and lets them lead the way in approaching the apocalypses of the past, present, and future.

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Darío, mi amor, mi compañero de vida.
Every day you love, support, and celebrate me.
You continually remind me that our love is beyond space and time.
Thank you.

Victoria,
You are my life's greatest gift and inspiration.
Born during a pandemic, I named you Victoria because you are the victory of hope for the future.
You are the light that guides me.
Thank you for coming into this life through me.

When I was a child my family would travel
down to Western Kentucky where my parents were born.
And there's a backwards old town that's often remembered
so many times that my memories are worn.

And daddy won't you take me back to Muhlenberg County
down by the Green River where Paradise lay?
Well, I'm sorry my son, but you're too late in askin'
Mister Peabody's coal train has hauled it away.

[…]

Then the coal company came with the world's largest shovel
and they tortured the timber and stripped all the land.
Well, they dug for their coal till the land was forsaken
then they wrote it all down as the progress of man.

[…]

When I die let my ashes float down the Green River,
let my soul roll on up to the Rochester dam.
I'll be halfway to Heaven with Paradise waitin'
Just five miles away from wherever I am.

—John Prine, "Paradise"

INTRODUCTION

Apocalypse Now and Then, Here and There, and Again

"[I]f the apocalypse is the subversion of the present time and the advent of another world in this world, queer subjects… have no need for an apocalypse because for them, the apocalypse, or rather apocalypses, plural, have been happening for a long time."
-Lorenzo Bernini, *Queer Apocalypses: Elements of Antisocial Theory* (2017)

"[T]he Haitian and Caribbean apocalypse has its own particular meanings and paradoxes, for instance in the ways in which the state functions (or does not function), and most notably in the sense that the apocalypse has endured for centuries, and that the end times have no apparent end."
-Martin Munro, *Tropical Apocalypse: Haiti and the Caribbean End Times* (2015)

"History is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility, the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots."
-Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995)

Approaching the Apocalypse

The human experience in the early twenty-first century can be described as paradoxically utopian and apocalyptic. Utopian and paradisaical for the privileged few whose unbridled accumulation and hoarding of capital, resources, and luxury goods and services contrasts starkly to the apocalyptic and hellish living conditions and suffering of many. The ongoing crisis of human-caused climate change threatens to destroy the very living conditions, environments, and biodiversity humanity depends on for survival. And the recent outbreak of SARS-CoV-2 and subsequent pandemic have killed millions globally and continue to reveal the structural inequalities and colonial legacies built into healthcare systems, global supply chains, vaccine distribution, housing markets, and scant legal protections for the unemployed and the poor as they bear the brunt of the resulting economic crises. The feminist anthropologist Rita Segato characterizes the early twenty first century ("colonial-modernity") as the "apocalyptic phase of capital" in which a small group of extremely wealthy elites "are the owners of life and death on

the planet" and capitalist accumulation, "the major end of capital's historical project," is sought at the expense of human empathy, the sacred, the land, and communitarian life ("Patriarchy from Margin to Center" 621-22). However, as Bernini and Munro illustrate in the epigraphs above, for queer and colonized peoples the apocalypse is nothing new and the current "apocalyptic phase" of capital, climate-driven mass extinction and mass migration, and the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermaths are simply (re)iterations, or rather, a continuation of the end times that began in the long sixteenth century and that have no apparent end.

The grandest of the grand narratives, apocalypse and belief in apocalyptic myths often arise as meaning-making and contextualizing narratives in times of crisis; as a means by which to understand our place in the world (as the world is seemingly falling apart), apocalyptic myths and expectations help to make sense of crisis—be it a natural disaster, a pandemic, or imperialist subjugation—by incorporating the crisis into a larger plan for history that often promises a new, better world and the triumph of good over evil just over the horizon of the end of history. If apocalypse is "the subversion of the present time and the advent of another world in this world," as Bernini suggests in the epigraphs above, then the crises provoked by Columbus's voyages certainly can be described as apocalyptic and apocalyptic imagery and narratives could be used to make sense of the historical devastation. For example, Gerald Horne's recent historical studies of the seventeenth and sixteenth centuries—*The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism* (2018) and *The Dawning of the Apocalypse* (2020), respectively—describe the beginnings of settler colonialism, white supremacy, slavery, and capitalism as apocalyptic, thus privileging the perspectives, histories, and suffering of displaced, murdered, and enslaved indigenous and African populations at the inception of Western modernity. For Horne, describing the dawn of European imperialist expansion into the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island, particularly

the British empire, in apocalyptic terms allows him to explore "the global forces that created this catastrophe" and detail how "this apocalypse spelled the devastation of multiple continents… all for the ultimate benefit of a relatively tiny elite in London, then Washington" (*The Dawning of the Apocalypse* 9-12). While Horne's characterization of European imperialism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is largely concerned with the violent and destructive side of apocalypse (catastrophe, annihilation, devastation, etc.), apocalypses are also moments (both real and imagined) of radical change and hope, even for Columbus and the early European colonizers and settlers who set the colonial apocalypse into motion. Is there room for desire, hope, and even pleasure in the unending (post)colonial, modern apocalypse? And beyond using the apocalypse to describe the events and lingering effects of the long sixteenth century, what can apocalypse reveal about the identities, histories, experiences, and hopes of individuals and communities birthed from within the violence of the socio-spatio-temporal matrix of Western modernity?

This dissertation is about apocalypse and modernity in the lands that European colonial powers renamed "América," or "the Americas"—Abya Yala, Turtle Island, and the Caribbean.[1] Departing from the intersection of queer theories, post- and anticolonial thinking, ethnic studies, and theology, this dissertation examines the temporal and spatial dimensions of apocalypse as well as the deep relationship and history between apocalypse and the experience of (post)colonial modernity. While the stories that unfold in the following pages center on a theoretical and exploratory queering of apocalypse, I understand "apocalypse" in the post-1492 world to be grounded in the everyday realities, interactions, movements, and experiences of millions of people across the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island. Apocalypse and

[1] I use these terms throughout the dissertation in an effort to decolonize my vocabulary. I use indigenous names to refer to individual islands in the Caribbean (such as Haiti-Quisqueya), however, for the sake of brevity, I use the colonial term "Caribbean" to refer to the region as a whole.

apocalypticism, within this context, are inseparable from Western modernity as an historical and spatial-geographical project particularly concerned with "the human" and "human progress"—and therefore with white supremacy, misogyny, and heteronormativity. Apocalypse therefore provides fertile ground for the exploration of the spatio-temporal dimensions of Western modernity as "the profound colonization of the concepts of time and space" as well as queer and anti/decolonial approaches to time, space, and history (Sanjinés 55).

As theological historian Bernard McGinn explains in the introduction to *Apocalyptic Spirituality* (1979), eschatology is "any type of belief that looks forward to the end of history as that which gives structure and meaning to the whole." If, as McGinn contends, apocalypticism is a form of eschatology with a particular "sense of the proximity of the end," then apocalypticism also serves to give structure and meaning to the whole of history by looking forward to its supposedly imminent and singular end (5). Like McGinn, feminist theologian Catherine Keller situates the apocalypse within the larger category of eschatology. By reexamining the Greek roots of eschatology—*ta eschata*, the edge or spatial-temporal horizon—Keller emphasizes the possibility of hope implicitly found within apocalypse and within eschatology in general: "Eschatology... is distinguished by its indignation in the face of injustice, that is, its prophetic critique of the status quo, its privilege of the future as the horizon of renewal, and its historicizing account of its time" (*Apocalypse Now and Then* 20). As tools for creating and perpetuating historicizing accounts of time, both eschatology and apocalypse "reveal" (as the etymological root of *apo-kalypso* bears out) that time and space are culturally constructed categories saturated with power, politics, and desire.

To engage with queer, postcolonial, and anti-colonial approaches to utopia and apocalypse is to engage with colonial history and imperial, expansionist uses of apocalypse and

utopia, and it is the goal of "Queering Apocalypse" to further explore and reveal how apocalypse and utopia have shaped the historical and spatial project that is Western modernity as well as how they can provide the creative and discursive tools for feeling into the past, critiquing the present, and imagining liberation in the future. "Queering Apocalypse" is therefore deeply indebted to utopianism, particularly queer, anti-imperial, and postcolonial approaches to utopia that, in the words of Bill Ashcroft, attempt "to achieve a breach in the ideological and cultural structures that persist as a consequence of imperialism" and whose function is "[n]ot to construct a place, but to enact the utopian in the engagement with power… a certain kind of *praxis* rather than a specific mode of representation" ("Critical Utopias" 420). Both apocalypse and utopia engage with imaginative breaches of the horizons of the past, the future, and/or the spatial horizons that constitute the here and now, and consequently offer the possibility for reconceiving, recontextualizing, and even challenging or rejecting the present. Queer and anticolonial approaches to utopia and, I would argue, apocalypse, allow us to "see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present," as José Esteban Muñoz's own queer utopian work revealed (*Cruising Utopia* 1). However, both utopia and apocalypse are also implicated in the processes and history of European colonialism and Western imperialism; for example, the apocalyptic beliefs of Columbus and many early European explorers and colonizers as well as Thomas More's use of colonial discourse in his *Utopia* (1516) attest to how these apocalyptic, millenarian hopes for the end of History and the beginnings of the utopian literary genre both shaped and were shaped by the colonization of the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island.

Taking my cues from affect theory and queer approaches to historiography and temporality, I understand that to intellectually approach any historical moment or hypothetical future from a queer perspective, even with the intention of critiquing modernity's universalizing

timeline, is to inevitably situate the past and future in proximity to a (post)modern present and to historicize this present in a temporal-binary relationship of "then" and "now" or "now" and "tomorrow." Western modernity and modern historiography's chronology, periodization, and period-bound concepts of the past, present, and future have established themselves as the *lingua franca* for thinking, writing, and researching about the human experience across time, both within Western and Western-influenced academic research institutions and in popular culture. Perhaps more important than rejecting or disrupting this "retrospective fiction of periodization" (e.g., prehistory, antiquity, the premodern Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the modern, and the postmodern) is to explore how we *feel* about time rather than continue to deconstruct and analyze how we *think* about time.[2] Affective modes and queer approaches to historiography and temporality—such as those explored by Carolyn Dinshaw, Elizabeth Freeman, Heather Love, Carla Freccero, Jack Halberstam, Valerie Traub, and Jaclyn Pryor—affirm the political nature of time as the traumas and triumphs of the past, the fleeting present, and the hopes and fears of the future are charged with affective resonances that open up new possibilities for relationship, connection, community formation, and even pleasure across time.[3]

From decolonial theory and critique, I am inspired by the concept of the coloniality of power—as described by Aníbal Quijano and later expanded upon by Ramón Grosfoguel, Walter

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[2] In their introduction to *Queer Disorientations: Queer Temporalities, Affects, Theologies* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), Stephen Moore, Kent Brintnall, and Joseph Marchal explain how affect theory and queer theory intersect and intermingle in the study of queer temporalities: "…it is not just how we *think* about time but also how we *feel* about time that matters… Temporality is a politically and ethically charged category because its affective resonances are incalculably consequential" (4).

[3] See Carolyn Dinshaw's *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), Heather Love's *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), Carla Freccero's *Queer/Early/Modern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), Valerie Traub's *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), and Jaclyn Pryor's *Time Slips: Queer Temporalities, Contemporary Performance, and the Hole of History* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2017).

Mignolo, Sylvia Wynter, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres, among many others—in how it points to the enduring effects of colonialism on the socio-political orders, economic systems, and knowledge and cultural production of contemporary postcolonial societies, and therefore on the material living conditions, experiences, and everyday realities of formerly or repeatedly colonized peoples.[4] Coloniality argues that colonial relations and ways of thinking and being continue to shape our present-day political, economic, and social realities and systems of creating and propagating knowledge. Within the territorial expanse of the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island—where nations that became independent from European colonial powers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries coexist with currently colonized or, in the case of Puerto Rico, doubly colonized lands and peoples—an affective and queer take on history, modernity, and coloniality enables the exploration of the continuities and disruptions birthed from colonialism that stretch across time. These continuities and disruptions include the feeling of the apocalyptic colonial past lingering in the present form of U.S. imperialist interventions or the possibilities for hope and community simultaneously located in the horizons of the future and the anticolonial struggles and rebellions of the past.[5]

[4] In his critique of modernity and historicism, *Embers of the Past: Essays in Times of Decolonization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), Javier Sanjinés C. defines coloniality as "the logic of economic, political, and social domination of the whole world, above and beyond the concrete fact that in the past the colonizing country may have been Spain, Britain, or more recently the United States." He continues: "If modernity is the name of the historical process by which imperial Europe began to build its worldwide hegemony… Coloniality thus explains the logic that has imposed control, exploitation, and domination on the rest of humankind and that masks this subjugation with the language of salvation, of progress, of modernization" (3).

[5] Juana María Rodríguez, in *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (New York: New York University Press, 2014) defines affect as "how feelings function in the realm of the social," explaining that "How we feel and act exceeds us. We are social—inextricably, undeniably, normatively and queerly, painfully and delightfully social" (17-18). If time and how we talk about and organize time into categories like the past, present, and future are culturally constructed, then time forms a part of "the realm of the social" and affective and queer approaches to the past and temporality pay attention to how feelings—emotions, bodily sensations, intuitions, and longings—function across time.

Focusing on the case of European colonialism and its lasting effects in the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island, I am interested in exploring how queer and formerly or repeatedly colonized peoples enact their relations to the past and future, when fissures and cracks appear in the story of history as told by dominant groups, and when apocalypse itself reveals new insights into the inner workings of colonialism, modernity, and oppression as well as new possibilities for liberation. Queering apocalypse, then, points to moments of continuity and disruption across time and investigates how contemporary queer and colonized peoples and communities relate to, imagine, and touch the continuities and disruptions of the past and the future as these temporal horizons arise within, subvert, and inform the present. Given the global scope and universal timelines of both Western modernity and the Christian/Catholic apocalyptic tradition that influenced many early European explorers and colonizers, queering apocalypse also allows me to study the apocalyptic hopes and affective relationships with the past, present, and future of the colonizers. Therefore, I am also interested in the apocalyptic expectations of early European explorers, colonizers, and missionaries who, leaving a Europe enveloped in political turmoil, economic crises, and religious wars, projected their millenarian hopes and eschatological anxieties onto the territories and peoples of the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island. I am not interested in making totalizing, broad claims as to the role of apocalypse in European colonialism or in Western modernity. I am not claiming that modernity is wholly apocalyptic in its logic or that apocalypse is the only religious, ideological, or political element undergirding modernity and its projects—as my discussion of apocalypse, utopia, and modernity in the following pages illustrates. Nor am I interested in claiming that apocalypse provides the single explanatory paradigm for European colonialism or that queering apocalypse is the universal solution for hope, social justice activism, and liberation movements. Rather, I recognize that

apocalypse provides valuable insights into not only how Europe made sense of the lands and peoples it colonized and justified its colonial projects; apocalypse also sheds light on the persistence of systemic oppression resulting from colonialism that continues to affect global politics, economies, migrations, military interventions, and the everyday lives and actions of millions of people.

European colonialism provides a clear starting place for my analysis because apocalypticism's influence appears at the very beginning of the European explorations in the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island. While I touch on English colonialism and imperialism in the third chapter, I generally focus on Spanish colonialism because of the prevalence of apocalyptic and millenarian prophetic thinking that was popular in medieval Iberia that eventually influenced Columbus's mission and the subsequent Spanish chroniclers, missionaries, and *conquistadores* that followed him.[6] The totalizing force of the apocalyptic Christian end-script that rendered the territories, human bodies, and natural resources of the Americas and Africa commodifiable, exploitable, and useful in bringing about the Second Coming of Christ as foretold in the Book of Revelation (as Columbus and many of his contemporaries believed) also revolutionized European knowledge production and eventually paved the way for Renaissance humanism, the Enlightenment, and the modern imagined community of the nation-state. However, in true colonial fashion—and much akin to the local histories, global designs, and subaltern knowledges discussed by Walter D. Mignolo—the "advancements" and changes to

[6] In his contribution to *Prophecy and Eschatology in the Transatlantic World, 1550-1800* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016) titled "Between the New and the Old Worlds: Iberian Prophecies and Imperial Projects in the Colonisation of the Early Modern Spanish and Portuguese Americas," Luís Filipe Silvério Lima situates the early Spanish explorations and colonization within the context of medieval Iberian beliefs and prophecies of "the last empire" inspired by Franciscan mysticism and the popularity of the eschatological and historical works of Joachim of Fiore. Silvério Lima states: "The voyages of discovery and the conquest of the Spanish and Portuguese Americas were from the very start permeated by Edenic, biblical, and millenarian arguments… The Iberian monarchies' self-declared mission was founded on a messianic idea of the last empire and their election as the new chosen people" (34).

European knowledge production that resulted from colonialism and made Humanism, the Enlightenment, and modernity possible also concealed, enslaved, subjugated, and attempted to wipe out any way of producing knowledge and being in the world that challenged Europe's universalist claims to and definitions of history, civilization, humanity, and progress.[7] It is my intention, therefore, to *reveal* the role(s) apocalypse may have played in the machinations of European colonialism as well as explore how a queering of apocalypse can shed new light on how strategies from the margins and underside of modernity, to borrow from Nelson Maldonado-Torres, have been employed by various Latina/x and Chicana/x artists, writers, and activists in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries to challenge these universalist claims made in the name of Western modernity.[8]

In many ways, "Queering Apocalypse" is born out of my frustrations with, to borrow from Susan Buck-Morss, "the limits that scholarship places upon our imagination" as well as how "the construction of an object of research over time can hide as much as it illuminates," particularly in the case of historical interpretation when bound within traditional historical periodization and the academic compartmentalization of research areas and disciplines (*Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* 12). As Buck-Morss so aptly points out, the central paradox within Western modernity since the days of the "Enlightenment"—the discourse of individual freedom as a universal political value and inalienable right at the same time that global capitalism, since its mercantile and colonial manifestations to its present-day apocalyptic form, has always depended on the exploitation and dehumanization of laborers—often still shows up in academic research and scholarly productions as scholars todays "are still capable of constructing Western

[7]See *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
[8] See *Against War: Views from the Underside of Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

histories as coherent narratives of human freedom" (22). Buck-Morss continues with a warning for those "new disciplines… that were established precisely to remedy the situation:"

> When national histories are conceived as self-contained, or when the separate aspects of history are treated in disciplinary isolation, counterevidence is pushed to the margins as irrelevant… It should be noted that specialization and isolation are also a danger for those new disciplines such as African American studies, or new fields such as diaspora studies, that were established precisely to remedy the situation. Disciplinary boundaries allow counterevidence to belong to someone else's story. (22)

Following Buck-Morss's above warning, "Queering Apocalypse" strives for interdisciplinarity in its approach to apocalypse, European colonialism, and Western modernity. "Queering Apocalypse" is therefore equally inspired by the imaginative works of researchers and scholars like Buck-Morss, Stelio Cro, and J. Martin Evans who creatively explore how colonial discourse, imperialist ideology, and historical events like Columbus's voyages and the Haitian Revolution may have shaped Hegel's understanding of history and freedom, Thomas More's Christian humanist take on a nascent bourgeois ideology and capitalist, mercantile economy in *Utopia*, and John Milton's engagement with Genesis in *Paradise Lost* (1667), respectively.[9] In investigating the impact of colonization on such classics of early modern and Enlightenment philosophy and literature, these authors bring the beginnings of the colonization of the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island to the fore in the story of the creation of Europe and its cultural productions.

[9] Here I am greatly inspired by Buck-Morss's groundbreaking reinterpretation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic from within the Haitian Revolution and the contradictions of Enlightenment thinking and modernity, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009). I am also inspired by Stelio Cro's imaginative exploration of the possible impact of Spanish colonialism and early colonial writings on Thomas More's elaboration of *Utopia*, "From More's *Utopia* to the Jesuit *Reducciones* in Paraguay" (*Moreana* Vol. 42, 164, 2005, pp. 93-117). Lastly, I am also inspired by J. Martin Evans's creative investigation into the possible impact of the colonization of the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island on Milton's epic poem, *Milton's Imperial Epic: Paradise Lost and the Discourse of Colonialism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2018).

Far from perpetuating Eurocentrism in their scholarship, the works of these authors beg the question "of how Eurocentrism itself was constructed historically, and what role Haiti [and the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island] might have played in that process" (Buck-Morss 13).[10] Following the lead of such imaginative and revolutionary scholarship, "Queering Apocalypse" maps out what Buck-Morss might call an unconventional topology of time and space by looking at the significance of European exploration and colonization in the Caribbean, Abya Yalta, and Turtle Island for contemporary queer Latinidad and queer, Latinx literary and artistic production—and consequently centers queer Latinx subjects in how the story of Western modernity is told.[11]

Queering Apocalypse" is just as concerned with method(s) as it is with content, but without depending upon or arguing for a singular, prescriptive methodology. "Queering Apocalypse" is, therefore, a project concerned with *approach* in both senses of the word. When used as a noun, "approach" connotes a way of dealing with a situation, the style or strategies one adopts to address and overcome a problem. Taking my cues from the uncanny, unnamable, and even uncomfortable side of queerness, focusing on approach(es) makes room for an analysis of a multiplicity of strategies from diverse sources, disciplines, and peoples across time and invites us to constantly return to the question of how we can best tackle the ongoing dehumanization built into Westen modernity as the tactics and rhetoric of colonial violence and oppression are constantly changing and adapting, too. Approach, when used as a verb, also conveys a sense of

[10] This imaginative, re-mapping work of European history and cultural identity mirrors the epistemic shift and re-centering of Haiti and the Haitian Revolution in the story of Western modernity and U.S. national identity, history, and imperialism as taken up by C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, and David Brion Davis in the early-mid twentieth century and continued into the twenty-first century by Michel-Rolf Trouillot, Sibylle Fischer, David Scott, Mary A. Renda, Susan Buck-Morss, and Lorgia García-Peña, among others.

[11] In the Preface for *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, Buck-Morss begins with an account of how her essay "Hegel and Haiti" (published in *Critical Inquiry* in 2000) was received, including how it was praised and criticized, and credits its wide circulation to the "unconventional topologies of time and space it mapped out" (ix).

movement as one draws near or nearer to someone or something in distance or in time. For example, to say that "the Apocalypse is near!" is to say that humanity is soon approaching the horizon of the future where the end of History resides. To queer apocalypse, then, is to feel into the spatio-temporal horizons of the past and the future, to approach these horizons and explore what could be on the other side. The queer, Latinx/a, Chicanx/a, and Dominicanyork authors and artists I study utilize and embody approach in both senses of the word as their artistic productions, writings, and performances confront and disrupt current manifestations of oppression and colonial violence by engaging with the apocalyptic, colonial legacy within Western modernity itself and imagining and desiring other worlds within this world.

Queering Apocalypse: Approaching the Past as the Future Approaches

Given the vast breadth of time and space that the project traverses—from 1492 to an imagined near future of 2037, and from the island of Haiti-Quisqueya to the borderlands between the United States and México and the migratory flow between the Dominican Republic and New York City—as well as its interdisciplinary nature, "Queering Apocalypse" faces unique methodological challenges. Of these challenges, perhaps the most pressing and important for the project is how to approach the complexities and contradictions of Western modernity without an over dependence on generalizations that lose sight of the particular or adopting a myopic view of the particular that glazes over or outright denies larger patterns of dehumanization and epistemic violence, like the global scale of white supremacy, in the way the story of the West and its history(ies) are told. In fact, this tension between the general, or universal, and the particular is the first contradiction that is unique to, if not constitutive of, Western modernity as its "universalist aspirations," including liberal democracy and universal human rights, are contrasted

with the proliferation of "particularisms," like nationalism, racism, and Eurocentrism (Wegner 1-2).[12] The internal conflict within modernity therefore plays out in how modernity produces both universalist claims regarding Human History and a proliferation of particulars that contradict or selectively apply these claims to certain cultures, groups, and identities according to white supremacy, heteronormativity, and patriarchy. A second contradiction arose in the eighteenth century when Enlightenment thinkers and political philosophers both within Europe and its colonies viewed freedom, *liberté*, as "the highest and universal political value" at the same time that the enslavement of Africans and non-Europeans in the colonies "came to underwrite the entire economic system of the West" as global capitalism was transitioning "from its mercantile to its protoindustrial form" (Buck-Morss 21-22).

Now that we have entered an apocalyptic phase of global capitalism, as Segato might call it, these fundamental contradictions continue to undergird and plague "the West" as the entire economic system continues to depend on the exploitation of laborers and extraction of resources in (formerly) colonized lands while xenophobia in relatively wealthy nation-states, from the U.S. to Poland to Chile, continues to escalate, often targeting Black and Muslim refugees and migrants in particular. My first strategy, or approach, to tackling the immensity of Western modernity is to read modernity's teleological treatment of its own history and futurity as the narrative that it is, taking my cues from Caribbean authors and postcolonial theorists who have long been approaching "the West" and its universalist claims as a fiction, including Édouard Glissant, Sylvia Wynter, and Homi K. Bhabha to name a few.[13] Rather than treat "the West" and

[12] Here, Wegner's study of narrative utopia and its impact on the development of the nation-state is inspired by Slavoj Žižek's argument that the contradiction between the universal and the particular is constitutive of modernity itself, which he developed in *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991) and *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).
[13] For example, in Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse* (originally published in 1989), he includes a footnote about "the West" toward the beginning of his introductory essay: "The West is not in the West. It is a project, not a place" (2). In her 1992 essay "The Pope Must Have Been Drunk The King of Castille a Madman: Culture as Actuality, and the

its history as a given reality and universal human destiny, the transformation of "the West" into an object of study permits anyone to interact with it, to "read" it, and even criticize its universalist claims and contradictions. "The West's" grand metanarratives and universalist claims to human progress can therefore be approached or read in contra*diction,* borrowing from García-Peña, where the stories, narratives, and lived experiences of those left out or erased by a Eurocentric modernity and its goal-oriented history can take center stage in the retelling of how the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island (as we know them today) came to be.[14] By going through and queering the grand narrative of the apocalypse, particularly in how it colluded with colonialism and Western modernity, new constellations of interdependency, relationality, affect, and causation emerge as the regional, local, personal, and the particular are (re)mapped across what Michel-Rolph Trouillot calls the "global geography of imagination" produced by the fiction of "the West" (*Global Transformations* 1).[15]

Part of the work of approaching, reading, and challenging the fiction of "the West" is recognizing the importance of religion and religious experiences for "the West's" foundations in the fifteenth century, its ongoing project of self-creation and perpetuation, as well as for those queer, racialized, and gendered subjects for whom religious experiences form a vital component

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Caribbean Rethinking Modernity," Wynter is able to tie the 1493 Papal Bulls and Requirimiento document of the early sixteenth century to the twentieth-century history of U.S. invasion and interventions in Haiti by articulating the process by which the West began to believe itself, its bodies of knowledge, and its perspectives to be universal and "acultural:" "as actions/behaviors prescribed and legitimated by a universally applicable 'understanding of man's humanity' and its mode of truth" (Wynter, 25). And lastly, Bhabha's edited volume, *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge Press, 1990) treats the nation-state as a narrative, exploring "the Janus-faced ambivalence of language itself in the construction of the Janus-faced discourse of the nation" (3).

[14] See García-Peña's *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

[15] Following the example made by Glissant and other Caribbean intellectuals, Trouillot describes "the West" as a historical projection: "I have insisted so far that the West is a historical projection, a projection *in* history. But it is also a projection *of* history, the imposition of a particular interface between what happened and that which is said to have happened… As anchor of a claim to universal legitimacy, the geography of imagination inherent in the West since the sixteenth century imposes a frame within which to read world history… this framework has always assumed the centrality of the North Atlantic not only as the site from which world history is made but also as the site whence that story can be told" (*Global Transformations* 12).

of their anticolonial work.[16] From the apocalyptic beliefs and ambitions driving Columbus to make himself and Hapsburg Spain protagonists in the conquest of Jerusalem and the triumph of a global, imperialistic Christianity to the Chirstian-humanist critique in Thomas More's *Utopia* to the influence of More's *Utopia* on Franciscan missionaries in early colonial Mexico, Christianity undoubtedly played a role in the colonization of Abya Yala, Turtle Island, and the Caribbean and in how "the West" created an identity for itself and made sense of the peoples and lands it encountered and colonized. However, to speak of Christianity and its role(s) in colonization as a timeless monolith would be a mistake; perhaps it has always been more accurate to speak of "Christianities" when studying how it has both impacted and been impacted by colonization and Western imperialism, not only in the sense of its many denominations and manifestations but also in its history, the continuing evolution of its theologies, and the diversity of peoples and beliefs systems it came into contact with in the processes of colonization in the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island. Whether "the West" is identifying itself with its predominant religion, Christianity, or relegating religion to an "irrational," pre-science past in the telling of its history,

[16] While I am not a religious studies scholar, I am aware of how the term "religion" has a problematic and colonial history in religious studies and in fields like anthropology where "religion," particularly in the nineteenth century, connoted Western European understandings of the religious practices and experiences of "civilization" (i.e., Christianity) while terms like "animism," "magic," and "syncretism" were used to describe the religious practices and experiences of the non-Western, often colonized, people and communities being studied. The use of such terminology in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries betrayed a teleological understanding of religion on the part of Western scholars and anthropologists whereby Christianity was positioned as more advanced, coherent, and civilized compared to the "primitive" practices of non-Western cultures. If the fields of anthropology and the study of religion have made improvements in their practices and vocabulary since the nineteenth century, unfortunately, these teleological ideas about religion are alive and well in the general public; for example, I was explicitly taught by my local parish priest and Sunday school teachers as a child that monotheism and the fact that Christianity does not require animal sacrifice meant that Christianity was a more "advanced" form of religion compared to polytheism and ancient Judaism. Therefore, I use the terms "religion" and "religious practices and experiences" plainly and widely to describe the beliefs and practices of the subjects that I study. I do not use additional modifiers like "vernacular" or "syncretic" to describe the religious beliefs and practices that came out of modernity, like Puerto Rican Espiritismo or Dominican Vodou, because, in my opinion, to use such modifiers implies a sense of coherence and an ancient quality to dominant religions like Christianity that only feeds into the telos guiding Western modernity and its history.

religion and religious experience continue to shape the spatio-temporal project and fiction of modernity.

As a work of primarily cultural and literary criticism, "Queering Apocalypse" is concerned with: 1) how religious ideas and beliefs, like the apocalypse, are implicated in the history and machinations of European colonialism and Western imperialism; 2) with artistic and literary representations of religious phenomena and their significance for various Latinx communities; and 3) with establishing a dialogue between queer and affective approaches to temporality and history, on the one hand, and queer, feminist, Latinx, and Latin American theologies and religious experiences on the other to approach the body as the interface between the distant colonial past and the horizons of the future. The frictional convergence of the local, the colonial past, and the (post)colonial present on and through the imaginary geography of "the West" is seen in the music and literary works of the queer Dominican writer, artist, and singer, Rita Indiana. While Indiana's 2015 novel *La mucama de Omicunlé* (translated into English as *Tentacle* by Achy Obejas in 2018) is the focus of my first chapter, I'm including a brief analysis of her 2017 song and music video, "El Castigador" ("The Punisher"), as well as a brief mention of her most recent album, *Mandinga Times* (2020), to help introduce the methodological convergence guiding "Queering Apocalypse."

After a seven-year break from producing music following the success of her 2010 album *El juidero*, Rita Indiana returned to the music scene with the 2017 release of her single "El Castigador" and its accompanying music video directed by her wife, Noelia Quintero Herencia.[17] Described as "un homenaje al 'Work Song' afro americano'" ("an homage to the African American 'Work Song'") in the description of the music video on Indiana's official YouTube

[17] The music video can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iD76WvNz9U8

channel, both the song and video are replete with references to musical traditions and religious practices rooted in Afro-diasporic history across the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island, from the rhythmic hums and beats sustaining the tempo to the video's representations of spirit possession and the Mesa Blanca and Espiritismo de Cordón ("White Altar" and "Cord Spiritism") healing rituals from Puerto Rican and Cuban Espiritismo.[18] A song concerned with political corruption, "El Castigador" references the particularities of the Dominican Republic while also situating these particularities within five hundred years of colonial violence and exploitation. For example, the lyrics begin with a warning for corrupted elites and mentions one of the poorest neighborhoods in Santo Domingo, "el Capotillo:" "to' lo' corruptos van a temblar / cuando me suba El Castigador / flor de justicia del trovador… se regodean en lujos que paga el miserable / mientra' en el 'Capotillo' el hambre tiene / hambre" ("all the corrupt are going to tremble / when I am possessed by The Punisher / flower of justice of the troubadour… they take pleasure in luxuries paid for by the poor / while in 'Capotillo' even hunger is hungry;" my trans.). The lyrics continue with a references to colonial history and "Ramfis Trujillo," the son of the dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo who, after his father's assassination in 1961, lived a life of luxury while in exile in Spain until dying in a car accident in his Ferrari in 1969: "Son 500 años devorando esqueleticos / Comida pal' perro, mientras estos cochinos andan en lo' yate' / cual Ramfi Trujillo / al viejo, a la haitiana, / le suben lo' vidrio'" ("Nothing but bones to eat for 500 years / Food for the dog, while these bastards ride in their yachts / like Ramfi Trujillo / they roll their windows up at the old man, the Haitian woman;" my trans.). For Indiana and "El

[18] In *Creole Religions of the Caribbean: An Introduction from Vodou and Santeria to Obeah and Espiritismo* (New York: NYU Press, 2011), Margarite Fernandez Olmos, Joseph M. Murphy, and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert describe Espiritismo as "A Creole spiritual healing practice with roots in the United States, Europe, Africa, and the indigenous Taíno Caribbean" (203). Cuban and Puerto Rican Espiritismo in particular combined French Kardecian Spiritism with "the spirit-oriented popular and folk Catholicism of the rural peasant populations" and the African-influenced ancestor worship already present in Puerto Rico and Cuba (209).

Castigador," the corruption and abuses of power on the part of the elites in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is tied to Columbus's arrival to the island of Haiti-Quisqueya, the beginnings of the plantation economy, and the foundations of capitalism that began in the sixteenth century.

In the ritual scenes of the music video, Indiana is seated at the head of a long table covered with a white tablecloth and glass bowls and goblets of water; surrounded by the other ritual participants, Indiana's position at the head of the table indicates her leading role in the ritual as the person who will be possessed by the spirit of El Castigador, the Punisher. We are introduced to El Castigador once the lyrics begin; an ancient Taíno "espíritu guerrero," warrior spirit, stands at the banks of a stream deep in the forest. Throughout the video, images of flowing water, including the stream and a drainage trench, serve as representations of the flow of time as El Castigador emerges from the forest and is joined by a group of hungry, suffering children—the past brings hope for justice and change for the future. The lyrics begin with a reference to materials used for protection charms ("clavo con clavo soga con sal") using nails, salt, and rope typically arranged in the shape of a cross and often feature patterns of speech and discursive elements typical of healing rituals and spirit possession, such as magical and incantation speech and aphorisms. For example, while heading the ritual, Indiana uses incantation speech to seemingly curse those who abuse their wealth and power at the expense of the poor, returning the suffering of the poor back to those who waste resources: "Por cada peso que se han tumbao / santa tristeza la casa la llene / la tristeza del que le faltan lo' chele' pa' educar sus hijos / eso duele" ("For every peso they have wasted / holy sorrow fill their homes / the sorrow of those who can't pay for their children's education / that hurts;" my trans.). Indiana's use of aphorism also serves to indict the wealthy elites, their hoarding of wealth and resources, and their

complicity in the suffering of the poor: “El que le quita al pobre es el peor cobarde” (“He who steals from the poor is the worst coward;” my trans.). The moment El Castigador possesses Indiana is marked by a transformation in Indiana’s posture and countenance; the dramatic black and white makeup around Indiana’s eyes draws our attention as her eyes roll back, her head tips back, and she lets out an otherworldly wail. She becomes the embodiment and loudspeaker of El Castigador, the troubadour who brings the flower of justice into the present.

The depiction of ritualistic spirit possession in “El Castigador” is reminiscent of the Spiritist notion of “spiritual time” that, as Raquel Romberg explains, represents “a timeless morality” in which the practices of divination and spirit possession create “an alternative reality, where worldly, personal afflictions are reframed, acquiring a cosmological, impersonal status” (*Healing Dramas* 141). The convergence of past, present, and future of spiritual time, as seen in the disruption of standard speech and language during the practices of brujería, divination, and spirit possession, challenge linear conceptions of time and “the coherence of the speaking subject;” according to Romberg, the experience of spiritual time during divination constitutes “a different kind of holistic epistemology (and nosology):”

> Apparently, the rationalist premises that guide standard language and its linear-temporal foundation are inadequate for capturing the holistic world of divination experiences… When the voices of the spirits and the dead become manifest during divination and trance, they violate various rules of standard discourse… Their sacredness can be sensed in spite or because of the opacity of their discourse. This is when the spirits reveal the true source of afflictions (and their solutions) to the living in a totalizing, timeless, and spaceless discourse. (167-68)

The displacement of the subjectivity of the brujx/a/o, medium, or healer during spirit possession, the timelessness of aphorisms, shifts in speaking subjects and verb tenses during trances, and the revelation of both the sources of and remedies for afflictions all point to how intertwined language and time are in the religious experience of ritual and spirit possession—and how central the body is for accessing this "totalizing, timeless, and spaceless discourse." "Ritual practices thus offer a window into the workings of history," writes Romberg, because they create "a special space and time" in which "embodied memories can be enacted and the contradictions brought by globalizing discourses [Romberg mentions Catholicism, nationalism, and modernity] can be locally elaborated" and "local responses to and qualms about global forces that affect the lives of individuals" can be articulated (*Witchcraft and Welfare* 23).

In existing across time and space, ritual and spiritual time also aid in the mobility of Caribbean religions and magical practices across the region and across communities of various cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In her study of the circulation of "supernatural knowledge" and magical practices like obeah across the Caribbean, Lara Putnam argues that multiple "traditions of supernatural manipulation… coexisted and crossfertilized" in the Caribbean for centuries, making magical and religious practices like spirit possession and divination "a lingua franca in a region constantly on the move" ("Rites of Power and Rumors of Race" 254).[19] Rita Indiana's literary and musical career illustrate this point perfectly. From the percussive and rhythmic influences of Dominican gaga and Haitian rara in her music to her representations of time travel, spirit possession, and Dominican Vudou in *La mucama de Omicunlé* and the representation of Puerto Rican and Cuban Espiritismo and the Mesa Blanca ritual tradition in "El Castigador,"

[19] Romberg, in *Healing Dramas*, makes a similar case for ritual practices like possession and divination functioning as "a kind of spiritual lingua franca that enables individuals of various backgrounds and religious orientations… to move in and out of these various types of vernacular healing systems" (6).

Indiana's "fluency" in these religious and ritual traditions speaks to how this centuries-long circulation of supernatural knowledge and ritual practices exists both because of and despite Western modernity; Indiana points to how the transmission of these traditions was influenced by the economic forces driving modernity's expansion and the colonial and Eurocentric discourses organizing its histories.

Caribbean religions, magical and ritual practices, and moral philosophies are a constantly moving and changing amalgamation of indigenous Taíno beliefs and practices with the religious beliefs and ritual practices brought to the region by enslaved West African people; the Catholic Church; nineteenth-century upper-class European and North American practitioners of Spiritualism and Spiritism; indentured servants from Europe and South Asia; Chinese immigrants; and North American Protestant and Evangelical missionaries, among many others. As Putnam's study of the discourses surrounding obeah in early twentieth-century print media demonstrates, despite white commentator's overtly racist characterizations of practices like obeah as barbarous, primitive, savage, and violent (thus supporting their claims regarding the supposed impossibility of black people's self-governance in the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island), "obeah and related supernatural practices gained prominence in the twentieth-century Caribbean not because Afro-Caribbean societies were traditional but because they were modern, not because people were rooted in the past but because they were moving in the present… obeah could be practiced across the region not because of its shared Africanness but because of its open heterogeneity" (262). Here we see the tensions and contradictions of modernity playing out across Caribbean religious experiences and ritual practices. While dominant, racist discourses painted (and continue to paint) Caribbean religions and magical practices as inherently "African" and atavistic, and therefore antithetical to nineteenth-century

positivism, enlightenment values, and "Western civilization," the believers, practitioners, healers, and clients across the Caribbean were actually engaging with "modern capitalism, Victorian science, and the market" (in addition to Taíno, West African, European, and South Asian religious beliefs and magical practices), and thus forming a "transatlantic modernity" characterized by innovation and heterogeneity (Putnam 248). The story of modernity in the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island is, in many ways, the story of religious encounters, religious practices, and religious experiences across cultures, bodies, space, and time. Religion therefore provides a vehicle for people of various subjectivities and backgrounds for rebelling against and survival within the fiction of "the West" and its spatio-temporal project.[20]

"Queering Apocalypse" is most invested in exploring the treatment of time and the telos guiding modernity's version of the story of Human History. In many ways, the ritual practices and religious beliefs of peoples across the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island—from Puerto Rican brujería to local adaptations of Catholicism, like Mexican Catholicism, to the North American missionaries of the Church of Latter-day Saints I see walking around my neighborhood in Santiago, Chile—offer windows into the inner workings of modernity, how time is organized within modernity, and the body's relation to this temporal organization from various perspectives and across multiple locations. Consequently, "Queering Apocalypse" is indebted to how queer approaches to temporality and affect compliment and even enhance our

[20] Raquel Romberg's ethnographic work with Puerto Rican brujería, *Witchcraft and Welfare: Spiritual Capital and the Business of Magic in Modern Puerto Rico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), offers a unique perspective on how brujería and Puerto Rican healing rituals and religious experiences blend Enlightenment philosophies and modern, capitalist values with "folk Catholicism, African magic and healing traditions, Kardecean Spiritism, and Protestantism" to commodify its practices and become "an emergent local force that works in conjunction with, rather than in opposition to, consumer capitalism and welfare values… a form of 'spiritualized materialism'… [in which] profit and success (under capitalism) can become infused with an ultimate moral purpose, once spiritual forces are believed to have intervened in achieving these goals" (2).

understanding of time within theology and religious experiences, like the ritual of spirit possession Indiana represents in “El Castigador.”

In their introduction to a volume of essays about queer temporality, affect, and theology, *Sexual Disorientations: Queer Temporalities, Affects, Theologies* (2017), Stephen Moore, Kent Brintnall, and Joseph Marchal argue that “the theological fields have much to offer the cross-disciplinary enterprise of queer studies,” particularly queer approaches to temporality and affect, because “[r]eligious thinkers and practitioners through the ages and around the planet have pondered questions that would not be unfamiliar to queer theorists” (26). According to the authors, many of the same perennial and theological tropes and questions fueling religious experience and theological exploration—including discourses on memory and hope, the nature of time, trauma and healing, transcendence and immanence, and death and life after death—find resonances with queer approaches to temporality and affect, to the point that queerness itself can be seen as “a paratheological concept, an all but ineffable concept, an almost apophatic concept” (26). In bringing together both queer and religious approaches to time, history, and the body within the context of the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island, what emerges is a deep concern for the Self/Selves, the location of the Self/Selves in relation to the body in space, the location of the Self/Selves in relation to the body in time, and the formation and dissolution of the Self/Selves in relation to others, including ancestors, spirits, gods, goddesses, ghosts, forces of nature, and fellow living beings, both human and non-human, in our homes and communities.

As M. Jacqui Alexander explains in her groundbreaking (and deeply spiritual) contribution to transnational feminism, *Pedagogies of Crossing* (2005), “spiritual labor and spiritual knowing is primarily a project of self-knowing and transformation that constantly invokes community simply because it requires it" (15). For those colonized, racialized, gendered, and queer people

and communities who have, throughout the centuries-long apocalypse of Western modernity, faced the violence of diaspora and displacement, violence at the hands of the police and the state, legislative violence, medical violence, and the epistemic violence of erasure, religious experiences and rituals provide a time and place for the affirmation, dissolution, and reconstruction of the Self/Selves in the face of such dehumanization while the "boundary-eroding current of time" creates affective resonances across the past, present, and future "where happiness, joy, shame, loss, mourning, disgust, despair, hope, pride, and victory are experienced and processed" for both the Self/Selves and the community (Moore et al 4). Spirit possession disrupts modernity's temporality, particularly in the ways that the European colonial apocalypse renders the past as dead and inaccessible, opening up new possibilities for the constitution of the Self/Selves across space, time, and bodies.

Queer approaches to historiography and temporality generally disrupt the reproductive, heteronormative logic of "straight time," or what Jack Halberstam refers to as "the logic of reproductive temporality," Elizabeth Freeman calls "chrononormativity," and what Carla Freccero identifies as the "implicit heteronormativity of historical continuity… [the] teleological narratives of reproductive futurity" ("Queer Spectrality" 195).[21] These approaches also work to reveal how the body, sexuality, history, and time are, within these heteronormative logics, teleologically regulated by the demands of a global capitalist economy to maximize (re)productivity and secure the continuation of the religio-ethno-national identity of the nation-state (more often than not rooted in white supremacy and xenophobia). Queer and affective approaches to history and historiography initially emerged from medieval and early modern

[21] See Jack Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: NYU Press, 2005), Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), and Carla Freccero's "Queer Spectrality: Haunting the Past" (in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

studies and provide innovative strategies for tackling one of the main challenges of historiography: the question of how accessible or inaccessible the past is, that is, the tension between alteritism and continuism, between how alien and distant the past is and how the past continues to shape the present and the future.

Elizabeth Freeman's concept of erotohistoriography is one such strategy that is particularly relevant to my project for its treatment of the body in the (re)writing of history:

> Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object [the past] into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter. Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding. It sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations (*Time Binds* 95-96).

Freeman's proposition of seeing "the body as a method" is consonant with the Chicana and women of color feminists' take on theory and methodology, "theory in the flesh," in which the (re)writing of history becomes an *act*, a "conjuring/coming to 'see', what has yet to be recorded in history" which brings "into consciousness what only the body knows to be true… this is the revolutionary promise of 'theory in the flesh;' for it is both the *expression* of evolving political consciousness and the *creator* of consciousness, itself" (Moraga xxiv). Following Freeman and Moraga, historiography begins to appear more and more like spirit possession and divination (a "conjuring/coming to 'see'"); the body mediates and performs the encounter between the past and the present, thus disturbing the presumed coherence and homogeneity of the very categories of past, present, and future as it creates and expresses political and historical consciousness.

In bringing together various approaches to the past (including decolonial perspectives, queer and affective modes to temporality and historiography, and queer and Latinx religious experiences and theologies), "Queering Apocalypse" assumes the prodigious task of encountering the distant colonial past (the foundations of Western modernity) on and through the racialized, gendered, and transnational body. This task has less to do with drawing lines of causality between the colonial past and the current state of things than approaching and feeling into this past and its resonances, repetitions, and adaptations across space, time, and bodies. In the chapters that follow, I have selected literary, artistic, and performance creations of three women as the main objects of my analysis to highlight queer, Latina/x, Chicana/x, and migrant women's voices and contributions to our understanding of temporality, history, borders, and the body. Queer theory continues to be haunted by its history of privileging white, urban, gay, male subjectivities in its work and in its circulation within academic markets, therefore I focus exclusively on racialized and/or queer female subjects and their engagements with apocalypse, colonial artifacts and history, and modernity. The interplay between apocalypse, colonial history and discourse, and the body in the works of these racialized and/or queer female writers and artists cover extensive territory, both literally and metaphorically, as they challenge the literary conventions of science and speculative fiction regarding time travel and the location of subjectivity (as seen in Rita Indiana's engagement with Dominican Vodou, spirit possession, and colonial history in *La mucama de Omicunlé*), dare to undress the Virgen de Guadalupe and challenge the misogyny and heteronormativity built into Mexican and Chicano national imaginaries (as seen in the controversy surrounding the public display of Alma López's 1999 digital print *Our Lady* and the "Indecent Theology" of the late queer, Argentinian feminist theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid), and find home and bliss from within the embodied

experience of diaspora, negation, and exclusion (as seen in Josefina Báez's concept of El Nié and her ongoing conversation with, and complication of, Western paradisiacal projections targeting the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island). "Queering Apocalypse" therefore takes the spiritual labor of these women seriously and lets them lead the way in approaching the apocalypses of the past, present, and future.

In the introduction to his now classic book of Caribbean literary criticism, *La isla que se repite: El Caribe y la perspectiva posmoderna* ("The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective;" originally published in 1989), Antonio Benítez-Rojo juxtaposes Western conceptions of time and space with his own formulations of Caribbean time and space inspired by the popularity of Chaos Theory in Western science and mathematics. Like many twentieth and twenty-first century Caribbean and postcolonial writers and critics, Benítez-Rojo emphasizes fluidity, change, and heterogeneity in his rereading of the Caribbean that attempts to reveal its own textuality while also undermining the homogenizing force of Western historiography and its need for linear accounts of *The* Beginning and *The* End. Benítez-Rojo's textual analysis of his own childhood memory of the Cold War and the Cuban Missile Crisis in the subsection "Del apocalipsis al caos" ("From the apocalypse to chaos") leads him to conclude that the Caribbean "no es un mundo apocalíptico" ("is not an apocalyptic world"): "[l]a noción del apocalipsis no ocupa un espacio importante de su cultura" ("the notion of the apocalypse is not important within the culture of the Caribbean;" xiii; Maraniss 10). Considering the apocalyptic themes haunting her literary and musical productions, Rita Indiana, at first glance, would not agree with Benítez-Rojo's characterization of the Caribbean. For example, her most recent album, *Mandinga Times*, was completed and released during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and features apocalyptic themes interwoven with stories and histories that evidence

Indiana's pan-Caribbean and pan-Latin American consciousness , including "The Heist," which tells the story of how Los Macheteros, a Puerto Rican independence group, robbed a Wells Fargo branch in West Hartford, Connecticut of seven million dollars in 1983 and "Ayotzinapa," a collaboration with Rubén Albarrán, lead singer for Café Tacuba, dedicated to the 43 missing students abducted in Iguala, Guerrero, México in 2014. In an interview with Marla Ardila of *Vitrina Rock,* Indiana describes the inspiration behind the album, its title track "Mandinga Times," and her alter ego, "Mandinga": "[E]s un album sobre el fin de los tiempos, me gusta llamarlo un cancionero para el fin del mundo… Mandinga es este demonio loco al que le gusta la música tropical, y viene del fin del mundo para estar presente en lo que va a pasar, y tal vez tocar en otro concierto antes del fin del mundo" ("It's an album about the end times, I like calling it a song book for the end of the world… Mandinga is this crazy demon that likes tropical music and comes back from the end of the world to be present for what's to come, and maybe to play in one more concert before the end of the world;" my trans.). The Mandinga is a trickster figure, often associated with the Devil, with deep historical roots in colonialism and the slave trade who appears in mythologies and folktales throughout the Caribbean and Abya Yala. Mandinga-as-Indiana travels back in time to our present (their relative past) to warn us of what awaits—"Ya los panitas Nostradamus nos dijeron / Que lo que viene papi es fuerte pa' tu cuero"—and enjoy some music as the world burns ("Nostradamus's friends already told us / that what's coming is gonna be tough on your ass;" my trans.). Once again, as the time-traveling Mandinga, Indiana references the colonial past from the perspective of a post-apocalyptic future. Returning to Benítez-Rojo's assertion that the Caribbean "no es un mundo apocalíptico" ("is not an apocalyptic world"), when revisited in light of Indiana's oeuvre, it appears that the Caribbean

and, by extension, Abya Yala and Turtle Island, are apocalyptic *worlds* inhabiting multiple interlacing and overlapping apocalyptic times.

The Chapters: A Tapestry of Apocalypses

Mainstream U.S. culture seems to be flirting with the apocalypse again. If previous generations expressed widespread fear in response to the Cold War, nuclear threats, and moral panics surrounding the rise of computer technology (à la 1991's *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*), the current realities of human-caused climate change and the extreme weather phenomena it is producing have given rise to a renewed fascination with "the End Times." In their March 2021 contribution to *The Immanent Frame*, "The Coloniality of Apocalypse," the religious scholars Mayra Rivera and Catherine Keller explore this rise of apocalyptic discourse in relation to climate change through the lens of Puerto Rico and the devastation caused by Hurricane María in September 2017. Reminding us of the friction within modernity between the universal, or the global, and the particular and local, Rivera contends that to approach the global reach of climate change by focusing on a particular island "reveals significant tensions at the heart of discourses about climate change—between the planetary scale of the expected catastrophe and the particularities of their effects in different regions" (2). While popular news media seem to be increasingly gravitating towards attention-grabbing and hyperbolic descriptions of climate change and weather phenomena like Hurricane María as a sign of the "climate change apocalypse," Rivera and Keller are more interested in how apocalyptic imagery provides "an available idiom for expressing what had already happened, what had been happening," a "poetics of the end," that reveals how the disaster Puerto Rico suffered in the wake of Hurricane María was anything but "natural" (2). Five hundred years of colonial subjugation at the hands of Spain and the United States, disastrous economic policies and debt crises in recent decades that

weakened infrastructure, and the opportunistic and neoliberal takeover of the island by outside investors and millionaires looking for a tax haven after the hurricane hit all point to how the disaster resulting from the hurricane exemplify, in Keller's words, how "[t]he forms and forces of colonial power prove shape-shiftingly resilient" (7). Rivera and Keller take the original Greek meaning of "apokalypsis," *revelation*, to show how apocalyptic genres, especially in a decolonial context, can "reveal the destructive forces at work in the world as it is" and therefore provide a discursive space and an idiom for articulating a critique against the social, political, and economic power structures that produce disasters like those suffered by Puerto Rico and Haiti (5).

"The continuing importance of apocalyptic genres—in creative works and in scholarly writing," writes Rivera, "reside in their ability to perform disruptions to the current situation." Rivera adds that the more "intimate and subdued" manifestations of a "poetics of the end" are equally powerful and revelatory for they provide an idiom for lament, a means to mourn and describe all that has been lost and will never be recovered or saved as the end of *a* world, rather than as the end of *the* world, and therefore "refuse abstracting 'the world' from the sociomaterial bonds that constitute us as humans, the relations that weave the dynamic texture of each fragile world" (5). For Keller, Rivera's reading of apocalypse as a "performative disruption" of the current state of things to mark the end of *a* world "resists the abstraction that would homogenize *The* world, its lives, and their bodied interdependence" as well as the very forms of abstraction and homogenization that align "with the global economics that abstracts its calculations from the wellbeing of people and the planet" (5-6). Inspired by Rivera's take on apocalypse as a "poetics of the end," "Queering Apocalypse" seeks to perform such a disruption to the current state of things, not only by revealing "the destructive forces [currently] at work in the world" but also by

time traveling to the early colonial past to explore the origins of some of these destructive forces. The apocalyptic beliefs, aspirations, and millenarian hopes of early Spanish and European explorers, missionaries, and settlers therefore come into dialogue with the critical, performative disruptions of apocalyptic genres and queer ways of relating to the past.

Consequently, apocalypse can serve as a means of relating to and exploring the past and the destructive forces in the past that helped shape the world as we know it today. Beyond using apocalypse as an eye-catching description for catastrophes and disasters, both local and global, "Queering Apocalypse" understands that apocalypse can be either a colonial tool for narrating the drama and fiction of the Eurocentric telos of Western modernity or a performative, anticolonial disruption to the status quo, depending on who is wielding it. Returning to Martin Munro's characterization of the apocalypse in the Caribbean as "the end times that have no apparent end," to approach the apocalypse as "the end times" rather than as "the end of Time" is to acknowledge a multiplicity of worlds and times at work in "the sociomaterial bonds that constitute us as humans." It is to acknowledge that each local apocalypse in the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island, from hurricanes María and Katrina to the earthquakes that devastated Haiti and Chile in 2010, is part of a larger tapestry of apocalypses woven into the fabric, the spatio-temporal matrices, of the story of Western modernity since its origins in 1492. "Queering Apocalypse" looks at this tapestry of apocalypses laid out, or mapped out, across our bodies and the places we call home, with each thread representing the particularities of local apocalypses (local to specific places and/or times), and explores the relations between threads, their interdependence, as well as how these relationships provide new perspectives on how the fabric of Western modernity is held together as well as how it can be unraveled and undone.

The first chapter, "Caribbean Prophecies of Discovery and Apocalypse: Reading and Writing Prophecy *en dominicano*, from Columbus to Rita Indiana," brings two apocalyptic threads into conversation with each other—Christopher Columbus's apocalyptic beliefs and political aspirations, as evidenced by his *Libro de las profecías* ("Book of Prophecies;" 1501-05), with Rita Indiana's engagement with prophecy and apocalypse in her 2015 novel, *La mucama de Omicunlé* (translated into English as *Tentacle* by Achy Obejas in 2018)—and focuses on the coloniality of time in the Caribbean, particularly on the island of Haiti-Quisqueya. Inspired by Indiana's queering of linear time and engagement with colonial history in her performance piece, *Sugar/Azúcal* (2003), as well as her representation of time travel and spirit possession in *La mucama*, I establish an experimental conversation between Indiana's imagined, post-apocalyptic Dominican Republic of the near future and Columbus's *Libro de las profecías* from the beginning of the sixteenth century to explore how, in Indiana's words, *La mucama* is not a work of speculative or science fiction but rather a work of "speculative history." What might *La mucama* have to say about Columbus's engagement with apocalypse over five hundred years ago, and how might we still be living in the wake of the apocalypse(s) he brought to the Caribbean? While these two threads may, at first glance, seem like an unlikely pairing, what ties them together is Indiana's performative disruption of contemporary Dominican politics, namely the 2013 "La Sentencia" ruling ("The Sentence" or "The Punishment") and the racist xenophobia and anti-Haitianism it has come to emblematize in Dominican politics. Effectively stripping Dominican citizenship from all persons born to "extranjeros en tránsito" ("foreigners in transit"), the La Sentencia ruling retroactively invokes a 1929 citizenship law which guaranteed *jus soli*, or birthright citizenship, for all children born within Dominican national territory *except* for those children born to parents defined as "extranjeros en tránsito" between 1929 and 2010, thus

targeting Haitian immigrants, Dominicans of Haitian descent, and their children born within the Dominican Republic. In placing *La mucama* in conversation with the *Libro de las profecías,* I temporally bridge the events of 1492 with Indiana's imagined near-future of 2027, her imagined recent past of the late 1990s and early 2000s, and her imagined distant past in the seventeenth century and explore how, through the use of time travel, prophecy, and spirit possession, Indiana reconceptualizes current manifestations of xenophobic nationalism and anti-Haitianism, like the La Sentencia ruling, in terms of the colonial past and from the vantage point of the post-apocalyptic future for the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean she presents in the novel.

The second chapter, "Undressing the Apocalyptic Mexican Virgin: Controversies and Real Chicana Miracles with Alma López's *Our Lady* (1999)," historicizes the multiple ways in which contemporary Chicana/x and Latin American artists and feminist theologians have interpellated the hegemonic version of the Virgen de Guadalupe, and Mother Mary as the Immaculate Conception more generally, through the queer, lesbian Chicana/x and Latin American body, the material and ritualistic practices unique to Mexican Catholicism, and, by extension, surviving Nahua beliefs and religious symbolism. Specifically, I investigate the imaginative, creative, and relational act of undressing the Virgen de Guadalupe taken up by Chicana/x, Latinx/a, and Latin American feminist artists, writers, and theologians, including Sandra Cisneros, Yolanda López, Alma López, and Marcella Althaus-Reid, and I explore the implications of this desire to undress La Virgen for women's sexuality and religious experiences, especially for queer women. Taking Alma López's digital print, *Our Lady* (1999), as my starting point, I recontextualize the controversy sparked by the 2001 exhibition of *Our Lady* in Santa Fe, New Mexico by tracing the long history of controversies surrounding the Virgin of Guadalupe, including La Virgen's ties to the iconographic tradition and controversies surrounding the dogma of the Immaculate

Conception (as the *Mulier amicta sole*, or "Woman clothed in the Sun" in the Book of Revelation) in medieval and early modern Spain and debates regarding the historicity of La Virgen's apparition accounts and miraculous image in colonial and post-independence Mexico. I pay particular attention to the apocalyptic influences in the earliest known printed apparition account, Miguel Sánchez's *Imágen de la Virgen María madre de Dios de Guadalupe* ("Image of the Virgin Mary Mother of God of Guadalupe;" 1648) and the centuries-long debate and controversies regarding its historicity and validity that lasted well into the nineteenth century. My focus on controversy provides new insights into the process of community and national identity formation through the contested semiotic significance of La Virgen as a transnational sign and symbol. The centuries of controversies surrounding the Virgen de Guadalupe tell the story of Guadalupe's complicated role in the formation of Mexican and Chicano national identities and imaginaries as well as how queer approaches to Guadalupe's history and body can challenge the misogyny and heteronormativity built into these national imaginaries.

The third and final chapter, "Approaching the Nation-State from within El Nié: Paradise, Utopia, and Identity in Josefina Báez's *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* (2008)," shifts the historical focus of the dissertation from the apocalyptic hopes and reasoning of Columbus and early Franciscan missionaries in colonial México to how both paradise and utopia are implicated within the processes of European colonialism, Western imperialism, and the creation of the nation-state. Inspired by Báez's engagement with both paradise and the island-Self metaphor in *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing*, I argue that Báez approaches the colonial history of paradise and utopia from within the embodied space of El Nié and elucidates how paradise and utopia serve "the West's" needs for self-invention in response to its colonial projects and encounters with its "Others"—from the early colonial search for the lost biblical Paradise to metaphorical

projections of paradise onto the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island to the marketing of paradise in contemporary Caribbean tourism industries. As the fictional apartment building featured in Báez's *Levente no. Yolayorkdominicanyork* (2011) that houses a plethora of characters and stories that come together to form community in the diaspora, El Nié has come to represent the liminal experience of inbetweenness and marginality for transnational subjects. And as a phrase that translates to "neither here nor there" (and, in a more vulgar sense, refers to the "taint"), Báez's El Nié provides a symbolic time and place from which the transnational subject can, borrowing from García-Peña, "emerge as an agent of his or her own history and identity/ies" while their body continues to bear witness to the violence of colonization across history and through the generations (*The Borders of Dominicanidad* 173). By approaching the colonial history of paradise and the "no-place" of utopia from the "neither" space of El Nié, I elucidate how Spanish and English imperialist projects were influenced by millennial and apocalyptic hopes for paradise as well as a new way of imagining (and narrating) perfection with Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and the rising popularity of narrative utopias in early modern Europe that set the foundations for the invention of the nation-state and national identity. Báez's interrogation of the nation-state and national belonging and identity, as seen in *Comrade, Bliss* and El Nié, challenges the nation-state as, in Phillip Wegner's words, the "naturalized expression of both the space and the subjectivity of modern history" (*Imaginary Communities* xxii). Lastly, Baéz's El Nié and commentary on contemporary Caribbean tourism offers unique perspectives on the tourism industry's impact on locals, on the displacement of locals and their restricted movement within cities and beaches that have become "tourist destinations," or commodified paradises. Báez articulates a critique that reveals the colonial legacy of the Caribbean plantation

economy in modern day tourism as well as how the "nowhere" of the nation-state, through tourism, actively participates in the imagined community of empire (i.e., "the West").

The following chapters reveal that apocalypse is a meaning-making practice, it is a doing as much as it is a belief, a cultural script, or a literary or artistic genre. Apocalypse sheds light on the relationship between history, historiography, time, and the body, and queering apocalypse attests to the numerous ways in which apocalypse has served to give meaning to history, including Eurocentric, positivist notions of history, as well as how apocalypse can be utilized to challenge such totalizing claims to history and time. In bringing together queer, religious, Latinx/a, Caribbean, and Latin American approaches to time, temporality, historiography, and the body, "Queering Apocalypse" experiments with unlikely pairings—Rita Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé* with Christopher Columbus's *Libro de las Profecías*, Alma López's *Our Lady* with Miguel Sánchez's *Imágen*, and Josefina Báez's El Nié and bliss with Thomas More's *Utopia*—and demonstrates how the story of "the West" can be reread and retold by the queer, lesbian, racialized, and immigrant body.

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CHAPTER ONE

Caribbean Apocalyptic Prophecies: Reading and Writing Prophecy *en dominicano*, from Columbus to Rita Indiana

> The past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is, however, obsessively present. The duty of the writer is to explore this obsession, to show its relevance in a continuous fashion to the immediate present… That is what I call *a prophetic vision of the past.*
> -Édouard Glissant, "The Quarrel with History," *Caribbean Discourse*

> Escribir en dominicano significa que te pedirán que añadas un glosario a tus novelas, que escribas en un lenguaje más cómodo, más amable. Que recibirás cartas de rechazo de editores y agentes en las que te explican que lo universal es lo genérico y lo tuyo es la oralidad. La oralidad que es lo particular… no es para ellos universal.
> -Rita Indiana, "Escribir en dominicano," *El País*, 3 June 2019[22]

Rita Indiana's 2015 novel, *La mucama de Omicunlé*, begins with a matter-of-fact description of "los recolectores automáticos," the automatic collectors, that patrol the city of Santo Domingo, hunting, killing, and collecting the physical remains of the Haitian immigrants attempting to escape the quarantine placed on Haiti to control "el virus en el negro" ("the virus in the black man"; 11; Obejas 7).[23] Set in the near future of 2027, this opening scene initiates the reader into a post-apocalyptic Dominican Republic in which transhuman technologies are implanted within eyes and wrists, a human-caused ecological disaster has wiped out nearly all marine life in the Caribbean, and murderous robots, as common as garbage trucks and street sweepers, police the streets and Malecón of Santo Domingo in search of their "usual targets:" Haitian immigrants, the mentally ill, the destitute, and prostitutes. As we are introduced to Acilde, the main character and Esther Escudero's *mucama*, or "maid," we enter Acilde's world through the security camera implanted into her eye that she uses to check the front entrance of

[22] "Writing *en dominicano* means that they will ask you to include a glossary in your novels, that you write in a more comfortable language, a nicer language. It means that you will receive rejection letters from editors and agents explaining that the universal is the generic and that yours is orality. Orality, which is the particular… isn't universal for them" (my trans.).

[23] All English translations for *La mucama de Omicunlé* that appear in this chapter come from the English edition of the novel, *Tentacle*, translated by Achy Obejas (Sheffield, 2018).

Esther's building. The narrative voice once again adopts a chillingly neutral and descriptive tone as we share in what Acilde sees on the street below: a "recolector" is busy at work collecting the body of a Haitian man who was poisoned with lethal gas by the building's security system while another machine hunts a woman down the street, using its mechanical arm to scoop her into its deadly belly "con la diligencia de un niño glotón que se lleva a la boca caramelos sucios del suelo" ("with all the diligence of a gluttonous child picking up dirty candy from the floor"; 12; Obejas 7).

The "recolectores automáticos" are never mentioned again after the first chapter, and yet their presence and the tone they establish permeate the entire novel. Haitian immigrant bodies, black bodies, poor bodies, sex workers' bodies, and the bodies of the mentally ill and homeless are just as disposable (and unsightly) as trash on the streets of the Santo Domingo of 2027 imagined at the beginning of *La mucama*. After witnessing the capture of the woman down the street, Acilde, out of curiosity, activates the "PriceSpy" technology implanted into her left wrist to check the price of one of the machines. Donated by China after the ecological disaster of 2024, the "recolectores" were manufactured under the brand name "Zhengli" with the English translation "to clean up" appearing under the brand logo on the PriceSpy (12). Indiana launches the reader into a near-future world in which she locates the Dominican Republic within a broader web of global economic and historical forces that tie personhood and national belonging to property ownership, capitalist accumulation, and whiteness as the lives and bodies of those deemed unworthy of belonging (and of existence) are brutally and efficiently destroyed and "cleaned up," particularly in upper-class neighborhoods. The proximity of the "recolectores" scene to the present moment—at the time of my writing this chapter, 2027 is only a handful of years away—gives the novel an eerily prophetic tone pointing to new horrors that potentially lie

ahead on the horizons of the near future as humanity grapples with settler-colonial extractivism and climate change and the ecological disasters and human injustices they have already wrought across the planet.

Why begin a novel with such a horrid scene of casual, business-as-usual dehumanization and violence? In this chapter, I read *La mucama* while keeping in mind the haunting brutality of the "recolectores automáticos" scene at its beginning. To better understand why Indiana might have chosen to begin her novel with such a scene and explore what she might be saying about the origins and reasons behind the dehumanization and violence of the "recolectores" scene, I focus on the role(s) of prophecy in the near future imagined in *La mucama* while looking at a different kind of text that also employs prophecy within a Caribbean context, but from the colonial past of the long sixteenth century: Christopher Columbus's *Libro de las profecías*, or "Book of Prophecies." Therefore, I approach both works from within the tradition and frameworks of Caribbean poetics, particularly its preoccupation with dehumanization and violence in relation to colonial histories, Western modernity, the rise of global capitalism, and time. The essays and works of Sylvia Wynter, her "epistemic disobedience" (as Walter Mignolo characterizes her *oeuvre*), and her exploration of new ways of organizing knowledge and redefining "the Human" provide the foundations for my reading of both *La mucama* and Columbus's *Libro*, including the link between dehumanization and the coloniality of time and "History."[24] I am also inspired by Indiana's 2019 *El País* column, "Escribir en dominicano" (a quote from which is included in the epigraphs above), particularly her frustrations with the publishing industry's demands that she include glossaries or write in a Spanish that is considered more "universal"—a demand that inevitably erases both Indiana's and her characters' *dominicanidad* and that, as I demonstrate, is

[24] See Walter Mignolo's essay "Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean to Be Human?" in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*, edited by Katherine McKittrick, p. 106-123 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015).

linked to universalizing claims to "the Human" and History that erase the centrality of the island of Haiti-Quisqueya from Western modernity.[25] As a rejection of what Lorgia García-Peña calls the Dominican footnote condition, writing, reading, and prophesying *en dominicano* celebrates and complicates Dominican plurality while rejecting the silencing of this plurality from Dominican and U.S. archives, scholarship, and Dominican national identity.[26]

Contemporary Caribbean writers and artists, like Rita Indiana, harness the poetic potential of prophecy for (re)imagining and (re)writing Caribbean futures *and* histories. In that spirit, I read Christopher Columbus's *Libro de las profecías* in tandem with *La mucama* to better understand prophecy and the role(s) the Western prophetic tradition played in the early days of European exploration and colonization. Inspired by Indiana's queering and disrupting of linear time and colonial history in her performance piece *Sugar/Azúcal* (2003), I place Indiana's imagined, post-apocalyptic Dominican Republic of the near future in conversation with Columbus's apocalyptic beliefs and political aspirations from the beginning of the sixteenth century to better understand how, in Indiana's words, *La mucama* is not a work of speculative or science fiction but rather a work of "speculative history."[27] Following Wynter's essay, "1492: A New World View" (1995), on the global impact of Columbus's 1492 accidental encounter with the Caribbean and Abya Yala, I argue that *La mucama* provides what Wynter calls "a New World view" that seeks to reconceptualize the past in terms of the problems, lived experiences, and existential realities of the present. *La mucama* reconceptualizes the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean of 2027 by time traveling back to the colonial past, both recent and distant, while

[25] Throughout the chapter, I refer to the island that currently houses the Republic of Haiti and the Dominican Republic as Haiti-Quisqueya to decolonize my vocabulary and honor the original Taíno-Arawak names for the island.
[26] See García-Peña's *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction* (Duke University Press, 2016).
[27] See Carolina Venegas-K.'s interview with Indiana, "Rita Indiana, una escritora con 'paranoia' fantástica del Caribe" (*El Tiempo*, 1 May 2015). https://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-15671317

Acilde discovers her role in Esther's prophecy and decides whether or not to fulfill that role. Columbus, on the other hand, believed himself to be the fulfillment of biblical and medieval Christian prophecy and projected his beliefs, ambitions, and vision of an apocalyptic future onto Haiti-Quisqueya. Therefore, I read Columbus's *Libro* with *La mucama* to help us reconceptualize the past, particularly the distant colonial past, and enrich our understanding of Columbus's use of prophecy and the Western-colonial problem of dehumanization from the vantage point of the post-apocalyptic near future Indiana presents in her novel.

The 2013 "La Sentencia" Ruling and the Colonial Origins of Anti-Haitianism

> Los chinchorros de fritura que el maremoto del 2024 había borrado del Malecón reaparecieron en el Parque Mirador como moscas tras un manotazo. Este nuevo malecón, con su playa contaminada de cadáveres irrecuperables y chitarra sumergida, parecía un oasis comparado con algunos barrios de la parte alta, donde los recolectores atacaban no solo a sus blancos usuales, sino también a indigentes, enfermos mentales y prostitutas.
>
> -*La mucama de Omicunlé*[28]

La mucama de Omicunlé follows the time-traveling and gender-queering adventures of its main character, Acilde Figueroa, the *mucama* of Dominican president Said Bona's personal *santera* and counselor, Esther Escudero (also known as Omicunlé). Before working as Esther's *mucama*, Acilde took advantage of her more masculine appearance ("de diminutos pechos y caderas estrechas—pasaba por… un chico de quince años") and performed sex work in the Parque Mirador, offering oral sex to older wealthy male clients with the hopes of saving enough money to study to become a chef ("her body—with its small breasts and narrow hips—passed for that of a fifteen-year-old"; 14; Obejas 8). Acilde eventually accepts an offer to work for Esther after servicing Eric Vitier, a Cuban doctor and Esther's right-hand man, with the promise that the

[28] "All the flimsy fried food stands the 2024 tidal wave had washed away from the Malecón reappeared in Mirador Park like flies buzzing. This new sea wall, just off a beach contaminated by unsalvageable corpses and sunken junk, felt like an oasis compared to some of the neighborhoods higher up, where the collectors pursued not only their usual targets but also the homeless, the mentally ill, and the prostitutes" (Obejas 10).

salary Esther can offer will be enough to pay for Acilde's cooking classes and, eventually, her top surgery (16). Unbeknownst to Acilde, Eric had chosen her to work for Esther because he believed Acilde was destined to fulfill a prophecy he had received during his initiation ceremony as a devotee of Yemayá:

> En la profecía que se hace al iniciado, se le reveló que él encontraría al hijo legítimo de Olokun, el de las siete perfecciones, el Señor de las profundidades; y por eso su padrino le puso Omioloyu, los ojos de Yemayá… A Esther Escudero, Omicunlé, el oráculo le había revelado que su casa recibiría al elegido y que gracias a este, Esther encontraría la muerte. (68)
>
> In the prophecy delivered at his initiation, it was revealed he would be the one to find Olokun's legitimate son, the one with the seven perfections, the Lord of the Deep. That's why his godfather called him Omioloyu, the Eyes of Yemayá… The oracle had told Esther Escudero, Omicunlé, that she would receive the Chosen One in her own home, and that she would meet her death at his hands. (Obejas 46)

After a tragic event that left Esther dead (the first sign of the fulfillment of the prophecy), Acilde undergoes various transformations throughout the trajectory of the story, beginning with the "Rainbow Bright," an underground drug that, with a single injection, "prometía un cambio de sexo total, sin intervención quirúrgica" ("promised a complete sex change without surgery"; 20; Obejas 13). After Acilde's transformation into the "Omo Olokun," the son of Olokun, (the orisha of the depths of the sea, "el dueño de lo desconocido," the ruler of the unknown), the narration time travels to the late twentieth century and focuses on Argenis, a disgruntled artist and tarot card reader working at a call center for a psychic hotline. After being stung by a sea anemone while in residency as a visual artist for a project in Sósua, Argenis suddenly finds himself time

traveling in his dreams back to a group of buccaneers living on Haiti-Quisqueya (or "Saint-Domingue") in the early days of colonization (28).

Both Acilde and Argenis travel back and forth between the twenty-first and twentieth centuries and the twentieth and seventeenth centuries thanks to the prophecy and the magical power of the sea anemone associated with Olokun, the *Condylactis gigantea*, also known as the giant Caribbean or Haitian anemone. Argenis's accidental encounter with the anemone occurs while he is snorkeling in the reefs near Sósua and Playa Bo; by Acilde's timeline in the late 2020s, one of the last anemones to survive the disaster of 2024 is in Esther Escudero's possession. After injecting Acilde with the Rainbow Bright, Eric places the anemone on Acilde's head to aid her transformation into the Omo Olokun, causing Acilde to exist simultaneously in three bodies at three different times in the history of Haiti-Quisqueya: as Acilde, now a man in the twenty-first century; as Giorgio Menicucci, a mysterious man claiming an Italian-Swiss background who emerges from the reefs off Playa Bo in the 1990s; and as Roque, a seventeenth-century buccaneer. As Acilde/Omo Olokun inhabits three bodies and lifetimes, Acilde in the twenty-first century discovers that their role in the fulfillment of the prophecy is to prevent the disaster of 2024 and save the marine life in the Caribbean—a role Acilde ultimately chooses to ignore.

Rita Indiana's writings, music, music videos, and performance pieces have garnered increasing amounts of popularity and scholarly attention, particularly after the release of the album *El Juidero* in 2010 with her band, Rita Indiana y los Misterios, and following the critical success of her novels and short stories, including *La estrategia de Chochueca* (2000), *Papi* (2005), and *La mucama de Omicunlé* which earned Indiana a nomination for the Premio Bienal de Novela Mario Vargas Llosa and was eventually awarded the *Grand Prix Littéraire Région*

Guadeloupe of the Caribbean Writers Congress in 2017. Within the growing body of critique and analysis of Indiana's works, some of the recurring themes scholars point to include Indiana's queerness and sexuality as an out lesbian, Dominican migration and movement (between the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico and the United States), and Dominican nationalism and identity in the post-Trujillo era. Among more recent studies of Indiana's multimedia works, the 2013 Ruling 0168-13 of the Constitutional Tribunal of the Dominican Republic—the "Plan nacional de regularización de extranjeros ilegales" ("National Plan for the Regularization of Illegal Immigrants")—is often featured prominently as the socio-political backdrop for discussions on Indiana's works and the history, politics, and debates surrounding race and citizenship on contemporary Haiti-Quisqueya. For example, Lina Martínez Hernández looks at Indiana's music and writings as critical interventions in the continuing debates surrounding citizenship, national belonging, and Haitian-Dominican migration and identities that the 2013 constitutional ruling (also known as "La Sentencia," the Sentence or Punishment) has come to emblematize.[29]

Similarly, Sydney Hutchinson has argued that Indiana's artistic production—written, visual, performative, and musical—pushes the boundaries of gender, genre, and national borders.[30] In her analysis of the influence of Haitian and Dominican Vodou in Indiana's music, including her work with her former group Rita Indiana y Los Misterios, Hutchinson ties the 2013 La Sentencia ruling to her interpretation of the group's musical and video productions:

[29] In her 2015 article, "Sana que sana, ciudadanía dominicana: El proyecto multimedia de Rita Indiana," Martínez Hernández focuses on the notions of citizenship and borders ("ciudadanía y frontera") and what place these notions might occupy in Rita Indiana's body of work. Specifically, Martínez Hernández looks at the Haiti-Dominican border as a material-political space ("como espacio material y politico") and argues that it plays a central role in many of Indiana's projects (39-40).

[30] See Hutchinson's seventh chapter, "Listening Sideways: The Transgenre Work of Rita Indiana," in *Tigers of a Different Stripe: Performing Gender in Dominican Music* (The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

> The group expresses these ties while also dealing with the problematics of race in the Dominican Republic by drawing heavily from Afro-Caribbean religious traditions in several videos… This last is an especially important political statement given the ongoing racism against Haitian immigrants and their descendants in the Dominican Republic… as can be observed through the humanitarian crisis resulting from a September 2013 court ruling that stripped over two hundred thousand Dominicans of Haitian descent of their citizenship. ("Listening Sideways" 187)

In my reading of prophecy in *La mucama*, I analyze Indiana's presentation of prophecy in a Dominican post-apocalyptic near future, recent past, and colonial past while also keeping in mind the contemporary Dominican politics Indiana was most likely observing and thinking about while writing and publishing the novel: the anti-Haitianism and xenophobia evident in the 2013 La Sentencia ruling, a reinstated a piece of citizenship law that effectively strips Dominican citizenship from all persons born to "extranjeros en tránsito" ("foreigners in transit"). Targeting Haitian immigrants, Dominicans of Haitian descent, and their children born within the Dominican Republic, the La Sentencia ruling retroactively invokes a 1929 citizenship law which guaranteed *jus soli*, or birthright citizenship, for all children born within Dominican national territory *except* for those children born to parents defined as "extranjeros en tránsito" between 1929 and 2010. As evidenced in her July 2014 and March 2015 columns for *El País*, "Tu afro no cabe en la foto" ("Your Afro Does Not Fit in the Photo") and "El problema haitiano" ("The Haitian Problem"), respectively, Indiana uses her writing to openly criticize the Dominican state and its xenophobic policies.[31] In *La mucama*, however, Indiana's critique of anti-Haitianism—

[31] Both columns touch on the Dominican state's anti-Haitianism and racism in relation to the 2013 "La Sentencia" ruling. In "Tu afro no cabe en la foto" (29 July 2014), Indiana focuses on the case of Dominican journalist, Gisela Paredes, who was denied renewal of her government-issued identification card because of her hair; "El problema haitiano" (3 March 2015) focuses on the lynching of a Haitian immigrant in Santiago, Dominican Republic.

clearly presented for the first time in the "recolectores automáticos"—imagines new, frightening forms of state-sanctioned dehumanization that seem plausible, and even inevitable, if current anti-Haitian racist immigration policies and attitudes continue as she grounds this frightening future within colonial history. The horrors of her imagined future are intimately tied to the horrors of the present day and the horrors of the colonial past.

In recent years, particularly after the 2013 La Sentencia ruling, a growing number of Dominican scholars, writers, artists, and activists have called attention to how international media and U.S.-based scholarship often misrepresent Dominican-Haitian relations and history by using the La Sentencia ruling as an example of the negrophobia, or a denial of blackness and self-hatred, that supposedly dominates Dominican racial beliefs, society, and identities. Scholars such as Carlos U. Decena, April J. Mayes, Milagros Ricourt, and Raj Chetty and Amaury Rodríguez highlight how this view pathologizes Dominican racial beliefs and attitudes as it privileges U.S.-centric beliefs and attitudes regarding race and blackness. Lorgia García-Peña also addresses the implications of these limited views and scholarship for how Dominican and Haitian histories are understood (or misunderstood and misrepresented). For example, in her study of the significance of the 1844 independence from Haiti for Dominican national identity, García-Peña challenges the "pervasive views of dominicanidad in the US academy" that define anti-Haitianism as the central impetus for Dominican independence for the white criollo elite that purportedly "decided the destiny of the nation" (*The Borders of Dominicanidad* 30). For García-Peña, these views are both myopic and violent because they erase "Dominican blacks and mulatos as political actors" from how the story of the 1844 independence is told: "Though the 1844 independence was a project of interracial cooperation and unity, the posthumous narration

of the 1844 foundational date—even by contemporary critics—continues to erase Dominican blackness by privileging the critique of elite white supremacist and anti-Haitian discourse" (37).

In her study of Rita Indiana's 2003 performance piece *Sugar/Azúcal: A Sweet Tale of Terror*, Maja Horn shares these concerns over how the complexities of Dominican and Haitian histories are being represented in light of the La Sentencia ruling and the international attention it brought to the island. Horn places Indiana's performance piece in conversation with the concepts of the "Global South" and Paul Gilroy's "black Atlantic" to articulate the particularities of the black diasporic experience in the Global South where Dominican-Haitian histories and relations are understood within broader North-South dynamics that include "[t]he role that the United States played in fomenting and consolidating [Dominican and Haitian] racial identifications" ("A Sweet Tale of Terror" 257). For Horn, Indiana's *Sugar/Azúcal* is important in that it "takes as its point of departure the two nations' shared origin in the Global South Atlantic" as Indiana, or "Sugar/Azúcal," narrates the colonial and postcolonial histories of the sugar industry on the island (262). In both *Sugar/Azúcal* and *La mucama*, Indiana's engagement with the distant colonial past overlaps and dialogues with more recent history and the present moment (as well as with her imagined near future) and complicates the North-South dynamic that U.S.-based scholarship and perspectives often (unwittingly) perpetuate.

The La Sentencia ruling is therefore recontextualized from within a Global South Atlantic framework where Dominican-Haitian histories, relations, and racial identities and dynamics inhabit "Western modernity's promises with a colonial and postcolonial difference" while Rita Indiana's work, including *Sugar/Azúcal*, engages the distant colonial past and exploits this colonial and postcolonial difference to reveal the fundamental contradictions inherent within Western

modernity itself (271).[32] As Horn notes, in the published version of the performance text Indiana includes a non-chronological timeline that jumps back and forth from the sixteenth century to the late twentieth century. The timeline begins with the appearance of the first sugar mill on the island in the year 1516 and ends with an entry for the year 1514 when plantation owners and colonial officials discussed the need to import enslaved Africans directly from Africa (and not from Spain) to prevent and suppress revolts and insurrections among the Spanish-speaking slave population. This non-linear and circular timeline that begins and ends with the early days of the Caribbean plantation economy and the Atlantic slave trade on Haiti-Quisqueya allows Indiana, according to Horn, to show "some of the particularities of Atlantic history in the colonial and postcolonial South" where both subjects and nations are placed in tenuous, often contradictory, relationships with Western modernity's values and desires (270).

With prophecy in mind, pushing the beginning (and end) of Indiana's historical timeline back to 1492 can therefore continue this complication and work to redirect our focus from blaming and pathologizing an entire nation of people for the anti-Haitianism in the La Sentencia ruling to instead recontextualize the ruling as well as interrogate and explore the origins of Western modernity and its racist contradictions on the island of Haiti-Quisqueya itself. Where do the dehumanization and violence in both the opening scene of *La mucama* and the La Sentencia ruling *really* come from? And what might Indiana be revealing about prophecy and the coloniality of

[32] Alluding to Walter Mignolo's concept of "colonial difference" (in *Local Histories/Global Designs*, 2000), Horn situates Haiti-Quisqueya's experience with colonial and postcolonial difference within the Global South Atlantic context and in conversation with Gilroy's "politics of fulfillment" and "politics of transfiguration" (in *The Black Atlantic*, 1993). For Horn, Indiana's performance piece points to not only the unfulfilled promises of modernity; more specifically, *Sugar/Azúcal* highlights "the particular ways in which the Global South Atlantic inhabits the insides and outsides of Western modernity" that require resistance strategies and forms of politics that "emerge out of the very ambivalence of imagining postcolonial futures based on promises that were formulated without these regions and peoples in mind, if not in contradiction to them" (272).

power and time from the perspective of a post-apocalyptic Dominican Republic where violently enforced anti-Haitianism and state sanctioned Dominican Vodou coexist?

Caribbean Apocalyptic Prophecies, from Columbus to President Said Bona

> I became the message-bearer of the new heaven and earth created by our Lord God, according to the Scripture of St. John in the Apocalypse and told by the word of Isaiah.
> -Christopher Columbus, "Carta al ama del príncipe Don Juan" (1501)[33]

In Bartolomé de las Casas's transcription and compilation of Columbus's *Diario*, Columbus declares the island of Haiti-Quisqueya for Spain and renames it *La Isla Española*, the Island Hispaniola, just four days after his arrival on December 5, 1492. As it is recorded in the *Diario*, the entry for December 9 begins with descriptions of the weather on the island, estimations of the island's size, and comments about the island's terrain woven together with comparisons and references back to the kingdom of Castilla in Spain: "Este día llovi-ó e hizo tiempo de invierno como en Castilla por octubre…enfrente de él [the recently-named port of San Nicolás] hay unas vegas las más hermosas del mundo y cuasi semejables a las tierras de Castilla… por lo cual puso nombre a la dicha isla la *Isla Española*" ("That day it rained and the winter weather resembled that of Castilla in October… in front of the port of San Nicolás there are the most beautiful meadows in the world much like the land in Castilla… for this reason he [Columbus] named the island Hispaniola"; 71).[34] Later, after erecting a Christian cross at the entrance of the port on December 12 to mark Spanish royal possession of the island, the diary entries include descriptions of the people encountered during Columbus's first days on Haiti-

[33] Translated by Adriano Prosperi, "New Heaven and New Earth: Prophecy and Propaganda at the Time of the Discovery and Conquest of the Americas." *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period*, pg. 279. (Clarendon Press, 1992)

[34] For this chapter, I am using the Colección Aventureros edition of *Los cuatro viajes del Almirante y su testamento* published by Plaza Editorial, 2010. This edition begins with Bartolomé de las Casas's transcription of Columbus's *Diario* of the first voyage titled *El primer viaje a las Indias: Relación compendiada por Fray Bartolomé de las Casas*. I translated all passages from the *Diario* included within this chapter into English.

Quisqueya. For example, the December 13 entry details the Spaniards' first impressions of the island's native inhabitants and their beauty; the Spaniards are referred to simply as "los cristianos," the Christians, and, according to the text, they spoke with the Almirante (Columbus), telling him that the native inhabitants were "toda gente más hermosa y de mejor condición que ninguna otra de las que habían hasta allí hallado" ("more beautiful and in better condition than anyone else they had previously come across"). The "cristianos" go on to comment that both the native men and women were incomparable in their beauty and that they were "blancos más que los otros, y que entre los otros vieron dos mujeres mozas *tan blancas como podían ser en España*" ("more white than the others and among them were seen two young women *so white they could be from Spain*"; emphasis added; 74-75).

Within the entry for December 16, the narration again emphasizes the inimitable beauty of the land of Haiti-Quisqueya—now claiming that its beauty surpasses that of Castilla—and switches from describing the terrain, vegetation, and Columbus's conversations with native leaders in the third person to the first person voice of the Almirante himself as he explains to the Spanish monarchs how useful the indigenous populations of the island will be in working the land and generating wealth for Spain:

> Crean Vuestras Altezas que estas tierras son en tanta cantidad buenas y fértiles… Y crean que esta isla y todas las otras son así suyas como Castilla… Ellos [los indígenas] no tienen armas, y son todos desnudos y de ningún ingenio en las armas… y así son buenos para les mandar y les hacer trabajar, sembrar y hacer todo lo otro que fuere menester y que hagan villas y se enseñen a andar vestidos y a nuestras costumbres. (78-79)
>
> May Your Royal Highnesses believe that these lands are abundantly good and fertile… And may You believe that this island and all the others are thus Yours like Castilla…

> They [the indigenous populations] do not have weapons and are naked and do not possess any skill with weapons… and therefore they are good for You to make them work, sow the fields, and do all necessary labor so that they build settlements and learn to wear clothing as is our custom.

By the time Bartolomé de las Casas had finished editing, paraphrasing, and publishing Columbus's first voyage *Diario* in the 1530s, the processes initiated by Portugal's explorations down the coast of Africa, the Papal Bulls of 1493, and the *Requerimiento* of 1513 had been operating for decades, laying the juridical and theological groundwork for justifying and legitimating the Portuguese and Spanish crowns' claims to the new territories (and souls) Columbus and later explorers and colonizers encountered in the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island.[35] Though the extent to which Las Casas intervened in the *Diario* has been debated among scholars, what is clear throughout the *Diario* is that the text expressed concern about how to make sense of these previously unknown lands and peoples, how they can be incorporated within Roman Catholicism, and how they can best serve the Spanish monarchs' imperialist interests and wealth.[36]

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[35] Three papal bulls were issued in 1493 by Pope Alexander VI, known as the Bulls of Donation, which "granted" control over the newly "discovered" and explored territories in Africa, Asia, and "the Americas" to Portugal and Spain. In 1494, the negotiations between the Portuguese and burgeoning Spanish empires started by the Papal Bulls of the previous year culminated in the Treaty of Tordesillas which further defined conquest rights and divided the territories between Portugal and Spain. The *Requerimiento* of 1513 was a declaration utilized by the Spanish monarchy to define and enforce their supposed divinely ordained rights over the peoples and territories encountered in "the Americas." The *Requerimiento* was read to indigenous peoples to notify them of their subjugation under Spain and to define Spain's rights of possession as part of the Christian god's plan. In her 1995 essay, "The Pope Must Have Been Drunk The King of Castile A Madman: Culture as Actuality, and the Caribbean Rethinking Modernity" Sylvia Wynter ties the 1493 Papal Bulls and *Requerimiento* document of the early sixteenth century to the twentieth-century history of U.S. invasion and interventions in Haiti by articulating the process by which the West began to believe itself, its bodies of knowledge, and its perspectives to be universal and acultural—at the same time that its various imperialist projects painted the peoples encountered, displaced, negotiated with, killed, and enslaved as Other and culturally specific and different from the European norm.

[36] See Estelle Irizarry's "The Two Authors of Columbus' 'Diary,'" *Computers and the Humanities* 27.2, 1993, pp.85-92.

Europe's initial encounter with the Caribbean, Turtle Island, Abya Yala, and the peoples who already inhabited them challenged the foundation of Christian European thought.[37] As Luís Filipe Silvério Lima argues, "the new discoveries had to be signified and comprehended… within an existing system of knowledge in order to be acknowledged" (37).[38] If "the Americas" and its original inhabitants were not overtly mentioned in the Bible, predicted in biblical prophecy, or included in the works of Aristotle and other classical texts, then, as Silvério Lima illustrates, European epistemology, historiography, and geography had to adapt their existing paradigms and systems of knowledge to account for the so-called "discovery." As evidenced in the famous debate between Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and Bartolomé de las Casas, some humanists and theologians utilized Aristotle's principle of natural slavery to differentiate the "naturally free" European men that were supposedly fit to govern from the "natural slaves" (the autochthonous populations and, later, African peoples brought in the transatlantic slave trade).[39] Others, employing a more theocentric approach, used typology and new interpretations of the Bible (exegesis) and argued that the indigenous populations of "the Americas" were the

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[37] Anthony Pagden, in *European Encounters with the New World from Renaissance to Romanticism* (Yale University Press, 1993), calls this phenomenon the "Principle of Attachment," wherein early European colonizers made sense of the peoples, sights, sounds, and experiences they encountered in "the Americas" by fitting them within familiar Western worldviews, biblical scripture, and familiar schemes of European knowledge.

[38] Silvério Lima's studies Iberian prophecies and their impact on Spanish and Portuguese colonial projects in "Between the New and the Old World: Iberian Prophecies and Imperial Projects in the Colonisation of the Early Modern Spanish and Portuguese Americas," which appears in the 2016 collection of essays *Prophecy and Eschatology in the Transatlantic World, 1550-1800*, edited by Andrew Crome.

[39] Known as the Valladolid Debate (1550-1), this seminal debate over the rights and treatment of the Native Americans under Spanish colonial rule involved the Dominican friar and Bishop of Chiapas, Bartolomé de las Casas (c. 1484-1566), and the humanist philosopher and theologian, Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1494-1573). Sylvia Wynter, in her 2003 essay "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," takes the dispute between Las Casas and Sepúlveda as an example of the friction between two competing Eurocentric descriptive statements/conceptions of "Man" and what it means to be human: the theocentric conception of the human (the Christian Man, in the case of Las Casas) and Sepúlveda's new humanist conception of the human, what Wynter calls "Man2" that defines the human as a political subject of the state. According to Wynter, the newly encountered Native American populations take center stage in this dispute as Las Casas and Sepúlveda each used their respective conceptions of Man/the human to make sense of the newly encountered peoples and territories. These peoples and territories were therefore understood as either "a function of the Christian evangelizing mission" or "as a function of the imperial expansion of the state" within this dispute (269).

descendants of one of the prophet Abraham's sons, usually Ham or Shem. Even the apocryphal book of Ezra was used to argue that the Native Americans were the offspring of Shem—therefore one of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel—and that the conversion of the Native Americans to Catholicism would "fulfill the prophecy announced by Ezra and complete God's design for the end times" (39-41). With the rising popularity of the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202) and pseudo-Joachimite prophecies and writings in the Iberian Peninsula, particularly within the Franciscan order and its missionaries, the evangelization of the indigenous populations was incorporated into the Franciscan Order's global missionary efforts and apocalyptic fervor. The "apocalyptic conversion" of all the world's populations would bring about Fiore's prophesied age of the Holy Spirit in which an elite group of contemplative monastics (the Spiritual Franciscans) would prepare humanity for the end of the world.[40] In the post-1492 European imagination, particularly within the Spanish and Portuguese empires of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island became centerstage for millenarian and utopian eschatological hopes for the final Christian kingdom and the building of the "New Jerusalem."

By November 1500, after his disastrous third voyage to "the Indies"—which resulted in his returning to Spain in chains to face Francisco de Bobadilla's accusations of mismanagement—Columbus began collecting materials for a work that would come to be known as his *Libro de las profecías*, the *Book of Prophecies*.[41] With the hope of clearing both himself and his brothers of

[40] The Spiritual Franciscans and some early Franciscan missionaries in "the Americas," particularly in colonial Mexico, were influenced by pseudo-Joachimite writings and the thirteenth and fourteenth-century idea of apocalyptic conversion. Within the Joachimite three-part scheme of history, modeled after the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), human history is seen to be moving progressively toward a final spiritual age in which a monastic order is destined to evangelize all of humanity before the end of the world. Though his writings on the Holy Trinity were denounced as heretical, Joachim of Fiore's prophecies and the pseudo-Joachimite tradition they inspired were influential for many in the Franciscan Order and for Columbus in his *Libro de las profecías*.

[41] According to Delno C. West's introduction to his and August Kling's translation of the *Libro de las profecías*, Columbus referred to the *Libro* as the "*Notebook of authorities, statements, opinions and prophecies on the* subject

Bobadilla's charges and possibly financing a fourth voyage, Columbus patiently waited for his audience with the Spanish monarchs while staying at the monastery of Nuestra Señora Santa María de las Cuevas near Sevilla at the invitation of his friend, the Carthusian monk Gasper Gorricio. Columbus, along with the aid of his son, Ferdinand, and Father Gorricio, compiled the *Libro* between the years 1501-2 and possibly continued to work on it as late as 1504-5. In addition to the numerous quotes from the Bible (ranging from the Book of Genesis to St. John's Book of Revelation); ancient philosophers and theologians (including Aristotle, Seneca, and St. Augustine, among others); and quotes from medieval authors (including St. Thomas Aquinas and the fourteenth-century chancellor of the University of Paris, Pierre d'Ailly, among others), Columbus's *Libro* includes an unfinished letter directed to the Spanish king and queen, Fernando and Isabel:

> Already I pointed out that for the execution of the journey to the Indies I was not aided by intelligence, by mathematics or by maps. It was simply *the fulfillment of what Isaiah had prophesied*, and this is what I desire to write in this book, so that *the record may remind Your Highnesses*, and so that you may rejoice in the other things that I am going to tell you about *our Jerusalem* upon the basis of the same authority. If you have faith, you may be certain that there will be success also in that other project. (emphasis added 111) [42]

Additionally, Columbus began signing his letters with a new style of signature; using the Greek letters for Christ, he began signing his name with an abbreviation, *XRO-FERENS*, "Christ bearer," thus connecting himself with the myth of Saint Christopher and, more importantly, assembling a public identity for himself as the chosen messenger who would spread the word of the Christian

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of the recovery of God's holy city and mountain of Zion, and on the discovery and evangelization of the islands of the Indies and of all other peoples and nations" (2).

[42] For my analysis, I use Delno C. West and August Kling's translation, *The* Libro de las profecías *of Christopher Columbus* (University of Florida Press, 1991).

god to new lands and whose explorations and exploits would finance the final crusade to capture Jerusalem, rebuild the temple on Mt. Zion, and bring about a new, Christian era—the "other project" mentioned above in the selection from the letter to the monarchs (Keller 161). For Columbus, then, biblical prophecy offered more than just a familiar system of knowledge (a universalizing account of History) with which he could signify and comprehend his "discoveries;" Columbus conspicuously wrote himself and his explorations into the timeline of biblical prophecy and then intended to use his *Libro* to justify his rightful (and destined) place within this timeline. In addition to using the *Libro* as proof that his evangelizing and colonial mission was divinely guided and intended to bring about the Apocalypse, it seems that Columbus was also interested in utilizing the *Libro* and its prophecies in the service of his legacy; the biblical prophecies and theological writings collected for the *Libro* were to be integrated into an epic poem about the Admiral's life and exploits, thus presenting Columbus himself as the epic's hero.[43]

Though he is credited for initiating this encounter and his framing of his voyages within prophetic and apocalyptic terms was, at the time, unique, Columbus was not alone in his fascination with (and ardent belief in) the various apocalyptic schemes and prophecies that were popular in Europe both before and during his lifetime.[44] In the wake of the initial 1492 encounter, with the rise of the northern and continental European empires and colonial projects in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Columbus became just the first among many early modern European Catholics and Protestants whose participation in colonialism in the Caribbean,

[43] See Hector Avalos's contribution to *Religion in the Age of Exploration: The Case of Spain and New Spain* (Creighton University Press, 1996), "Columbus as Exegete: A Study of the *Libro de las profecías*."
[44] As Adriano Prosperi argues in his contribution to *Prophetic Rome in the High Renaissance Period* (1992), "Columbus's case remains isolated and exceptional: only in him do we find the venture of discovery united with its interpretation in terms of prophecy and missionary conquest" (284).

Abya Yala, and Turtle Island involved, to some extent, a belief in a connection between prophetic biblical scripture and Europe's colonial activities in "the Americas" and other parts of the world. Following Wynter's arguments in "The Pope Must Have Been Drunk The King of Castile A Madman: Culture as Actuality, and the Caribbean Rethinking Modernity," the nature of this belief and connection can be understood as an example of the culturally-specific phenomenon of prophetic belief that, thanks to late medieval and early modern Western Christianity's universalizing narrative of History, served as one of many tools for figuring out how and where previously unknown lands and peoples fit within the timeline of this "universal" History as well as serving as a justification for evangelizing missionary efforts, slavery, and settler colonialism. According to this view, biblical prophecy functions as part of a "specific culturally instituted order of consciousness or belief system," as an essential part of the Catholic-Christian belief system, that was then projected onto the islands, mainland, and peoples of the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island (20). The actions, decisions, and behaviors of Columbus and those that followed him can therefore be understood as, at least in part, legitimated by what they assumed to be universally applicable understanding of time and History where biblical prophecy provides the evidence that the Spaniards' stumbling upon and colonization of the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island and its peoples was part of the Christian god's timeline (divine providence) all along.

However, as Andrew Crome illustrates in *Prophecy and Eschatology in the Transatlantic World* (2016), the concept of prophecy and phenomenon of prophetic belief varies greatly depending on who is trying to use it and to what end, even within Christianity and Roman Catholicism. Prophecy can be understood simply as the recorded statements of the biblical prophets, as the interpretation of the word of God, or, in a more popular sense, prophecies can be

understood as predictions or warnings about future events (such as the impending Apocalypse) that involve or depend upon the actions and decisions of the prophet's target audience—current and future believers. Even though most of the essays included in Crome's volume on prophecy and eschatology focus on specific examples of prophecy from the British Atlantic world—only Silvério Lima's essay cited above looks at the particularities of Iberian prophecies in the Caribbean and Abya Yala—Crome argues that prophecy in the Atlantic, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, was most often of the millennial sort in which predictions about the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth (as mentioned in Revelation 20:1-6) played an integral role in how colonial authorities and their subjects negotiated power. The eschatological nature of such predictive prophecies functions as a political tool for asserting and challenging colonial authority and legitimacy, as well as an explanatory tool that "provided one way of situating the previously unknown portions of the world within existing maps of meaning" (5).[45]

Biblical prophecy and the Western prophetic tradition of his time not only allowed Columbus to place his chance encounter with the indigenous peoples and territories of the Caribbean and Abya Yala firmly within Christian Europe's universalizing History and timeline but also to define and defend his status in the Spanish court and his (and his heirs') access to the wealth extracted from Spain's early colonies and settlements. Within the first pages of the *Libro*, directly before his letter to Fernando and Isabel, Columbus includes excerpts from various theologians and scholars, including a section from Thomas Aquinas's (c. 1225-1274) famous *Summa Theologiae* in which Aquinas touches upon the fourfold method of scriptural

[45] Regarding his use of a transatlantic framework, Crome cites David Armitage's three concepts of Atlantic history (Circum-Atlantic, Trans-Atlantic, and Cis-Atlantic history) and argues that an Atlantic framework allows his contributors to "draw out conclusions about the influence of both the wider Atlantic world on the prophetic and eschatological discourses it discusses, and the importance of local political and social conditions in shaping those prophetic positions in the first place" (6)

interpretation common among many medieval theologians and thinkers. According to this view, biblical scripture can be simultaneously interpreted as: 1) literal and historical; 2) as allegorical and typological, in which meaning is drawn from making allegorical connections between Christ's life story in the New Testament with books and stories from the Hebrew Bible; 3) as moral and tropological teachings about how one should act in accordance to the scripture; and lastly, 4) as anagogical and eschatological, meaning that the focus of one's interpretation is on future events (including prophecies, the Final Judgment, and the destiny of one's soul after death). Later, in the second paragraph of his unfinished letter to the king and queen, Columbus emphasizes the role of biblical prophecy and scripture in inspiring his exploratory and evangelizing projects. He states that although he had studied "all kinds of texts: geographies, histories, chronologies, philosophies and other subjects," none of these subjects were ultimately of any use to him because it was the Holy Spirit, working through scripture, that gave him the strength and determination to press forward with his mission despite the ridicule he received for his ideas in the Spanish court. He writes: "Who can doubt that this fire was not merely mine, but also of the Holy Spirit who encouraged me with a radiance of marvelous illumination from his sacred Holy Scriptures… Continually, without a moment's hesitation, the Scriptures urge me to press forward with great haste" (109).

By citing the *Summa* and the common fourfold medieval approach to biblical interpretation, Columbus not only demonstrates his fervent beliefs in Catholic doctrine and the breadth of his knowledge and familiarity with various subjects, including scripture; perhaps more importantly, Columbus also addresses his critics within the first three paragraphs of the letter and, in doing so, bases his defense of his voyages on the unquestionable legitimacy and authority of biblical scripture—and on his ability to correctly interpret scripture. For example, he utilizes

an allegorical/typological interpretative method to defend his belief in the possibility of sailing from Spain directly to "the Indies": "I spent seven years here in your royal court discussing this subject with the leading persons in all the learned arts, and their conclusion was that all was in vain… But afterwards it all turned out just as our redeemer Jesus Christ had said, and as he had spoken earlier by the mouth of his holy prophets." In the second half of the letter he employs an anagogical/eschatological interpretation of the Gospels and argues that even though "the greatest portion of the prophecies of the Holy Scripture has already been fulfilled," there remains one prophecy left to be fulfilled, the supposed prophecy of Abbot Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202) who said, according to Columbus, "that the restorer of the House of Mt. Zion would come out of Spain."[46] In addition to the Gospels and Joachim of Fiore, Columbus cites the writings of Pierre d'Ailly (c. 1351-1420) and Augustine of Hippo (354-430) as well as his own experiences encountering the autochthonous peoples of the Caribbean as evidence "that the Gospel must now be proclaimed to so many lands in such a short time" because the end of the world (which Augustine had predicted would take place in the seventh millennium after the initial creation of the universe) was just 155 years away and would necessarily require "the end of the sect of Mohammed and the coming of the Antichrist" (109-11).

Columbus claims in his letter to the Spanish queen and king at the beginning of the *Libro* that his missions to "the Indies" were directed by the will of the Christian god—"The Lord

[46] Joachim of Fiore (c. 1135-1202) was one of the most influential apocalyptic thinkers of the medieval period because he explicitly read the Book of Revelation as a prophetic text and came up with a millenarian and historicizing account of time which divided all of history into three ages: the Age of the Father (referring to the Hebrew Bible), the Age of the Son (the New Testament), and the impending utopian Age of the Holy Spirit. As Ralph Bauer, Anna Brickhouse, and Kirsten Silva Gruesz elaborate in *The Alchemy of Conquest: Science, Religion, and the Secrets of the New World* (University of Virginia Press, 2019), Columbus's assertion that Joachim of Fiore had prophesied that a Christian from Spain would restore Jerusalem to Christendom was mistaken and based on the pseudo-Joachimite tradition. Though the prophecy about a Spanish king restoring Jerusalem to Christian rule gained popularity since the mid-fourteenth century, scholars today agree that Joachim of Fiore never made such a prophecy himself (see the fourth chapter in *The Alchemy of Conquest*, "The Secrets of the World: Christopher Columbus's Ecstatic Materialism," page 138).

purposed that there should be something clearly miraculous in this matter of the voyage to the Indies"—and were therefore always intended to play a role in bringing about the end of the world. But there is little to no evidence in his surviving writings that he applied such clear eschatological and apocalyptic meaning to his voyages before 1500 (107). As Elise Bartosik-Vélez argues, "[t]he texts that Columbus himself wrote contain no evidence that supports the notion that he developed apocalyptic ideas until at least the end of 1500… there is no evidence from which to argue that Columbus's colonial rhetoric was mixed with that of the apocalyptic tradition before 1500" ("The Three Rhetorical Strategies of Christopher Columbus" 35).[47] Bartosik-Vélez goes further to argue that Columbus, over time, used three rhetorical strategies in his writings to provide his voyages meaning and defend his position in the Spanish court. She cites his late-1492 diary entries and 1493 letters to the Spanish monarchs and Luis de Santángel as evidence of his use of nationalist, reconquest rhetoric to situate his initial voyage within the political context of the 1492 Jewish and Muslim expulsion and the *Reconquista* (of both the Iberian Peninsula and Jerusalem) and align himself with the political and imperialist interests of the king and queen. Bartosik-Vélez then cites Columbus's 1498 letter on the third voyage as evidence of Columbus's use of the biblical prophetic tradition to protect his waning status in the Spanish court after his disastrous third voyage. After returning to Haiti-Quisqueya in 1498 only to discover that Francisco Roldán had led a revolt against his brothers Bartolomé and Diego, and after being brought back to Spain in chains to face charges, Columbus used the prophetic

[47] Bartosik-Vélez disagrees with Delno West's contention that Columbus's 1481 notes in the margins of his copy of *Historia rerum ubique gestarum* by Pope Pius II provide evidence for Columbus's eschatological and apocalyptic understanding of his voyages. In the West and Kling 1991 translation of the *Libro de las profecías*, West argues that these marginal notes are evidence that Columbus's apocalyptic beliefs date to at least 1481 based on a similarity in themes between the notes and the *Libro*; however, Bartosik-Vélez argues that similarity in themes is not "sufficient evidence to support the claim that Columbus had developed an eschatological consciousness by 1481" (34).

tradition to "continue to invoke the nationalist mission of the reconquest of Jerusalem and to begin to portray himself as more than just a colonizer" (38).

Columbus then used the apocalyptic tradition to frame his voyages and establish an eschatological meaning to his enterprise. For example, the third section of the *Libro* includes biblical passages and summaries of biblical prophecies that predict the discovery of unknown lands and contact with unknown peoples that signal the beginning of world unity under one kingdom of Christ; some examples of these passages include Matthew 15, Isaiah 5:26, I Chronicles, and selections from the *Glossa ordinaria* (the commentaries of Nicholas of Lyra on the New Testament books of Matthew, Luke, and John.). Based on the apocalyptic and prophetic traditions and beliefs, Columbus portrayed his own stumbling upon the islands of the Caribbean as the discovery of these "unknown" lands and peoples remaining to be evangelized as a prerequisite for the coming of the new Millennium.[48] As Bartosik-Vélez notes, Columbus's arguments were consonant with queen Isabel's belief that Muslims and Jews "were the servants of Satan and the Antichrist, as described in the Book of the Apocalypse" and were therefore also in line with Catholic Spain's imperialist expansion within the Iberian peninsula (43).[49]

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[48] In his contribution to *Religion in the Age of Exploration: The Case of Spain and New Spain* (Creighton University Press, 1996), "Columbus as Exegete: A Study of the *Libro de las profecías*," Hector Avalos details how Columbus attempts to identify the "islands" and "far lands" mentioned in the biblical passages with the Indies. One interesting example Avalos includes comes in the form of Columbus's own comments on Jeremiah 16:19 written in the margins of the *Libro* in which Columbus writes: "India is in the farthest lands in the east… In India, they venerate and raise up idols" (68).

[49] The queen and her astrologers were most likely familiar with the writings of Pierre d'Ailly, including his most well-known work, the *Imago mundi* (1410) which Columbus himself owned and used as evidence for his argument that India could be reached by sailing west from Spain. As a Christian astrologer, d'Ailly followed Roger Bacon's example in the *Opus maius* (1267) and wrote several compendiums and treatises between 1410 and 1414 contending that religious history was governed by astrological conjunctions. Among his most popular claims in Spain was the assertion that the Antichrist was Muslim and that the fall of the Muslim world (and the "reconquest" of Jerusalem) would mark the beginning of a new millennium. Such anti-Muslim and antisemitic beliefs served as the ideological basis for the forced expulsion and conversion of Spain's Jewish community and the territorial conquest of Muslim Granada during Fernando II and Isabel I's reign.

So far, I have provided an overview of the *Libro* and reviewed some of the predominant ways Columbus utilized the prophetic, eschatological, and apocalyptic traditions to make sense of and defend his ideas, status, and voyages, especially after 1500. In the *Libro*, Columbus concerns himself with demonstrating the breadth of his learning and ability to correctly interpret scripture—despite claiming to be "unlearned in literature, a layman, a mariner, a common worldly man" in the unfinished letter—and inserts himself and his accidental encounter into the absolute and universal timeline of biblical prophecy, Christian eschatology, and imperialist expansion. As he inserted himself into the timeline of biblical and apocalyptic prophecy, Columbus also swallowed up the territories and peoples of the Caribbean and Abya Yala into the same timeline that, as he argued in the *Libro*, predicted their existence and their inevitable (and necessary) conversion to Christianity. Moreover, keeping in mind the importance of Spanish religious nationalism and xenophobia toward Muslims and Jews for Columbus's rhetorical strategies and defense of his status and access to wealth, the evangelization of the peoples of the Caribbean and Abya Yala, and the very peoples themselves, were assigned meaning and significance inasmuch as they served to bring about the predicted and hoped for end of the timeline (the fulfillment of prophecy): "the end of the sect of Mohammed and the coming of the Antichrist," the "reconquest" of the "New Jerusalem" by Catholic Spain, and the global Apocalypse.[50]

[50] When looking at Columbus's writings and rhetorical strategies, it is evident that he, as the initiator of the great accidental encounter, attempted to define the significance of the encounter principally in theocentric terms as part of a global, eschatological Christian evangelizing mission as established by biblical prophecy. However, keeping in mind the popularity of pseudo-Joachimite and anti-Muslim apocalyptic prophecies on the Iberian peninsula and the Spanish crown's competitive relationship with the Portuguese empire's expansions into Africa and Asia, it is difficult to distinguish the theocentric from the more humanist and imperialist functions of the forced evangelization and subjugation of the indigenous peoples and later African populations brought to "the Americas."

What can revisiting Columbus's *Libro de las profecías* reveal about the La Sentencia ruling and the anti-Haitianism and dehumanization scenes at the beginning of *La mucama*? Despite the obvious differences between the *Libro* and Indiana's novel, their featuring of prophecy and their relationship to, and reliance on, various conceptualizations of time offer a window to the roots and workings of Western modernity's contradictions regarding white supremacy and time—as well as Haiti-Quisqueya's complicated relationship with Western modernity itself. Building upon Columbus's apocalyptic timeline, Western modernity would eventually formulate its own linear timeline culminating in its claims to "progress," "civilization," and, eventually, "development," all the while the island of Haiti-Quisqueya was ground zero for, in the words of Silvio Torres-Saillant, "the colonial plantation and New World African slavery, the twin institutions that gave blackness its modern significance" (*Introduction to Dominican Blackness* 2). While post-1492 Haiti-Quisqueya was at the forefront of events that would shape the significance of blackness for centuries (and therefore modernity itself), the island's significance within Western modernity's timeline has since either been erased and forgotten or it has been propped up as an example of underdevelopment and backwardness, particularly the Haitian side of the island (as a rejection of "progress" and modernity's forward-moving timeline).[51]

Returning to the "recolectores" scene at the beginning of *La mucama*, the security system for Esther's apartment building releases the poisonous gas to kill the Haitian man at the front

[51] Perhaps one of the most explicit and recent examples of this are the former U.S. president Donald Trump's January 2018 remarks in which he supposedly called Haiti and several other countries "shithole countries" as his administration attempted to end temporary protective status (TPS) designations for immigrants from Haiti, Sudan, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras. TPS designations, first created by the U.S. Congress in 1990, are designed to protect people living in the U.S. from deportation because it would be dangerous for them to return to their countries of origin due to natural disasters or other humanitarian emergencies. Haiti was granted TPS designation after the January 12, 2010 earthquake; by November 20, 2017, then acting Secretary of Homeland Security, Elaine Duke, announced the decision to terminate TPS designation for Haiti effective July 2019.

entrance once the system recognizes "el virus en el negro," the virus in the black man. Though the scene is reminiscent of Junot Díaz's 2012 post-apocalyptic short story, "Monstro," in which a disease called "La Negrura" (The Darkening) infects the population of Haiti, in *La mucama* the "recolectores" and the quarantine placed on Haiti are never mentioned again; as world-building elements that do not necessarily move the plot forward, the quarantine and the Haitian man's murder on the first page of the novel suggest that the man's blackness and Haitian origin are the "virus" being eradicated from the Dominican Republic of 2027. If Muslims and Jews were the "servants of the Antichrist" for Columbus, the Spanish crown, and their apocalyptic-imperialist ambitions, Haitian immigrants are the "virus" infecting Dominican society with backwardness, disease, and underdevelopment—a racist narrative Indiana pushes to dystopian extremes in her futuristic novel, thus underscoring the extent to which this narrative has *already* been exploited and perpetuated by white supremacist nineteenth and twentieth-century Dominican politicians and intellectuals (like Joaquín Balaguer) and European colonial and U.S. imperial discourses, economic sanctions, and military occupations alike.

Centering Haiti-Quisqueya within discussions on blackness, anti-black racism, and Western modernity and its teleological approach to its History allows for a (re)contextualization of Dominican racial and national discourses and attitudes that is firmly planted within what Torres-Saillant calls the island's "discrete historical experiences" (*Introduction to Dominican Blackness* 2).[52] Much like Horn's resituating of Indiana's performance piece *Sugar/Azúcal* within Global North-South dynamics, a recontextualizing and resituating of the "recolectores" scene at

[52] Within his *Introduction to Dominican Blackness*, Torres-Saillant also calls attention to the erasure of the importance of the island of Haiti-Quisqueya from the "Black Atlantic" and related discussions on blackness and racial identities in "the Americas." Torres-Saillant therefore calls for the importance of contextualizing Dominican racial discourses within the Dominican Republic's "discrete historical experiences" to avoid misconstruing Dominican racial attitudes and identities as "delusional" (2).

the beginning of *La mucama* within the complexities of Dominican histories also highlights how Indiana challenges limited nationalist historical accounts that continue to associate the Dominican Republic solely with Spanish colonialism and the Republic of Haiti with French colonialism and, eventually, "African barbarism" and backwardness. For example, in the post-apocalyptic future of 2027, Acilde activates the "PriceSpy" technology in her left wrist to check the price of one of the "recolectores," revealing that the machines were built and donated by China, a global economic power, to help alleviate the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean in general of the repercussions of the 2024 disaster, including the "virus" in the Haitian man.

With Acilde's incarnation as Roque in the seventeenth century, Indiana once again (re)situates the island of Haiti-Quisqueya within the larger Caribbean colonial complex that, in addition to the Spanish and the French colonial administrations on the island, included English, French, and Dutch smugglers, Taínos, and black maroon communities. As Roque in the seventeenth century, Acilde leads a group of *bucaneros* on the north coast of the island; the group is comprised of characters that represent the major cultural groups involved in the early days of colonization in the Caribbean (including a runaway slave, Engombe, a Taíno man, an Englishman missing his arm, and a Frenchman) who make their living stealing cattle from the Spanish and tanning and trading the hides and meat with French, Dutch, and English traders. Indiana redraws and reworks Haiti-Quisqueya's colonial and postcolonial timelines. She starts and ends with the sugar plantation economy at the beginning of the sixteenth century in *Sugar/Azúcal* and bounces back and forth between the seventeenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries in *La mucama*—she plays with the tension between continuity and discontinuity as events in the past and events in her imagined future are bound together in both causation and contradiction. Events of the past have a causal relationship with the present and the future but the

past also becomes a place for anticolonial imaginative work where official *dominicanidad* and Dominican racial narratives are contradicted by the lived experiences of people that predate the drawing of the Haitian-Dominican border and Western modernity itself.

What Indiana is tapping into, subverting, and revealing, then, is the coloniality of time and History. As Javier Sanjinés argues, Western modernity can be understood as the historical project and process of European colonialism and coloniality founded on seventeenth-century Rationalism (Cartesian logic), eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophies, and, in terms of modernity's claims to "progress" and "civilization," Hegelian philosophy of History. Sanjinés explains:

> From the viewpoint of the dominated, History is an institution that legitimates the silence of other histories… the Hegelian philosophy of History is the best example of how the West made any other possible view of the world unrealizable. The West held on to the categories of thought by which the rest of the world could be described, interpreted, and classified. Hegel's "Occidentalism" was located, geohistorically and geopolitically, in the heart of modernity. (*Embers of the Past* 4)

Prophecy, particularly Columbus's use of biblical prophecy, is then implicated in the coloniality of time, serving as a tool for justifying European colonialism and, later, Western modernity's imposition of its self-proclaimed universal conceptualizations of time and History onto subjugated peoples and places. In *La mucama de Omicunlé*, prophecy is also implicated in the coloniality of time but from within a postcolonial difference—from the viewpoint of the post-apocalypse and from within an Afro-Caribbean and Taíno religious context. Before sending Acilde to prison for Esther's death, President Bona reveals that Esther, his personal *santera,* was his sister. He rhetorically asks Acilde, "Entonces, ¿tú ere' el bujarroncito que va a salvar al

país?" before leaning over Acilde's hospital bed to explain that he had sworn to his sister that he would help in any way necessary to ensure the completion of Acilde's prophetic mission to prevent the 2024 disaster ("So then, you're the little queer who's going to save the country?"; 112; Obejas 76). Acilde's nervous reaction to Bona's presence in this scene is telling; the narration compares Bona's voice to Balaguer and appearance to Malcom X before recounting how Bona seized and maintained political power for fifteen years: "El carisma de este hombre, que se había echado al bolsillo la voluntad del país durante quince años, surtía el mismo efecto en él [Acilde] que en las masas que había seducido a golpe de videos de youtube en los que criticaba al gobierno y usaba el español dominicano que se hablaba en la calle" ("This man had captured the country's will for fifteen years and his charisma had the same effect on Acilde as on the masses he had seduced via YouTube videos in which he criticized the government and used Dominican street Spanish"; 113; Obejas 77). Not only had Bona seized power thanks to his popularity on YouTube and created alliances with other populist, totalitarian governments in Latin America (the "Alianza Bolivariana Latinoamericana,"); once in power, Bona also declared Dominican Vodou the official religion of the Dominican Republic and changed the colors of his political party from purple and yellow to red and black as a sign of his devotion to Legbá, "Elegguá, la deidad africana que regía su destino" ("Elegguá, the African deity who ruled his destiny"; 113; Obejas 77). Acilde's mission, then, serves the political interests of a populist totalitarian leader who, despite his devotion to Elegguá and Dominican Vodou, permits the mass murder of Haitian immigrants, the poor, the mentally ill, and sex workers in Santo Domingo.

Without sufficient attention to the distinct historical experiences with European colonialism and Western modernity on the island of Haiti-Quisqueya, the "recolectores" scene can come across as the ultimate delusion in terms of the supposedly universal denial of blackness

and anti-Haitianism within Dominican national identity, history, and racial attitudes and beliefs. Under the leadership of Bona, the dehumanizing violence and literal erasure of Haitian immigrants from the streets of Santo Domingo happens not within a Hispanophile and Catholic religious context (as it had during the Trujillo and Balaguer regimes, for example) but within an Afro-diasporic and indigenous religious context where the state simultaneously adopts and legitimates the religious practices of the historically oppressed as it inflicts violence on the very people who helped shape these religious practices. However, when recontextualized within the Dominican Republic's complicated history with Western modernity, Bona's actions and the "recolectores" themselves serve not as evidence for Dominican delusion and denial of blackness, but rather as evidence of the continuation of the coloniality of time and the white supremacy that began, in part, with Columbus and his apocalyptic and prophetic delusions. Like Columbus, Bona uses the prophecy (and Acilde's role in it) to protect his waning political popularity and support after he agreed to house Venezuelan biological weapons in Ocoa that, after the seaquake of 2024, spilled out into the Caribbean and Atlantic. Despite declaring Dominican Vodou the official religion of the Dominican Republic—a religion that was once demonized as a negative Haitian influence on Dominican culture and was penalized and made illegal in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—and despite the different conceptualizations of time and history within religions like Dominican Vodou, Santería, or Haitian Vodou, the coloniality of time persists under Bona.[53]

[53] In "Criollismo Religioso," the fifth chapter in *The Dominican Racial Imaginary*, Milagros Ricourt employs ethnographic approach to studying Dominican religious *criollismo* in the San Cristóbal province in the south of the Dominican Republic. As Ricourt details the basic religious beliefs, practices, and histories of Dominican Vodou, she emphasizes why Dominican Vodou does not have the same visibility as Haitian Vodou: "On the Spanish side of Hispaniola, Vodou has been demonized for centuries… Legislation enacted after the creation of the Dominican Republic prohibited and penalized the practice of Vodou…Dominican intellectuals have been critical in disseminating dislike for Vodou; they considered it a barbaric practice transmitted from Haiti" (112).

In the following section, I explore why this is and how the coloniality of time is implicated in the historical process and development of white supremacy and racism within Western modernity. I am especially concerned with the novel's ending and the final decision Acilde (during his time-traveling incarnation as Giorgio Menicucci) takes regarding his destiny to fulfill the prophecy and prevent ecological disaster as the "legitimate son of Olokun." If Columbus portrayed himself as chosen by the Christian god to help in the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, why does Giorgio decide to ignore the Olokun prophecy and not tell the young future president Bona about the 2024 tsunami that will cause the Venezuelan biological weapons to spill into the sea and kill off most marine life in the Caribbean? How might Indiana be practicing epistemic disobedience (à la Sylvia Wynter) in *La mucama* and to what extent is it appropriate to characterize this disobedience as writing prophecy *en dominicano*?

Stranger than Fiction: Acilde/Roque/Giorgio's Final Decision

> Tras hablar de rap y política, había despedido a Said sin decirle una palabra sobre su futuro. Podía sacrificarlo todo menos esta vida, la vida de Giorgio Menicucci, la compañía de su mujer, la galería, el laboratorio… En poco tiempo se olvidará de Acilde, de Roque, incluso de lo que vive en un hueco allá abajo en el arrecife.
>
> *-La mucama de Omicunlé*[54]

While cleaning Esther's workspace and altars dedicated to Yemayá, Acilde notices an aquarium tank with a rare sea anemone, one of the last of its kind after most of the life in the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean, including the coral reefs near Haiti-Quisqueya, had been destroyed by the toxic pollution of the Venezuelan weapons released by the tsunami of 2024. Upon seeing the rare anemone, Acilde immediately knows it must be worth a fortune on the black market; she contacts her friend, Morla, a trafficker on the black market who can sell the

[54] "After chatting about rap and politics, he'd said goodbye to Said without a word about his future. He could sacrifice everything except this life, Giorgio Menicucci's life, his wife's company, the gallery, the lab… In a little while, he'll forget about Acilde, about Roque, even about what lives in a hole down there in the reef" (Obejas 125).

anemone to buy Acilde's dose of the Rainbow Bright. Acilde's plan, however, quickly unravels when Morla shows up with a pistol and ends up killing Esther. Acilde saves the anemone by hitting Morla over the head with a statue of a dolphin from Esther's altar, knocking him out cold, and eventually obtains the Rainbow Bright with Eric's help. Eric crowns Acilde with the anemone and administers the Rainbow Bright which, upon entering Acilde's veins, causes them to convulse, marking the beginning of Acilde's first transformation that would leave them, by the following afternoon, "un hombre completo" ("wholly a man"; 66; Obejas 44).[55] It is through the visceral transformation of their body that Acilde becomes the Son of Olokun, the fulfillment of the prophecy and destined to carry out Olokun's sacred mission to save Caribbean marine life. However, in the final pages of the novel, Acilde decides to ignore their destiny and chooses not to fulfill the prophecy.

Acilde's transformation testifies to the strong connection between bodies and prophecy. Rhiannon Graybill, in her study of the male bodies and body parts of the Hebrew prophets in the Hebrew Bible, also argues for the importance of the body for prophecy: "The body is essential to prophecy. The body of the prophet is not simply a vessel that is filled with prophetic word… prophecy is staged on and through the body, and cannot occur without it" (*Are We Not Men?* 5). For Graybill, the "very practice of prophecy" requires the body to be disturbed, "sometimes displaced, sometimes disabled, sometimes transformed" for it is "in the moments of bodily extremity that prophecy is most fully and successfully enacted" (125). For this final section, I am interested in exploring the implications of Acilde/Roque/Giorgio's final decision for the body as socio-theoretical category and the body's relationship to time, History, and the Western-colonial

[55] I use the pronoun "they" to refer to Acilde after their transformation with the Rainbow Bright; I use of the third person plural pronoun both because it is commonly used as a gender-neutral option in English and because of Acilde's experience of plurality as they inhabit multiple bodies in different moments of time.

project of the Human (and dehumanization). In addition to subverting the "Chosen One" trope, thus contrasting starkly with Columbus's attempts to make himself into a Chosen One and write himself into biblical and medieval Christian prophecy, Acilde/Roque/Giorgio's decision not to fulfill the prophecy also subverts the estranging effect that is supposedly, according to Darko Suvin, a defining characteristic of speculative fiction.[56] Rather than estranging the reader from their known norms, values, or from their time and place, Acilde/Roque/Giorgio's time-traveling adventures and ultimate decision *feel* eerily, even hauntingly familiar while the means of their time traveling (Afro-diasporic and Taíno religious practices of spirit possession) literally bring the relative past and future into the present moment, into embodiment and familiarity, through the possessed body. Acilde/Roque/Giorgio's time travel and final decision therefore reveal that Caribbean histories and realities are stranger than fiction.

Following Graybill, Acilde's extreme bodily transformation marks them as a prophet as it also marks, or genders, their newly masculine bodies.[57] However, in addition to challenging traditional biblical masculinity and gender roles, Acilde's transformation occurs within an Afro-Caribbean and Taíno religious and cosmological context that permits them to possess and embody multiple bodies across different locations and historical times. Acilde's relationship to the past is reimagined as Acilde exists and experiences life simultaneously in three separate bodies and timelines, highlighting how, within the practice of spirit possession in Haitian and

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[56] "Cognitive estrangement" is a concept put forth by Darko Suvin's *Metamorphoses of Science Fiction* (1979); combining Russian formalism's notion of "making strange" with Bertolt Brecht's concept of the estrangement-effect, Suvin, according to Fredric Jameson, "characterizes SF [science fiction] in terms of an essentially epistemological function" by estranging the reader from their own existence, alienating the reader from their own assumptions and beliefs and provoking new perspectives and even critiques on the familiarity of the present moment (*Archaeologies of the Future* xiv).

[57] In her introduction, Graybill makes a commitment to "redirect the gaze" and "break down the link between masculinity and neutrality," that is, to gender the masculine (12). This queer reading of the queer male body, in which Graybill sexes the masculine, allows her to analyze prophecy as "the point at which the ordinary representations of biblical masculinity break down… a series of failures of masculinity—or, alternately, as transformations to the very representation of 'masculinity' as a category." (14)

Dominican Vodou, the individual self is connected to other selves in a web of interactions and histories that span time and space. Acilde's body is queered through the practices of prophecy and spirit possession that reveal, in the words of Roberto Strongman, "that the location of the self vis-à-vis the body can and is culturally constructed" ("The Body of Vodou" 99-100). Whereas the traditional Western conceptualization of self is understood to be fully contained within the body and privileges the mind as the center of "rational" thought and self-awareness, in African and Afro-Diasporic philosophies, as Strongman argues, there exists a multiplicity of selves that operates "under a transcorporeal conceptualization of the self… the immaterial aspect of the Afro-Diasporic self is multiple and removable" (106).

Acilde's transformations and time traveling within an Afro-Caribbean and indigenous religious context therefore problematizes and complicates "the body" as a theoretical category that, following Mayra Rivera, "fosters an illusion of completeness and wholeness easily naturalized, normalized, and deployed as part of cultural systems of representation" (*Poetics of the Flesh* 7).[58] In inhabiting multiple bodies across time, Acilde's transformation breaks the illusion of completeness of their body/bodies as they (Acilde, Roque, and Giorgio) also break the illusion of the linear and unidirectional progression of time and invite a reconsideration of the Self's relationship to, or location within, time and space. Indiana's melding of science and speculative fiction elements, like time travel, with Afro-Caribbean and indigenous religious beliefs and practices also disrupts or, rather, exposes some of the assumptions about the Self built into Suvin's notion of cognitive estrangement, or the estranging effect speculative fiction has on the reader. Namely, that the reader's self and location in space and in time are fully

[58] By understanding "poetics" as "a practice of engaging the world, in which one risks being transformed… a stance toward knowledge, a style of writing, and the creative dimensions of thought," Rivera's focus on flesh "seeks to unsettle the reifying tendencies of 'the body' by evoking carnal interdependence, vulnerability, and exposure" (4-7).

contained within the reader's lived reality of their present moment and circumstances; that is, for the estrangement effect of speculative fiction to work, the reader's self must be understood from a more Western conceptualization of Self as fully contained within their body and their (relative) present moment. Time travel through spirit possession unravels these assumptions by dispersing the Self across bodies, locations, and times, both for the characters in the novel and, potentially, for the reader. In other words, time travel in *La mucama* would only have an estranging effect if we, as readers, understand ourselves to be wholly contained within our individual bodies and present circumstances. Spirit possession thus signals a conceptualization of Self that simultaneously collapses time and marks the body as fundamental in the history of social relations; the possessed body, then, (re)paves new and old avenues to studying history, being, and knowing. The body becomes the primary sacred site of decolonial work as past and future, Self and Other, mind and body, converge. The singular, universalizing account of linear time and history of Western colonial Christianity and the Western prophetic tradition are then confronted with the time-bending, creolized, queer Caribbean prophetic bodies of Acilde in the twenty-first century, Giorgio at the end of the twentieth century, and Roque in the early seventeenth century. Moreover, keeping in mind the epistemological and geographical crisis Columbus's voyages caused for European knowledge production and identity formation, *La mucama*'s subversion of the cognitive estrangement effect highlights how Europe of the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries faced the cognitive estrangement provoked by the peoples and lands of the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island. An example of history being stranger than fiction, Europe was faced with unknown lands and peoples and became alienated from its previous understandings of itself and its place in the world and History.

After Acilde's initial transformation, the novel takes the reader to the late twentieth century, in the 1990s after Balaguer's final electoral campaign that would leave him in office until 1996. We are introduced to Nenuco, his wife and cousin, Ananí, and their children living on the coast of the Dominican Republic at "la playa del Gran Señor," also known as Playa Bo. Willito, a young fisherman, trespasses on Nenuco's beach and fishes in the coral reef to provide for his two brothers and ailing grandfather. While fishing near *la poza* (the cave/pool that forms the base of the reef), Willito finds the body of a man near the poisonous anemones that cover the *poza*. Nenuco helps recover the man's body from the reef and takes him to his home where Ananí, recognizing that the mysterious man is one of "los hombres del agua," kneels before the body and recites the words she had been taught to say for such an occasion: "Bayacú Bosiba Guamikeni" (102). Ananí and Nenuco had received the prophecy from their Taíno ancestors that "los hombres del agua… venían cada cierto tiempo a ayudarlos" ("the men from the water, who came every so often to help them"; 103; Obejas 70); Nenuco guarded Playa Bo and the coral reef because that is where the "hombres del agua" always appeared:

> Pero más allá del amor y los hijos, los unía [Nenuco and Ananí] el cuidado de la playa del Gran Señor, Playa Bo, donde vivía la criatura más preciada y sagrada de la isla, la puerta a la tierra del principio, de donde también surgen los hombres del agua… cuando el tiempo los necesita. Por eso, cada verano, Nenuco prestaba especial cuidado a la poza y monitoreaba el túnel poblado con las anémonas que parirían al fenómeno. (105)
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> Beyond their love and their children, what united them was taking care of the Great Lord, Playa Bo, where the most precious and sacred creature on the island dwelled, the portal to the land of the beginning, through which the men of the water would come… whenever they were needed. That was why every summer Nenuco would pay special attention to

the pool, monitoring the tunnel with the anemones where the phenomenon took place. (Obejas 71)

With the appearance of the "hombre del agua," Indiana differentiates the oral traditions and beliefs of the Taínos from the official, written History of the Spanish colonizers. For Ananí, the history books she read during her primary education made no mention of the "hombres del agua" who periodically came to help the Taínos and their descendants; nor did the "libro de historia," her history book, make mention of how *los españoles* had stolen power from the Arawak peoples, "con el cual doblegaron a las demás tribus del continente" ("to conquer the other tribes on the continent"; 103-104; Obejas 70). In the novel, this prophecy of the "hombres del agua" eventually became creolized with Yoruba beliefs and practices brought to Haiti-Quisqueya by those who survived the Middle Passage. The prophesied Son of Olokun would emerge from the same *poza* near Playa Bo, like "los hombres del agua," to help the descendants of both oppressed groups and fulfill Olokun's (or rather, President Bona's) mission to save and protect marine life.

Considering the history of persecution of Vodou on both the eastern and western halves of the island, Bona's declaring Dominican Vodou the official religion of the Dominican Republic in *La mucama* may appear, at first glance, to be an anticolonial move towards religious legitimacy and recognition.[59] However, that "legitimacy" still rests on the Dominican state's

[59] In describing Caribbean religions as "syncretic," "superstitious," or as "folk" healing or magical practices, Western bodies of knowledge, like anthropology, and Western media and cultural productions have historically perpetuated a false binary between the religious beliefs and practices of the colonizers in contrast with those of the colonized. This binary presumes the timeless, coherent, and universal nature of the religions brought to the colonized territories of "the Americas," like Roman Catholicism or Christianity in general (thus erasing the long history of inter-cultural exchange and influences that allowed for the development of these religions) in contrast to the supposedly historically-specific, incoherent, decentralized, and superstitious (irrational) nature of the beliefs and practices of Caribbean religions like Vodou. A reiteration of the classic civilized Self/barbaric Other binary, this arbitrary hierarchy of religious beliefs and practices would eventually lead to the violent persecution of Vodou on Haiti-Quisqueya well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by the Catholic Church, the growing political power of evangelical Protestantism (especially since the 1990s), the Dominican and Haitian states, and U.S. military occupations and political and economic interventions. For example, in the fourth chapter of *Creole Religions of the Caribbean*, "Haitian Vodou," Fernandez Olmos, Murphy, and Paravisini-Gebert elaborate on the history of the persecution of Vodou leaders and practitioners within Haiti. This history of persecution includes the Catholic

active participation in, and collusion with, Western modernity and global neoliberal capitalism and reveals the politics of naming regarding the naming of a state's official religion. When in service of a corrupt, totalitarian leader whose abuse of power depends on the continual exploitation of power structures established during the colonial days, even the religions often characterized as examples of "political resistance" by scholars and critics (like Haitian and Dominican Vodou) become enmeshed in the coloniality of time and the violence of the modern nation-state. For example, in her ethnographic study of Vodou in the Dominican south, Milagros Ricourt claims that on plantations, cattle farms, and within maroon communities, religion "became an effective means to preserve the enslaved subjects' cultural essence and to resist the impositions of the colonizer" (105).[60] In *La mucama*, however, Rita Indiana complicates this characterization as the religion and practices of the historically oppressed become, in the hands of President Bona in the near future, entangled with new forms of persecution and violence (such as the "recolectores automáticos") that reiterate and repeat the old familiar patterns of colonial violence.

Church's many attempts to repress Vodou with antisuperstition campaigns in 1896, 1913, and 1941 and decades of U.S. occupation (1915-1934) and the post-Duvalier era (1986-1993), "during which temples were destroyed and hundreds of people who admitted to being practitioners of Vodou were massacred" (119).

[60] In "Criollismo Religioso," Ricourt compares her characterization of Dominican Vodou with Marc Blanchard's discussion of Cuban orishas in "From Cuba with Saints" (from *Faith without Borders: The Curious Category of the Saints*, University of Chicago Press, 2011, pp. 1-35), claiming that, like Cuban orishas, Dominican Vodou "emerged in the midst of resistance" and that the religious practices of Vodou among maroon communities "reimagined the nation and subverted the official religion" (106). Ricourt continues: "While the indigenous Taínos and earliest Africans were being coerced into Christianity, they were also responding with and reproducing their own spiritual beliefs and ways of dealing with their own deities. If the imposition of foreign religious values was inevitable, the unequal encounter with Europeans forced Africans to negotiate their own religious pathways into and within Christianity" (107). As Ricourt traces the historical development of Dominican Vodou and the exchanges and interactions between Haitian and Dominican practitioners over the centuries, she grounds her characterization of Vodou in the history of colonial violence and religious resistance to this violence. I believe that Indiana's complicating and questioning of this characterization is not intended to erase this very real history of violence and resistance; rather, by bringing Dominican Vodou into her imagined future, Indiana is highlighting the insidious nature of colonial violence (functioning via the coloniality of power and time) and demonstrates how, despite its origins in resistance, a religion like Dominican Vodou (or Christianity, which has its own origins in Jewish resistance to Roman imperialism) can be subject to changing power structures, historical processes, and economic and social forces that can inadvertently (or overtly) perpetuate dehumanization and oppression.

Back in the year 2027, after their transformation, Acilde is arrested and falsely accused of Esther's murder. Acilde wakes up in a hospital bed, still groggy and disoriented after being injected with the Rainbow Bright, and begins to suspect that the Rainbow Bright is causing strange dreams: "¿Tengo dos cuerpos o es que mi mente tiene la capacidad de transmitir en dos canales de programación simultánea?" ("Do I have two bodies or is my mind capable of broadcasting two different channels simultaneously?"; 110; Obejas 75). It is at this point in the novel, in the chapter titled "Update," that the reader discovers that Acilde is the "hombre del agua" that appeared to Nenuco and Ananí in the coral reef in the 1990s. Acilde, as the "hombre del agua," adopts the name of Giorgio Menicucci, invents an Italian-Swiss immigrant background and identity, and eventually marries Linda Goldman, a marine biologist who dreams of protecting the coral reefs. Giorgio is introduced earlier in the novel, in the chapter "Psychic Goya," as the organizer of the "Sosúa Project, "una iniciativa cultural, artística y social con la que quería devolver algo al país [the Dominican Republic] que lo había hecho rico" ("a cultural, artistic, and social endeavor that he hoped would give something back to the country that had made him rich"; 49; Obejas 33).

Back in the hospital room in the twenty first century, the president of the Dominican Republic, Said Bona, visits Acilde and reveals that Esther was his sister and that he is aware of the prophecy. Bona and Acilde agree that Acilde will stay in prison for a few months to protect Acilde from Esther's angry followers (who believe Acilde murdered Esther) and to ensure that Acilde accomplishes their mission. However, after ten years of imprisonment (during which time Acilde simultaneously lives as Giorgio in the recent past and Roque in the colonial past), Acilde gets to know Iván de la Barra, an older Cuban author and art dealer accused of selling falsified manuscripts of Lydia Cabrera and Alejo Carpentier. Iván tells Acilde his story and eventually

reveals that one of the falsified manuscripts he attributed to Lydia Cabrera, an unedited book on Olokun, was inspired by a letter of Cabrera's sent to Pierre Verger: "en esa carta le cuenta que finalmente ha logrado hacer hablar a una anciana de Matanzas sobre el culto a Olokun, el más misterioso de todos los Orishas" ("in this letter she recounts how she had managed, finally, to have a conversation with an old woman in Matanzas about the cult of Olokun, the most mysterious of the orishas"; 143; Obejas 98). Iván continues: "Según la carta, los negros llamaban Olokun a una criatura marina que caminaba hacia atrás en el tiempo, chico, una cosa lovecraftiana" ("According to the letter, black Cubans called a certain marine creature Olokun. It could travel back in time, dude, very Lovecraftian"; 144; Obejas 98).

After watching a news story with Iván from the government's official channel commemorating *Los Inoperantes* ("*The Inactives*"), an artist collective from the early 2000s recognized and awarded by President Bona for its impact on Dominican art and culture, Acilde, still in prison, finally pieces together the mystery of the nature of their mission in the late twentieth century: to save the coral reef from the destruction caused by the tsunami of 2024 that caused a stockpile of Venezuelan biological arms to spill into the Caribbean Sea. As Giorgio, Acilde would establish an art gallery highlighting local artists and use the gallery's earnings to fund and construct a marine laboratory for Linda, thereby protecting the coral reefs of Playa Bo. From their jail cell in the future, Acilde uses Giorgio in the early 2000s to create the Sosúa Project and hires the younger Iván de la Barra to "discover" and promote artists, like Argenis Luna, who would eventually become *Los Inoperantes*, Dominican visual and performance artists who were "hundidos en la pobreza y el alcoholismo, habían sobrevivido al menosprecio de las instituciones que ahora querían venir a ofrecerles serenatas de gloria acartonada" ("buried in poverty and alcoholism, had survived the disdain of the very same institutions that now offered

them paper glory"; 144; Obejas 99). In his analysis of the novel, Carlos Garrido Castellano argues that Indiana is critiquing how these institutions appropriate subaltern and marginal discourses.[61] In summarizing Indiana's multifaceted works and career, Garrido Castellano emphasizes the importance of the visual ("lo visual") and spectacle in relation to globalization and consumerism in her works and attributes this importance to Indiana's familiarity with and knowledge of contemporary art and "los discursos de vanguardia" ("avant-garde discourse") that, when coupled with her usual challenges to heteronormative and racist nationalist discourses, result in "un distanciamiento consciente de modelos convencionales de producción creativa" in her works ("a conscious distancing from conventional models of creative production"; my trans.; 353).

In *La mucama*, however, as Garrido Castellano points out, Indiana approaches the visual aspects of globalization and consumerism not from a subaltern perspective but "desde el contexto mucho más 'letrado' del mundo del arte contemporáneo dominicano" ("from the much more 'lettered' context of the contemporary Dominican art world"; my trans.; 353). For example, in "Psychic Goya," the chapter in which we are introduced to the character Argenis Luna, Indiana relates how Argenis struggled while studying art at the School of Design at Altos de Chavón because he "se sintió pobre, ignorante y, sobre todo, confundido" ("felt poor, ignorant, and, above all else, confused") compared to his classmates who were "niños ricos con Macs y cámaras digitales que hablaba de Fluxus, videoarte, videoacción, arte contemporáneo" ("rich kids with Macs and digital cameras who talked about Fluxus, video art, video action, and contemporary art"; 37-38; Obejas 25). Instead of presenting the contemporary Dominican art

[61] See Garrido Castellano's 2017 article, "'La elocuencia que su entrenamiento como artista plástico le permitía.' Subalternidad, cultura e instituciones en *La Mucama de Omicunlé* de Rita Indiana Hernández" (*Hispanic Research Journal*, vol. 18, no. 4, pp. 352-364).

scene as a space for potential social transformation and critique, Garrido Castellano argues that, in *La mucama*, "el modelo artístico representado por Chavón y por el Sosúa Project es asociado no tanto al potencial transformativo de lo postmoderno, sino a su connivencia con desigualdades sociales y raciales" ("the artistic model represented by Chavón and the Sosúa Project is associated not so much with the transformative potential of the postmodern but rather with its collusion with social and racial inequalities"; my trans.; 356). Argenis and his involvement in the Sosúa Project then become a vehicle for Indiana's critique of how the Dominican and Caribbean art world perpetuate these inequalities despite their leftist politics, references to and reliance on globalization, and multidisciplinary use of technology and media.[62] In *Hecho en Saturno* (2018), Indiana continues to complicate and critique traditional Latin American leftist spaces, politics, and discourses as she develops Argenis's story further, particularly focusing on his recovery from heroin addiction and his strained relationship with his father, José Alfredo Luna, a well-known leftist politician of the Partido de la Liberación Dominicana (the Dominican Liberation Party, or PLD) who sends Argenis to rehab in Cuba to protect his image and the image of his political party for the upcoming elections.

Throughout *Hecho en Saturno*, Argenis is haunted by his father's fame in Latin American and Caribbean leftist and revolutionary circles as he revisits painful memories of his father's hypocrisy and abusive words and behavior; Argenis compares his father to Francisco Goya's

[62] Another clear example of Indiana's critique of the Dominican art world is seen in the character Elizabeth, a fellow participant in the Sosúa Project from an upper-class background and self-proclaimed video artist and DJ who made her way into the video art scene with a series titled *Seco y latigoso*, a series of nine loops of scenes of prostitutes working in various sectors of Santo Domingo. After putting the series on the internet, a French curator included it in a textbook on "Arte del Tercer Mundo," Third World Contemporary Art (123). In a different scene, Elizabeth, Argenis, and Malagueta (another artist in residence for the Sosúa Project) go to Los Charamicos, the small forgotten town nearby whose residents depend on sex tourism to survive. As Elizabeth takes out her digital camera to "document" the town and its residents, Argenis thinks to himself, "*¿Qué hacían ellos enseñoreados en un barrio pobre? Fucking turistas culturales*" ("What were they doing strolling like kings through a poor neighborhood? Fucking cultural tourists"; 81; Obejas 55).

famous painting *Saturn Devouring His Son*, a copy of which hangs in the home office of Doctor Bengoa, the Cuban doctor and friend of José Alfredo in charge of Argenis's rehabilitation. Prophecy appears once again in *Hecho en Saturno* in reference to the myth of Chronos/Saturn and the prophecy he received predicting that one of his children would usurp him; in the myth, Chronos/Saturn devours his children to prevent the prophecy from coming to fruition but is tricked into swallowing a stone instead of his son, Zeus/Jupiter, who eventually fulfills the prophecy. In *Hecho en Saturno*, Argenis also revisits memories of his paternal grandmother, a poor servant named Consuelo (who is also a devotee of Saint Michael in Dominican Vodou), who used to say, "en este mundo están los que lo limpian y los que se lo comen" as she cleaned and removed stones from rice ("in this world there are those who clean the rice and those who eat the stone"; my trans.; 181). In the end, Argenis is presented with a choice: eat the stones and perpetuate the homophobia, abuse, and corruption like his father, or fulfill the prophecy and dethrone "Chronos" by taking the time to clean the rice and remove the stones once and for all.

Returning to *La mucama*, to categorize Acilde's involvement in the prophecy and existence in multiple bodies across multiple timelines as inherently anticolonial or as resistance work by virtue of its connection to Dominican Vodou and the practice of spirit possession would be an oversimplification and misrepresentation of the complexities of Dominican and Caribbean histories and realities Indiana presents and (re)imagines in the novel. For example, according to their original agreement with President Bona, Acilde was only supposed to spend a few months in La Victoria prison; after ten years, however, Acilde's body and existence in the year 2037 is deteriorating like the paint on the ceiling of their jail cell. In the ten years that Roque lived as the leader of a group of *bucaneros* trading and tanning cow hides in the seventeenth century and Giorgio lived with his wife, Linda, as they established the Sosúa Project to protect and study the

coral reefs of Playa Bo in the late twentieth century, Acilde was suffocating from the humidity of their jail cell and often passed the time by staring at the ceiling and finding the shapes of animals in the chipping paint: "se distraía en las noches de un presente que sólo tenía sentido en función de lo que pasaba a otra gente, en otros tiempos" ("He used them to distract himself during nights in the present that only made sense when dealing with other people in other times"; 169; Obejas 116).

Within the final pages of the novel, Giorgio meets the young Said Bona and becomes aware of the real goal of their prophetic mission: "darle un mensaje a Said Bona, evitar que, cuando fuera president, aceptara esas armas biológicas de Venezuela" ("to give Said Bona a message—as president, to avoid accepting the biological weapons from Venezuela"; 177; Obejas 122). Giorgio immediately thinks about the consequences of fulfilling the prophecy: "si Said Bona se llevaba del consejo y tras el tsunami los químicos no se derramaban, ¿lo hubiese buscado Esther Escudero? ¿Lo hubiese encontrado Eric Vitier entre los bugarrones del Mirador?... ¿Desaparecería Giorgio?" ("if Said Bona followed his advice and there was no chemical spill after the tsunami, would Esther Escudero go looking for him? Would Eric Vitier find him among the hustlers at El Mirador?... Would Giorgio disappear?"; 177; Obejas 122). Once Giorgio and Linda's house clears of their party guests in the final chapter, "Salitre" ("Saltpeter"), Giorgio revisits his other selves in the twenty-first and seventeenth centuries and witnesses both of their deaths. Roque is overwhelmed and killed by a squadron of Spanish soldiers and Acilde, in their jail cell, commits suicide by taking Iván's sleeping pills. Having made his decision not to fulfill the prophecy, Giorgio is free from his other selves and bodies and, as the narration tells us, he soon forgets about his life as Acilde, as Roque, and even his past as the "hombre del agua" that emerged from the coral reef.

Comparing Acilde/Roque/Giorgio's decision with Columbus's engagement with biblical and medieval millenarian prophecies, we see two different approaches to prophecy, time, and history. In the description of his fourth voyage in the *Diario*, which takes the form of a letter directed to the Spanish King and Queen, Columbus (or the narrative voice attributed to Columbus) describes a "Voice" that spoke to him during a difficult time during the voyage: "Desque naciste, tuvo de ti muy grande cargo. Cuando te vido en edad de que El fue contento, maravillosamente hizo sonar tu nombre en la tierra. Las Indias, que son parte del mundo tan ricas, te las dio por tuyas" ("Ever since you were born, He [the Christian god] had assigned to you a great position. When He saw you reach the right age, He marvelously made your name ring across the Earth. He gave you the Indies, some of the richest lands in the world;" my trans.; 177). At the end of the letter, Columbus again reiterates the apocalyptic prophecies attributed to Joachim of Fiore and his role in them on behalf of Spain: "Hierusalem y el monte Sión ha de ser reedificado por mano de cristianos. Quien ha de ser… El abad Joaquín dijo que éste había de salir de España… ¿Quién será que se ofrezca a esto? Si Nuestro Señor me lleva a España, yo me obligo a llevarlo, con el nombre de Dios en salvo" ("Jerusalem and Mount Zion will be rebuilt by Christian hands. Who shall it be [to carry out the mission in the Holy Land]… Abbot Joachim said that the one to carry out the mission will come out of Spain… Who will offer themselves for the mission? If the Lord God brings me back to Spain, I commit myself to carry it out, in the name of God;" my trans.; 183). For Columbus, prophecy is about destiny and the fulfillment of the Christian god's immutable timeline and the global project of Christianity. The mysterious voice that spoke to him and offered him comfort reaffirmed Columbus's role in the prophecy as chosen by the Christian god to bring Christianity to "the Indies;" Columbus then extends his role in the prophecy into the near future by offering to participate in a Christian takeover of Jerusalem

on behalf of the Spanish crown. The past (the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments and Medieval apocalyptic prophecies) and the future global evangelization and Christian conquest of Jerusalem converge and align themselves with the God's timeline through Columbus. For Acilde/Roque/Giorgio, however, prophecy takes a more conditional form—if Giorgio warns Said Bona not to accept the Venezuelan biological weapons, then marine life in the Caribbean will be saved (and Giorgio will lose everything)—and that conditionality speaks to the interdependent relationships that exist between bodies, subjectivities, and actions and decisions taken across space and time. Time and the relationship between cause and effect in *La mucama* are in fact mutable and non-linear.

In choosing to be a wealthy, white European cis-gendered man and art dealer, free from the consequences of the 2024 disaster in the future, Giorgio/Acilde's final decision also reveals that the convergence of past and future, self and other, and mind and body within spirit possession does not always result in the sacred subjectivity and anticolonial work as we might expect. As a refusal of the "Chosen One" trope common to the science fiction genre, Acilde/Giorgio's decision highlights the limitations of traditional leftist (and classist) spaces and institutions in anticolonial work. Instead of risking Giorgio's comforts and privileges to warn Said Bona and change the events of the future, Acilde/Giorgio opts for the Dominican art scene and establishes a laboratory at Playa Bo with his wife, Linda, to study the coral reef. Both Columbus's making of himself into the "Chosen One" for biblical and medieval Christian prophecy and Acilde/Giorgio's decision to ignore their destiny as the "Chosen One" in the Olokun prophecy highlight the question of agency and selfhood for those prophesied to be "Chosen One." Columbus, in fashioning himself as the indispensable "Chosen One" destined to fulfill apocalyptic prophecy, helped set into motion the Spanish imperial and European settler-

colonial machine and plantation economy. Acilde, on the other hand, refuses to fulfill their destiny when, as Giorgio, they are in a position to reap the white supremacist, classist, and heteronormative benefits of this ongoing machine. However, despite their refusal, Acilde/Roque/Giorgio still end up being carried by History; their denial of the prophecy is still a fulfillment of the historical teleology that Columbus set up.

In a 2015 interview with Carolina Venegas-K. for the Colombian newspaper, *El Tiempo*, Indiana describes *La mucama*'s main character as a type of Messiah trying to survive capitalism who "utiliza sus poderes para viajar en el tiempo y lucrarse, que es lo que haría un humano común" ("uses their powers to travel in time and get rich, which is what any typical person would do"; my trans.). Can we blame Acilde/Giorgio for their final decision? Much like the Hebrew prophets' bodies Graybill studies, Acilde's body/bodies also experience immense transformations and suffering seemingly in the service of the prophecy. In their life in the twenty-first century, Acilde is the child of a Dominican immigrant, Jennifer, "una trigueña de pelo bueno" who migrated to Milan with the hopes of being a model but ended up addicted to heroin and performing sex work in the metro stations of Rome ("a brunette with good hair"; 18; Obejas 11). After being born, Acilde was brought back to the Dominican Republic to be raised by their abusive grandparents who targeted Acilde for their masculine tendencies. Most importantly, Acilde's initiation into the Olokun prophecy is marked by rape—after performing oral sex on Eric in the Parque Mirador, Eric forces himself on Acilde and anally rapes them before offering them the job as Esther's *mucama*. Acilde is then trapped in prison for 10 years at the hands of President Said Bona. Much like spirit possession's disruption of the body and time as theoretical categories and social constructs, Acilde/Giorgio/Roque is a protagonist that exists in three different bodies and time periods who chooses comfort and security over the fulfillment

of the prophecy even when that comfort comes at the price of Caribbean marine life and is made possible by colonial systems of dehumanization and oppression.

When Carolina Venegas-K. asks Indiana to classify the novel, whether she considers it science fiction or just an intuitive reading of the Caribbean, Indiana replies: "Prefiero llamarla historia especulativa… El problema es que, como sabemos, en Latinoamérica la ficción se queda corta en comparación con la realidad" ("I prefer to call it speculative history… The problem is that, as we know, in Latin America fiction falls short compared to reality"; my trans.). In calling the novel a work in speculative history rather than speculative or science fiction, Indiana's commentary on contemporary Dominican and Latin American politics, like the La Sentencia ruling, depends more on unearthing the legacy of the colonial past than on estranging the reader from the present. While the "recolectores automáticos," Rainbow Bright, and PriceSpy technologies in the novel do have an alienating effect, the roles they play in the novel as world-building elements and plot devices fade into the background as Acilde/Roque/Giorgio's time traveling and lived experiences come to the fore and highlight all that is familiar in the novel, especially for those acquainted with Latin American colonial and postcolonial histories: Acilde's ten years in prison brings to mind the imprisonment of political dissidents practiced by several Latin American dictatorships and military regimes; President Said Bona's rise to power reflects the prevalence of populism in current Latin American and North American politics; and Giorgio's road to success and wealth during the tail end of the Balaguer dictatorship speaks to how ubiquitous white supremacy continues to be throughout the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island. If speculative and science fiction, like utopian or dystopian fiction, imagines other worlds or times to comment on, critique, or problematize the here and now, then Indiana's commentary on the present state of politics and anti-Haitianism on Haiti-Quisqueya equally

depends on an imagined post-apocalyptic Dominican Republic in the future *as well as* the island's colonial and recent past. The letter from Columbus's fourth voyage quoted above was supposedly written on the seventh of July, 1503, just ten years before the *Requerimiento* and thirteen years before the first sugar mill was built on Haiti-Quisqueya, when Indiana begins her timeline for the performance piece *Sugar/Azúcal*. In placing *La mucama de Omicunlé* in conversation with Columbus's *Libro de las profecías*, I bridge the 535-year gap between the events of 1492 and 2027 and thus explore how Indiana reconceptualizes the colonial past in terms of the current manifestations of colonial dehumanization and her imagined apocalyptic future for the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean in general. Through Acilde's various bodies and experiences living in both the historical past and in an imagined future, Indiana reveals the political complexities and problems of the present, including the problem of xenophobic nationalism, racism, dehumanization, and anti-Haitian violence simultaneously seen in the 2013 "La Sentencia" ruling and in "los recolectores automáticos" at the beginning of the novel.

Reading and writing prophecy *en dominicano* allows for such human complexity and contradictions and offers a geographic and temporal remapping that moves the island of Haiti-Quisqueya from the margins to the center of how the story of Western modernity is told as well as how possible futures are imagined. The western apocalyptic and prophetic traditions, of which Columbus's *Libro de las profecías* is a part, can no longer be studied in isolation from colonialism and its universalizing timeline and Eurocentric understanding of geography and place, knowledge and knowledge making, and the Human and the body—all of which are significant factors in the problem of dehumanization within Western modernity, in all its various manifestations and guises. Additionally, in questioning and challenging claims to resistance and

liberation made by established Caribbean and Latin American leftist and revolutionary institutions, Indiana demonstrates how practitioners of a Caribbean religion with historical roots in revolt and resistance, like Dominican Vodou, can succumb to and perpetuate the colonial violence of dehumanization and anti-Black racism foundational to Western modernity *if* those who wield power become corrupted by modernity's empty promises. Writing prophecy *en dominicano* challenges the idea of the universal or the generic—be it the demands of the publishing industry to write in a Spanish that they consider more universally accessible or even Western modernity's claims to universality (especially claims to "progress," History, or time)—and brings to the fore the complexities and contradictions of Haiti-Quisqueya's relationship and history with modernity. As Maja Horn notes in *Masculinity After Trujillo: The Politics of Gender in Dominican Literature* (2014), Rita Indiana is part of a generation of Dominican writers and artists that challenge "hegemonic Dominican national discourses that previous writers and intellectuals, even those associated with the political Left, had failed to offer." Coming of age "during the politically disenchanted and newly consumerist years of the second Joaquín Balaguer administration (1986-1996)," this generation of artists and writers then bore witness to the continuation of political clientelism and authoritarianism under the administrations that followed Balaguer, starting with the election of President Leonel Fernández in 1996 and his failure to investigate numerous cases of political corruption from the Balaguer years (107).

Sylvia Wynter argues that the early days of Spanish and Portuguese colonization and the U.S.'s interventions, sanctions, and invasions in Haiti throughout the twentieth century are evidence that "History seemed to be repeating itself" ("The Pope Must Have Been Drunk" 20). The basis of her argument comes from her approach to studying human actuality and lived experience ("culture as actuality") that allows her to revisit and rethink the historical and

epistemological roots of Western modernity from within the Caribbean of the sixteenth century *and* the Caribbean of the twentieth century—a temporal movement and spatial re-centering similar to *La mucama*. In this chapter, I have placed Indiana's use of prophecy in dialogue with Columbus and situate this dialogue within the larger history and trajectory of Caribbean poetics and its preoccupation with the continuing problem of dehumanization and anti-black racism within Western modernity and its universalizing claims to time (the coloniality of time) and History. Generations of Caribbean and postcolonial scholars, writers, and artists have tackled this problem in relation to various fields of inquiry and the legacies of colonialism that deny the humanity and right to selfhood of some while upholding the privilege and claim to full humanity of others. For example, by focusing on the development of European epistemology and fields of knowledge, including the sciences, anthropology, and botany, scholars such as Walter D. Mignolo, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, and Richard Drayton have shed light on the fact that "'the West' is always a fiction" that, through colonialism, has projected itself "as the sole legitimate site for the universal" (Trouillot 1-2). Columbus's use of biblical prophecies and eschatology to make sense of his voyages and defend his status and access to wealth eventually made way for the colonization of other continents and the forced movement of millions of peoples across oceans and borders for the last 500 years. The initial encounter of 1492—though inspired by medieval interpretations of biblical prophecies, ancient predictions of unknown lands, and late-medieval and early-Renaissance cartography and geography—made the Enlightenment and European scientific revolution possible, thus laying the groundwork for new fields of knowledge and inquiry that often collaborated with colonial projects and perpetuated white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity.

The Caribbean writer has a duty to explore the obsessive presence of the past, particularly the colonial past which has yet to be written or recognized as official history, Glissant argues. "The past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us." Through active engagement with this past, the Caribbean writer participates in "a prophetic vision of the past" in which the past is shown to have a continuous relevance and impact on the immediate present and even the future. Whether or not this type of engagement with the past can or should be called a "duty" for the Caribbean writer is a question for further exploration elsewhere. In *La mucama,* however, Rita Indiana cultivates and harnesses such a prophetic vision of and engagement with the distant colonial past, the recent post-Trujillato and Balaguer past, and an imagined post-apocalyptic future and challenges dominant worldviews and incomplete (often whitewashed and exclusionary) versions of history, including Dominican, Caribbean, and modern Western "History." If the U.S.'s actions in Haiti provided evidence that History (i.e. colonialism and the coloniality of time) seemed to be repeating itself for Wynter, Indiana's use of prophecy in *La mucama* to shed light on the complexities and contradictions of Dominican history, politics, and everyday life seems to confirm Wynter's suspicions.

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CHAPTER TWO

Undressing the Apocalyptic Mexican Virgin: Controversies and Real Chicana Miracles with Alma López's *Our Lady* (1999)

> A great sign appeared in the sky, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars.
> -Revelation 12.1

> When I see *la Virgen de Guadalupe* I want to lift her dress as I did my dolls' and look to see if she comes with *chones*, and does her *panocha* look like mine, and does she have dark nipples too? Yes, I am certain she does. She is not neuter like Barbie. She gave birth. She has a womb. *Blessed art thou and blessed is the fruit of thy womb*… Blessed art thou, Lupe, and, therefore, blessed am I.
> -Sandra Cisneros, "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess"

On March 19, 2001, just weeks after the *Cyber Arte: Tradition Meets Technology* exhibition opened at the Museum of International Folk Art (MOIFA) in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Chicano activist and conservative Catholic José Villegas Sr. sent a scorching email to artist Alma López in response to her digital photo collage featured in the exhibition, *Our Lady* (1999). Within the email, Villegas accused López of crossing "sacred boundaries of our gentes [*sic*] traditional values" and warned that "you [López] cannot impose and/or provoke thought on an issue that will inflame emotions against your own gente." He then proceeded to reference the Immaculate Conception—the Catholic dogma that the Virgin Mary was free from original sin from the moment she was conceived—to highlight López's supposed disregard for "Our sacred images and religious symbols," claiming that:

> Our Nuestra de Guadalupe picture really constitutes Guadalupe. It is taken as representing the Immaculate Conception… Our sacred images and religious symbols is [*sic*] the foundation of our faith and belief systems in place and should not be taken advantage of… Again, these sacred images belong to the indigenous people of the Americas, not you and/or your new-age ideology that your exhibit portrays as "CyberArte Tradition Meets Technology." (qtd. in Pérez 154-155)

Villegas's repeated use of the possessive adjectives "Our" and "Nuestra" contrasts starkly to his use of the subject pronoun and possessive adjective "you" and "your" when addressing López directly; the Chicano activist's objections to López's *Our Lady* are enforced by an exclusionary syntax designed to ostracize López from the Chicano nation and preclude *Our Lady* from that nation's "sacred images and religious symbols."[63] Interestingly, within Villegas's attempt to deny López of ethnic and cultural belonging to mexicanidad lies a hidden history of controversies and debates surrounding both the Immaculate Conception and the Virgen de Guadalupe that spans centuries, from Medieval disputes between the Franciscan and Dominican monastic orders to humanistic debates regarding the historicity of La Virgen's miraculous apparition in early colonial Mexico. When recontextualized within this centuries-long history of controversy surrounding La Virgen, Villegas's exclusionary syntax points to an equally long history of semiotic power struggles over who gets to determine (and control) the meaning of this iconic, polyvalent sign—particularly when she is undressed and on public display. For Villegas, the controversy surrounding *Our Lady* provided an opportunity to enact a colonial bordering around the La Virgen, that is, a colonial imagining of belonging/exclusion that obscures the complexities surrounding Guadalupe, her history, and her significance for those who have borne the brunt of such exclusion and violence.

Originally inspired by Sandra Cisneros's essay "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess" (first published in *Ms.* in 1996), Lopez's *Our Lady* challenges Catholic orthodoxy and Chicano nationalist adherence to and perpetuation of the Catholic Church's homophobic and patriarchal creeds and institutions by re-visualizing La Virgen as a strong, nearly naked Chicana woman

[63] In her study of the controversies and protests surrounding *Our Lady* and the MOIFA exhibition, including the scathing letters and emails sent by Villegas and other male Chicano activists, Emma Pérez notes that "no one woman arose as a persistent critic in the same way certain men performed dogged condemnation… an explicit patriarchal, Chicano nationalist voice would not go away" ("The Decolonial Virgin in a Colonial Site" 152).

(modeled by the performance artist, Raquel Salinas), cloaked in fragments of the Coyolxauhqui stone, whose breasts, hips, and vulva are covered with roses. In undressing the Virgen de Guadalupe, *Our Lady* serves as López's response to Cisneros's question of whether La Virgen has a *real* Chicana woman's body under her clothes. For this chapter, I recontextualize the controversy inspired by López's *Our Lady* by looking at the long history of controversies surrounding the Virgen de Guadalupe, including La Virgen's ties to the controversial dogma of the Immaculate Conception, the *Mulier amicta sole* ("Woman clothed in the Sun") in the Book of Revelation, and debates regarding the historicity (and veracity) of La Virgen's apparition account and miraculous image in colonial and post-independence Mexico. In recontextualizing and re-historicizing the *Our Lady* controversy, I aim to explore La Virgen's connection to the Immaculate Conception, including its political and religious importance for the Spanish empire's early colonial efforts in present-day Mexico and the U.S. borderlands as well as the dogma's implications for women's sexuality and religious experiences, especially for queer women. I am particularly interested in exploring the imaginative, creative, and relational act of undressing La Virgen in connection with this history of controversies and debates, as well as investigating the role controversy plays in defining and renegotiating a community's (or nation's) identity. Why have so many Chicana/x, Latina/x, and Latin American feminist artists, writers, and theologians—including Alma López, Yolanda López, Sandra Cisneros, and Marcella Althaus-Reid, to name a few—expressed the desire to undress the Virgin? What are the historical precedents for this controversial desire? And lastly, what is at stake when the Virgen de Guadalupe, an icon of immense religious, cultural, and transnational importance, is depicted with exposed skin?

In the first section of this chapter, I engage in textual and visual analysis to trace the apocalyptic influences in La Virgen's iconic, flaming sunburst (also known as an aureola) to the iconographical tradition of the Immaculate Conception while also highlighting the participation of indigenous artists and pigments in the creation of the original "miraculous" painting. I am particularly interested in the influence of apocalypticism and apocalyptic prophecy in Miguel Sánchez's (1594-1674) apparition account, *Imagen de la Virgen María, Madre de Dios de Guadalupe* (1648), as well as the controversies that followed its publication regarding the historicity of Sánchez's version of La Virgen's apparition in the sixteenth century. I connect these colonial controversies to the modern-day controversy surrounding López's *Our Lady* and explore the role controversy plays in the formation of community and national identity through the contested semiotic significance of La Virgen as a transnational sign and symbol. In the second section of this chapter, I enlist the work of Marcella Althaus-Reid and her queering of Liberation Theology to examine the desire to undress La Virgen in relation to the everyday lives and sexualities of marginalized and colonized communities in Latin America. Inspired by Althaus-Reid's discussion of Chicana feminist re-imaginings of Guadalupe, as well as her comparison of La Virgen's aureola to the vulva and clitoris, I investigate how Chicana/x feminist artists and writers reconcile La Virgen's colonial origins and ties with heteronormative Latin American decency politics with her potential to be a source of liberation for marginalized communities. Lastly, in the final section, Chicana feminism, performance studies scholarship, and Guadalupan theologies aid my exploration of what it means for the Virgen de Guadalupe to be "real" for Chicana/x feminist and lesbian writers and artists—like Cisneros and López—and how these writers and artists undress La Virgen to both prove and relate to her realness. The centuries of controversies and debates regarding the historicity and veracity of La Virgen's original apparition

account and miraculous image tell the story of Guadalupe's often contested place in the formation of Mexican and Chicano national identities. Likewise, López's desire to undress Guadalupe, as seen in *Our Lady*, continues this story by highlighting La Virgen's ever evolving place in the making of queer and lesbian Chicanx/a/o and Mexican American identities and communities.

The Flaming Virgin's Apocalyptic and Controversial Origins

> "Esta es la Imagen, que con las señas de Agustino, mi Santo, hallé en la Isla de Patmos, en poder del Apostol y Evangelista San Juan, á quien arrodillandome se la pedí, le declaré el motivo, y le propuse la pretension de celebrar con ella á María Virgen Madre suya en una Imagen milagrosa, que gozava la Ciudad de Mexico, con título de *Guadalupe*… Dixe, que si en su Imagen estava significada la Yglesia, tambien por mano de María Virgen, se avia ganado y conquistado aqueste nuevo mundo, y en su cabeça Mexico fundado la Yglesia."
>
> -Miguel Sánchez, *Imagen de la Virgen María Madre de Dios de Guadalupe* (1648)[64]

According to the apparition story first published in Miguel Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María Madre de Dios de Guadalupe* in 1648, it was in December 1531 that the Virgin of Guadalupe first appeared to the indigenous neophyte, Juan Diego, at the hill of Tepeyac in present-day Mexico City and enlisted his aid in convincing Archbishop Juan de Zumárraga to build a shrine there in her honor. After several failed attempts to win the archbishop's favor, the Virgin instructed Juan Diego to collect out-of-season flowers blooming on the hill of Tepeyac and take them to the archbishop as proof of her miraculous appearance. Juan Diego collected the flowers in his *tilmatli* (cape or cloak) and, upon unraveling the *tilmatli* in the presence of the archbishop, discovered the miraculous image of the Virgen imprinted on the garment. According to the Catholic Church and millions of believers, this miraculous image is said to be an

[64] "This is the Image, that with signs from Augustine, my Saint, I found on the Island of Patmos, in the possession of the Apostle and Evangelist Saint John, to whom I asked for it while kneeling and declared my motive and proposed the desire to celebrate with it Mary Virgin Mother in her miraculous Image, enjoyed in Mexico City, with the title of *Guadalupe*… I said, that Her Image signified the Church, and also through Virgin Maria's efforts, the new world had been won and conquered, and the Church found its head in Mexico." (All translations for the *Imagen* from the original Spanish to English are my own).

acheiropoieton, an icon or miraculous image not made by human hands, and the same relic currently housed in the basilica of the Virgen de Guadalupe in Mexico City. Surrounded by the radiant flames of an aureola and standing on top of a crescent moon, the prayerful Virgin of Guadalupe bears a clear resemblance to the *Mulier amicta sole* ("Woman Clothed with the Sun," also known as the Woman of the Apocalypse) described in Rev. 12.1—a connection with the Apocalypse Sánchez would elaborate and promote in his theology on the Virgen 117 years after her first miraculous appearance, as seen in the epigraph above.

La Virgen's theological and visual ties to the Apocalypse mirror the apocalyptic beliefs and religious motivations that, at least in part, fueled the early invasion and colonization of present-day Mexico, Central America, and the U.S. borderlands. For example, Hernán Cortés's fourth letter to the king Carlos V requested that the Spanish crown send missionaries, specifically Franciscan and Dominican friars, to evangelize the native peoples; the king responded by sending a party of twelve Franciscans (emulating the twelve apostles) to aid Cortés in evangelizing and establishing the new viceroyalty. The Franciscan missionary and historian Jerónimo de Mendieta (1525-1604) would later describe Cortés as "the New Moses who had opened the lands in the New World for missionaries to initiate a new Christendom" in his *Historia eclesiástica indiana* ("Indian Ecclesiastical History") (West 306).[65] Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María, Madre de Dios de Guadalupe* was heavily influenced by the writings of

[65] Delno C. West details the apocalyptic motivations of the early Franciscan missionaries in colonial Mexico who came with an eschatological tradition and the thirteenth and fourteenth-century idea of apocalyptic conversion. The Spiritual branch of the Franciscan order was particularly influenced by pseudo-Joachimite writings, as was Christopher Columbus in his *Libro de las profecías*; for the Spiritual Franciscans of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, calls for Church reform and global missionary efforts set the stage for Columbus and what West calls "New World eschatology:" "The circulation of apocalyptic writings and their popularity coincided with the desire for a fundamental redemption in the Franciscan Order and indeed the entire Christian Church in Spain. The Protestant Reformation, coming on the heels of the discovery of the New World, added more fuel to the apocalyptic fires already burning in Spain… Christopher Columbus's attraction to prophetic interpretation of events set the stage for New World eschatology, and his close ties to the Franciscan order placed him within their circle of mysticism" ("Medieval Ideas of Apocalyptic Mission and the Early Franciscans in Mexico" 302).

Saint Augustine and the political importance of the Immaculate Conception for the Franciscan order and the early Spanish empire.[66] Sánchez's interpretation of the original Guadalupe image and apparition account was also shaped by the prevalence of *Mulier amicta sole* imagery within the Immaculate Conception's iconographical tradition as well as the doctrine's political and religious significance for Spanish society throughout the seventeenth century. By the late nineteenth century, during the celebration of the coronation of the Virgen de Guadalupe, the Bishop of Colima described the hill of Tepeyac as the site of "the Mexican Zion" and compared the sanctuary dedicated to the Virgin to the Temple of Jerusalem.[67] As a figure of immeasurable religious and cultural importance, the Virgen de Guadalupe's continued relevance over the centuries can be attributed to her status as "a polyvalent signifier that straddles the secular-religious divide" (Knauss 124). La Virgen's apocalyptic legacy therefore provides a way to bridge the distant colonial past with *Our Lady*'s controversial reshaping and forging of the future of Chicanx/a/o identities and communities.[68]

As the art historian Jeanette Favrot Peterson demonstrates in her monumental study of the visual history of the Virgen de Guadalupe, *Visualizing Guadalupe: From Black Madonna to*

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[66] As Suzanne L. Stratton notes in *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish Art* (1994), while the public devotion of the *Reyes Católicos* (Queen Isabella I of Castile and King Ferdinand II of Aragon) began to wane in their sixteenth-century successors, the Immaculate Conception remained a prominent feature of Spanish Catholicism in both popular religious devotion and among theologians: "the belief in the Immaculate Conception filtered from Franciscan theologians to the monarchs of Spain to the nobility and finally to the people" (36-37).

[67] On October 12, 1895, the month-long celebration of the coronation of the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe began at churches and cathedrals throughout Mexico. The coronation celebration in Mexico City culminated with a procession of twenty-two Mexican archbishops and bishops—joined by seventeen prelates from the United States, Canada, Havana, and Panama—to the hill of Tepeyac and the newly renovated sanctuary dedicated to La Virgen. During the festivities, the Bishop of Colima described Tepeyac as "the Mexican Zion" and compared the sanctuary to the Temple at Jerusalem. Other priests and bishops present asserted "that the foundation of Mexico could be dated from the apparition… since she [the Virgin] had then liberated its people from the bondage of idolatry and tyranny… they saluted the Virgin as the foundress of the new, mestizo nation" (Brading 9).

[68] Luz Calvo defines the Virgen de Guadalupe as a "polyvalent sign, able to convey multiple and divergent meanings and deployed by different groups for contradictory political ends." La Virgen's polyvalence and ubiquity in Mexican and Chicanx/a/o cultural production make her "a sign that is especially available for semiotic resignification and cultural transformation" ("Art Comes for the Archbishop" 96-97).

Queen of the Americas (2014), the original painting of the Mexican Virgin is a synthesis of sources and influences, including: the doctrinal and iconographic influences of the Immaculate Conception and the Assumption of Mary in Spanish art and worship in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the sacrality of blackness and popularity of Black Madonnas throughout Catholic Europe (including the Spanish Guadalupe), the apocalyptic and millenarian beliefs and writings of the early Spanish missionaries, and the participation of indigenous painters and worshippers in the making of the original painting and the spread of the Virgin's cult in early colonial Mexico. In this section I explore how Sánchez's *Imagen*, as the earliest known published Virgen de Guadalupe apparition account, and the original miraculous image itself are intimately tied to apocalyptic beliefs and prophecies as well as to the controversies surrounding the then doctrine of the Immaculate Conception that beset Spanish Catholic society throughout the seventeenth century. I investigate the role(s) controversy plays in the formation of communities and even national identities by focusing on the Virgin of Guadalupe's long history of controversy, particularly her relationship to the Immaculate Conception (via the iconography of the *Mulier amicta sole,* also known as the "Woman of the Apocalypse") and how this dogma brings questions of sin, decency, and the body to bear on the Virgin. I pay close attention to the iconography and visual culture and history of La Virgen and consider how her visual history complicates dominant narratives surrounding the original painting's creation and brings questions of materiality, embodiment, and abstraction from corporeality to bear on the Virgin. What are the historical precedents of the controversy surrounding López's *Our Lady* and what does this history *reveal* about the intersection of gender, sexuality, indigeneity, and religiosity within contemporary Chicanx/a/o identities and communities?

On March 31, 2001, less than two weeks after he sent his email to Alma López, Villegas organized a procession-protest in the parking lot of the MOIFA. The procession was headed by a shrine to the Virgin and included public prayers, petitions, and speeches decrying the apparent sacrilegious nature of the museum's exhibition and the *Our Lady* digital collage itself. Some of the procession participants carried signs with written demands to "Stop Blasphemy now!" and "Honor thy Mother!" while others chanted threats of violence against López and museum officials, including "Burn her!" and "Burn them!" Henry Casso, one of *Our Lady*'s most vocal critics, also participated in Villegas's procession-protest and was one of the Chicano men and male church officials who spoke at the event.[69] In a memo he hand-delivered on June 20 to then archbishop of Santa Fe, Michael J. Sheehan (who was also present at the procession-protest), Casso condemned the MOIFA *Cyber Arte* exhibition as an "Occult Chapel" due to the "pervasive use of symbols that parody a Catholic Chapel."[70] He further claimed that the museum raised suspicions of being a "Satanic Chapel" because of the "pagan revival and the animosity of the occult movements toward the Catholic Faith and the People of God" (qtd. in Gaspar de Alba 215). Charged with the rhetoric of the "satanic panic" that swept through U.S. Catholic and Protestant communities in the 1980s, Casso's memo echoes the sixteenth-century accusations of Bernardino de Sahagún who described the use of the title "Tonantzin" ("Our Precious Mother")

[69] In her observations about the procession-protest, Alicia Gaspar de Alba notes how clearly traditional gender roles were upheld by both the male organizers of the event (including Villegas, Casso, and the archbishop) and the female participants who fulfilled "their submissive role in patriarchy, doing the praying, the chanting, and the crying." Gaspar de Alba continues: "Because the protest was ultimately about determining not just who owns the Virgin of Guadalupe, who has the power to dictate what the Mother of God looks like but, more important, how faith will be exercised and how women are supposed to behave within the faith, it was men who initiated the protest against *Our Lady* and took center stage in the spectacle… the male defenders of the City of Faith wanted to manifest their predetermined right to control women's bodies, particularly the body of the woman they were all claiming as their mother" ("Devil in a Rose Bikini" 228-29).

[70] On the Archdiocese of Santa Fe website, Archbishop Sheehan made his opinion of *Our Lady* public. In "Archbishop Michael J. Sheehan on *Our Lady* of Guadalupe Portrayal," Sheehan called López's piece "insulting and sacrilegious" and compared *Our Lady* to "a tart or a street woman." For more information, see Luz Calvo's "Art Comes for the Archbishop: The Semiotics of Contemporary Chicana Feminism and the Work of Alma López" (2004).

by indigenous converts as an "invención satánica" (a satanic invention) and an example of idolatry.[71] The calls to burn López, museum officials, and *Our Lady* also hearken back to the early colonial period when missionary-trained indigenous painters were subjected to Church oversight and censorship; the indigenous painters' works were sometimes burned if the Church deemed the paintings were either heretical in nature or poorly executed (Peterson 115). When seen through the lens of the coloniality of power and gender, the actions and discourse of Villegas, Casso, Sheehan, and the procession participants brought the Eurocentric and patriarchal religious discourses of colonial "Nueva España" forward to the early twenty-first century.

In addition to repeating patriarchal, homophobic, and colonial attempts to control women, women's sexualities, and marginalized people's relationship with La Virgen, Villegas's procession-protest and Casso's memo provide two clear examples of how the religious categories of "the sacred" and "the sacrilegious" (or "the blasphemous" and "the satanic") are used to define the limits of inclusion and exclusion within a community as well as control and border women and women's sexuality and place within said community. The controversy led by male Chicano community leaders and church officials was, in part, a response to the "Our" in the title of López's digital print. Despite the Church's colonizing homophobia and misogyny (and Villegas's exclusionary syntax) López's *Our Lady* challenges the erasure of LGBTQ Chicanx/a/o

[71] In the second volume of his *Historia general de las cosas de Nueva España*, also known as the Florentine Codex (1569), Sahagún describes the history of indigenous worship at the hill of Tepeyac in what would come to be known as Mexico City. He recounts the worship of an indigenous goddess *Tonantzin* at the site that now hosted worship of the Virgin of Guadalupe and expresses concern for the use of the title *Tonantzin* by indigenous converts to refer to the Virgin. Describing the use of the title *Tonantzin* as a "satanic invention," Sahagún even goes so far as to express suspicion of the popularity of the site among indigenous converts, saying: "Y vienen agora a visitor a esta *Tonantzin* de muy lexos, tan lexos como de antes; la cual devoción también es sospechosa, porque en todas partes hay muchas Iglesias de Nuestra Señora y no van a ellas, y vienen de lexas tierras a esta *Tonantzin*, como antiguamente" ("And they [indigenous converts] now come to visit this *Tonantzin* from afar, as far away as before; such devotion is also suspicious because there are many churches dedicated to Our Lady everywhere but they do not go to them, they come from afar to this *Tonantzin*, as they always did"; vol. 2, "Nota" for "Párrafo sesto," Capítulo Duodecimo, 937). Translation from the original Spanish to English is my own.

and Mexican American relationships with La Virgen from Guadalupan theologies and iconography. López's use of the possessive adjective "Our" both mimics the many dogmatic, devotional, and place-based titles for the Virgin Mary (e.g., Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, Our Lady of Mercy, Our Lady of Loreto, etc.) and identifies what Alicia Gaspar de Alba calls a "social body," a community of people unified in its relationship with and devotional claim to La Virgen. Likewise, in generating and promulgating the controversy in response to *Our Lady*, Chicano community leaders and male church officials created a different social body, "a physical and a virtual community of offended Catholics and angry taxpayers demanding that their faith be respected" (Gaspar de Alba 229).[72]

Controversies are public debates, disputes, and disagreements that both require and create community, a sense of "we" or "us," that utilizes the object of controversy to differentiate itself from a perceived "them" or "Other." In the continuing process of community identity formation, objects of controversy function as ever changing and ever moving dividing lines, or borders, that mark a split between two or more opposing factions or camps within a society. *Our Lady*, as an object of controversy, demarcated a split within the Santa Fe and greater Mexican American and Mexican community of believers and admirers of La Virgen that evolved into two opposing social bodies: those who found artistic and spiritual inspiration and connection in López's revisualization of Guadalupe (or at the very least supported the artist's first amendment right to freedom of expression) and those who took offense to *Our Lady* and supported the religiously-

[72] In her analysis of the procession-protest, Alicia Gaspar de Alba draws on the works of Peter Caster and Peggy Phelan and describes the procession-protest as an example of "staged activism" in which a social body, a sense of "we," is generated through a performative political investment that, applying theatrical strategies of representation, draws the audience into a shared sense of responsibility to act. Gaspar de Alba describes the creation of a "we" that resulted from the procession-protest in theatrical terms: "By casting themselves in the role of the oppressed children of a maligned mother, the protestor-pilgrims performed the social discourse of a people clamoring for salvation and in need of deliverance from evil, which in turn created both a physical and a virtual community of offended Catholics and angry taxpayers demanding that their faith be respected" ("Devil in a Rose Bikini" 229).

motivated attempts at censorship of the artist and the *Cyber Arte* exhibition as a whole. The threats of violence ("Burn her!") both López and museum officials received are examples of the use of controversy-fueled violence to not only define the limits of a community and that community's insiders ("the Catholic Faith and the People of God"); more importantly and broadly, the calls to destroy *Our Lady*, burn the museum, or cause physical harm against López also reflect a larger pattern of violence being implicated in the identity formation of communities and national imaginaries and the ethno-national bordering of people, particularly in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands. Following Nicole Guidotti-Hernández's work on the history of nineteenth and twentieth-century violence in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, the threats of violence against López and museum officials that accompanied (and was fed by) the *Our Lady* controversy have an historical precedent in the use of violence and abjection by U.S., Mexican, and Chicano nationalism "for the consolidation of their narratives of loss and triumph, of national risk and consolidation" (*Unspeakable Violence* 9). The threats of violence against López implicate both those generating the controversy and the artist in an "ongoing social process of differentiation for racialized, sexualized, gendered subjects" which marks López as an objectionable outsider from the Santa Fe Mexican American community and from the Chicano nation as a whole—on top of López's outsider status for both U.S. and Mexican national imaginaries—for being a Mexican-born lesbian Chicana from California who dared to undress the Virgen de Guadalupe (3).[73]

Both men question López's belonging to the Chicano national imaginary by labeling the artist a New Age ideologue, pagan, and occultist who threatens "the Catholic Faith and the

[73] Guidotti-Hernández elaborates how violence touches everyone involved in the process of differentiation and national identity formation and consolidation: "When violence leaves its ineffaceable mark, it does not create merely a self-other relationship between violator and violated: rather everyone involved, spectators, enactors of violence, and the recipients of violence, is differentiated through her or his role in these processes. Violence is an underlying social process of differentiation for all involved" (*Unspeakable Violence* 9).

People of God" and takes advantage of and steals the Virgen de Guadalupe from "the indigenous people of the Americas." Furthermore, Villegas's reference to the Immaculate Conception and allusion to Chicano and Mexican nationalist indigenismo obscure and neglect La Virgen's complicated colonial history as well as the centuries-long history of controversy and debate surrounding her apparition and miraculous image. Villegas dehistoricizes the Virgen de Guadalupe and references a decontextualized, abstract social body of indigenous people to whom La Virgen supposedly (and exclusively) belongs to uphold narratives of "homophobic, essentialist, indigenous neonationalisms in an Anglo/Mexican binary" (Guidotti-Hernández 20).[74] Re-historicizing La Virgen therefore requires an exploration of the Immaculate Conception, the history of controversies surrounding the dogma, and its political (and apocalyptic) importance for the Spanish empire's early colonial efforts in the Americas. Additionally, unravelling the Virgen de Guadalupe's connection to the Immaculate Conception recontextualizes La Virgen within the historical process of colonization and permits a more complex and grounded consideration of the roles of indigenous beliefs, pigments, and artists in the creation of the original Guadalupe painting. Lastly, delving into the history of controversy surrounding La Virgen complicates Villegas and Casso's strategic use of controversy to reject López from the Chicano national imaginary and reveals that "Our Lady of Controversy" is nothing new.[75]

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[74] One of the most important contributions of Guidotti-Hernández's *Unspeakable Violence* (2011) is her interrogation of Chicano nationalism and Chicano/a studies scholarship that end up perpetuating epistemic violence in their reliance on over-simplified narratives of resistance, indigenismo, and mestizaje, particularly the "Chicano/a as Indian" paradigm based on an abstract, dehistoricized, and fetishized idea of "Indian essence." For example, Guidotti-Hernández argues: "Stepping out of a U.S. Chicano-based intellectual paradigm with its master narratives of mestizaje, the borderlands, and *lo indio*/*the Indian* would demonstrate that colonial aggressions are enacted by Chicana/os, Mexicano/as, and U.S. Mexicans as well" (14).

[75] The first section of this chapter and its focus on the role and impact of controversy on national imaginaries and community identities was greatly inspired by Alma López's 2008 piece, *Our Lady of Controversy II*, as well as the title for the volume dedicated to the *Our Lady* controversy edited by López and Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Our Lady of Controversy: Alma López's Irreverent Apparition* (University of Texas Press, 2011).

Unpacking the Immaculate Conception and its apocalyptic and colonial ties to the Virgen de Guadalupe first requires a brief overview of the dogma's theological significance and relationship with Mary's sexuality (or lack thereof). Within Roman Catholicism, original sin is the belief that humans inherit a flawed nature and propensity for sin from Adam and his first act of disobedience in the garden of Eden. For the early "Church Father" and influential theologian Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE), original sin was sexually transmitted and passed from parents to their unbaptized children through the soul-damaging effects of sexual desire.[76] Augustine's argument for the heritable nature of original sin raised the question of whether Mary, as the *Theotokos* ("God-Bearer"), was free from the stain of Adam's original disobedience and humanity's predilection for sin. If Christ was free from original sin because he was not the product of human sexual intercourse but rather was conceived of the Holy Spirit, and if Mary too was free from sin to give birth to Christ, then Mary had to be protected from the transmission of original sin. Though hotly debated as doctrine throughout the medieval and early modern periods—and not adopted as Church dogma until 1854 by Pope Pius IX—the Immaculate Conception served as an extra-biblical explanation for how Mary was free from original sin thanks to the Christian god's grace and intervention when she was conceived by her parents, Saint Anne and Saint Joachim.

The comparison between Eve and Mary also became increasingly popular among early Christian writers and theologians as Eve's apparent sinful nature was likened to all women and Mary was established as an abstract ideal of virginity and purity.[77] Sexuality became increasingly

[76] For example, in his *De bono coniugali* ("On the Good of Marriage"), Augustine argues that all sexual desire, even within the confines of Christian marriage, is touched by the dangers of lust and sin.
[77] For example, in his *Letter to Laetus* (Letter 243.10), Augustine states: "What is the difference whether it is in a wife or a mother, it is still Eve [the temptress] that we must beware of in any woman" (translation from the Latin by Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*, University of California Press, 1967, p. 63).

identified with the concept of sin and Eve was blamed for the Fall of humanity, making women more susceptible to sin.[78] As Sally Cunneen explains, the comparison between Mary and Eve along with the early Church Father's views on sin and sexuality would have long-lasting repercussions for women, as reflected in women's representation in Western art:

> A widening split between real women and the Fathers' views of an idealized Mary would also lie at the root of the representation of women in Western art, where Mary was almost never portrayed as a sexual being… Eve, on the other hand, was frequently portrayed as naked and voluptuous—and appropriately punished. (*In Search of Mary* 113)

The early Church Fathers' misogyny resulted in a transformation of Mary within Roman Catholic doctrine, dogma, theology, and iconography in which Mary the human being and mother became the Virgin Mary, the idealized feminine principal and "disciplinary object" whose body and absent sexuality could serve to police and enforce Western notions of female decency. Mary, therefore, could serve as a "panoptical figure who keeps incessant watch over their [women's] behavior and sexual conduct" as the Church consolidated its power across Europe and eventually reached what would come to be renamed as "the Americas" (Pérez-Gil 210). As we shall see, Mary's representation as the Immaculate Conception in visual art would play an important role in the controversy surrounding the Immaculate Conception in seventeenth-century Spain and the territories it colonized as the Church utilized visual art to counter the Protestant Reformation and Spanish Franciscan missionaries and priests made their way to the lands the Spanish Crown renamed *Nueva España* ("New Spain").

[78] In his treatise *On Paradise*, Ambrose (c. 340-397 CE) argues that Eve is inferior to Adam because she was created second and blames Eve for the Fall, stating that Adam "fell by his wife's fault, and not because of his own." Ambrose also compares all women to Eve and argues that women are more "liable first to do wrong… The woman is responsible for the man's error and not vice versa" (qtd. in Cunneen 110-111).

It was in 1615, during the reign of Felipe III (1578-1621), that the Immaculate Conception gained political importance for the Spanish Habsburgs as reports of violent confrontations between Franciscans and Dominicans in Seville reached the royal court, prompting Felipe III to create a *Real Junta* (Royal Committee) to address the conflict and officially throw the weight of the Crown behind the then doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The following year, in 1616, the Crown began sending embassies to Rome to attempt to have the Immaculate Conception declared a dogma, an article of faith and revealed truth requiring devotion by all devout Catholics; even though the Immaculate Conception would not be declared a dogma of faith until the mid-nineteenth century, the efforts of the Spanish embassies in Rome did result in a series of papal decrees throughout the seventeenth century that prohibited public expression of doubt in the doctrine and named December eighth the feast day of the Immaculate Conception.[79] Following the work of Pablo González Tornel, the controversy surrounding the Immaculate Conception provides a window into the consolidation of seventeenth-century Spanish national identity within the context of Spanish Marian devotion, the threat the Protestant Reformation leveled at the Church's orthodoxy and hegemony, the Inquisition, and Spain's colonial and imperial efforts. Specifically, González Tornel focuses on the accusation of scandal and the creation of a Maculist political "other" (Dominicans and those critical of the doctrine) by Conceptionist propaganda to "win Spanish society over to the doctrine… with the aim of polarizing public opinion and so swaying the sympathies of the church, the king, and society as a whole" ("The Immaculate Conception Controversy and the Accusation of Scandal" 157). In accusing Dominican Maculists in Seville and other Spanish cities of scandal—understood in the

[79] For example, in 1617, Pope Paul V (1550-1621) issued a decree forbidding any public expression of doubt in the doctrine. Later, in 1622, Pope Gregory XV (1554-1623) issued a new decree forbidding doubt altogether, both public and private, in the doctrine. Finally, in 1661, Pope Alexander VII (1599-1667) made the eighth of December the official feast day of the Immaculate Conception (González Tornel 157).

early modern period as insubordination to social rules and norms, to one's place in society, and to religious and political authority—Conceptionist Franciscans painted the Dominican Maculist critique as a threat to religious orthodoxy and unity, as an attack on the purity and honor of the Virgin Mary herself, and, ultimately, as a threat to peace in the king's realms and an act of political rebellion.[80] Often associated with both the Protestant Reformation and offenses tried by the Inquisition involving threats to religious authority and acts of subversion, the public accusation of scandal in early modern Spain served not only as a defense against religious dissidence but also to prevent civil unrest and insubordination as "the boundaries between religious discrepancy and civil rebellion were very diffuse" as Spain's national identity became increasingly enmeshed with religious orthodoxy (160).

In the case of the Immaculate Conception, controversy had formed part of the doctrine's legacy for centuries leading up to its political prominence in seventeenth-century Spain. The Dominican Order maintained it was impossible to prove that Mary had been conceived free of original sin—a stance they would formally defend at the Council of Trent, the nineteenth ecumenical council held between 1545 and 1563—and thus placed themselves in conflict with Conceptionist orders, like the Franciscans and, later, the Jesuits. By 1615, the Archbishop of Seville, Pedro de Castro (1534-1623), sent two Conceptionist prebends, Mateo Vázquez de Leca (1573-1649) and Bernardo de Toro (1570-1643), to the royal court to report on the supposedly violent confrontations that had taken place in the city between the Dominican Maculists and Franciscan and lay defenders of the Immaculate Conception. Seville became the epicenter of the

[80] González Tornel elaborates on his focus on the creation of a political and religious "other" by Franciscan Conceptionists in early modern Spain: "An enemy of the Immaculate Conception was manufactured and burdened with negative connotations, and the nation was then roused into taking a stand against it by leaping to the defense of Mary. The accusation of scandal was vital in the construction of this concept of otherness, which proved fundamental for the process of socializing the doctrine" (158).

Immaculate Conception controversy in early seventeenth-century Spain not only because of the political power of the ecclesiastical authorities that held sway there but also because of the Archbishop's concerted efforts to promote and foster public support for the doctrine. With the financial backing and support of Conceptionists like Mateo Vázquez de Leca and Bernardo de Toro, the Archbishop and his circle initiated an aggressive, systematic marketing campaign, utilizing the arts, music, and religious festivals and processions as propaganda to spread support for the Immaculate Conception in convents and schools, churches, and public spaces throughout the city. As González Tornel demonstrates, the Conceptionist campaign was so ubiquitous and intense, the Dominicans were "obliged to react," sending their own representatives to Felipe III's court to "denounce the constant aggression that was being suffered by the Order of St Dominic with the acquiescence of Archbishop Pedro de Castro" (163). Unfortunately for the Dominicans, the Conceptionist smear campaign was a success as Archbishop Pedro de Castro and his supporters undermined the political power of the Dominicans and "made the Order of Preachers [the Dominicans] into the enemy needed to goad the people into anger and support for the cause of the mystery [of the Immaculate Conception]" (164).

In the battle over the nature of the Virgin's conception in Seville and early modern Spain, the public display of competing images of both the Immaculate Conception and the Maculate Conception, as well as the destruction of Conceptionist images by Dominican Maculists, must be understood within the context of the Protestant Reformation and the accusation of idolatry aimed at the Catholic Church and its use of sacred images.[81] While the term "counterreformation" is an

[81] Amid the surviving documentation collected and written by Conceptionists at the time, various manuscripts and reports ascribe the destruction of images of the Immaculate Conception to Dominicans. For example, in 1615, a group of Sevillian Dominicans reportedly stole the titular image of the Brotherhood of the Conception at the convent of Regina Angelorum, causing a conflict that lasted nearly three years that culminated in a full-scale riot. Dominicans also reportedly burned an image of the Immaculate Conception during an Easter Thursday procession that same year and in 1616 Sevillian Dominicans had an image of Mary painted in which she was surrounded by the chain of original sin, thus emphasizing her Maculate Conception (González Tornel 166-67).

invention of nineteenth-century historians studying the Church's reaction to the Protestant Reformation in Europe, the religious crisis that broke out in sixteenth-century Europe prompted the Church to double down on the very aspects of Roman Catholicism the Protestants were critiquing and attacking: the visual and sensorial aspects of Catholic religiosity, including paintings, statues, holy relics, feasts, processions, and rituals.[82] By the beginning of the seventeenth century, as the Immaculate Conception controversy spread throughout Spain, Conceptionists like Archbishop Pedro de Castro weaponized the visual and sensorial manifestations of Catholic religiosity "to portray the two sides of the dispute in a similar way to the well-known opposition between Catholicism and the Reformation" and liken the Dominican Maculists to the Protestant threat to Catholic orthodoxy (González Tornel 171). The impact the Protestant Reformation had on the Church and its doctrines and dogmas, particularly those related to its use of sacred images, would eventually reach across the Atlantic Ocean through Spain and its early colonial efforts and, in the case of colonial Mexico, these colonized lands were often seen as a paradise free from the evil introduced by Martin Luther where the Church's promise of universal salvation could come to fruition.[83] In the case of the Immaculate Conception, its controversies, and iconography, the *Virreinato de Nueva España* provided a place for the early missionaries and colonizers to establish such a paradise as they incorporated the doctrine into their evangelizing efforts and apocalyptic beliefs regarding the Church's mission to spread the faith across the world.[84]

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[82] Following the work of such religious scholars and historians like Walter Zeeden, Heinz Schilling, and Wolfgang Reinhard, viewing the "Counterreformation" as simply a reaction against the Protestant Reformation would be an oversimplification of the sixteenth-century religious crisis in Europe. In addition to reacting to the Protestant threat to Catholic orthodoxy, the Church began a process of reforms to its power structures and consolidated its beliefs, doctrines, and dogmas, like the Immaculate Conception.

[83] See Alicia Mayer's "Política contrarreformista e imagen anti-luterana en Nueva España" (*Hispania Sacra*, Vol. LXVIII, 2016) for a complex look into the presence and impact of the Counterreformation in colonial Mexico.

[84] In her study of the Immaculate Conception in paintings in the lands the Spanish called the "viceroyalty of New Spain," Iraida Rodríguez-Negrón details how influential the Immaculate Conception doctrine was in the earliest

Nathalie Augier de Moussac's analysis of the *Tota Pulchra* ("All Beautiful," c. 1558) fresco in the Franciscan monastery dedicated to Saint Michael in Huejotzingo, Puebla, Mexico, provides one example of how the Immaculate Conception was featured within Franciscan missionary efforts and apocalyptic hopes. The image and title of the fresco refer to an early Catholic prayer dedicated to Mary as the Immaculate Conception; the prayer, inspired by Song of Songs 4:7, begins by asserting Mary's beauty in opposition to the "stain" of original sin: "You are all beautiful, Mary, and the original stain [of sin] is not in you." Flanked by images of the two theologians who initiated the Immaculate Conception debate in the thirteenth century—Saint Thomas Aquinas and John Duns Scotus—the Virgin in the *Tota Pulchra* in Huejotzingo is depicted in the center of the triptych with hands folded in prayer, standing on a crescent moon with stars surrounding her inclined head framed by an aureola. The *tota pulchra* as an iconographic tradition depicts the Virgin surrounded by her attributes, visual representations of Marian litanies and biblical phrases interpreted by biblical exegetes as forecasting the events in the New Testament.[85] Whereas the crescent moon at the Virgin's feet in many *tota pulchra* paintings, prints, and engravings referred not to Revelation 12 but rather to the Song of Songs, by the sixteenth century the iconographic traditions of the Immaculate Conception (as the *tota pulchra*) and the Assumption of Mary (as the *Mulier amicta sole*) became conflated due to the popularity of the Apocalyptic Woman in Spanish depictions of the Assumption since the late fifteenth century. Following the Immaculate Conception controversy and debates at the Council

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stages of Spanish colonization of present-day Mexico and Central America: "Soon after the conquest of New Spain, between the years 1519-1520, Hernán Cortes [sic]… wrote to King Charles V requiring the presence of missionary orders to aid in the conversion of Indians to Christianity. Around 1523 the Franciscan friars were among the first to come from Spain, and were soon followed by others like the Carmelites, Jesuits, Augustinians, all devoted to the Immaculate Conception and responsible for the introduction and evolution of local cults" ("Emblem of Victory" 68).

[85] Saint Bernard in the twelfth century was the first to use Song of Songs 4:7 to describe the Virgin which Peter Abelard (c. 1079-1142) later identified with the Immaculate Conception (Stratton 39-40). Song of Songs 4:7 would, through biblical exegesis, be understood as a description of the Church (especially in relation to Saint Paul's Letter to the Ephesians 5:27) and the Immaculate Conception.

of Trent, the conflated image of the Virgin *tota pulchra* with the *Mulier amicta sole* became the most common visual representation of the Immaculate Conception in Spanish art throughout the sixteenth century.[86]

The *Tota Pulchra* fresco in Huejotzingo includes an image of Augustine's *City of God* ("Civitas Dei") as one of the Virgin's attributes. Often considered a cornerstone of Western thought and Christian philosophy, the *City of God* was especially influential for those Spanish and *criollo* Franciscans and priests who participated in the early colonization of present-day Mexico—including Miguel Sánchez and his *Imagen de la Virgen María Madre de Dios de Guadalupe*. As De Moussac notes in her description of the fresco, the Virgin's inclined head gives the impression that she is looking directly at the Civitas Dei image in the bottom left corner of the central panel of the fresco; given the importance of both Saint Augustine and Joachim of Fiore for the first Franciscans in Mexico, the Civitas Dei image alludes to both Saint Augustine's text and the messianic prophecies of the Franciscan friars ("De la Inmaculada a la Mujer Águila del Apocalipsis" 344).[87] For De Moussac, the *Tota Pulchra* of Huejotzingo is a visual representation of the Immaculate Conception's iconographic connections to the "Vírgen Apocalíptica" ("Apocalyptic Virgin") and the early colonial apocalyptic and millenarian beliefs and evangelizing projects wherein "México se vuelve el lugar de la realización de la profecía

[86] While Suzanne Stratton-Pruitt argues that an orthodox iconography for the Immaculate Conception that blends the *tota pulchra* with the *Mulier amicta sole* did not appear until the late sixteenth century in *The Immaculate Conception in Spanish* (1994), Jeannette Favrot Peterson argues that the *Tota Pulchra* of Huejotzingo is evidence that this blending in colonial Mexico occurred decades earlier, in the mid-sixteenth century (*Visualizing Guadalupe* 128).

[87] Though his interpretation of the Holy Trinity was denounced as heretical, the writings of Joachim of Fiore were influential for many in the Franciscan order for centuries. Fiore used the Holy Trinity (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) as a model for history that progressively moves toward a final, spiritual age (the age of the Holy Spirit) initiated by a chosen monastic order destined to evangelize the entire world before the end of the world. Following the growing popularity of Saint Francis of Assisi and the mendicant orders, the teachings of Saint Francis became intertwined with Joachimite prophecy: "It was St Bonaventure, the Franciscan Order's leading theologian and master-general, who identified St. Francis as the angel of the apocalypse who opened the seal of the sixth age… In later years, the Spiritual branch of the Order was to claim that St Francis had inaugurated the third stage, that of the Holy Spirit" (Brading 23).

Joaquinita" ("Mexico becomes the place where Joachimite prophecies are realized;" my translation, 346).

In her image-based study of La Virgen, *Visualizing Guadalupe*, Peterson counteracts the academic tendency to privilege textual accounts and written documents in Guadalupan studies by examining the history of images of La Virgen and how these images' iconographies reveal what is often lost in official colonial edicts and records: "the contested discourses surrounding the Virgin of Guadalupe through time" (3-4). In fact, as Peterson notes, the visual record of La Virgen "precedes the published edition of the Juan Diego legend [Miguel Sánchez's *Imagen* from 1648 and Luis Laso de la Vega's *Huei Tlamahuiçoltica*, also known as the *Nican mopohua*, from 1649], contradicting the assertion that the foundational Guadalupe narrative was first publicly known in the mid-seventeenth century" (4). Perhaps the most important and innovative contribution of Peterson's study is her consideration of both the visual record and native-authored texts that complicate and, at times, contradict official Church documents and accounts that often reduce the native community to stereotypes (the "bad" pagan Indian in opposition to the "good" Christian missionary) and treat indigenous participation in evangelization as simply a means to an end (as a source of political power and to bring about Christ's Second Coming). This marriage between the visual record and native-authored texts and native perspectives contradicts the Church's assertion that the original miraculous image of La Virgen is an *acheiropoieton* (a holy image not made by human hands) that appeared on Juan Diego's *tilmatli* in 1531 and more accurately reveals how the native community of sixteenth-century Mexico co-opted the Virgin and made Christianity their own.

According to Peterson, the shrine at Tepeyac was dedicated to "Our Lady" in the decades following the Spanish invasion and, by 1555-1556, the shrine was enlarged to accommodate a

recently made Marian image that was added to inaugurate a new Marian cult. Peterson believes this new Marian image (the Mexican Guadalupe) was a painting of the Virgin as the Immaculate Conception that was installed "when the devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe was reoriented from her Spanish roots to a distinctly novel American offshoot" (109). One piece of evidence for this hypothesis is found in the *Anales de Juan Bautista*, a small, diary-like chronicle written in Nahuatl comprised of the detailed observations and inventories of several indigenous authors in Mexico City, including Juan Bautista, a native *alguacil* (tax-collector) who signed and dated the document in 1574, a featherworker, and several scribe painters whose observations "reflect a strong bias to artisanal activities citywide but especially within the Franciscan environment in which the authors/artists were educated and trained" (110). Peterson identifies one, single-line entry on folio 9r in the *Anales* that mentions the appearance of the Guadalupe painting at the shrine in Tepeyac: "Then in the year 1555 Santa María de Guadalupe appeared there in Tepeyac" (qtd. in Peterson 111).[88] Looking at the Nahuatl verb for "appear" in the *Anales* entry (*monextitzino*, from the root verb *neci* meaning "to appear"), Peterson argues that the use of the verb in the *Anales* "does not carry a supernatural meaning, but rather should be understood as 'to show publicly' or 'to manifest,' sometimes for the first time" (111). While the verb *neci* occurs fourteen additional times in the *Anales* to indicate the non-miraculous appearance and public display of holy images, the "colonial conflation of the representation and the holy personage that blurred boundaries between the real and the unreal, the visible and the invisible" was a potential slippage for indigenous neophytes and European believers alike. For the Spanish Catholic

[88] The original vellum manuscript of the *Anales de Juan Bautista* is housed in the archives of the Biblioteca Boturini in the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City. Among the sources Peterson cites in her description and analysis of the manuscript, Luis Reyes García's 2001 Spanish translation from the original Nahuatl was, according to Peterson, the most helpful. The above example is Peterson's English translation of Reyes García's Spanish translation and the original Nahuatl is: "Yn ipan xihuitl mill e qui[nient]os 55 a[n]os yquac monextitzi[no] in sancta maria de guatalupe yn ompa tepeyacac" (qtd. in Peterson 111).

colonizers, the long history of theological debates regarding popular religion and the representation of holy personages—including popular rituals with holy images and icons and the performance of miracles attributed to images and icons—informed the European believers' understanding of and interactions with an image like the Virgin of Guadalupe. For the Nahuatl-speaking converts, the concept of *ixiptla*, or god-representation, from Aztec ritual and visual representations of the gods informed the native neophytes' reverence for the new Christian saints and images of the Virgin so that the new converts and European believers alike "may have confused the likeness or surrogate with the actual presence of the Virgin Mary" (112-113).[89] As a new devotion to the Virgin Mary, the painting of the Virgen de Guadalupe in the shrine at Tepeyac became an object of debate and controversy when Church officials, particularly the Franciscans, voiced concern over the nature of indigenous worship of La Virgen, fearing that the indigenous neophytes' devotion to the new Virgin inadvertently perpetuated "pagan" idolatry.

The 1556 debate between the Franciscan provincial of Mexico, Francisco de Bustamante, and the Dominican second archbishop of Mexico, Alonso de Montúfar, serves as one of the earliest examples of controversy surrounding the Virgen de Guadalupe, specifically the questioning of the painting's miraculous nature and the painting's popularity among indigenous converts. On September 6, 1556, Montúfar gave a sermon praising the devotion to the Virgen de Guadalupe at Tepeyac and supported the claims of the image's holy powers to perform miracles. Having recently enlarged the shrine at Tepeyac and hired a full-time priest for the shrine, Montúfar actively promoted devotions to the Virgin with the aim to inspire popular fervor among

[89] Peterson offers two examples of the blending of *ixiptla* with Christian representations of the Virgin Mary from Nahuatl manuscripts. In the *Anales*, she cites one example from the feast of the Assumption when the author called a carved Mary statue an *ixiptlatzin*, a reverential form *ixiptla* meaning "god-impersonator." The other example comes from the Nahuatl annals called *Anales antiguos de México y sus contornos* in an entry detailing the arrival of the Virgin of Guadalupe to Tepeyac; the entry uses the verb *temohui* ("to come down") to describe how the Virgin arrived to the shrine—"the Virgin came down here to Tepeyac"—suggesting, according to Peterson, "both animation and intentionality on the part of the Virgin Mary" (113).

European and indigenous believers alike. Two days later, during the celebration of the Virgin's nativity and feast day of the Spanish Virgin of Guadalupe in Extremadura, Bustamante responded to Archbishop Montúfar with his own sermon and denounced the Tepeyac image as a mere painting without miraculous powers because it had just recently been painted by "un indio" named Marcos and therefore lacked a time-honored tradition. Bustamante's critical (and potentially insubordinate) response to Montúfar's sermon prompted the archbishop to call for a secret investigation in which nine witnesses were interviewed "in an attempt to reconstruct Bustamante's exact words" (Peterson 114).[90] According to Peterson, Bustamante "was not demeaning the indigenous nature of the artwork" in naming the author of the painting; rather, the Franciscan provincial friar expressed doubt about the miracles attributed to the recently made Guadalupe image and used his sermon to combat "the ongoing threat of potentially idolatrous behavior" that, given the history of indigenous worship at Tepeyac, made the new cult of Guadalupe particularly suspicious and concerning (114).

While early colonial missionaries and writers like Bernardino de Sahagún (a Franciscan friar) expressed doubt concerning the continued use of Tepeyac as a shrine and the adoption of the Nahuatl title Tonantzin ("Our Precious Mother") for fear of promoting ambiguity and idolatry among indigenous converts, the image and cult of the Virgen de Guadalupe must be understood

[90] The archbishop's investigation into Bustamante's sermon did not become publicly available until the late nineteenth century with the publication of the *Información que el Arzobispo de México D. Fray Alonso de Montúfar mandó practicar con motivo de un sermon que en la fiesta de la Natividad de Nuestra Señora (8 de setiembre de 1556) predicó en la capilla de S. José de Naturales del Convento de S. Francisco de Méjico, su Provincial Fray Francisco de Bustamante acera de la devoción y culto de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe*. In his study of the many controversies surrounding the Virgen de Guadalupe, *The Guadalupan Controversies in Mexico* (2006), Stafford Poole notes that the authenticity of the 1888 Montúfar-Bustamante interrogatory has been challenged since its publication and little-to-no documentary evidence exists to support the investigation besides the *Información* itself and mid-nineteenth century reports of a folder of original papers that was secretly kept in a reserved archive in the secretariate of the archdiocese that has since disappeared (42). For example, according to Poole, none of the "mendicant historians who wrote the life of Bustamante" mentioned the controversy (40). Poole does clarify that this lack of historical evidence could be due to the secretive and politically sensitive nature of the archbishop's investigation.

as "first and foremost a colonial manifestation, forged out of preexisting elements," including both European and indigenous elements (Peterson 70).[91] The participation of Franciscan-trained indigenous painters and artisans in the making of religious images, like the Mexican Guadalupe, exemplifies this uniquely colonial process and shows how these indigenous artists built upon European models of the Virgin to make the Mexican Guadalupe image and cult more reflective of their lived realities and Nahua concepts of sacrality—she is, in Peterson's words, "a Nahua Mary… who could not have emerged on any other continent at any other time" (73). Sixteenth-century missionary-trained indigenous artists and painters were often members of the Aztec aristocratic class (a continuation of pre-invasion painting traditions) and were taught theology and European painting techniques in workshops within Spanish missionary institutions, making them "the first active artists in the colony of New Spain, employed mainly for the decoration of religious buildings" (Rodríguez-Negrón 69). For example, the *Tota Pulchra* in Huejotzingo, one of the earliest examples of the Immaculate Conception in colonial Mexico, was reportedly painted by a Spanish-trained indigenous artist, often referred to as "Marcos de Aquino," whose other attributed works include the *retablo* (altarpiece) in the Chapel of San José de los Naturales, an image of the Virgin of the Assumption in Huaquechula, Puebla, and, possibly, the original Guadalupe painting (De Moussac 344).

[91] Peterson dedicates her third chapter, "Her Presence in Her Absence," to studying the precedents of indigenous devotion to the Mexican Guadalupe, including Tepeyac as a sacred pilgrimage site and part of a larger religious complex and sacred landscape, the name Tonantzin, and the religious beliefs and rituals associated with both. With respect to the significance of Tepeyac, its history, and its role in Spanish evangelization, Peterson writes: "By baptizing the pagan landscape with newly constructed oratories and altars, Europeans sought to legitimate and sacralize their political claims… Tepeyac's significance in the sacred and political landscape of the Valley of Mexico had deep, pre-Aztec roots, facilitating the sequential reappropriation of the site for later cultures" (71-72). In terms of the names Tonantzin and Tonan, Peterson complicates both Sahagún's accusations and modern usage of the name by demonstrating how the colonial Church itself propagated the use of Tonantzin to refer to the Virgin Mary and how, within Aztec imperialism, Tonan and Tonantzin functioned as honorary titles for a plethora of goddesses and natural forces across multiple ethnic groups: "The name Tonan(tzin) also persists as it replicates gracefully the most benign of Aztec appellations for a number of their goddesses and, conveniently, mirrors the Christian title for the Virgin Mary as the Mother of God… The indigenous constituency strategically deployed the name Tonantzin to retain a hold on their own beliefs, a process in which language played a crucial role" (101).

Among the nine witnesses interviewed for Montúfar's investigation into Bustamante's sermon, four reported that Bustamante had attributed the creation of the Guadalupe painting to "un indio" and one witness, Alonso Sánchez de Cisneros, remembered the name of the artist as "Marcos" (Peterson 114). While the surviving evidence of documented indigenous artists in sixteenth-century Mexico City links the name Marcos to three possible candidates for authorship of the Guadalupe painting—Marcos Cipac, Marcos de Aquino, and Marcos Griego—Peterson argues that Marcos Cipac and Marcos de Aquino were the same person who simply used the surname Cipac within the Nahua community (as seen in his ten appearances within the *Anales de Juan Bautista*) and went by Marcos de Aquino among European constituency (as evidenced by his appearance in Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España*). In the *Anales*, Marcos is variously referred to as Marcos Cipac and Marcos Tlacuilol ("the Painter") and, as Peterson demonstrates, he appears to have been a master painter well-known among the Franciscan missionaries who worked independently as a freelance artist and occasionally led teams of artists on projects, such as the San José de los Naturales altarpiece, often acting as the team's spokesperson when dealing with Spanish civil authorities (115-117).[92]

The influence of Nahua painting traditions can also be seen in the dyes and colors used in the creation of the original Guadalupe painting. As the only painting on cloth to have survived from sixteenth-century colonial Mexico in more or less its original condition, and due to its alleged miraculous origins, the Virgen de Guadalupe painting has yet to be examined thoroughly with modern techniques and methodologies. However, after being granted limited access to the

[92] Clara Bargellini, in her study of "The Colors of the *Virgin of Guadalupe*," provides more details about the Franciscan education and training Marcos probably received: "the Marcos cited by Bustamante in 1556 as author of the Guadalupe painting probably studied with Fray Pedro de Gante at the Franciscan school for natives set up at San José de los Naturales, where he would have had access to European prints of compositions corresponding, like the Guadalupe, to the early phase of Immaculate Conception iconography" (6).

painting, a 1982 report by José Sol Rosales, a painting conservator, and a 1996 commentary by the former director of the Museum of the Basilica of Guadalupe, Jorge Raúl Guadarrama Guevara, argued for the possible presence of cochineal pigment in La Virgen's tunic and noted the similarity of the painting's color palette to that of pre-colonial paintings (Bargellini 8-9). Additionally, in her study of the colors of the Guadalupe painting, Clara Bargellini hypothesizes that the blue-green color of La Virgen's mantle may be an example of "the famous Maya blue," a renowned Mesoamerican pigment (25).[93]

The theory that Marcos (Cipac) de Aquino painted the original Guadalupe painting began in the late nineteenth century at around the same time the Montúfar-Bustamante inquiry was first published and following the writings of two prominent Mexican historians, Joaquín García Icazbalceta (1824-1894) and Francisco del Paso y Troncoso (1842-1916). While the evidence for Marcos de Aquino's authorship remains somewhat circumstantial and continues to be speculated by scholars, the prominence and notoriety of native painters in the mid-sixteenth century is well documented in both colonial writings and in the numerous paintings and images that continue to adorn Mexican chapels, churches, and monasteries. As Peterson notes, native painters like Marcos "had the necessary talent for the task, skills polished for the colonial market by extensive training in European styles and Christian symbolism" (118). By the dawn of the seventeenth century, however, the story of Guadalupe's creation began to change; the painting of the Virgen de Guadalupe made by the master indigenous artist became an *acheiropoieton*, a sacred image of La Virgen made by otherworldly means.

[93] Bargellini fully admits that, without extensive study of the original Guadalupe painting, her hypothesis cannot be tested or proven. However, she compares the color of Guadalupe's mantle to the blue-green color of the *Assumption of the Virgin* in the Franciscan church at Tecaxic, the only other painting of the Virgin on cloth with indigenous influences to have survived from sixteenth-century colonial Mexico. Even though the painting has been severely damaged and repainted over the centuries, some of the original colors are still visible and "they resemble those in the Guadalupe painting, including the blue-green" (25).

Predating Sánchez's *Imagen* by four decades, Baltasar de Echave Orio's 1606 oil on canvas copy of the Virgen de Guadalupe demonstrates that the story of the original painting's creation and La Virgen's apparition had changed by the early seventeenth century and suggests that the *tilma* itself was considered a holy relic. The Virgin in Echave Orio's copy is framed by a painted depiction of a rough cloth, like Juan Diego's *tilma*, thus distinguishing "her precisely defined form from the piece of rough cloth" and giving the impression that she, like the Sudarium ("Veil of Veronica"), is not "a miraculously discovered painting, but rather a unique and miraculously made painting" (Bargellini 11). Unlike the wooden statue of the Spanish Guadalupe in Extremadura—which was (according to legend) carved by Saint Luke the Evangelist and miraculously discovered by the poor shepherd Gil Cordero near the Guadalupe River at the beginning of the fourteenth century—the Mexican Guadalupe painting became an *acheiropoieton*, a miraculously made image whose apparition story was first chronicled in the mid-seventeenth century in Miguel Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María Madre de Dios de Guadalupe: Milagrosamente aparecida en la Ciudad de México. Celebrada en su historia, con la profecía del capítulo doze del Apocalipsis* ("Image of the Virgin Mary, Mother of God of Guadalupe: Miraculously Appeared in the City of Mexico. Celebrated in Her History with the Prophecy of Chapter Twelve of the Apocalypse").[94] As the first published theology of the Virgen de Guadalupe and the first published account of La Virgen's apparitions to the indigenous neophyte, Juan Diego, Sánchez's *Imagen* "shaped theologies of Guadalupe more than any other publication" and officially erased Marcos (Cipac) de Aquino from Church-approved Guadalupan

[94] A diocesan priest who studied at the Royal and Pontifical University in Mexico City and was buried at the original chapel of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Sánchez was not affiliated with any monastic order but was heavily influenced by the writings of the Church Fathers, particularly Augustine. In addition to the Imagen, his few surviving writings display a deep spiritual connection with the Virgin and include several sermons, an account of a procession and ceremony at the university in defense of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and a 1665 Marian novena (nine days of devotional prayers) for the sanctuaries of both the Virgen de los Remedios and the Virgen de Guadalupe (Matovina 18-19).

history (Matovina 20).[95] One of the most important and long-lasting impacts of Sánchez's *Imagen* on Guadalupan theology and the Mexican national imaginary was his use of biblical typology and exegesis to construct a narrative of the Spanish invasion and evangelization of Mexico infused with unsurpassed theological significance. His "decidedly Eurocentric interpretation of the Spanish imperial project and its place in world history" engaged with Christian scripture and theological discourse to place Guadalupe and the evangelization of Mexico firmly within Christian salvation history (Matovina 18).

According to Guadalupan scholar and theologian Timothy Matovina, Sánchez's *Imagen* must be understood within the context of Sánchez's training as a patristic theologian, an expert in the writings of the early Church Fathers. For Matovina, readings that focus solely on Sánchez's *Imagen* as an early example of *criollo* nationalism fail to address the extent to which Sánchez's theology (based on an Augustinian theology of history) impacted the Guadalupe tradition.[96] As a patristic theologian and scholar of Augustinian thought, Sánchez deployed biblical typology to present the Spanish imperialist project in Mexico as a re-enactment and fulfillment of biblical prophecy to address the theological quandary about how to make sense of previously unknown

[95] D.A. Brading elaborates on Sánchez's impact on Mexican theologians and clerics for years after the publication of his *Imagen*: "…Sánchez took the clerical elite of Mexico by storm, his influence most powerfully manifest in the great cycle of panegyric sermons preached in honour of the Mexican Virgin in the years 1661-1766. Time and time again the scriptural figures and theological doctrines he had expounded were reiterated and applied afresh" (*Mexican Phoenix* 74).

[96] Published seventeen years before Matovina's contribution in *Theologies of Guadalupe*, Brading's study of Sánchez's *Imagen* in *Mexican Phoenix* also addresses the relative lack of theological analysis of the *Imagen* compared to the body of scholarship devoted to studying the *Imagen* as a foundational myth for early Mexican *criollo* nationalism: "If the creole clergy greeted the revelations of Sánchez with enthusiasm and propagated the cult of the Guadalupe with such zeal, it was in large measure because it provided them with an autonomous, sacred foundation for their Church and *patria*… Despite its primordial significance for the growth of the Catholic Church in Mexico, Sánchez's work has not attracted a theological analysis comparable to the assessment of its role in the consolidation of creole patriotism. And yet Sánchez must count among the most original, learned and audacious of Mexican theologians. He wrote as if possessed of a single, blinding idea: the 'revelation' that the image of Guadalupe came from heaven and was thus divine in both origin and form" (74-75).

(to Europeans) lands and peoples within the universalizing Christian history and framework of salvation:

> Just as Augustine's *City of God* drew on Christian revelation in developing a response to the theological crisis of the collapsing Roman Empire, Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María* scrutinized the Christian biblical and theological heritage in formulating a response to the dilemma of rooting the faith in a world previously unknown to Europeans. (*Theologies of Guadalupe* 46)

Quoting liberally from Augustine and from sources erroneously attributed to Augustine, Sánchez identifies the woman in Revelation 12.1, the *Mulier amicta sole*, with the Church, Mary, and, by extension, with the Virgen de Guadalupe, making the miraculous image of La Virgen imprinted on Juan Diego's *tilma* "the self-same image that Saint John's visionary eye had seen prior to his writing chapter 12 of the Apocalypse" (Brading 58).[97] Like the *Mulier amicta sole* of Revelation 12.1-9 who appeared to Saint John of Patmos in the sky and fled to the desert after giving birth to a son so that Michael the Archangel and his angels could battle a great red dragon (Satan), Guadalupe had appeared in Mexico so that Michael (the angel supporting La Virgen in the original painting) could conquer Satan in the form of Aztec idolatry.[98]

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[97] In an earlier version of his chapter that later appears in *Theologies of Guadalupe*, Timothy Matovina relates how Sánchez refers to Augustine more than two dozen times and quotes liberally from other Church Fathers (such as Ambrose, Jerome, and Tertullian) throughout the *Imagen*. Matovina also clarifies how Sánchez's foundational thesis—that the Woman of the Apocalypse in Revelation 12.1 is identified with Mary, the Church, and, by extension, the Virgen de Guadalupe—does not come from Augustine's writings but rather from the works of Quodvultdeus, a contemporary of Augustine and bishop of Carthage in the fifth century ("Guadalupe at Calvary: Patristic Theology in Miguel Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María (1648)*," *Theological Studies* vol. 64, 2003, p. 801).

[98] Sánchez's use of typology to describe and characterize the Spanish imperialist project in Mexico as the fulfillment of biblical prophecy occurs throughout the *Imagen*. For example, when describing Guadalupe's role in the "conquista" of Mexico City, Sánchez identifies King Carlos I of Spain with the angel of chapter ten of Revelation. He also describes the hill of Tepeyac and Mexico City as a Mexican Zion and a New Jerusalem while also comparing Archbishop Zumárraga with Saint John of Patmos, the author of Revelation. As Timothy Matovina notes in "Guadalupe at Calvary: Patristic Theology in Miguel Sánchez's *Imagen de la Virgen María* (1648)" (2003), Sánchez also "compares Juan Diego to Moses, Tepeyac to Mount Sinai, and Mary of Guadalupe to the Ark of the Covenant, observing that Juan Diego ascended the Mount Sinai of the New World to bring down the blessings of the 'true ark of God'" (803).

Sánchez's typological interpretation of Guadalupe further erased the contributions of native artists like Marcos (Cipac) de Aquino from official accounts of La Virgen's origins and set the stage for another wave of Guadalupan controversy in the eighteenth century regarding the veracity and historicity of Sánchez's apparition account. In the prologue to the *Imagen*, Sánchez reveals that he could not find documentary evidence for the apparition story despite searching through various archives and repositories: "Determinado, Gustoso, y Diligente busquè Papeles, y Escritos tocantes á la Santa Imagen y su milagro, no los hallè, aunque recorri los archibos donde podian guardarse" ("Determined and diligent I gladly looked for papers and writings regarding the Holy Image and its miracle, I did not find any even though I went through the archives where they could be kept").[99] Despite his lack of documentary or archival evidence, Sánchez claims he had access to the memories of older natives whose ancestors knew Juan Diego and remembered the sixteenth-century miraculous events and, in his visual analysis of the Guadalupe image, Sánchez offers La Virgen's impeccable beauty as further evidence for her divine origins.[100] For example, at the end of his version of the apparition story, before transitioning to a typological analysis of the painting itself, Sánchez humbly confesses that his attempts to describe the miraculous image with words are mere shadows ("sombras") compared to the colorful and

[99] The prologue ("Fundamento de la historia") for the *Imagen* does not have page numbers; I will include the original page numbers when possible. For this chapter, I am working with the digitized copy of the *Imagen* available through the Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes at http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/nd/ark:/59851/bmcnp271. All translations from the Spanish to English are my own.

[100] Matovina describes how several sixteenth-century sources make no mention of the Guadalupe apparition tradition, including the decrees made at the 1555 First Mexican Provincial Council, the writings of Bartolomé de las Casas, those of the Franciscan missionary Pedro de Gante, or the writings of Bernardino de Sahagún. Perhaps the most damning missing piece of documentary evidence is the lack of primary resources from extant records of Archbishop Juan de Zumárraga; given his foundational role in the Guadalupe apparition account and tradition, it is particularly interesting that his will made no mention of Guadalupe "since various sixteenth-century Spanish Catholic wills include bequests for Masses dedicated to a special celestial patron" ("The New World in Salvation History" 27). In 1666, Sánchez claimed that a paper shortage in the sixteenth-century colony caused many documents to be stolen from the archdiocesan archive, including those dealing with Guadalupe; as Poole notes, there was a paper shortage in the early 1620s, but "there is no record of the extremities that Sánchez mentioned" (*The Guadalupan Controversies in Mexico* 5).

otherworldly beauty of the image that “no desdeña pinceles para comunicarse” (“spares no paint brushes to express itself;” 37).

As Stafford Poole details in *The Guadalupan Controversies in Mexico* (2006), by the end of the seventeenth and into the eighteenth centuries, the lack of written sources and evidence for the Guadalupe apparition became more of a problem for apparition apologists as growing tendencies in Catholic historiography (especially among some Benedictines and Jesuits) began to abandon traditional Baroque historical approaches in favor of Enlightenment approaches that “were more critical and skeptical of traditional devotions and demanded evidence for their authenticity” (7). In response to the lack of documentation supporting the Juan Diego apparition story, as well as the tension between traditional Catholic Baroque and Enlightenment historiography, seventeenth and eighteenth-century apparition apologists argued that the beauty of the Guadalupe image and the existence of a long-standing pious tradition made the supernatural origins of the painting self-evident. For example, in an early attempt to have the Holy See in Rome declare December twelfth the feast day for Guadalupe with its own mass and office, an investigation was organized in December 1665 in which twenty witnesses were interviewed; all twenty witnesses, including one mestizo, seven native people, ten Spanish clerics, and two Spanish laypersons, testified to the credibility of the Guadalupe apparition story by citing a tradition dating back to the previous century. The testimonies were sent to Rome, along with other documents, but “the entire case went into the limbo of Vatican bureaucracy” (5).

By the eighteenth century, many apparition apologists saw that the Holy See’s approval of the December twelfth Guadalupan feast day and proper mass could serve as further proof of the historicity of the Juan Diego story and therefore made another attempt to establish the feast day in 1752. After the Virgen de Guadalupe had been declared patron of “New Spain” in 1746,

the Jesuit Juan Francisco López went to Rome with a copy of the Guadalupe image to persuade the Holy See to approve the feast day; according to Poole, in the absence of written evidence, the Pope's approval of the feast day and mass "merely certified that there was an ancient tradition" and made no mention or declaration that the original Guadalupe image was miraculous in character (14). The first public attack of the apparition story came at the end of the century with Juan Bautista Muñoz's "Memoria sobre las apariciones y el culto de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de México" ("Memorial on the Apparitions and Cultus of Our Lady of Guadalupe of Mexico"). A Spanish priest and student of philosophy and history, Muñoz was charged with updating the history of the Spanish colonies in the Americas for the Real Academia and read his "Memoria" before the Real Academia in 1794. Muñoz pointed to the textual silences regarding the Guadalupe apparition in a survey of sixteenth and seventeenth-century chroniclers and writers (including Archbishop Zumárraga, Torquemada, Motolinía, and Mendieta) and, citing a letter from 1575, argued that the second archbishop of Mexico, Alonso de Montúfar, established the shrine at Tepeyac (15-16). Once the "Memoria" arrived in Mexico in the early nineteenth century, Muñoz's critiques and arguments became "the principal target of rebuttals by apologists for the apparitions" (16).

The late nineteenth-century controversies and disputes regarding the historicity of the apparition story and the coronation of La Virgen came in light of the Roman Church's move to centralize its power as well as mid-century reforms and wars between liberal, anticlerical forces within the Mexican state and conservative clerics in the Mexican Church.[101] One of the most

[101] Poole details these conflicts and reforms in the second chapter of *The Guadalupan Controversies in Mexico*, "The Controversy is Ignited." The 1855 anticlerical legislation (known as "La Reforma") and the 1857 Constitution prompted a clerical and Conservative backlash that led to three years of civil war (1858-61), known as the War of the Reform (26). Brading, in his twelfth chapter for *Mexican Phoenix*, "The Coronation," argues that the coronation of La Virgen was the result of a resurgence of the Mexican Church in the 1880s after the turmoil and reforms of the previous decades. Brading also details how the move to coronate the Mexican Virgin followed the French Church's coronation of the apparition at Lourdes to renew its power after the French Revolution. According to Brading, the

notable examples of nineteenth-century controversy came with the writings of the esteemed Mexican historian, Joaquín García Icazbalceta. García Icazbalceta first became involved in Guadalupan controversy when, in 1881, he published a biography of the first archbishop of Mexico and key figure in the Guadalupe apparition narrative, Juan de Zumárraga, and failed to mention the Guadalupe apparitions in the biography because there was no mention of the apparitions in any records or documents related to Zumárraga's life (including his will). In 1883, Archbishop Antonio Pelagio Labastida y Dávalos ordered García Icazbalceta to evaluate a manuscript for a book that served as a defense of the apparition narrative—José María Antonio González's *Santa María de Guadalupe: Patrona de los mexicanos*—and García Icazbalceta responded with his famous letter which examined the historicity of the Guadalupe apparition accounts. In the letter, García Icazbalceta concluded: "In my youth I believed, like all Mexicans, in the truth of the miracles; I do not remember where my doubts came from and in order to remove them I went to the apologias; these turned my doubts into the certainty that the event was false" (qtd. in Poole 37). Despite the archbishop's and García Icazbalceta's closest friends' promise to never publicly divulge the letter's contents, by 1888 the letter had been leaked and published as "part of a major push by the anti-apparitionists to thwart Roman approval of a new mass and office" for La Virgen (44). The controversies regarding the apparition's historicity and veracity would continue well into the twentieth century with the campaign for the beatification of Juan Diego in the 1980s. Tracing these controversies across time, from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries, reveals that "Guadalupe's ascent as the premier holy image in Mexico evolved over centuries" and, therefore, beliefs that "her current renown stems from a

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sermons given at the Guadalupe coronation celebration reveal an anxiety about the Mexican Church's future in the independent Mexican nation-state and a need to believe in Mexican Catholic exceptionalism (303).

spontaneous sixteenth-century eruption of devotion that encompassed all of New Spain are unsubstantiated" (Matovina 24).

In positioning López's *Our Lady* within controversial dividing lines, Villegas, Casso, Archbishop Sheehan and the like reiterate La Virgen's already ambiguous locus within cultural, national, racial, sexual, and spiritual borderlands—between autochthonous and invading religions, indigeneity and European settler colonialism, Church-vilified lust and Church-sanctioned virginity, and, in the case of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, between mexicanidad and latinidad and the Latinx-erasing Anglo/white nationalism of the United States. Villegas's strategic use of homophobia and misogyny-driven controversy to attack López distances La Virgen from the complexities of her own history and iconography in much the same way that Mary, through the Immaculate Conception, was abstracted from her physical experiences as a mother and Sánchez, in describing Guadalupe as an *acheiropoieton*, further distanced and erased indigenous participation in the creation of the original Guadalupe painting. From the medieval and early modern periods through Spanish colonialism and post-independence Mexico, La Virgen's body and sexuality have been the subject of controversy inhabiting similar dividing lines and demarcating the boundaries between communities and national imaginaries. As the Immaculate Conception, Mary's bodily "purity" and exemption from the sexually transmitted original sin became an object of controversy that divided Spanish Franciscan and Jesuit Conceptionists from their Dominican Maculist counterparts. Once the Virgin arrived to the Spanish viceroyalty and became a new Tonantzin of Tepeyac, her apparition and sacred image became embroiled in centuries of controversy as changes within the Roman Church and its understanding and writing of its own history reflected changes in the political realities of the

Mexican Catholic Church and its relationship with what would become the independent nation of Mexico.

Far from being a "singular, master national symbol," La Virgen de Guadalupe continues to emanate a plurality of meanings depending upon the subjectivity of the person interacting with her sacred images, with each meaning revealing a diversity of experiences and encounters across space and time.[102] In the following section, I shift my focus from tracing the history of controversies with colonial texts and images to exploring the uncomfortable side of Guadalupan encounters for those subjectivities that continue to be oppressed by the Catholic Church and its political influence in Latin America. With the help of Marcella Althaus-Reid and her "Indecent Theology," I seek to complicate Guadalupe as a potential source for feminist, anticolonial, and queer liberation and explore further the act of seeing and undressing La Virgen.

Seeing and Indecenting Guadalupe

> I wanted to answer Sandra Cisneros's question: Does the Virgen de Guadalupe have a body like mine? She's brown, but does she have a body like mine? Does she have breasts and vagina and does she look like me? Is she real? I wondered what she would look like if I lifted her dress. My answer was flowers, roses, because roses were the proof of the Virgen's apparition.
> -Alma López in conversation with Clara Román-Odio[103]

For Augustinian thought and, in turn, for Sánchez's *Imagen*, there exists a need to distinguish between "seeing with the eyes of the mind" and seeing with the "earthly eyes of the body" to address theological anxieties regarding the worship of physical objects, icons, and

[102] In her introduction to *Visualizing Guadalupe*, Peterson dispels Eric Wolf's assertion that the Virgin of Guadalupe acts as a "single master symbol" in his 1958 study, "The Virgin of Guadalupe: A Mexican National Symbol" (*The Journal of American Folklore* vol. 71 no. 279, pp. 34-39). Peterson states: "The multivalent roles projected onto the Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe challenge Eric Wolf's contention that she acted as a 'single master symbol'… Innovations in the composition and iconography of the Mexican Guadalupe and the factors that brought about those changes allow us to understand how her images responded to and enacted social and political changes, some revolutionary" (6).

[103] From Clara Román-Odio's contribution to *Our Lady of Controversy*, "Queering the Sacred: Love as Oppositional Consciousness in Alma López's Visual Art" (pp. 121-147).

images and the sin of idolatry.[104] In the case of the Virgin Mary, these anxieties surrounding idolatry were, at times, coupled with fears and tensions concerning the Virgin's feminine body, the implied or imagined nakedness of her statues and paintings under ceremonial costumes and garments, and the indecorous thoughts this nakedness could inspire in male worshippers. For example, Peterson discusses the theological significance and anxieties surrounding the undressing of the Virgin, in this case the wooden statue of the Spanish Virgin of Guadalupe at the Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe in Extremadura. Peterson cites Diego de Montalvo's 1631 history of the Spanish Guadalupe in which Montalvo describes the secretive and ceremonious undressing and dressing of the Spanish Virgin statue in private quarters within the monastery in an effort to, in Montalvo's words, "keep in check the bad manners of the many men who pass through this place… men who want to see and know everything and who are especially covetous of that which is prohibited" (*Visualizing Guadalupe* 31). For Peterson, Montalvo's account of the precautions taken when changing the statue's wardrobe reveals "an acute awareness of the precarious divide between representation and presence… [i]n this the Virgin of Guadalupe, like so many other sacred images, becomes more than a conduit for *expressing* divine power and moves into the dangerous terrain of *possessing* divine power" (32). As a key element in Montalvo's and the Spanish monks' anxieties surrounding the undressing of the wooden statue, the act of seeing the Virgin's nakedness also reveals the overlap and friction between repressed (or hidden and dangerous) female sexuality and the experience of, and belief in, divine presence and power. Despite her supposed "purity" (thanks to her Immaculate

[104] According to Peterson, Saint Augustine "distinguishes between two kinds of vision, the flawed, temporary glance and the steady gaze. The latter type of seeing attached the eye to the devotional object with an almost palpable intensity; with this gaze the true believer might ultimately behold God… While the physical presence of the icon is essential for the transaction to occur, only the fervor of a believer's vision and in unimpeded sight line to the icon can mend ailments and convert heretics" (*Visualizing Guadalupe* 44-45).

Conception and perpetual virginity), Mary's feminine body remains a source of fear and sexual anxiety that must be covered by multiple layers of clothing and dogma, particularly when the subject looking upon her is presumed to be a heterosexual man who, inspired by her nakedness, can become "covetous of that which is prohibited"—even when her earthly body is made of wood or, in the case of the Mexican Virgin, tempera and oil pigments on *cáñamo* fabric.[105]

Acts of seeing (and not seeing) often play a foundational role in many Marian legends and apparition accounts, including the discovery and apparition accounts of both the Spanish and Mexican Virgin of Guadalupe images. The foregrounding of the primacy of vision in the Mexican Guadalupe's apparition accounts and the propagation of her images reflects the importance of vision and visual culture for medieval and early modern European Christianity and colonialism; the deployment of Christian images served in the indoctrination, evangelization, and colonization of the peoples and territories of the Americas. Religious images and icons therefore fulfilled several purposes within the Spanish imperial goal to universalize Roman Catholicism and Christianity. In addition to affirming the sensorial and experiential aspects of Roman Catholicism, within the context of the Protestant Reformation and the Immaculate Conception controversy in Spain, sacred images also served a didactic function in the indoctrination of the native peoples; as Peterson puts it: "acts of seeing were intended to elicit certain cognitive, spiritual, and visionary responses as well as bodily performances. From the European perspective, vision was claimed to be a colonizing tool" (10). Given the privileging of sight

[105] In an earlier work from 2005, "Creating the Virgin of Guadalupe: The Cloth, the Artist, and Sources in Sixteenth-Century New Spain," Peterson provides an overview of the materials and history of the original "miraculous" painting. Dispelling the supposedly miraculous nature of the painting as an acheiropoieton, Peterson identifies the painting as an "object of human craft produced post-Conquest" with "a traceable genealogy within the combustible mix of art modes, mixed media and theological tracts found circulating in early colonial New Spain" (571). Citing the conclusions of conservator José Sol Rosales, Peterson demonstrates how, despite the claims made by seventeenth-century apparition apologists and their "indigenist agenda" regarding Juan Diego's humble *tilma* garment being native in origin, the original painting in the Basílica de Guadalupe is two pieces of finely woven *cáñamo* fabric commonly used in early colonial paintings (573-574).

within Catholicism and the utility of images and visual communication in communities with low literacy rates and language barriers, in colonial Mexico Christian images and visual culture were deployed "as a potent weapon of indoctrination in the evangelization and colonization of the Americas" as Spanish missionaries and priests "relied heavily on visual 'signs' and narratives to teach new doctrinal concepts and Christian values" (9).

However, thanks to her focus on the "subjectivity of seeing," Peterson complicates this colonial use of vision by considering the subjectivity, the who, behind the act of seeing and interacting with images of the Virgin of Guadalupe. For example, in detailing the participation of indigenous peoples in Guadalupe celebrations and processions, and even in the creation of the original "miraculous" image itself, Peterson approaches acts of seeing from an indigenous and ancient Mesoamerican perspective in which vision is similarly privileged as the "bodily locus in which human perception, knowledge, and sensation appear." Within this pre- and early colonial indigenous perspective, vision was understood to be multisensorial and, when involved in the worship of the Virgin, sight and vision implied a "ritually based type of seeing" where the "performative function of artworks forcefully engaged viewers" (11). The subjectivity of seeing—in foregrounding the diversity of ways of looking and modes of interpretation involved in the act of seeing—highlights the Virgin of Guadalupe's ocean- and border-crossing history, as well as the multivalent nature of the Virgin's significance for her many cults, admirers, and devotees across the world and across time. For Peterson, the subjectivity of seeing is intimately tied to the unique Catholic paradox of "visualizing the sacred [the otherworldly, the ineffable] in a material form" because "our ability to see Guadalupe necessarily requires her visualization as an object" (3). The original sixteenth-century painting of the Mexican Virgin therefore becomes the first icon that generates, in Peterson's words, "a lineage of simulacra, copies that operate

within a larger genealogy of sacred works" in which every copy and (re)visualization of La Virgen over the centuries acts as an innate carrier of "meaning and power, both symbolic and real" (3). Here simulacra does not carry the connotation of inferiority but rather points to the very physicality of devotional objects and the necessity of these objects in the worship of Guadalupe; while Juan Diego saw and heard the Virgin herself, for the rest of us, the original Guadalupe painting and its many copies are required for our ability to see Guadalupe, relate to and venerate her, and feel her presence and power. In the case of Alma López's *Our Lady*, how this symbolic meaning and power are received and understood depends on the subjectivity of the spectator looking at the digital print. Despite López's statement that *Our Lady* is "not an object of devotion in a church," for her toughest and most virulent critics *Our Lady* was more than just an artistic creation in a museum. Rather, for those who took offense to the digital print, La Virgen was (re)visualized on and through the undressed, Chicana/x body (modeled by Raquel Salinas) and the controversy was derived, in part, from whether the undressed Chicana/x body-as-Guadalupe should be part La Virgen's lineage and genealogy of sacred works.

For López, however, the critics found *Our Lady* offensive because, in the artist's words, "they were unable to separate between the church—a place of prayer—and the museum—a place for art exhibits" (qtd. in Román-Odio 128). The archbishop's and Chicano nationalists' inability to separate the church from the museum underline the power of art, like *Our Lady*, that cites a sacred object that has shaped—both culturally and religiously—Latinx communities, as well as highlighting how museums can blur the sacred/secular divide by housing and displaying sacred objects. Additionally, their projection of patriarchal and sexual anxieties onto *Our Lady* point to a unique challenge Chicana/x artists and writers face in undressing La Virgen: the hegemony of the Catholic Church and socio-religious ideologies and discourses (such as patriarchy, homophobia,

the virgin-whore dichotomy, etc.) upheld by offended spectators and critics. Peterson's concept of the subjectivity of seeing permits us to consider both the lesbian Chicana artist's subjectivity and her challenging of predominant attitudes and discourses *as well as* the subjectivity of seeing of her critics. While recognizing López's critics runs the risk of privileging the critics' perspectives and, therefore, privileging the hegemonic discourses and ideologies they espouse and uphold at the expense of the artist's intentions and first amendment rights, considering the subjectivity of the critics and their seeing highlights the Virgin's complicated history with the colonization of the lands and peoples of the Americas that spread such patriarchal and homophobic discourses and ideologies beyond Catholic Europe in the first place. While López strategically emphasized that *Our Lady* is not a religious artwork to protect her freedom of artistic expression from religious censorship, acknowledging both the artist's and her critics' subjectivity of seeing also underscores the blurry divide between the secular and the religious significance of the figure of Guadalupe, both within and beyond this colonial history. When re-visualizing and undressing the Virgin of Guadalupe, is it possible to divorce La Virgen from the Church, even when she is on exhibition in a museum? Can López's *Our Lady* be excluded from the genealogy of images proliferated for centuries by the Church? And, when considering the long history of these images and their involvement in the Church's colonial projects (and twentieth-century dictatorships and military regimes) within Latin America, is an undressed Virgen still a source of patriarchal oppression, an example of anti-colonial and feminist liberation, or can she be both?

The late Argentinean feminist theologian Marcella Althaus-Reid (1952-2009) describes the process of undressing the Virgin as a process of "indecenting" which implicates both the feminist theologian and the Chicana/x artists in the deconstruction of "a moral order which is

based on a heterosexual construction of reality, which organises not only categories of approved social and divine interactions but of economic ones too" (*Indecent Theology* 2). For Althaus-Reid, this process of indecenting becomes an Indecent Theology, an approach to theology that exists "at the crossroads of Liberation Theology and Queer Thinking" that "undresses the mythical layers of multiple oppressions in Latin America" (2). Within the context of an Indecent Theology, undressing and indecenting signal the processes of serious doubting, recontextualizing, and challenging the traditional Latin American and Catholic orders and values of decency and compulsive heterosexuality perpetuated by male-dominated Liberation Theology and hegemonic political and economic agendas alike. As "a Latin American woman brought up in the poverty of Buenos Aires," and as a theologian trained within the materialist concerns of Liberation Theology, Althaus-Reid's Indecent Theology focuses on the everyday lives of those traditionally excluded from the purview of heteronormative liberationist discourses of "the poor:" the urban poor, urban poor women, prostitutes, victims of sexual violence, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people (9).[106] In constructing the asexual, obedient poor as the theological subject of Liberation Theology, traditional liberationists, according to Althaus-Reid, allowed Latin American Liberation Theology to become absorbed by the North Atlantic theological market that had initially "contested and rebuked Latin American theology as Marxist, atheist or simply illogical and incompetent" (29). In de-sexualizing and denying the diverse

[106] Althaus-Reid critiques the romanticized notions of Latin American poverty that predominated liberationist writings and discourse once Liberation Theology gained popularity in Europe and North America. Within these romanticized notions, "the poor" in Latin America were constructed as being asexual/heteronormative, obedient, and rural. In doing so, liberationists failed to challenge women's subordination or acknowledge the sexual insubordination of the urban poor: "Not only did 'the poor' subsume women, it also subsumed lesbian, gay, transgendered and bisexual people. The reality of the old traditions of Latin American poverty such as incest and abuse of girls in their communities was ignored. Abortions in the back street (or at home with a knitting needle), a common cause of death amongst poor women, was not on the agenda of the theologians although it was part of the life of the communities. The poor, as in any old-fashioned moralising Victorian tale, were portrayed as the deserving and asexual poor" (30).

sexual and lived experiences of the poor, Liberation Theology then opened itself up to "church tourism and theological voyeurism" as theologians and church officials from the Global North "came with notebooks and cameras to take photos, and returned to their countries of origin suntanned, with some traditional shirt from Latin America and notes for a future book to be published on Liberation Theology" (26).[107] For Althaus-Reid, then, the material suffering of the people became an item of merchandise within the theological market dominated by Eurocentric theology and guided by Latin American systems of decency which continue to regulate "how women should dress, how they should speak, the sexual activities they should perform" (27).[108]

In addition to her critique of the misrepresentation and capitalization of "the poor" in Latin America within European and North American theological markets, Althaus-Reid expresses doubt on the liberatory potential of the Virgin Mary and Mariology within Liberation Theology. The "Mary-machine model" within male-dominated Liberation Theology and liberationist writings perpetuates, according to Althaus-Reid, patriarchal and economic systems based on women's oppression while idealizing Mary as the model woman for Liberation Theology, respected not because she was "the so-called white middle-class woman" but because she was "the poor, ignorant but faithful Christian mother" (34). Addressing feminist theologians of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s and their take on the role of the Virgin in Liberation Theology, Althaus-Reid rhetorically asks, "If Mary is a symbol for the Latin American women's liberation

[107] Recounting a time when a European bishop came to Buenos Aires, Althaus-Reid explains how she and her community "played the game" and allowed the bishop to misrepresent them: "To become marketable in Europe, Liberation Theology needed to go native… The community of the poor that he [the bishop] wanted to visit only existed in his imagination, composed of his colonial ancestral memory of stereotypes of such degrees that he could not have recognised a community of the poor if he had spent a month amongst them" (31).

[108] Althaus-Reid explains: "Over the dead bodies, the bodies of people who suffered and felt their life to be sometimes intolerable, theology was written… Systematic theological production has traditionally made reflection on human suffering its object of exchange. In Eurocentric theology, the material suffering of the people was expropriated from the oppressed classes and became the intellectual property of the owner of the intellectual system of production, the theologian. The real suffering of the oppressed… becomes an item of merchandise which, following Marx's analysis, becomes an abstraction separated from the system which nurtures and locates it" (27).

movement, how is it that in 500 years we have seen exactly the opposite?" (44).[109] Here, Althaus-Reid invites a serious reconsideration of the Virgin Mary, her symbolic role within Spanish colonial projects and twentieth-century military dictatorships, and the limitations—theological or otherwise—of calling upon the Virgin for women's liberation; instead of elevating the Virgin Mary as a symbol for women's liberation, Althaus-Reid argues that the "symbolic action of the Virgin Mary throughout the history of Latin America is part of the problem, not the solution" (46). The Virgin Mary is, for Althaus-Reid's critique of Liberation Theology and feminist theological thought of the late twentieth century, a simulacrum, "a myth of a woman without a vagina" and symbol divorced from the complex realities of Latin American women's lived experiences. Althaus-Reid's assertion that the symbolic action of the Virgin Mary in Latin America perpetuates oppression signals the seemingly irresolvable tension between the opposing forces and discourses that the Virgin and her worshippers must straddle and navigate, particularly the tension between the secular and the religious, the symbolic and the embodied, and the virgin and the whore.[110]

In the years since Althaus-Reid's Indecent Theology, theologians, cultural critics, and performance scholars alike have revisited the Virgin Mary, especially the Virgen de Guadalupe, and her importance for people whose identities and experiences remain outside the purview of "approved social and divine interactions." For example, Diana Taylor approaches the Virgen de Guadalupe as part of a "pantheon of Virgenes" produced by the "representational practice of multiplying the images of the Virgen" resulting in "the multiplication of the apparitions

[109] Althaus-Reid specifically mentions Ivone Gebara and Maria Clara Bingemer's *Mary: Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, trans. from Portuguese Phillip Berryman, Maryknool, NY: Orbis Books, 1987.
[110] For a more in depth look at the virgin-whore dichotomy in relation to Chicana/x feminist thought and the Virgen de Guadalupe, La Malinche, and Tonantzin, see Irene Lara, "Goddess of the Américas in the Decolonial Imaginary: Beyond the Virtuous Virgen/Pagan Puta Dichotomy," *Feminist Studies*, vol. 34 no. 1/2 (2008), pp. 99-127.

themselves" in "[e]very area colonized by the Spaniards" (*The Archive and the Repertoire* 48). For Taylor, the multiplicity of Virgenes and socio-religious practices involving the worship and re-presentation of these Virgenes make visible "an entire spectrum of attitudes and values" which have "as many layers of meaning as there are spectators, participants, and witnesses." Taylor, like Peterson, acknowledges the plethora of religious practices, significations, gestures, and affects made possible by over five centuries of interactions between the various visualizations of La Virgen and her spectators and worshippers that tell "a very specific story of oppression, migration, and reinvention" (49). Similarly, Brent Blackwell's exploration of the queering of popular Mariology and popular religiosity approaches La Virgen from the perspective of "the theologically 'othered'" and finds within the ambiguity of Mariology the potential for both oppression and liberation ("Towards a popular queer Mariology" 131). Blackwell argues that such traditional Catholic teachings as the Immaculate Conception and Mary's "perpetual virginity" represent a "negation of the flesh," a denial of the materiality of Mary's body (132). A queering of Mary and of Mariology therefore requires a re-articulation of Mary as a queer figure "who is embodied; who is both virgin and whore, and in whom death is affirmed and celebrated" (138).

In line with Blackwell's queering of popular Mariology, Stefanie Knauss's take on López's *Our Lady* highlights the Virgin Mary as an ambiguous figure existing within, and moving between, both religious and secular-political spheres who can serve as an instrument of oppression *as well as* a source of empowerment. For Knauss, the ambiguous complexity of the Virgin Mary—an ambiguity that moves between passivity and activity, virginity and motherhood, and symbolic representation and the concrete experiences of women—provides "openings that have allowed feminist, liberation and queer theologians and artists to draw on

Mary in their critique of this [patriarchal, heteronormative, and colonial] order as a source of empowerment" ("Imagining Mary in Theology and Visual Culture" 132). As a colonizing symbol of patriarchal and heteronormative codes of conduct and decency, the Virgin Mary is, for Althaus-Reid, part of the problem of oppression and not the solution. However, in emphasizing the plurality of La Virgen's interactions with devotees and worshippers over the centuries, Taylor, Blackwell, and Knauss make room for ambiguity in La Virgen's symbolic action and meaning, an ambiguity (and potential for liberation) made possible by the affirmation of the materiality of La Virgen's body.

Within Althaus-Reid's Indecent Theology, the Virgin Mary is not the only Christian figure subject to undressing and indecenting in the revelation and challenging of spiritual and economic oppression in Latin America. In her discussion of the Spanish colonization of the Americas, Althaus-Reid focuses on the subjugation of women and the economic-religious regulation of sexuality as the unifying threads holding a colonizing Christianity together. She therefore proposes the simultaneous undressing of the male Christian godhead and the heterosexual concept of man to reveal the centrality of the body, bodily functions, and bodily struggles within Christianity and Christian dogmatics, despite the predominance of a "make-believe dualistic opposition of mind and body" within "decent" theological thought:

> Christianity is related to bodily functions (artificial insemination and the birth of Jesus-God, issues of control of sexuality, torture, hunger, death, and the return of the killed body in resurrection). It is also about bodily relations such as the dogma of the Trinity which is a reflection of the social understanding of what we call 'a medieval family' pattern of hierarchical obsessions and Darwinian tensions, intrinsically male. Other elaborated dogmas such as the life of the body after death… function with the same

> precision of the regulation of bodies by concepts of sin which never escape the boundaries of perceived embodied needs. (18-19)

The centrality of the body or, as Althaus-Reid calls it, the "body-paradigm" is a key component of Indecent Theology because "it undresses and uncovers sexuality and economy at the same time" as it uncovers the primary, sexual resistance to religious and political authority and hegemonic discourse (19-20). The timelessness of this resistance to discourses of religious (and political and economic) power—Althaus-Reid describes such resistance to discourse and authority as "openings" that simultaneously exist in the past, present, and future—matches the claims to timelessness and universal truth of the religious dogmas themselves as theology in the post-1492 globalized world continues to desperately cling to "what gives it an ultimate sense of coherence and tradition: not God, but a theory of sexuality" (22). For Althaus-Reid, then, hegemonic, patriarchal theology in Latin America is "a sexual act, a sexual doing" that is simultaneously economical in that it "regulates numbers, fixes positions and pre-empties intimacy and meaning." Indecenting theology therefore also requires the undressing and indecenting of the theologian, a reckoning of the theologian with their own sexuality, sexual "indecency," and body that requires "us [feminist and indecent theologians] to take our pants off at the moment of doing theology" (37). Undressing and indecenting the Virgin Mary, the Christian god, heterosexuality and heteronormative notions of "man," and the theologian "doing theology" strips theology bare and exposes the centrality of sexuality and sexual-bodily relations and needs within Christianity and Christian dogma. The indecent theologian's undressed body therefore bridges the symbolic with the material/sexual in a way that traditional acts of worship or identifying with religious symbolism cannot.

In the case of the cultural critic, the process and experience of undressing and indecenting while studying La Virgen, her symbolism, and her history requires a reckoning with both desire and desire's place in the production of knowledge and criticism. The undressed critic's body and the criticism they produce reach across disciplinary boundaries and explore where theology meets the secular and the impact of theology and Church history on socio-historical and economic processes, like European colonialism. Approaching the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in this way plants the Church firmly within communities and the processes of human relations—the sexual, political, affective, and economic relations of day-to-day living—and avoids separating the Church and its dogmas from the people who constitute it, from priests and archbishops to biblical scholars and the laity. While (re)historicizing the Immaculate Conception and Guadalupe can be taken as an assault on the very core beliefs and universal/ahistorical claims of the dogma and the supposedly miraculous nature of the original Guadalupe image, taking up such a project for the undressed cultural critic provides an opportunity to explore the centrality of bodily functions and sexual relations for both Church dogma and secular institutions and nation-states, as well as how Church dogma informs and influences these institutions, and therefore questions the secular/religious divide and Guadalupe's place within this divide.

As an image, a sacred-secular simulacra of the Virgen de Guadalupe that sparked controversy for its display in a museum and inspired calls for religious censorship, López's *Our Lady* straddles these divides and highlights La Virgen's ever evolving place within conservative Catholic and queer communities, indigenous and settler-colonial discourses and communities, and theological and secular markets as a top-selling image/figurine around the world. Created nearly 400 years after Montalvo's account of the undressing of the Spanish Guadalupe statue, *Our Lady* brings to the fore and confronts the politics and theology of decency as well as the

Mexican Guadalupe's role in perpetuating the misogyny of "decent theology." As Cisneros explains in "Guadalupe the Sex Goddess," women pay for such politics and theology with guilt and shame as the Virgen de Guadalupe serves as a role model "for brown women like me [Cisneros]:" "How could I acknowledge my sexuality, let alone enjoy sex, with so much guilt? In the guise of modesty my culture locked me in a double chastity belt of ignorance and *vergüenza*, shame" (46-48). For Cisneros, the process of indecenting her relationship with La Virgen, and therefore the recovery and liberation of her sexuality, required an excavation of pre-colonial and colonial history as she searched for Guadalupe "in the rubble of history" (49).

Our Lady depicts this rubble literally by replacing the Virgin's blue, star-covered cloak with images from the Coyolxauhqui stone, the fifteenth-century monolith uncovered by electrical workers in Mexico City in 1978 that depicts the mythical dismemberment of the moon goddess, Coyolxauhqui, at the hands of her brother and national deity of the Mexica, Huitzilopochtli. As a symbol of the continuing process of self-discovery and healing after trauma (both personal trauma and the historical trauma of colonization), the Coyolxauhqui stone drapes around Raquel Salinas's shoulders yet leaves her head uncovered as she models an upright, forward-facing stance, unlike the covered, bent head and demure posture of the Virgin in the original Guadalupe painting. The floral embroidery painted on the original Guadalupe's dress now serves as a stylized background for *Our Lady* as the rose-covered Salinas emerges from a bright red, yellow, and orange aureola. Using the original Virgin's dress as the background for *Our Lady* gives the impression that we, the audience, are lifting the Virgin's dress to discover her naked, rose-covered, brown Chicana body underneath. As a Christian motif tied to Spanish depictions of the Immaculate Conception both within early modern Spain and its colonies, the appearance of an aureola in *Our Lady*, along with the Coyolxauhqui stone and the floral embroidery, create layers

of meaning tying pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial Mexican history to the Virgin as Salinas's body is framed by the Coyolxauhqui stone, which in turn is framed by the aureola which is then framed by the floral embroidery. If, as Althaus-Reid contests, it is a theory of sexuality and not the Christian godhead that provides a sense of tradition and coherence to Christianity, decent theology, and Christian dogmatics in the post-1492 world, Salinas's undressed body confronts such a patriarchal theory of heteronormative sexuality by reappropriating the aureola of the Immaculate Conception and the historical trauma of colonization (represented in the Coyolxauhqui stone) for the purposes of self-discovery, exploration, and representation.

Addressing "Virginal liberationists," or liberation theologians who insist that Latin American women can/should identify with the Virgin Mary, Althaus-Reid argues that worshipping Mary in this way, like writing theology about Mary, is an "act of identification with religious symbolism" akin to the act of putting one's head in the hole of a funfair or carnival photo-booth. This momentary act of identification allows the worshipper to identify as the symbol being worshipped, like the carnival goer sticking their head through the hole in the funfair photo-booth to become a pirate, a superhero, or a nude woman. The thrill for the carnival goer who wants to be portrayed as a superhero or a nude woman is made possible by the fact that the funfair photograph contradicts "as much as possible the identity of the person portrayed." Similarly, traditional acts of identification with the Virgin necessitate the erasure, or contradiction, of the identity, sexuality, and body of the worshipper. For Latin American women and the poor, identifying with the canonical Virgin Mary (as Virginal liberationists would want) requires the denial of their sexualities, lived realities, and the labeling of their sexual and bodily experiences as "sinful" and "indecent." For this reason, Althaus-Reid argues that "in worshipping

Mary women need to go through a spiritual clitoridectomy, in the sense of mutilating their lust, in order to identify with the Virgin, get her approval of their behaviour and never question the social and political order built around such religious ideology" (48-49). Althaus-Reid goes so far as to call the theology written by most Latin American feminist theologians (of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s) "Vanilla Theology," like "vanilla sex," because it is afraid of "disapproval from their churches or institutions" and does not "risk anything, because it does not come from women who love women enough" (52). Writing about and worshipping the Virgin Mary in ways approved by the Church is therefore always an inescapable identificatory act in which the (decent) feminist theologian becomes "a hybrid product" who retains the "full cultural values of sexual oppression" by letting the symbol of the Virgin and the Church's control of her symbolic significance overtake real women's identities, realities, and sexualities (52). However, in prioritizing pleasure and sexuality, the indecent theologian's undressed body flips the script of identification with, and worship of, religious symbolism. The indecent theologian does not identify with the Virgin Mary; rather, the Virgin Mary is portrayed, felt, and explored on and through the body of (in this case) the indecent theologian. The indecent theologian's lust then becomes Mary's lust—and this lust for sexual pleasure houses the divine.

Inspired by Yolanda López's *Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe* (1978), Althaus-Reid describes how she made plans to attend carnival in Buenos Aires as "a female impersonator of the Virgin of Guadalupe" (47). While admiring López's self-portrait—her modern dress, bare legs, running shoes, and sense of autonomous power and motion—Althaus-Reid notices how López's Virgen de Guadalupe appears to be emerging from "an open, gigantic red vulva" (47). The gigantic red vulva is the flaming aureola emanating from La Virgen to mark her status as a sacred personage. Yolanda López's self-portrait is, for Althaus-Reid, a sort of

Chicana a*micta sole* participating in an act of identification by sticking her head through the hole in the funfair photograph, except this time the hole is the divine, swollen red vulva. Seeing La Virgen's aureola as a vulva requires a re-thinking of the sexual position of "the divine," or "God," in relation to this vulva and what it means for the artist (or theologian) to be emerging from and identifying with it.[111] If the religious symbolism in question is a gigantic vulva, is the Chicana artist or indecent Latin American theologian destined to perpetuate oppression and "Vanilla Theology" (an understanding of the divine as the penetrative dissemination of the Word of God made possible by forced submission to and reception of the Word of God and the sacrifice of female pleasure)?

Describing La Virgen's aureola as a divine vulva allows Althaus-Reid to explore a new definition of god/the divine as a site of pleasure, a "G(od) spot" that "belongs to the vulva and her pleasure… to the embrace of the lips and the hardness of the clitoris" that exists independently of "penetrative disseminations" (48). The Chicana artist and indecent feminist theologian can therefore think about themselves and their relationship with the G(od) spot of La Virgen from an "undifferentiated sexual position" as they emerge from the divine vulva; in this way, symbolic representation of the divine gives way to the presence and embodiment of the divine (48). Seeing La Virgen's aureola as a gigantic divine vulva enables an inversion of the relationship between the Virgin and the Chicana artist (or indecent theologian) in which it is the Virgin who sticks her head through the divine vulva (aureola) that marks the *real* body of the artist as sacred. Instead of the theologian or artist identifying as the Virgen de Guadalupe

[111] Althaus-Reid explains further: "The point is that to write about the Virgin will always be 'the portrait of the theologian as the Virgin of Guadalupe' because it cannot avoid showing considerable degrees of (dis)investment in that gigantic vulva… To put our heads, as women theologians, in that vulva is, in itself, a statement of sexual identifications, which are closely linked to the production of ideological discourses in the continent and the challenges presented in them by conscientisation processes" (52).

(*Portrait of the Artist as the Virgin of Guadalupe*), La Virgen is instead portrayed on and through the body of the theologian or artist (a "portrait of the Virgin of Guadalupe as the artist"). In the case of Alma López's *Our Lady*, the slippery relationship and tension between representation and divine presence, embodiment, and power is laid bare on the undressed body of the Virgen de Guadalupe-as-Chicana artist (in this case, Raquel Salinas). For Montalvo and the Spanish monks in Extremadura, undressing the Spanish Virgin's wooden statue inspired more than sexual anxieties surrounding the impropriety of the men who would want to see and know "that which is prohibited." The secretive undressing of the wooden statue, like the undressed Virgen-as-Chicana artist, acknowledges that, despite the Church's best efforts to abstract the Virgin and her body from the realities of women's lived experiences here on Earth, Mary does indeed have a vulva and a G(od) spot. The flaming aureola of La Virgen—originally tied to the apocalyptic iconographical tradition of the Immaculate Conception and doctrinal denial of the Virgin's lust—then becomes an affirmation of La Virgen's (and the lesbian Chicana artist's) body and material existence.

The Virgen de Guadalupe is a complicated figure that straddles the secular-religious divide. Her sacred, miraculous image has been replicated and re-visualized thousands of times over the centuries and she has been invoked by Spanish colonizers and missionaries, eighteenth and nineteenth-century patriotic *criollos*, twentieth-century Mexican revolutionaries, Chicano nationalists, present-day immigrant rights groups in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, and lesbian Chicana feminists alike. Peterson's concept of the subjectivity of seeing elucidates La Virgen's ambiguity as a paradoxical figure of both liberation and oppression, sexual freedom and patriarchal repression, spiritual empowerment and religiously motivated genocide. While this ambiguity can, at times, be a source of discomfort, controversy, and disagreement, La Virgen's

polysemous and enigmatic nature also enables Chicana feminist and indecent theological explorations of the divine. The original apparition account and miraculous image of La Virgen underscore the importance of visual culture, acts of seeing, and religious symbolism for medieval and early modern Catholicism and the Church's colonial-evangelizing projects in the Americas. However, thanks to the propagation of copies and re-visualizations of the miraculous image, a multiplicity of subjectivities can see, re-imagine, undress, and see themselves in La Virgen (as well as see La Virgen within themselves). In the following section, I close this chapter with an exploration of what it means for the Virgen de Guadalupe to be "real" in relation to her ambiguous nature and Alma López's *Our Lady*. For López, *Our Lady* was never about sexualizing La Virgen or depicting her nude; rather, it was about proving that La Virgen was real and this "realness" is uncovered and revealed by the lesbian Chicana body.

La Virgen's Controversial Realness: Alma López's *Our Lady* as Queer Chicana Miracle

> One can easily say that the Virgin Mary is the strangest thing in Christianity and scarcely needs anybody to Queer her, but Queer is not oddity. Queer is precisely the opposite: it is the very essence of a denied reality that we are talking about here when we speak of 'Queering' or Indecenting as a process of coming back to the authentic, everyday life experiences described as odd by the ideology- and mythology-makers alike.
>
> -Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Indecent Theology* (2000)

After Alma López and museum officials received death threats and were publicly criticized and attacked by Archbishop Sheehan and conservative Catholics like Villegas and Casso, López prepared a statement to meet with protesters to defend her first amendment rights as an artist:

> I am forced to wonder how men like Mr. Villegas and the Archbishop are looking at my work that they feel it is "blasphemy" and "the Devil." I wonder how they see bodies of women. I wonder why they think that our bodies are so ugly and perverted that they

> cannot be seen in an art piece in a museum… I am a woman who has grown up with La Virgen. Who are these men to tell me what to think and how to relate to her? ("The Artist of *Our Lady*" 14-15)[112]

López's rebuttal cuts through the religious discourse and decency politics and lays bare the misogyny and homophobia hidden beneath her critics' outrage, violence, and offense. According to López, her critics "looked at the image sexually" and therefore misconstrued her intentions with the piece: "It wasn't about her [La Virgen] being naked. It was about her being covered in roses. She was proving that she was real, that her myth or story was real" (qtd. in Román-Odio 129). The roses covering Salinas's body in the digital collage—like the roses and flowers in the Guadalupe apparition accounts—serve to prove La Virgen's "realness," a realness that underscores the material reality of La Virgen's body, a brown, indigenous body that consequently has (and always had) hips, a vulva, a clitoris, and breasts. And, following Mayra Rivera's reading of materiality and the body in the works of Althaus-Reid, I aim to approach La Virgen's embodiment of "realness" in "its dynamic, complex relationality" and thus describe her materiality "as fundamentally relational (rather than substantial)" ("Corporeal Visions and Apparitions" 74).[113] In the first two sections of this chapter, I explored the Virgen de Guadalupe's long history of controversy and the problems and nuances of representation and

[112] López intended to deliver this statement at the MOIFA on April 4, 2001 during the first meeting of the museum's Board of Regents; her efforts were thwarted, however, when protestors stormed the meeting.

[113] In her contribution to *Dancing Theology in Fetish Boots: Essays in Honour of Marcella Althaus-Reid* (London: SCM Press, 2010), Rivera looks at Althaus-Reid's "constructive contributions for theologizing with/in flesh and matter," and relates Althaus-Reid's work with the body and sexuality to the history of ancient theologians and writers who were deeply concerned with the body and materiality, particularly in how relics bridge the dichotomy between matter and spirit ("Corporeal Vision and Apparitions" 79). Following Judith Butler's take on the discursive construction of the materiality of the body in *Bodies that Matter*, Rivera argues that theological work concerning the body and materiality "must resist the tendency either to reify or idealize them, instead theorizing materiality in its dynamic, complex relationality and incompleteness… describing materiality as fundamentally relational (rather than substantial) without losing sight either of the density of common stuff or of the ghostly presences that haunt even the most concrete things" (93-94).

identification with La Virgen for Latinx/a, Chicanx/a, and Latin American feminist artists, writers, and theologians when undressing and indecenting Guadalupe. As a digital collage on public display that was made into an object of controversy by conservative Catholics and male Chicano nationalists, López's *Our Lady* was forced to inhabit the dividing line between the sacred and the sacrilegious (or the decent and the indecent) within public discourse and the international media coverage the controversy received. To close this chapter, I approach *Our Lady* as a queer Chicana miracle birthed amidst controversy—not unlike the colonial circumstances and complex cultural and religious mix that gave birth to the original Guadalupe painting in the mid sixteenth century and the subsequent controversies that made her a symbol of national and international importance. *Our Lady* is therefore miraculous in that it serves as a testament to, borrowing from Althaus-Reid, a denied reality: the existence of real women and women-loving-women and their everyday life experiences described as odd (and indecent and sacrilegious) by the ideology- and mythology-makers alike.

In the official apparition account, roses and flowers play a key role in proving to Archbishop Zumárraga that the Virgen de Guadalupe had indeed appeared to the native neophyte Juan Diego and asked for a church to be built at the hill of Tepeyac in her honor. Following La Virgen's instructions, Juan Diego collected roses and flowers in his *tilma* and, as he opened the *tilma* to show the out-of-season flowers to the archbishop, the image of La Virgen miraculously appeared imprinted on the cloth. For Sánchez's *Imagen*, the fact that the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe had been born among flowers—the only known Marian image to have been miraculously created in this way—signaled the superiority of the Mexican Virgin to all other Marian images (Brading 65-66). In his *Imagen*, Sánchez, while praising the miraculous image, describes the flowers as essential components in the triumph of Christianity over the "demonic

religion" of the Nahua speaking peoples: "flores milagrosas brotadas en el monte, flores que son el triunfo de todas las flores, flores con que triunfan los fieles de aqueste Nuevo Mundo" ("miraculous flowers sprouting on the hill [of Tepeyac], flowers that are the triumph of all flowers, flowers with which the faithful of the New World triumph;" 94). Even though Sánchez's narrative presents Guadalupe's miraculous apparition as an allegory for global salvation and erases the identity of the painting's indigenous creator, Marcos (Cipac) de Aquino, the importance of flowers for the apparition narrative reveals the persistent contributions of sixteenth-century Nahua painting practices and ideas "in which the making of pigments and dyes with flowers and plants was the norm, and in which flowers were an integral part of relating to the divine" (Bargellini 17). The prominence of flowers and floral imagery in seventeenth and eighteenth-century copies of the Guadalupe painting and depictions of the Juan Diego apparition narrative can be seen in the works of European and native painters alike and demonstrates how "the association of flowers with pigments, dyes, and colors" endured for centuries (20). From Sánchez's assertion of Guadalupe's superiority to other Marian images and the supposed triumph of a colonizing Catholicism over the religious beliefs and practices of the Nahua peoples to the long-lasting influence of indigenous painting traditions in the fabrication of sacred pigments and dyes, the roses and flowers of the Mexican Virgin's miraculous apparition mark the body and image of Guadalupe as real and divine, and connect López's *Our Lady* to La Virgen's colonial, indigenous, and controversial history.

For Alma López's critics, however, the roses covering Raquel Salinas's body were anything but sacred and instead became a "rose bikini," a sacrilegious and scandalous outfit for the mother of the Christian god.[114] Ironically, as Alicia Gaspar de Alba illuminates, in their

[114] Once word got out about the protests and controversy surrounding *Our Lady* in Santa Fe, international and national press (from the Los Angeles Times, New York Times, and the Ottawa Citizen to the BBC) insisted on

protests and public outcry against *Our Lady*, López's critics transformed (or transubstantiated) *Our Lady* into Mary Immaculate despite the artist's clarifications that the piece was never meant to be displayed in a church: "The viewer's subjective beliefs inscribe the image with connotative meaning, be it sacred or sacrilegious… [the protestors and critics] actually created an apparition; that is, they perceived something that was not visible" ("Devil in a Rose Bikini" 214). The "vituperative community response that was instigated by men" inadvertently (and unwittingly) transformed *Our Lady* (the museum art piece and object of their disgust) into a miraculous and indecent apparition that, in showing the Virgin with exposed skin, disrespected the immaculate mother (239).[115] Gaspar de Alba points out that, in referencing the Virgen de Guadalupe as a cultural sign, the controversial reception of *Our Lady* boils down to "semiotic questions of interpretation, of the perception, reception, and negotiation of meanings" which are ultimately "questions about power" (216-217).[116]

As David Weddle demonstrates in his cross-cultural study of miracles, however, miracles and miraculous apparitions are also about power and, as narratives of power, miracles reflect the political situations of the communities in which they occur. From the Latin *miraculum* ("object of wonder") and *mirari* ("to wonder"), a miracle can be broadly defined as, according to Weddle, "an event of transcendent power that arouses wonder and carries religious significance for those

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referring to López's work as a "bikini-clad Madonna," a "Virgin Mary in a Two-piece," and a "bikini Virgin," thus reducing the protests and religiously motivated attempts at censorship to catchy headlines.

[115] In her analysis of the procession-protest organized by Villegas, Gaspar de Alba clarifies: "In the case of the Our Lady controversy… the Museum of International Folk Art was believed to be imbued with… the antisacred. Ironically, the protest was inverted into its opposite, a pilgrimage, spurred by the social body's miraculous transformation of a photo-based digital collage into an irreverent apparition" (230).

[116] Gaspar de Alba uses Chela Sandoval's *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), particularly her concept of "meta-ideologizing," to describe how Alma López appropriated key elements of the original Guadalupe image, as cultural sign, to create a different sign and challenge the heteronormative and misogynist powers that be that claim ownership of Guadalupe: "… it was Alma López's exploration of the way her own life fit into the structured meaning of the Virgin of Guadalupe which led her to 'meta-ideologize' the image and create a different sign with an altered meaning that most challenged the powers that claim ownership of the sign" (217).

who witness it or hear or read about it" (*Miracles* 4). Apart from the pedagogical function of miracles in illustrating religious teachings and traditions, miracles and miracle stories are intimately tied to the material conditions of everyday life and the hope that human needs, material or otherwise, can and will be met. As symbolic expression of a community's desire for political freedom, and as hope for universal human needs, miracles represent a disruption of order whose "subversive effect is precisely their attraction, especially to those for whom 'order' is too often a code word for limitation, even suppression" (20). Miracles, as events of transcendent power that evoke wonder, are social events that require a community of witnesses and believers to acknowledge the miracle as a disruption of order and everyday reality. López's *Our Lady*, then, can be described as an object of controversy *and* as an object of wonder whose "miraculous" apparition at the MOIFA in Santa Fe disrupted the everyday, political order of the community. By tapping into the original miraculous image and apparition story, *Our Lady* signals a revolutionary desire and hope "in radically new possibilities for this world" and grounds this desire and hope in the undressed, lesbian Chicana body (3). The *Our Lady* controversy itself could be described as a miracle of sorts for its role in consolidating a community of supporters for López and the MOIFA museum; while the controversy provided an opportunity for Villegas, Casso, Sheehan, and the like to perpetuate (and perpetrate) colonial and patriarchal violence, the controversy also allowed for the universal human need for community to be met for López's supporters and the greater LGBTQ Latinx and Chicanx communities. As a miracle that played a role in consolidating the LGBTQ Latinx and Chicanx community in the face of homophobia and misogyny, the *Our Lady* controversy also highlights the importance of hope for the future of the community for, as Weddle explains, "[p]erhaps at the most basic level,

belief in miracles is the expression of our refusal to accept existence in a closed system of material forces and our hope that the future may be radically different from the past" (34).

The relationship between the miraculous and the body and bodily experiences is nothing new in Christianity and, apart from the story of Christ's birth, death, and resurrection, this relationship is particularly evident in the reported (and at times controversial) miracles and hagiographies of the Catholic saints. For example, in his study of the iconographic history of the stigmata of Saint Francis of Assisi, Arnold Davidson shows how stigmata, like that of Saint Francis, signaled a form of mysticism "in which mystical experience is no longer merely spiritual but is accompanied by phenomena and transformations that are physical" that reflect changing attitudes towards the humanity of Christ and his corporeal existence in the early Church. According to Davidson, these changing attitudes towards Christ's incarnation cannot simply be reduced to "a new theoretical elaboration regarding Christ's humanity" or a "rational theological discourse on the transcendent" but instead must be understood from within the realm of "the spiritual experience of the transcendent" in which the body is an essential component of the ecstatic experience where immaterial and material spiritual concerns meet ("Miracles of Bodily Transformation" 452). This blurry line between the physical and the spiritual, the immaterial and the material, or the object of devotion and the devotee, can also be understood, according to Glenn Peers, as a form of animism in which the "distinctions among humanity, objects, and world were sometimes blurred or masked. The natural world, then, provided insight into God's immanence… Divinity infused matter, and when properly activated and perceived, that matter mediated and transformed" ("Object Relations" 971). In his study of the religious practices of everyday Christians in Late Antiquity (c. 200-c. 750), Peers looks at the "deep relational sympathy between late antique Christians and their objects" in which the "line between

image and saint, representation and relic, loses meaning; agency extends from saint to relic to image, and the network of relations among them is a constant operation of power" (971). For Peers, then, studying the religious practices of late antique Christians and their relationships with objects of devotion through the lens of animism reveals that, for these early Christians, "not only did objects alter subjectivities but also they actively participated themselves, as entities in a process of exchange among desiring bodies" (989).

In her exploration of queer bodies and queer Christian theologies, Susannah Cornwall focuses on apophatic theologies grounded in the ineffable nature and ultimate unknowability of the Christian god and explores how apophasis sheds light on the relationship between bodies and the divine, and between bodies and other bodies:

> Body identities come to be figured as both self-constituting and as constituted by others in the community… That bodies are known and unknown, that they are wholly irreducible yet at the same time wholly mysterious, is particularly significant given the ontological status of bodies in the Christian tradition. In the Eucharist, human bodies assimilate into themselves the body of Christ, thereby actually *becoming* the body of Christ… Bodies thereby define themselves and define all other bodies. ("Apophasis and Ambiguity" 20)

As a queering of theology and proactive exploration of the tension between knowing and unknowing, Cornwall's approach to apophasis reveals that embodiment is, paradoxically, transcorporeal; that is, to define a body as discrete is to recognize that the body "is always already to be constructed by others as well as being self-constructed and self-projecting" (37).[117]

[117] For Cornwall, "queer" and "queering" do not necessarily refer to well-defined political categories of identification. Rather, "queer" refers to "a blossoming of multiplicity with justice and fullness of personhood as central, common ends" where queerness itself must be "continually reframed and reworked." Queerness, following

The miraculous in relation with the body therefore implies an encounter: between the body and the divine, the body and the miraculous, and the body and other bodies in the community. Within the context of the dressing, cross-dressing, and undressing of Christian bodies—like the undressing of La Virgen—the miraculous and the ecstatic, and the religious and the erotic, become united in devotion and "make possible a different reality" in which transgressions against the norms of sexuality and gender are celebrated and "the spaces of possibility which are closed off by dichotomous conceptualization" are made visible (Isherwood 4-5).

López's miraculous undressing of La Virgen not only harkens back to the miraculous physical (and queer) experiences of the early Catholic saints and late antique Christians; keeping in mind the unique colonial encounters and circumstances that birthed the Virgen de Guadalupe in the first place, López's *Our Lady* also exemplifies what Jennifer Scheper Hughes calls the material dimensions of Guadalupan devotional practice and the ritualistic fusion between sacred objects and bodies of devotees unique to Mexican Catholicism. Studying the devotional practice in which Mexican devotees and pilgrims carry replicas of La Virgen as sacred burdens on their backs on their way to Tepeyac, Scheper Hughes argues that "[t]he boundary between the body of the devotee and the body of the effigy becomes blurred… the pilgrim transforms their body into a mobile altar upon which the image or effigy is borne." In the sacred encounter between the replica of La Virgen, the pilgrim carrying the replica, and the original painting at Tepeyac, the replica becomes infused with sacred power and, according to Scheper Hughes, "the pilgrims become the image itself" because "the line between religious actor and the objects of material religion is almost entirely blurred;" she continues: "The ritual act of binding in this context is neither self-negation nor submission… the act of binding the sacred objects to the body of the

apophatic theology, is "profoundly eschatological: transformative and transforming, provisional, its meaning constantly made and remade, done and undone" (34).

pilgrim fuses the two together into a single material, sacred entity" ("God-Bearers on Pilgrimage to Tepeyac" 168). Careful not to describe the contemporary ritual/pilgrimage as a direct continuation of the pre-Hispanic *Teomamaque* ritual god-bearers tradition—in which Nahua priests carried sacred bundles (*tlaquimilloli*) on their backs, mythologically referencing the priest who carried the god Huitzilopotchli on his back while migrating from Aztlán to Mexico City—Scheper Hughes does highlight resonances between the contemporary and the pre-colonial practices that result from the "fusion of European Christian iconography with indigenous Mexican conceptions of religious materiality" (179). The sacred image and the body carrying the sacred image become one in much the same way La Virgen and the lesbian Chicana body depicting La Virgen become one in López's *Our Lady*. The roses covering Salinas's body, the Coyolxauhqui stone-mantle draped on her shoulders, the black crescent moon at her feet, and the viceroy butterfly wings of the angel (modeled by Raquel Gutiérrez) all reference this fusion that results from the encounter between European iconography of the Immaculate Conception and Nahua conceptions of sacred materiality and Mesoamerican mythologies of migration.

In the statement she prepared for meeting with the protestors, López includes herself in a lineage of Chicana artists who have re-visualized La Virgen and who have also received threats of violence for sharing "their own personal experiences using La Virgen de Guadalupe:"

> When I see *Our Lady* as well as the works portraying La Virgen by many Chicana artists, I see an alternative voice expressing the multiplicities of our lived realities… I see Chicanas creating a deep and meaningful connection to this revolutionary cultural female image. I see Chicanas who understand faith. ("The Artist of *Our Lady*" 14) [118]

[118] López specifically mentions how Ester Hernández and Yolanda López were threatened and attacked for their portrayals of La Virgen: "More than twenty years ago, artists Yolanda M. López and Ester Hernández were threatened and attacked for portraying La Virgen in a feminist and liberating perspective. Yolanda M. López received bomb threats for her portrayal of La Virgen wearing low-heeled shoes" (14).

For theologian and Guadalupan scholar, Timothy Matovina, faith takes a central role in theology. Citing theology's traditional definition as "faith seeking understanding," Matovina's examination of Guadalupan theologies understands that faith, more often than not, functions as a precursor to theology that "stems from an encounter: with believers, with holy beings like Guadalupe, and for Christians ultimately with Jesus Christ" (*Theologies of Guadalupe* 7). The faith that López sees and expresses through the Virgen de Guadalupe stems from an encounter with La Virgen that is made possible through La Virgen's miraculous realness and the materiality of the lesbian Chicana body: "For Alma López, the place at which she connects most intimately with the Virgin of Guadalupe is her own sex, that is to say, her body" (Gaspar de Alba 234).

The controversy surrounding *Our Lady* was largely generated by a confused male gaze confronted with an image of a powerful, real woman who exists solely for herself. As Gaspar de Alba illustrates in her analysis of the controversy, the Virgin in *Our Lady* "refuses to be objectified or appropriated." With the help of her friends, Raquel Salinas and Raquel Gutiérrez, Alma López depicts La Virgen as a real woman in a powerful stance facing directly forward, chin raised in confidence, who is "liberated from the yoke of a relational identity" that would tie her identity to the traditional patriarchal roles of wife and mother ("Devil in a Rose Bikini" 239-240). In this chapter, I have approached the *Our Lady* controversy by weaving together an analysis of the desire to undress La Virgen held together with the many contributions of Chicana/x and Latina/x feminist artists, theologians, and writers as well as the perspectives of art historians, historians, queer theologians, and ethnographic and performance studies scholars. In exploring La Virgen's indigenous, colonial, and apocalyptic roots, as well as her connections to the Immaculate Conception, I unearth the inner workings of controversy in the process of community formation and demonstrate that controversy and Guadalupe are inextricably

intertwined. As a depiction of the Immaculate Conception irrevocably shaped and changed by colonialism, the original Virgen de Guadalupe painting and official apparition accounts depict a demure, Nahua Mary whose miraculous apparition serves to justify Spanish imperialism and later, Mexican nationalism, and whose body and identity are not fully her own. As the Immaculate Conception, the creation of her body and identity required divine intervention to protect her from the stain of original sin and ensure her "purity" to fulfill her role as mother of the Christian god and, as Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe and Empress of the Americas, she continues to bear the burden of modern, heteronormative Latin American nationalisms and decency politics. The controversy and violence López and *Our Lady* faced are part of a larger history and lineage of controversies surrounding Mary as the Immaculate Conception and the Virgen de Guadalupe that abstract the Virgin Mother from the everyday lived realities and sexualities of women and gender minorities in much the same way that, in naming her an *acheiropoieton*, the Church erases the real, Nahua-speaking artist of the original painting from apparition narratives through the centuries. An indecent, miraculous apparition, López's *Our Lady* pushes La Virgen through the divine, flaming vulva and testifies to the reality that women and women-loving-women exist, independently of misogynistic religious and political discourse and representation. The miracle of *Our Lady* identifies real women as divine and reveals the divine in real women, especially when they come together.

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CHAPTER THREE

Approaching the Nation-State from within El Nié: Paradise, Utopia, and Identity in Josefina Báez's *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* (2008)

> I have visited paradises on earth. / But they were really paradises on earth because I was just visiting.
> -Josefina Báez, *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* (2008)

> To be a Nowhere is not, however, to be without place. Rather, it is to be a whole unto oneself, an *insula*, a world apart, an enclosed and bordered social, political, and cultural totality… Because Utopia is Nowhere, *not* a place in the world… it offers the possibility of redefining what "place" and collective identity might themselves mean. To put it another way, More's *Utopia* helps usher in the conceptual framework or representation of space of "nationness" within which the particularity of each individual nation can then be represented.
> -Phillip E. Wegner, *Imaginary Communities: Utopia, the Nation, and the Spatial Histories of Modernity* (2002)

"Don't you just Foucault my work, *Anzaldúa* it!" I first had the pleasure and privilege of meeting Josefina Báez in the spring of 2012 when, during Lorgia García-Peña's class on Performing Latinidad at the University of Georgia, Báez challenged us to approach her work from Gloria Anzaldúa's *herida abierta* ("open wound") rather than from Michel Foucault's poststructuralist takes on power and biopolitics. That summer I participated in Báez's Performance Autology workshop, and, over the course of two weeks of silence, ritual, and play, I came to know myself more as a co-creator and not just a researcher of the creations of others. In the fall of 2017, I witnessed a reading/performance of *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* (2008) in a church basement in East Harlem that ultimately inspired this chapter. The performance space was split into two areas separated by the audience's seating area. On one extreme, in addition to the microphones and chairs needed for the reading/performance and musical accompaniment, there was an altar covered in flowers, a loaf of bread, artichokes, and pomegranates, among other foods mentioned in *Comrade, Bliss*, at once consecrating the sensuous, pleasurable, and bittersweet experiences described in the poem while also inviting the audience to consider the

performance as a "secular prayer" and join in what Báez playfully calls "The artichoke's politics:" "Beyond right, left, or center. / The artichoke's politics: / Many leaves on the same stem, / Full devotion to one… Artichoke's party is my kind of party" (29).[119] On the other side of the seating area there was a large tarp on the floor imprinted with the image of a labyrinth, specifically the style of labyrinth commonly used for walking meditations. Before the performance began, audience members were invited to remove their shoes and walk along the labyrinth in silent contemplation. While walking along the twists and turns of the labyrinth, silently spiraling towards its center and then back out again, the image of the labyrinth as an island and the island-Self metaphor came to my mind, a metaphor that, as Elizabeth McMahon contends, is a "key coordinate in the map of modernity" in how it relates identity to geography and rose to prominence in the "Western imagination" as Europe was encountering and colonizing new islands and the peoples who originally inhabited them (*Islands, Identity, and the Literary Imagination* 19). Báez's self-identification with an island in *Comrade, Bliss*—"This portion of land inhabited and surrounded by water, / This island called me"—inspires me to bring Báez's particular take on the island-Self metaphor into conversation with this "map of modernity" (24). What might Báez's engagement with the island-Self metaphor reveal about one of the most significant ideas that was born out of the colonial and imperialist foundations of Western modernity, specifically the nation-state?

If the island-Self metaphor is a "key coordinate in the map of modernity," then the nation-state is, according to "the West's" teleological treatment of its history, the destination

[119] The 2008 printing of *Comrade, Bliss* includes a sort of preface after the dedication in which Báez lists various (often contradicting) descriptors for the poem. One of these descriptors is "Secular prayer." Others include: "Grammatically incorrect," "Holy world," "Litany for my present / Soliloquy before dying / Simple. Simplistic / Journal notes… All or none of the above." For this chapter I will be quoting from two versions of *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing*—while my analysis focuses on the 2008 printing of the text, *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* by Ay Ombe Theatre/I om be Press, I will supplement my analysis with quotes from the version of the poem that appears in *Dramaturgia Ay Ombe I* (2011) which has no page numbers.

driving the organization of coordinates on modernity's map. For this chapter, I focus on the spatial elements impacting identity formation within modernity, following what McMahon calls "the spatial turn in the humanities" of recent decades that investigates "[t]he links between geography, literature, and subjectivity" and shows that these links are "not only textual or metaphorical, but historical and structural" (39). Therefore, I place Báez in conversation with two ideas that inform the history and development of "the West" and the nation-state and continue to shape how the nation-state is imagined as the "natural" container and location for collective identity and political organization within the fiction of "the West:" paradise and utopia. As a racialized, transnational subject, Báez's experiences of migration and displacement bring to the fore the problem of home for those subjects most often denied belonging to the nation-states to which they migrate. Following previous studies of Báez's works that emphasize a transnational approach to Dominican performance and the themes of identity, borders, and home—including those penned by Lorgia García-Peña, Camilla Stevens, and Emilia María Durán-Almarza, among others—I argue that Báez *approaches* paradise and utopia from within the space El Nié, that is, from within the pain and discomfort of exile, the violence of national exclusion and, I would argue, from the embodiment of the deep colonial past where the European projection of paradise onto the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island first took root. As a "spiritual locus of enunciation," the temporal *and* spatial dimensions of El Nié provide a symbolic time and place from which the Dominican racialized exile subject can, borrowing from García-Peña, "emerge as an agent of his or her own history and identity/ies" while their body continues to bear witness to the violence of colonization across history and through the generations (*The Borders of Dominicanidad* 173). As transnational identity-forming and home-making practices for migrants and the displaced, writing and performing from within El Nié

provides a time and place, like the metaphorical island-Self, for racialized transnational subjects to grapple with, challenge, and explore the colonial legacy of paradise and utopia to find alternate routes to identity, belonging, community, and bliss.

The island is a powerful image and site for imagining and (re)defining identity, both individual and collective identity, for it provides an opportunity to explore the relationship between identity and place. The unique geographic features of islands invite us to consider some of the tensions built into this relationship between identity and place, including questioning to what extent are our identities self-contained or coherent, as well as the related tension between separation and alienation on the one hand, and connection and interdependence on the other. The first lines of *Comrade, Bliss* touch on these tensions in the voice of Báez's mother, María Pérez vda. Báez, "'God, I do not know where any member of my family is. / But you do. That comforts me'" (1). Beginning with the pain and generational trauma of separation caused by diaspora, exile, and migration, *Comrade, Bliss* is a poem largely concerned with identity, with the doing and undoing of identity, with grappling with the historical and economic forces pushing and pulling on our identities, and with developing a spiritual identity of transcendence that is simultaneously grounded in authentic human relations and the interconnectedness found in the sanctity and universality of silence: "In silence we are one. / One is in silence oneness… And in silence we are alone. / Alone together too" (94-5). Báez's engagement with the paradise and island-Self metaphors in *Comrade. Bliss*, as well as her calls to pay heed to bliss because it "ain't playing," disrupt and disturb the power dynamics and national scripts that organize modern life and dictate who supposedly belongs (and does not belong) to pieces of land wrapped up within the imagined community, to borrow from Benedict Anderson, of the nation-state.[120] Anderson's

[120] See Anderson's influential work, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, originally published in 1983)

influential thesis that, in addition to being territorial and administrative units, nations are imagined communities that depend on the creation and circulation of a shared sense of culture and collective identity provides a starting point for my analysis. However, if Anderson locates the origins of the nation-state in the rise of print media and print capitalism in sixteenth-century Europe, I am more interested in investigating the development of the fiction of "the West" as a sort of imagined community and identity birthed out of European imperialism and perpetuated by U.S. hemispheric imperialism into the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. Inspired by Anderson, Dennis Merrill's approach to tourism and U.S. imperialism in the Western hemisphere also sees empire as an imagined community, a "nuanced system of inequality, resistance, and negotiation…the hemispheric empire is in fact a heavily textured and integrated community" (*Negotiating Paradise* 9). Following Anderson and Merrill, I argue that the metaphorical and discursive use of paradise in the Caribbean is one key component in the creation of "the West"—and that Báez's use (or reappropriation) of this metaphor in *Comrade, Bliss* to critique the tourism industry is a form of resistance that sheds light on the imperialist legacies of the tourism industry and how national identities in the region are shaped by tourism. Also inspired by Anderson, Phillip Wegner's study of narrative utopias and the beginnings of Western modernity approaches utopia and the utopian genre as an "imaginary community" that helped build the conceptual framework for imagining and representing the nation-state for it "offers the possibility of redefining what 'place' and collective identity might themselves mean" (*Imaginary Communities* 55). Therefore, following Wegner, I also argue that Báez's reappropriation of the island-Self metaphor responds to the colonial discourse and imperialist ideology undergirding both utopia and the nation-state and offers different ways of imagining

and locating the Self in relation to place and community that are grounded in Báez's experiences of diaspora and unbelonging.

Approaching Paradise from within El Nié

As snails and turtles we carry our homes. / We are our home. And vice-versa. / We are our own country. / My country is a home. I am my home. / I am my own country. I am a turtle.
-Josefina Báez, *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* (39)

Of Báez's many written and performed works—ranging from narrative fiction, poetry, theater, performance pieces, performance texts, and a children's book—her 1999 performance piece, *Dominicanish* (first published in written form in 2000), has received the most scholarly attention, which is still not that much considering, as García-Peña has argued, "*Dominicanish* exists at the margins of even minor literature" (200). A performance piece and text that cites a wide array of cultural figures and practices, from the music of Billie Holiday, the Isley Brothers, and the Dominican national anthem to a 1990 public subway add from the New York City Health Department addressing the AIDS epidemic and the Kuchipudi dance from India, *Dominicanish* tells the story of Báez's developing "transcultural, translingual, and transracial consciousness" (Maillo-Pozo 20). Scholars have paid particular attention to Báez's use of language, references to African American musical traditions like soul and jazz, and her use of Kuchipudi during the performance of *Dominicanish* as examples of how Báez reframes "understandings of dominicanidad in the diasporic space" from within the multiplicity of cultures and identities found within immigrant communities in New York City and across the Caribbean (Maillo-Pozo 19).[121] Similar to Rita Indiana's complaint about the publishing industry's demands that she

[121] In *The Borders of Dominicanidad*, García-Peña talks about how Báez's use of Kuchipudi, Hindi, and Indian cultural practices in *Dominicanish* "allude to the reclamation of an oft-forgotten part" of Caribbean history and identity when, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, "thousands of East Indians were brought to the Caribbean as indentured servants" (196). Citing cultural theorist Shalini Puri, Garcia-Peña explains how Báez embodies a "larger

write in a Spanish they consider more "universal" and her rebellious insistence in "escribir en dominicano" ("writing in Dominican"), Báez-as-narrator invents or rather, discovers within herself and her experiences a new idiom: Dominicanish. Dominicanish is a language that amalgamates U.S. systems of racialization and oppression, African American and black musical traditions and political movements that confront these oppressive systems, and her own experiences of diaspora and dominicanidad into "a diction from which to translate her oppression and racialization to a larger transnational community" (García-Peña 191-92). A language saturated with the history of political and anticolonial struggle across multiple sites that is made possible by her Dominicanyork-diasporic existence and experiences, Dominicanish affirms and celebrates Báez's embodiment of a transnational *and* Dominican blackness and identity: "Discos del alma con afro. Con afro black is beautiful. / **Black** is a color. / **Black** is my color" (*Dominicanish* 17).

Inspired by the line in *Dominicanish*, "Home is where theatre is," Camilla Stevens's study of Dominican theater and performance, particularly the works of Elizabeth Ovalle, Zaida Corniel, Chiqui Vicoso, and Báez, argues that contemporary Dominican theater is transnational in nature and draws "our attention on the margins of both U.S. Latino and Latin American theater traditions" ("'Home is where theatre is'" 43). According to Stevens, "[t]he artistic endeavor of theater is an act of home-making" and Dominican theater, when viewed through a transnational lens, counters "stereotypical images of Dominican identity" and articulates "new ways of understanding the meanings of national belonging" (43). As performances and home-making practices, Báez's oeuvre, including *Comrade, Bliss, Dominicanish*, and *Levente no. Yolayorkdominicanyork*, can therefore be located within a tradition of Latinx literature,

Pan-Caribbean identity" and "reconciles the tensions produced by the hybridity of the Caribbean region" from within structures of power and oppression often mediated by national identity (196).

performance, and theory concerned with home, belonging, and the transnational subject's lived experiences from within the confines of the nation-state, including Gloria Anzaldúa's *herida abierta* and barbed wire, Gustavo Pérez Firmat's "living on the hyphen," Luis Rafael Sánchez's "La guagua aérea," ("the flying bus") and Frances Negrón-Muntaner's *Brincando el charco: Portrait of a Puerto Rican* ("Jumping the pond;" 1994).[122] In each of the aforementioned examples, the authors and filmmaker allegorize the experience of diaspora, migration, and the marginality produced by national, linguistic, and historical borders as a physical or linguistic space of inbetweenness that both causes discomfort and affords unique perspectives for the transnational subject on the violence of national borders and the roles colonialism, white supremacy, heteronormativity, and patriarchy have played in the history and development of these borders. Báez allegorizes this liminal experience of inbetweenness and marginality as El Nié, the fictional apartment building featured in *Levente no* that houses a plethora of characters and stories that come together to form community in the diaspora. However, as García-Peña articulates, El Nié is "not the border space that the subject inhabits" like Anzaldúa's representation of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands as barbed wire; El Nié, meaning "neither here nor there," also refers to the "taint" and therefore "queers both the hegemonic narrative of the nation-state(s) and the very location of inbetweenness inhabited by Anzaldúa, Sánchez, and Pérez Firmat" by "proposing the body as the location that contains and reflects national exclusion (borders) across history and generations" (4-5). When understood from within the

[122] Gloria Anzaldúa introduces the image of the U.S.-Mexican borderlands as an *herida abierta* (open wound) and barbed wire in her semi-autobiographical work, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (originally published in 1987). Gustavo Pérez Firmat talks about Cuban-American identity in *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way* (Austin: University of Texas Press, originally published 1994). Originally published as an essay in 1983, Luis Rafael Sánchez's "La guagua aérea," ("the flying bus") chronicles the movement of people between Puerto Rico and the U.S. and how this movement shapes the island's identity; it was later published in a collection bearing the same title, *La guagua aérea* (Editorial Cultural, 1994). Frances Negrón-Muntaner's *Brincando el charco: Portrait of a Puerto Rican* ("Jumping the pond;" 1994) is a film that tells the story of a young queer Puerto Rican woman and her experiences of migration and living in the U.S. and the homophobia she faced back home.

practices of Afro-religious traditions, like spirit possession, El Nié "becomes a transhistorical location where the stories of exclusion can be recovered and preserved," thus making the body of the Dominicanyork-transnational subject "a site for negotiating the narratives of race, gender, and cultural belonging that operate in bordering the nation" (4-6). In locating the violence of bordering within and on the transnational subject's body, rather than within the linguistic, geographical, or metaphorical spaces transnational subjects must cross in migration, Báez's El Nié brings to the fore the problem of home and belonging for those transnational subjects navigating multiple layers of violence and negation. How is it possible to find or create a home from within a "neither" space, a space and experience defined by negation?

Like the curling of a snail's shell and the winding path of the labyrinth, Báez, in the above epigraph, simultaneously spirals inward and outward ("And vice-versa."), moving from the collective "We are our home" to the singular "I am my home," from the transient experience of carrying our homes on our backs to the permanence of being our own home and country, and back again. In a 2018 interview with Joshua Deckman for *SX Salon,* the digital forum for the *Small Axe* peer review journal, Báez explains what "home" means for her:

> Home. For me, 'home' is that *is* that is always present. I prefer to dwell in not what I have lost but what I have gained—what it has given me. Migration is not a burden, I am a builder. So my home, then, is *el nié*. My home is 'the neither' that I know, that I have built. If I stayed in the Dominican Republic, I would still be in the nié. I was always a migrant, and I think that all migrants have been migrants in their dissenting communities. We wander and create. ("el nié: inhabiting love, bliss, and joy")

Home, for Báez, is a place that also implies a doing. It is "that *is* that is always present… the 'neither' that I know," and, at the same time, it is built, the product of an act of creation. For the

racialized Dominican migrant, the Dominicanyork, building a home in El Nié means carving a place for oneself, an identity and sense of belonging, from within the experience of multiple negations that deny the Dominican migrant "access to full citizenship and from public, cultural, historical, and political representation" both in the Dominican Republic and in the nation where they ultimately land, be it the United States, Puerto Rico, Spain, Italy, or Chile (García-Peña 4).[123] In Báez's case, migrating to the United States meant that she was not quite Dominican anymore because she left, not African American because she speaks Spanish, and not U.S.-American because she is both black and a migrant. El Nié invites us to reconsider the meaning of home and belonging; rather than approach "home" as a location, El Nié approaches home as a process that takes place within and materializes through the transnational, racialized body and the experience of unbelonging, negation, and exclusion. And this emphasis on process inspires new possibilities of bringing Báez's works, particularly *Comrade, Bliss*, into conversation with the texts, historical processes, and discourses that had a hand in creating the conditions undergirding these experiences of negation and exclusion in the first place—namely the idea of paradise and the role(s) it has played in the processes of the invention of "the West" and Europe's identity formation.

In her preface for the 2008 printing of *Comrade, Bliss*, Aida Heredia underscores the revolutionary character of Báez's poem, emphasizing how Báez's use of the term "Comrade" to refer to the reader ("her fellow being") harkens to "socialist struggles for equality in many parts of the world," reminding us that "bliss is far from being an abstract, individualistic state of mind." In the same vein, Báez's treatment of paradise in the middle portion of the poem is

[123] For more information on Dominican migration to Italy, see García-Peña's "Being Black Ain't So Bad… Dominican Immigrant Women Negotiating Race in Contemporary Italy" (*Caribbean Studies* 41.2, 2013) and "Black in English: Race, Migration, and National Belonging in Postcolonial Italy" (*Kalfou* 3.2, 2016).

accompanied by images and impressions of the Caribbean tourism industry; Báez assumes the role of a tour guide and takes the reader on a trip that reveals the suffering of locals living in tourist destinations. Báez begins using the word "travel" at the same time she describes her travels in terms of displacement and survival, thus drawing our attention to the differences between "travel," a word associated with choice and leisure, and "displacement," a word typically associated with forced migration, colonization, and diaspora: "I travel to discover more about my own self, / as any displaced -surviving, / as any traveler -surviving… I take the trip. / The trip takes me. / I am tripping." (34). Playing with the language colloquially used for a psychedelic trip ("I am tripping"), Báez explores the tensions between agency and choice ("I take the trip") and lack of agency and forced migration, exile, and displacement ("The trip takes me"). Báez takes us along for the trip and continues by mixing the images of paradise and heaven with the hellish living conditions and suffering of those denied access to the tourist paradise:

I have visited paradises on earth.

But they were really paradises on earth because I was just visiting.

[…]

Continuing with the tourist itinerary…

if the glossy-color photo is scratched a little, it bleeds.

Bluest sea and white sand beaches… but few local people could

swim.

Heaven advertised for the hereafter… please read it as purgatory

lived by the majority in this current life.

Look at the eyes of the smiley-happy party people

full of sadness.

Anger. Hunger.

Anguish.

Homelessness. (34-36)

As we continue our journey, Báez again uses the tourism brochure and postcard photograph to expose the power dynamics of representation as the "smiley-happy party people" captured in the brochures and photographs, and consumed by tourists, perform their smiles for "the advertised paradise:"

Check postcards and tourism brochures.

No locals are enjoying the offer. If they are in the photo, the

smile hides the truth or nods in disbelief at the recurrent staged

performance.

Guards and guns keep the advertised paradise clean and safe for

those speaking a foreign language.

Exporting souls. Exporting hearts.

These times… as all times are…

Personal. Local.

Now magnified globally.

For some. By some. (38).

Alluding to her travels to wealthier countries, Báez describes the "order, defined social structures, cleanness" she found, as well as the liberal policies and attitudes regarding natural resources and the climate: "nature highly respected, / impressive cultural agendas, / global warming mindful" (36). However, these liberal attitudes and agendas are accompanied by

xenophobia and racism: “But migrants were not welcomed. / And when I say migrant I mean working class-colored conscious / migrants. / The tour continues…” (36).

With Báez as our tour guide, we are tripping, or rather, the trip takes us through the uncomfortable realities of tourism, migration, and paradise. Hailing from La Romana, a popular tourist destination in the Dominican Republic, Báez knows these uncomfortable realities intimately, particularly the use of police and military force to “keep the advertised paradise clean and safe for / those speaking a foreign language.” An article published in the online travel magazine *Leisure & Travel Week* from February 6, 2010, less than one month after a magnitude seven earthquake devastated Haiti, provides an example of how the promise of safety for tourists is often enforced through violence targeting local populations or, in this case, the implied threat of Haitian refugees crossing the border into the Dominican Republic:

> The Dominican Republic (DR) Ministry of Tourism assures visitors that all of its cities, tourism and resort areas are conducting normal business operations… Major tourism regions Punta Cana and La Romana on the East Coast, as well as Samana and Puerto Plata along the North Coast are welcoming winter season tourists from all over the world… The DR government has stationed military, police and immigration officials along the DR border reinforcing relief efforts to help Haiti. The DR has strong border control permitting only crossings for humanitarian reasons… (“Dominican Republic Ministry of Tourism; The Dominican Republic DR Ministry of Tourism Reassures Visitors Punta Cana, La Romana, Samana, Puerto Plata and Other Cities are Receiving Tourists”)

Published in English for an online travel magazine run by NewsRx, a media company headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, the article reassures North American tourists that not only is

the Dominican tourism industry open for business; it emphasizes that the Dominican Republic is a *safe* place to vacation for the "winter season," emphasizing the increased policing and militarization of its border with Haiti and even the distance and physical obstacles separating the two countries: "Punta Cana, the major global tourism destination in the DR is located approximately 400 miles (633 kilometers) east of Haiti's capital, or a 10-12 hour drive, with numerous mountain ranges separating the two countries." The aftermaths of "so-called natural disasters" are, for Báez, implicated in the exploitative dynamics of the tourism industry in the Caribbean, for "[e]very storm, earthquake, hurricane and all other televised and / highly profitable so-called natural disasters began with an ill / thought, / buying and selling land, / property of all. / And continued with many / lies and other pettiness" (*Comrade, Bliss* 69).

Báez's treatment of paradise in *Comrade, Bliss*, particularly in relation to the Caribbean tourism industry, can be characterized as a form of resistance, what Angelique Nixon calls a resistance to paradise that exposes "the lie and burden of creating and sustaining notions of paradise for tourism and the extent to which this drastically affects people, culture, and identity across the region [in this case, the Caribbean]" (*Resisting Paradise* 4). Acknowledging the importance of tourism and diaspora in shaping Caribbean identity, Nixon contends that the myth and metaphor of paradise "continues to powerfully determine representation of the Caribbean within popular culture and the global tourist industry;" according to Nixon, "[d]iscourses of paradise are inherently racialized, gendered, and sexualized," and these discourses exist because of colonial history and the legacy of slavery (3). Paradise in the Caribbean is therefore "always on some level signifying colonial, sexualized, racialized, and gendered space/object/desire" (3). As a diasporic subject and transnational writer and artist, Báez's treatment of paradise in *Comrade, Bliss* testifies to the ongoing power of the myth and metaphor of paradise in shaping

representations of the Caribbean and its peoples within a global tourism industry that economically dominates the region, as well as in shaping national identities and local economies. However, by approaching the history of paradise in the Caribbean from within Báez's home in El Nié, I examine how paradise also shaped (and continues to shape) the creation and identity of Europe and "the West."

The islands of the Caribbean and the adjacent mainland territories touching the Caribbean Sea have long been on the receiving end of Western projections of paradise. Since the beginning of European exploration and colonization of the region, Europeans both living within Europe and settling in the colonized territories have utilized the idea and belief in paradise to, in Jefferson Dillman's words, project onto the Caribbean "what the European traveler or colonist desired to see" while also creating "a protective cover, a rhetorical bandage, over the unpleasant realities of Caribbean life" (*Colonizing Paradise* 3). For the various colonial powers in the Caribbean, including the Spanish, English, French, Dutch, and the later U.S. imperial presence in the region, the meaning and utility of "paradise" has changed over time to suit the ideological and economic needs of empire as the "unpleasant realities of Caribbean life" also changed. As the hope for relocating the lost biblical Paradise made way for more metaphorical projections of paradise onto the region, the starvation, disease, mutinies, and genocide of the region's original inhabitants in the early days of exploration later gave rise to the slave trade and the plantation economy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and eventually the environmental destruction, U.S. political and military interventions, and displacement and forced migration of Caribbean peoples in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. From the earliest days of exploration and colonization to the contemporary juxtaposition of political violence and U.S. military occupations on the one hand and the image of tropical paradise sold to European and North

American tourists on the other, the Caribbean has existed as a place of absolutes and contradictions, a place of "both paradisiacal delights and psychological terrors" within the Western imagination (Dillman 13).

Following Mary Louise Pratt's concept of the "Imperial Eye" and David Arnold's "Tropical Gaze," these paradisiacal projections contributed to, in Pratt's words, Europeans' sense of "ownership, entitlement and familiarity with respect to the distant parts of the world that were being explored, invaded, invested in, and colonized" as places like the Caribbean and its original inhabitants and later enslaved populations were swallowed up by European cultural frameworks that both predate Western imperialism and resulted from it, such as the Garden of Eden/Paradise, the myth of the Golden Age, and the invented category of "the tropical" (*Imperial Eyes* 3). While Arnold's *The Tropics and the Traveling Gaze* (2014) and Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* (originally published in 1992) focus on European travel writing and scientific literature, and Dillman's *Colonizing Paradise* (2015) takes a phenomenological and cultural approach to geography and landscape studies in relation to European colonialism, I am interested in looking more closely at European projections of paradise onto the Caribbean as an important component in the ongoing processes of Europe's ("the West's") identity formation—as well as what approaching paradise from within El Nié, might illustrate about the intersection of time, place, and identity given these colonial, paradisiacal projections.

As I explored in the first chapter, Columbus's writings, particularly his journals (as transcribed, paraphrased, and transmitted by Bartolomé de las Casas) exemplify how Catholic beliefs, scripture, and symbols, like the Garden of Eden, served not only to make sense of these newly stumbled upon lands and peoples but also gave the early explorers and colonizers a means to describe and share their experiences to reading publics back home—in Columbus's case, his

royal audience and financial backers in Spain. Based on his readings of the ancient geographical treatises of such philosophers as Ptolemy, Pliny, and Aristotle, along with the writings of theologians like John of Damascus and Saint Isidore of Seville and the medieval *Mappamunndi* tradition that placed Eden in the East, Columbus believed that the islands he stumbled upon and the Garden of Eden were in the eastern extreme of the world.[124] While it can be argued that Columbus made such hyperbolic descriptions of the beauty and fertility of the lands and peoples he came across—along with his claim to have found the location of "el Paraíso Terrenal" (Earthly Paradise) during his third voyage—out of economic self-interest and to promote his legacy and glory, I am more interested in looking at how Eden/Paradise functioned as a bridge allowing European reading publics to access the early explorer's experiences while also connecting Christian beliefs about the beginning of time to beliefs and hopes for the end of sacred time. As "a familiar medium… a well-ingrained conception, a cultural memory," Eden/Paradise gave the early explorers and their reading publics back home something known and recognizable (in the face of the previously unknown) in their "attempt to discover the New World's place in the scheme of European knowledge," including its place within "a larger progressive Christian view of history" (Dillman 12-13).

Following Richard Drayton's work on British imperialism during the long eighteenth century, Europe and Western modernity more generally must be understood "as much a product of processes of empire as modern India, Nigeria, New Zealand, Barbados, or Guyana" for European imperial expansion "both before and during the modern era shaped culture and society

[124] We know what Columbus was reading and how he came to believe that the Indies and the Garden of Eden lay in the eastern extreme of the world thanks to his illegitimate son and biographer, Hernando Colón (or Ferdinand Columbus) who wrote *Historia del Almirante Don Cristobal de Colón* ("The Life of the Admiral Christopher Columbus") in honor of his father sometime in the late 1530s.

at its [Europe's] centre" (*Nature's Government* xii-xiv).[125] As many decolonial and postcolonial scholars and critics of the last fifty years have revealed and elucidated (from Edward Said to Sylvia Wynter), in the wake of the Crusades and wars with the Ottoman empire, the Spanish "Reconquista" and the forced conversion and expulsion of Muslims and Jews from the peninsula, fifteenth-century Portuguese exploration and the beginnings of the African slave trade, and Columbus's voyages, early modern Europe—both Catholic and Protestant—created its identity, told the story of its history, and projected its hopes and beliefs about its future in relation to its perceived Muslim, Jewish, and later Black, Brown, and Indigenous "others" and colonial subjects. The land, natural resources, and non-human subjects were also implicated in this creative, relational-oppositional process of inventing "Europe" as the plants, animals, and landscapes of colonized territories were described as exotic, wild, tropical, savage, and fertile and exploitable—newly invented categories that easily lent themselves to the dehumanization and exploitation of colonized peoples as the line between the human and non-human was intentionally blurred. Europe was not only attempting "to discover the New World's place in the scheme of European knowledge," as Dillman demonstrates; Europe was constantly creating and (re)defining its scheme of knowledge and situating itself within this scheme in light of its encounters with the people and places it would then colonize. From the beginning of European imperialism and the colonization of the lands and peoples of the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island, paradise functioned as a familiar cultural touchstone and ideological justification for imperialism and territorial expansion and was therefore enmeshed in the processes of

[125] While Drayton's work focuses on the role of the natural sciences as part of the ideological justifications for British imperial expansion, he also touches upon Christian beliefs about humanity's place in nature as exemplified and defined by the Garden of Eden in Genesis and its impact on British and European imperialism well into the nineteenth century: "Ideas of Providence, and of Adamic responsibilities and prerogatives, were the ideological taproot of the First British Empire and, translated into political economy, they underpinned the Second, and the nation-states which were its successors" (Nature's Government xvii).

Europe's self-invention and the (re)writing of its place within a progressive view of Christian history—what Pratt refers to as a "Euro-expansionist teleology" (126).[126]

Within Christian conceptualizations of sacred time, the Garden of Eden exists both at the beginning and end of Christian history. At the beginning of this history, Eden is the time and place of prelapsarian innocence, perfection, and communion with the Christian god and his creation. However, according to prophesies like Isaiah (51:3) and the Christian theologies of redemption that built upon such prophesies, Eden also contains a sense of futurity as humanity's disobedience and expulsion from the Garden imply "the promise of future redemption" and forgiveness so that humanity might return to its original, perfect communion with the Christian god (Drayton 3). For those early modern Europeans who believed in the historicity and prophesied futurity of Eden, history ends in a recovery of (and return to) Paradise, heaven on Earth, under the flag of a universal Christendom. Eden's association with primitivism as well as millennialism and the Apocalypse signal Eden/Paradise's place within the temporal horizons of European Christian conceptualizations of sacred time and history. Within the context of imperialism and the invasion and settling of territories, the temporal horizons of sacred time become temporal *frontiers*, a concept charged with colonial significance for it, in William Beinart and Lotte Hughes's words, "suggests constant, restless expansion" (*Environment and Empire* 2). Sacred time and history consequently become universalized and intertwined with

[126] In the sixth chapter of *Imperial Eyes*, "Alexander von Humboldt and the reinvention of América," Pratt reads Humboldt's South American travel writings as part of a larger interrogation of the "ideological reinvention of South America in the first decades of the last [nineteenth] century" that resulted from the end of Spanish colonial rule and "entailed a full-scale renegotiation of relations between Spanish America and Northern Europe" (110). According to Pratt, Humboldt's writings greatly influenced both Northern Europe's reinvention of South America as "bound up with prospects of vast expansionist possibilities for European capital, technology, commodities, and systems of knowledge" as well as South America's independent elites who "faced the necessity for *self*-invention in relation both to Europe and to non-European masses they sought to govern" (110). Citing the comments of the English translator of Humboldt's *Personal Narrative* (1814-25) which depict Humboldt as a civilizing force ("he imprints the first step that leads to civilization and all its boundless blessings, along the trackless desert") Pratt cheekily comments: "Euro-expansionist teleology constitutes the 'charm' of the narrative" (126).

imperial territorial expansionism through Eden and the paradisiacal projections of the early European explorers, colonists, and their reading publics back home.[127]

Continuing with the trip, Báez brings our attention to the commodification of culture and "traditions" within the dynamics of tourism and the paradisiacal projection:

Tradition. Tradition. Tradition.

Framed custom. Framed lore.

Constant targets.

Odd tourist fallacies.

[…]

Like in the magazine.

Like in the documentary.

The known show take away.

A low price package with all

possible amenities and national anthems included. (40)

The travel brochure, postcard photograph, the magazine article, and the documentary frame Báez's resistance to paradise and critique of tourism. As a disruption of what Ian Strachan calls "brochure discourse," Báez's intervention takes the form of a guided tour ("The tour

[127] Frank Graziano, in *The Millennial New World* (1999), highlights the important role Christian scholarship played in the process of Europe's self-invention in response to Columbus's voyages: "The medieval march toward world unity [ecumenicalism] ran into an unanticipated obstacle when the Columbian and subsequent voyages revealed enormous deficiencies in the European concept of what constituted the whole. Christian scholarship dedicated itself to the integration of the missing piece, the 'new' world, into traditional geography and cosmology" (149-50).

continues…") and introduces the reader to the lived realities and suffering of locals that such "brochure discourse" is meant to conceal from would-be tourists and visitors (*Paradise and Plantation* 1).[128] Paradise in the Caribbean is, according to Strachan, "a fantasy that the region's nations encourage their citizenry to maintain for the benefit of tourists" (2). Local carnivals and festivals, cultural practices, and even the colonial and precolonial past are commodified by local and national governments for the tourists' consumption and entertainment. Báez rejects this commodification outright, stating: "But, when I hear the word tradition, sorry, / I must run to the other side, miles and miles away. / Paradises on earth and their… traditions" (*Comrade, Bliss* 41). Instead, Báez proposes her own tradition, the universal human activity of breathing: "I have my own tradition. I do. / In my tradition, / breathing / is the only expression to keep alive… Inclusive, common sense tradition, / for all and by all" (42).

The commodification of traditions and national identity in tourism speaks to, in Ian Strachan's words, the extent to which imperialist expansion and capitalist growth influenced "Europeans' metaphorical renderings of the Caribbean and in Caribbeans' renderings of themselves" (*Paradise and Plantation* 4). For Strachan, tourism is "an indispensable part of the plantation economy" in how the same power structures, hierarchies, divisions and uses of land, and exploitation of labor laid down by the plantation system in the Caribbean are upheld and perpetuated by the tourism industry: "As an institution of colonization, the plantation established a political and economic dependency on the metropolitan centers that tourism merely extends" (7-9). In reappropriating the paradise metaphor in *Comrade, Bliss*, Báez presents a strategy for resisting the continuing legacy of the plantation system from within the same discourses "the

[128] Strachan's concept of "brochure discourse" is inspired by Derek Walcott's characterization of tourism in the Caribbean as the "culture of the brochure" in "What the Twilight Says: An Overture," from the collection *"Dream on Monkey Mountain" and Other Plays*.

West" has used to render the Caribbean an exploitable paradise and thereby construct its own identity and progressive trajectory for its history. From the early colonial attempts to locate the lost biblical Paradise to the privatization of beaches by resorts and hotels in places like the Dominican Republic, European and later North American paradisiacal projections have excluded, displaced, and depended upon the labor of enslaved peoples, indentured servants, and local populations so that explorers, settlers, and, eventually, tourists could get a piece of "heaven." From within the Neither of El Nié, Báez articulates a critique that reveals the colonial legacy of the Caribbean plantation economy in modern day tourism as well as how the "nowhere" of the nation-state, through tourism, actively participates in the imagined community of empire. In the following section, I look at Báez's playful interrogation of the nation-state and national belonging and identity in tandem with paradise's role in setting the foundations for the development of the nation-state in the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island. Specifically, I examine how Spanish and English imperialist projects were influenced by millennial and apocalyptic hopes for paradise as well as a new way of imagining (and narrating) perfection with Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) and the rising popularity of narrative utopias in early modern Europe. In pairing *Comrade, Bliss* with the colonial history of the paradisiacal projection and utopia, I explore the influence of narrative utopias in the imagining and invention of the nation-state as well as how Báez challenges the nation-state as, in Phillip Wegner's words, the "naturalized expression of both the space and the subjectivity of modern history" (*Imaginary Communities* xxii). Within this context, Báez's El Nié and concept of bliss emerge as a response and disruption to the modern construct of the nation-state and offers new visions for the Self, identity, home and belonging that are simultaneously tied to but also untethered from one's experiences of place and (un)belonging.

"This island called me" and the Nowhere-Island of the Nation-State

> This portion of land inhabited and surrounded by water, / This island called me, / Playing duality in abundance, / knows that its water-floating existence / it's grounded, tied, / coupled / to the whole. / The seen peak, / this island called me, / underneath / and above / it's one. / One with the All."
> -Josefina Báez, *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* (24)

The metaphorical use of the island as a location for and representation of the Self has a long tradition in modern literature and the "Western imagination." Perhaps the most well-known example from early modern English literature is John Donne's Meditation XVII from his *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions, and severall steps in my Sicknes* (1624), a series of reflections written as he was recovering from illness that brought him to the brink of death. More commonly known under the title "No Man is an Island," Meditation XVII is intimately tied with the history of colonialism and the rise of British imperialism for, as Elizabeth McMahon argues, "Donne's claim [that "No man is an island"]… is poised on the brink of a new cartography of islands and continents taking form in his time… Inseparable from these historical events is the powerful charge of the island in the Western imagination" (19). Written at a time when islands were increasingly understood as ideal locations for colonies and prisons for their unique geographic features, Donne's use of the "man-island metaphor" paradoxically stands, according to McMahon, "as a defining axiom of identity for Western modernity" for its "capacity to refuse yet define the fantasy of self-origination and autonomy" as the island increasingly became "both the site and the means by which this new modern self is mapped at a defining moment of its constitution" (20-21). As McMahon explains, Meditation XVII was also written at a time when the meaning of the term "continent" was changing in English literature, as the Renaissance use of "continent" for a "container" made way for its modern usage in the geographical sense: "Donne's usage of the term continent as a land mass… necessarily carries the older understanding of the continent as a container… This earlier meaning underscores the designation

of the geographical continent as a proper container for man." (36). Donne's Meditation XVII exemplifies how the concepts of "Self" (understood in masculine terms), "island," and "continent" were caught up in Europe's processes of self-invention and self-creation in relation to its colonized "others," even when these "others" (including the islands of the Caribbean) are not explicitly named in his Meditation XVII. Within this colonial context, islands served as a geographical metaphor and mode of self-definition in which the European (male) Self could imagine its autonomy and self-contained identity, as well as its "rebirth and re-creation" as "the man who makes himself (anew)," a fantasy that was not limited to early modern literature but was "rehearsed and developed across the culture, especially in colonial acquisition and settlement" (40).

The above epigraph from Báez's *Comrade, Bliss* appears to respond to Meditation XVII and the tension between the island and the continent, the individual Self and the collective, that Donne attempts to resolve with his proclamation that "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main." For Báez, however, this tension serves as an invitation to play with the duality of individual and collective identity ("Playing duality in abundance") as she identifies herself as an island, "This island called me," a line she repeats toward the end of the stanza when the island's singularity and insularity makes way for its connectedness to the whole—"The seen peak, / this island called me, / underneath / and above / it's one. / One with the All" (24). For this section, I focus on the metaphorical and literary use of the island for the (re)imagining and (re)defining of European and early modern collective identities. Specifically, I am interested in exploring how Thomas More's *Utopia* shaped the development of the imagined community and collective identity of the modern nation-state. I approach More's *Utopia,* particularly his description of the creation of the fictional island of

Utopia, through the lens of Báez's El Nié, highlighting More's use of colonial discourse and the influence of imperialist ideology in the text. In setting his imaginary community (to borrow from Wegner) on a manmade island off the coast of Abya Yala, More's *Utopia* and the narrative utopias that followed it present not only "a way of imagining subjectivity, but also a way of imagining space, thereby helping the nation-state to become the agent and locus of much of modernity's histories" (*Imaginary Communities* xvii). In approaching the "Nowhere" of *Utopia* through the "Neither" of El Nié, I privilege Báez's perspective as a transnational subject often left out of modernity's histories and denied belonging to the nation-state. Consequently, and in a queer and apocalyptic fashion, Báez's El Nié invites us to revisit the story of how the nation-state came to be, including paradise's/utopia's role in creating a site for imagining the nation-state as the container for collective identity and modern subjectivity. While nearly five hundred years separate Thomas More's *Utopia* from Báez's performances and written works, the investigative and exploratory time travelling made possible by El Nié (as the embodiment of non-hegemonic history) brings More's motivations for writing *Utopia* into the present, explores the impact of early Spanish exploration and colonialism on More as well as More's influence on early Spanish missionaries and colonists, and reveals how *Utopia* and early modern utopian literature had a hand in the creation of the nation-state. Like Báez's reappropriation of the paradise metaphor, Báez's reappropriation of the island-Self metaphor and concept of bliss offer the opportunity to revisit and redefine the relationship between "place" and collective and individual identity from the perspective of the transnational, gendered, and racialized subject.

Identity, for Báez, is a feeling that straddles the gap between Self and Other and the individual and the collective; it is what we feel within ourselves and what others perceive and project onto us. Identity is a feeling that has become muddled by theories and discourses:

Of the many feelings

felt in this life,

identity,

and its plural, identities,

is the most complex.

So they say.

So their theories say.

So.

Imagine.

A prioritized feeling

that photographs a nation.

Flagless nation.

A nation with no flag.

A feeling that shows and tells how and why I constantly dance

loving my black body

and my natural crown of hair.

Playing with the elements at hand.

Elements that are not my flags either.

[…]

Defining itself from itself.

Not negating the other.

Me, the other of the other.

Me, feeling the feeling.

No discourse needed.

Identity.

A mere feeling. (5-6)

Báez reduces the complexity of identity to a "mere feeling" without reducing its significance for the internal organization of feelings and experiences for the individual and the collective. The "prioritized feeling" of identity captures the nation within a photograph. Here, the photograph, like the travel brochure and the tourist's postcard, becomes a representation of national identity that the unnamed "they" and their theories prioritize and analyze. In capturing the nation in a photograph, collective identity becomes an object that can be manipulated, bought and sold (in the case of tourism), and theorized and subjected to discourse. However, Báez reminds us that the nation is flagless, that is, identity does not have to be controlled by or limited to the politics of the state that would otherwise negate "the other." Báez, "the other of the other," intentionally blurs the divide between individual and collective identity in the stanzas quoted above; she is the individual "playing with the elements at hand" and she is the "flagless nation" caught up in "feeling the feeling," acknowledging that creating an identity based on difference and separation between the Self from the Other, on negating the Other, is to negate a part of itself ("Defining itself from itself").

In the 2011 version of *Comrade, Bliss*, Báez's wordplay with "identity" underscores this blurring between the individual "I" and the collective "nation:" "I dentity. I dent it why? Identity. A prioritized feeling that / photographs a nation… Identity. A mere feeling. / Iden tity. I." Báez pulls the letters of the word "identity" apart, reducing it to its basic syllables, and puts it back together again in creative ways that alienate the reader from its original or assumed meaning, thus providing the reader the opportunity to reflect on how and why we participate in the making

of collective and national identities, as well as what the feeling of identity means for us: "I dent it why?" Báez's "denting" and questioning of identity creates a new cartography for the Self and its relationship to place. Returning to her use of the island-Self metaphor ("This island called me"), Báez's island-Self is interconnected to its surrounding geography, to the water surrounding it and the ground beneath it, making it "grounded, tied, / coupled / to the whole… One with the All" (24). Subsequently, Báez says, "So long for just surface cartography" as she maps out her Self-identity, particularly her origins, across multiple places and times:

Yes, yes like everybody else,
I am from where I was born. I am from where I am right now.
I am from all the places that I have been.
I am from all the places that I will be.
But above all, I am that place gathering
selected, subjective poetry
on my own trail.
I am that I am. (24-25)

As Báez explains, "This island do has bridges," and her "hyper-individualism" started from her "collective living" (21). Báez bridges the paradoxes that arise from identification with the island, namely how the island represents the opposing forces of insularity (isolation, separation, discretely bordered) and connectivity (relationality and interdependence). If, as McMahon contends, the modern, Western manifestation of the island-Self metaphor is characterized by "individualist identification" and a drive for colonialist acquisition, what might Báez's use of the metaphor reveal about how the modern, Western manifestation came to be and how, in the form of the island-utopia, it shaped the development of the nation-state?

As the initial encounters and early settlements gave way to the establishment of European colonial enterprises well into the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, the paradisiacal projection changed. Paradise was no longer a long-lost location or mythical realm worth searching for; while Columbus's claims to have found the Garden of Eden and the search for El Dorado and the Fountain of Youth placed paradise within an imaginary and inaccessible geography, with the rise of narrative utopias in early modern European literature, paradise became a critical tool and model for new visions for the future of humanity. By the time England solidified its colonial projects in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the pursuit of Eden/Paradise had become the pursuit of perfection, a modeling of the ideal, paradisiacal sociality that, according to Zachary McLeod Hutchins, can be characterized as "essentially American" not because such a pursuit was exclusive to English colonists "but because their transatlantic quest was inspired and then emblematized by the New World itself" (*Inventing Eden* 8). According to McLeod Hutchins, in addition to being set off the coasts of Abya Yala, More's *Utopia* and Bacon's *New Atlantis* (published posthumously in 1626) "reinvigorated debate in England and abroad over how best to construct an ideal society" precisely because they are "both, critically, presented as the products of New World exploration" (8). Like narratives of the long-lost golden age, the elusive location of the original Eden, or the prophesied terrestrial paradise of millenarian thought, utopias are "always here but not now, or now but not here," occupying "a past-future that recovers an imaginary ideal projected onto an inaccessible landscape" (Graziano 11). The islands of the Caribbean and the lands of Abya Yala and Turtle Island provided the unexplored and inaccessible landscapes onto which the early modern European imagination could project its utopias, stage its debates over how to best organize society, and, as we will see with the Franciscan and Jesuit missions in colonial Mexico and

Paraguay, even experiment with utopian Christian sociality. Paradise/utopia therefore began to fulfill the needs for the establishment of European imperialism and Western modernity. As an imaginative and critical exercise, narrative utopias provide a fictional time and place for experimenting with radical ideas for social reform and an ideal society in contrast with the status quo; in locating the humanmade island of Utopia off the coast of Abya Yala, More in particular demonstrates how such paradises/utopias fulfilled Europe's constant need for self-invention as well as how colonized lands and peoples were recruited and reimagined for this need. Conversely, within the context of the millenarian beliefs of the Spanish missionaries and settlers, paradise/utopia as theoretical and critical exercise inspired utopian projects and experimental efforts to set up the necessary conditions for the Apocalypse and the subsequent terrestrial paradise on earth—one of the most important conditions for Spanish missionaries being the conversion of indigenous populations to Christianity.

As Columbus's claims to have located Eden came up short, and as the violence inflicted upon native populations became more and more abhorrent and undeniable (at least to some), Franciscan, Jesuit, and Dominican missionaries and friars focused more of their efforts on the founding of experimental utopian enclaves within colonial society to seemingly protect recently converted native populations from exploitation and violence at the hands of Spanish and other European colonists. Within these experimental utopias, Spanish missionaries sought to bring about a millennial kingdom, counter the corruption that plagued the Church in Europe, and, often inspired by the writings of humanists like Erasmus and Thomas More, return Christianity to its roots in the fundamental teachings of Jesus, including love, charity, and pacifism. In addition to exploring the possible "New World sources" that may have inspired More in the writing of *Utopia*—including Pedro Mártir's 1511 princeps edition of *De Orbe Novo* and the

Cosmographiae Introductio (1507) that accompanied Martin Waldseemüller's world map, *Universalis Cosmographia*, and contained the first mention of the name "America"—Stelio Cro's work on utopia in relation to the colonization of Abya Yala and Turtle Island expands the utopian genre to include experimental utopias in addition to literary and theoretical manifestations of the genre. According to Cro, early modern Spanish/Peninsular utopia emphasizes "the experimental over the literary and theoretical utopia" and centers Christianity in its reimagining of the ideal state. Paying particular attention to the first fifty years after Columbus's accidental encounter, Cro argues that both the Christian humanists, like More, and the early Spanish missionaries and intellectuals, like Bartolomé de las Casas, were "were looking at the same events and documents at the same time" with the same goal in mind: "to give Christian Europe the means of salvation by learning from the Gospel and the Classical tradition" ("From More's *Utopia*" 108). The events of 1492 therefore had an impact on both literary and experimental forms of utopia as the accidental encounter with previously unknown lands and peoples gave More a setting for imagining Christian humanist reforms for Europe and Christian settlers and missionaries took the opportunity to use these lands and peoples in their attempts to make such reforms a reality, including several attempts that were explicitly inspired by More's *Utopia*. For example, the first Bishop of Michoacán, Vasco de Quiroga, wrote the *Información en Derecho* (1535) arguing against the continued enslavement of indigenous peoples, instead proposing policy recommendations based on More's *Utopia* for organizing and controlling "unruly" indigenous populations. As the first Archbishop of Mexico (the same archbishop featured in the Virgin of Guadalupe apparition story), Juan de Zumárraga's *Doctrina breve* and *Doctrina cristiana* were also directly influenced by More's *Utopia,* particularly in his recommendations for organizing "a theocratic, Indo-Christian republic parallel to Spanish

settlements but governed by Franciscans" to avoid too much intermingling between the Spanish settlers and indigenous converts (Graziano 164).

From the Jesuit *reducciones* in present-day Paraguay that lasted well into the eighteenth century to Las Casas's 1521 failed attempt to establish a utopian agricultural community in present-day Venezuela, these early attempts at Christian utopias in Abya Yala sought to protect native populations from enslavement, war with colonists, and, in the case of the *reducciones*, from exploitation within the *encomienda* system.[129] They did so, however, by controlling the native converts' movements to within the missionary villages and limiting Spanish colonists' access to regions under Franciscan and Jesuit control. While claiming to protect indigenous converts from violence and abuse at the hands of Spanish colonists, and while attempting to return the Church to more primitive Christian values, these Christian utopias actively participated in the cultural genocide of indigenous cultures and religions and saw themselves as pacifying and civilizing projects for indigenous populations who were, in the words of Quiroga, a "barbarous, tyrannical, rude, and savage people" (qtd. in Graziano 168). Recontextualizing both early modern literary utopias and experimental utopias firmly within European imperialism reveals how utopia functions as a "repository of desire," to borrow from Ruth Levitas, as well as how this desire for social engineering perpetuates the dehumanization of colonized and enslaved peoples, even while expressing concern for their physical safety and spiritual wellbeing (*The Concept of Utopia* 199). Following Levitas, the centrality of desire in the utopian impulse allows us to "learn a lot about the experience of living under any set of conditions by reflecting upon the desires which those conditions generate and yet leave unfulfilled. For that is the space which

[129] Jesuit *reducciones* functioned as villages in which the Jesuit missionaries would gather nomadic tribes, like the Guarani, and confine them to a space where they could be more easily controlled and separated from the rest of Spanish colonial society.

utopia occupies" (8). When seen as "repositories of desire," early Spanish colonial attempts at experimental Christian utopia offer just as much insight into the social problems and critical perspectives that mobilized Franciscan, Jesuit, and Dominican missionaries as the religious, economic, and social problems and crises that inspired the rise of narrative and theoretical utopias written in Europe, like More's *Utopia*. Additionally, in studying how they operate within an early colonial context, both the humanist desire to reform the Church within Europe (in the case of More) and the millenarian desire to universalize Christianity and purge the Church of corruption (in the case of the Franciscan and Jesuit missionary villages and *reducciones*) reveal the circularity of the utopian impulse between Europe and its colonized territories in the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island. Early modern utopian literature was, in large part, informed and inspired by European exploration and colonization and, in turn, inspired experimental Christian utopias in the colonized lands. And, as we shall see, this intimate relationship between utopian desire, imperialism, and settler colonialism had a hand in the creative and imaginative work of inventing the modern nation-state.

While it can be difficult to prove a direct influence of colonial texts on More's writing of Book One and Book Two of *Utopia*—even Stelio Cro's exploration of the possible influences of early Spanish colonial writings in the elaboration of *Utopia* is careful to clarify that the texts he analyzes represent a small selection of "what *might* have impressed More's imagination"—it is perhaps more fruitful and illuminating to consider the discursive consequences of the events of 1492 and their aftermath within European society and, by extension, on *Utopia* and the utopian genre ("From More's *Utopia*" 101; emphasis added). For J. Martin Evans's examination of the impact of the colonization of the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island on John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667), studying Milton's poem within the context of seventeenth-century colonial

discourse elucidates the "complicated and elusive process of cultural mimesis whereby a literary text articulates the complex of beliefs, values, anxieties, hopes, and prejudices, in a word the ideology, of the society that generated it" (*Milton's Imperial Epic* 7). Despite the lack of irrefutable evidence that Milton had read or was inspired by colonial literature, approaching *Paradise Lost* in this way allows Evans to uncover how "the rhetorical and argumentative strategies deployed by the promoters and agents of European imperialism [i.e., colonial discourse] seemed to find an echo in the text of *Paradise Lost*" to the extent that Milton "seems to have conceived the principal sites and characters in the poem in essentially colonial terms" (3-4). In fact, writing a poem based on the story of Genesis was, according to Evans, "to engage with a text that was already thoroughly impregnated with the ideology of European imperialism" in seventeenth-century England and Europe more generally (6). Written over one hundred and fifty years before *Paradise Lost*, and in closer temporal proximity to the events of 1492, More's *Utopia* more directly engages with the beliefs, anxieties, hopes, and prejudices both sparked by 1492 and kindled by the socio-political and religious crises within a nascent, early modern Europe and capitalist social order.

As the text that inaugurated the utopian genre in early modern Europe—and coined the term "utopia," playing with the ambiguity between "eu-topos" ("good place") and "ou-topos" ("no place")—More's *Utopia* has received both praise and denunciation since its conception in the early sixteenth century. Over the centuries, the interpretation of *Utopia* has reflected the socio-political, economic, and religious environment and context (in a word, the *zeitgeist*) of its readers. And, as Phillip Wegner points out, any reading of *Utopia* that attempts to "determine More's own thoughts about the worth of the place of Utopia" necessarily assumes "a self-coherent core of values imagined to be possessed by More, against which the work's vision is

measured" (*Imaginary Communities* 33). For example, in the wake of Marx and Engels, many readers and critics celebrated More and his *Utopia* for seemingly anticipating the ideals of socialism and communism and for proposing radical, "progressive" ideas like the elimination of private property, religious tolerance, and for its somewhat egalitarian society. In fact, *Utopia* was one of the first books authorized for translation into Russian after the 1917 Communist Revolution (Rebhorn xv). However, as Wegner argues, recent scholarship on More's life reveals that More's values changed throughout his life as his social position and life circumstances changed "in relationship to a number of institutional settings and historical events," including his work for the English crown, his circle of humanist friends, and the Protestant Reformation (33). Therefore, rather than read *Utopia* as a testament to More's personal core beliefs and values, I follow a tradition of decolonial critique of *Utopia* that approaches the text as a testament to the pervasiveness of colonial discourse and imperialist ideology that already existed during More's lifetime. For example, Susan Bruce's 2015 study of More's *Utopia* approaches *Utopia* from within the context of contemporary Israel's settler colonial and violent actions in Palestine, arguing that the text is a blueprint for settler colonialism that "offers not merely the formulation of a fundamentally ideological justification for colonialism, but a more extensive blueprint for the brutal eradications of indigenes not merely from their homelands but also from the memories of those who replace them" ("Utopian Justifications" 37). In situating her analysis in conversation with the works of George Logan, Andrew Hadfield, Fredric Jameson, Louis Marin, and Antonis Balasopoulos, Bruce builds the case for a nearly forty-year-old tradition of scholarship that is increasingly interested in revealing "the ways in which *Utopia* might be argued to 'speak' the colonial discourse of the early sixteenth century" and the "emergent sense

of nation that pervades the text" (25).[130] Continuing with this de/anticolonial tradition, my reading of *Utopia* always keeps Báez's El Nié and *Comrade, Bliss* in mind. As a text deeply concerned with the human experience and identity in relation to place and belonging, particularly for those who have experienced diaspora and displacement, *Comrade, Bliss* brings to light just how central utopian anticipatory desire was *and continues to be* for, as Wegner puts it, the imaginary community of the nation-state.

A staunch Catholic who, as lord chancellor, ordered the confiscation and burning of "heretical" books and oversaw the surveillance, torture, and execution of heretics in Henry VIII's England, More's devout faith and humanist education led him to criticize what he saw as the worldliness, idleness, and pride of many of the Catholic clergy as well as make Martin Luther and his followers into an enemy of the one true faith. In addition to engaging with and critiquing the beginnings of the Protestant Reformation and the ensuing religious and political crisis within Europe, More's *Utopia* also bears witness to the socio-economic crises of late medieval-early modern England resulting from the enclosure of the commons, the transition to capitalist accumulation, and a growing vagrancy crisis that prompted "violent state measures against the homeless and unemployed," many of which are echoed in the corporal punishment, shaming, surveillance, and discipline that "saturate the everyday life of Utopian citizens" (Balasopoulos 621). The context and circumstances surrounding the writing of *Utopia* are not only important

[130] Bruce cites George Logan's *The Meaning of More's Utopia* (1983), Andrew Hadfield's *Literature, Travel, and Colonial Writing in the English Renaissance, 1545-1625* (1998), Fredric Jameson's *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (2005), and Louis Marin's *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces* (1984) as examples of recent scholarship that increasingly interrogates the question of colonial expansionism and imperialism in More's *Utopia* and utopia more generally. And while citing Antonis Balasopoulos's hesitation to approach the text as a blueprint for colonialism in his 2004 article, "Unworldly Worldliness: American and the Trajectory of Utopian Expansionism" (*Utopian Studies* 15.2, pp. 3-350), it seems that Balasopoulos's views have changed, as evidenced in his 2015 article, which I cite for this chapter, "Dark Light: Utopia and the Question of Relative Surplus Population" (*Utopian Studies*, 27.3, pp. 615-629) in which Balasopoulos reads *Utopia*'s attempts at social engineering within the context of the refugee crisis in Europe.

for readers and scholars of *Utopia* and the utopian genre in the centuries following its publication; the fact that the writing of Book 2 of *Utopia* predates Book 1 suggests that contextualizing *Utopia* within a socio-political critique of contemporary England and Europe was important for More as well. According to Sarbani Chaudhury's attempt to read *Utopia* as a piece of literature produced as much by More as by the times in which it was written, a 1519 letter from More's friend, Erasmus, mentions that More wrote Book 2 before Book 1. Meaning that More wrote Raphael Hythloday's (from "Hythlodaeus" or "speaker of nonsense" in Greek) adventures and encounters with the kingdom and people of Utopia before deciding to introduce Hythloday as the main character and narrator via a fictional conversation in Antwerp in Book 1 involving fictional versions of real people, including Peter Giles (or Gillis), a fellow humanist and chief clerk in the court of justice in Antwerp, and More himself. For Chaudhury, the fact that More wrote Hythloday's biting criticisms of the clergy and the English punitive system in Book 1 after Book 2 suggests that More "felt the need to provide a specific English context" and wanted to prevent his readers from "misreading his fictive world as a mythical absolute divested of historical contingencies and instead suggesting obliquely the Utopian model… as a *corrective guideline* for a currently malfunctioning power structure" ("Literature and Beyond" 52).[131]

Within the growing body of analysis focusing on the colonial and imperial aspects of *Utopia*, perhaps the most cited and analyzed passages come from Book 2, specifically those passages in which Hythloday recounts the story of the creation of the island of Utopia and how the Utopians deal with the original inhabitants of the lands they come to occupy and cultivate. At

[131] One of Hythloday's most scathing criticisms does appear at the end of Book 2, however, when he compares Utopia to contemporary European states or "commonwealths" which "nowadays anywhere do flourish:" "Therefore, when I consider and weigh in my mind all these commonwealths which nowadays anywhere do flourish, so God help me, I can perceive nothing but a certain conspiracy of rich men procuring their own commodities under the name and title of the commonwealth" (143).

the beginning of Book 2, after describing the physical dimensions of the island of Utopia, Hythloday tells of how King Utopus civilized the land's inhabitants and ordered the creation of the island:

> But King Utopus, whose name as conqueror the island beareth… which also brought the rude and wild people to that excellent perfection in all good fashions, humanity, and civil gentleness, wherein they now go beyond all the people of the world—even at his first arriving and entering upon the land, forthwith obtaining the victory, caused fifteen miles of space of uplandish ground, where the sea had no passage, to be cut and digged up, and so brought the sea round about the island. He set to this work not only the inhabitants of the island… but also all his own soldiers. (More 62)[132]

King Utopus's role in colonizing the isthmus and ordering the separation of the island from the mainland appears again in the 1518 Basel first edition of *Utopia* in which a sample of Utopian literature, "[a] meter of four verses in the Utopian tongue," was included toward the beginning of the work, before More's letter to Peter Giles that prefaces Book 1 of *Utopia*. The verses begin with a celebration of King Utopus's creation of the island: "My king and conqueror, Utopus by name, / A prince of much renown and immortal fame, / Hath made me an isle that erst no island was" (151). Although it is not clear whether the Utopian language and its corresponding alphabet were created by More alone or with the help Giles, the 1518 edition presents the poem and its Latin translation as factual, a sample of the language and literature of the Utopian people and their cultural history. For Bruce, the inclusion of the poem and alphabet underline Utopia's "national status" as they are "saturated with nationalist and colonialist discourse" (26). Bruce

[132] For this chapter, I am using the Ralph Robinson 1551 English translation of *Utopia* as reprinted and edited by the Barnes & Noble Classics series. In his translation, Robinson makes Utopus a "king;" in the original Latin, Utopus is described as a *dux*, a leader.

compares the transliteration and translation of the poem—from Utopian, which was based on Greek and Latin, to Latin for the 1518 edition and then into other European languages as *Utopia*'s success spread across Europe—to the real-life attempts of European colonizers to record and make sense of the indigenous languages they encountered "as best they could, first transliterating them into European characters, and thence into English, or Portuguese, or Dutch" ("Utopian Justifications" 26). The founding of Utopia, the creation of the island, the civilizing and perfecting of the land's original inhabitants ("the rude and wild people"), and the inclusion of the Utopian language and sample of its literature all reflect the consolidation of European national identities vis-à-vis colonial discourse, the actual processes of colonization, and European competition over colonized people and lands. Raphael Hythloday, as narrator and More's humorous take on humanism (a "speaker of nonsense"), stumbles upon an island and people who, in many respects, at least according to More's critiques of the Church and England, are "actually closer to the teachings of Christ than are the Europeans who proclaim themselves Christian, but whose behavior… does not always hold true to this claim" (Cro 103).

Later in the text, in a section of Book 2 titled "Of Their Living and Mutual Conversation Together" in which Hythloday describes the organization of families, the gendered division of labor, and the distribution of people and resources in Utopian society, Hythloday includes the following description of Utopian justifications for taking over the lands of others:

> But if the inhabitants of that land will not dwell with them [the Utopian colonizers] to be ordered by their laws, then they drive them out of those bounds… And if they resist and rebel, then they make war against them, for they count this the most just cause of war, when any people holdeth a piece of ground void and vacant to no good nor profitable use, keeping others from the use and possession of it. (77)

As perhaps the most damning and obvious example of settler colonial expansionism in the text, the above passage, and the section in which it was included, expose More's concern for population control and the management of labor and resources given the labor crisis and vagrancy laws that plagued England during his lifetime—and given that idleness, or sloth, is a cardinal sin. If the number of families within any Utopian city exceeds six thousand, children over the age of fourteen are redistributed to families with fewer children within their city and, if need be, they are redistributed to other cities whose population falls short of the prescribed number. However, if the population of the island should "pass and exceed the due number," then citizens are chosen from every Utopian city to settle in "the next land where the inhabitants have much waste and unoccupied ground" (77). The original inhabitants of the "wasted and unoccupied ground" are then faced with a choice: assimilate to Utopian society or face war with the invading Utopians. In either case, the original inhabitants are confronted with the possibility of genocide and erasure, be it cultural genocide through assimilation or the literal killing and displacing of their bodies from the newly occupied lands. In reading the subversive passages of *Utopia*—including Hythloday's critiques of the enclosure of the commons and the English punitive system in Book 1—alongside the revolutionary words of John Ball, a fourteenth-century peasant leader, and W. P. Gent, a member of the seventeenth-century Leveller movement, Chaudhury's exploration of More's motivations and reasoning for writing *Utopia* reveals the centrality of historical erasure for *Utopia* as a nation-building project. When reading More's "erudite humanist treatise" side by side with the "genuinely rebellious proclamations" of John Ball and W. P. Gent, Chaudhury argues that More's proximity to the ruling class betrays "the extent to which *vox populi* could wrest for itself a site within elite discourse in times of momentous transition," and therefore become "appropriated by the very forces against whom it is directed" ("Literature and Beyond" 56).

Confronted with the reality that his vision for English society, particularly his radical notion of the abolition of private property, would require the self-cancellation and the destruction of the very ruling classes for whom More worked and helped to generate more wealth, More's solution is settler colonialism and the "erasure of pre-colonial past and de-historicisation" (Chaudhury 60). In setting *Utopia* outside of an English context, in an imaginary nowhere-island, More de-links his critiques of English society and the Church from the actualities of English society and history and, in so doing, seemingly predicts and enacts the role many colonial elites would take in independence movements across Abya Yala and Turtle Island in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—the erasure of the pre-colonial past permitted colonial elites to replace "the guilt of corrupting a nation [or colonized land] with the responsibility of building a new one" (60). The genocidal erasure of the original inhabitants from colonized lands wipes the slate clean, so to speak, for settlers and allows members of the ruling class to escape self-scrutiny and self-annihilation "not by reforming [themselves] but by dismantling the old state structure and replacing it with an entirely new model," thus demonstrating "the audacity of the shapers of national identity" who are "[u]nable and unwilling to de-class, i.e., reform themselves, they would rather re-mould the collective identity within which they are positioned" (60). According to Chaudhury, *Utopia* can be read as an example of how members of the elite appropriated the grievances of the oppressed and yet continued to secure their wealth and privilege when faced with the "threatening prospect of marginal discourse displacing and subsuming dominant discourse" (60-64). Following John Freeman's analysis of *Utopia*, what started as a thought experiment exploring the frictions between practical humanism's take on the social inequities of late medieval/early modern Europe and a nascent bourgeois ideology—"a private fantasy, a

refashioning of both the self and the island of England"—ends up becoming "circumscribed by the dominant ideology it seemingly subverted" ("Discourse in More's *Utopia*" 309).

Despite *Utopia*'s becoming subsumed under the capitalist demands of an incipient bourgeois elite and the beginnings of Europe's imperialist ideology, More's text remained just revolutionary enough to inspire German peasant rebellions as well as Franciscan missionaries in colonial México.[133] In fact, More would later denounce his *Utopia* and state that he would rather burn *Utopia* "wyth myne own hands" than allow the Latin version of the text be translated into English—a sign that, according to Wegner, More understood the "potential power of the rhetorical machine" that he produced that could teach his audience "to *conceive,* and subsequently, to live and perceive their world in a new way" (More qtd. in Wegner 33).[134] The estranging effect *Utopia* and the narrative utopia genre have place their readers in a "kind of fictional point of exteriority" from which the reader can see two "different cultural and social realities, between the world that is and that which is coming into being" (37).[135] The reader is temporarily distanced from known cultural norms and values so that they can experience their social realities as "contingent, artificial, and most importantly, a deeply malleable human construct" (17). However, for this estranging, deterritorializing effect to work, the reader must be immersed in, and belonging to, their extant cultural and social realities (the cultural norms, values, and identities) against which the utopia is imagined and contrasted. What effect might the narrative utopia have on a reader whose life experiences as a migrant already estranges and deterritorializes their identity(ies) from their place

[133] Wegner cites a German peasants' rebellion from 1525 that supposedly quoted "from an early vernacular translation of More's work" (33).
[134] Here Wegner is quoting More in his *Confutation to Tyndale's Answer*, included in Vol. 8 of *The Yale Edition of the Complete Works of St. Thomas More* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973). More was opposed to translating both *Utopia* and the works of Erasmus from Latin into vernacular English and stated that "I wolde… helpe to burne them both wyth myne own hands."
[135] Here Wegner is influenced by Ernst Bloch's concept of the immanent and already present "horizon" of utopia which underscores the pedagogical work of narrative utopias in teaching their readers how to operate in emergent social and cultural realities (34).

of origin and who are not granted full belonging (culturally or politically) to the places to which they migrate? This question becomes particularly pertinent to my analysis given *Utopia*'s role in helping to establish "the nation-state as the increasingly naturalized expression of both the space and the subjectivity of modern history" (xxii).

The Nowhere of Utopia ushers in, according to Wegner, a uniquely modern conceptualization of spatiality (the nation-state) within which the history of modernity takes place:

> To be a Nowhere is not, however, to be without place. Rather it is to be whole unto oneself, an *insula*, a world apart, an enclosed and bordered social, political, and cultural totality… Because Utopia is Nowhere, *not* a place in the world… it offers the possibility of redefining what "place" and collective identity might themselves mean. (54-55)

Utopia is therefore imagined as an *insula*, an island, a discrete and "bordered social, political, and cultural totality" that makes the imagined community of the nation-state possible for it provides the fictive place within which collective identity can be explored and (re)defined. The Nowhere of Utopia makes imagining the somewhere of the nation-state possible. From the perspective of the Neither-space of El Nié, the difference between the imaginary community of Utopia and the social and lived realities of transnational subjects does not produce an estranging effect so much as affirms the transnational subject's state of inbetweenness and unbelonging to the nation-state and, therefore, to modern history.

Báez finds home in this inbetweenness, outside of history, as she reminds us that once we remove the partitions from our inner maps of identity that have proven "themselves limited"—East and West, North and South, "So called first, / Second or Third / world"—we will discover that we are all "Naked of traditions or flags" (*Comrade, Bliss* 90-91). In *Comrade, Bliss*, Báez

offers her readers a different kind of cartography that maps the Self on and across the transnational, racialized subject's body (and hair) and the places where they can find community in diaspora:

There is a map.

There's a map within.

A map holding the concavity of your immense universe. A map

that forgot to put stars on cities.

No wonder the inner city does not know its stardom.

[…]

Weaving the map, The fields. The present.

The history.

Braids.

And knots.

And Bantu knots. Zulu knots.

And puffs.

More knots.

China bumps.

Knots.

¡Forget me knots!

The design is tight. Dignified.

Maps of universes

as close as my cornrows. (63-64)

In charting, weaving, and braiding this map of the transnational Self that is as immense as the universe, Báez leads us to "the end of the world," to the place "where time begins-ends-begins-ends" where she ultimately finds herself:

Yes, me.

Me, me, me.

Me at the threshold of the Event Horizon.

Where the cosmic tickle took over my existence.

In the midst of it all,

I lost and found myself,

in every possible existence. (65)

For my focus on identity, history, and the intersection of identity with place, the history of the two interrelated and intertwined ideas of paradise and utopia reveals the contradictions within modern Western history and complicates how the story of the creation of "the West" has been told. It is my hope that, in approaching the colonial legacies of paradise and utopia through the queer Neither of El Nié, this chapter inspires future scholarship that continues to challenge, in Michel-Rolph Trouillot's words, "the geography of imagination inherent in the West since the sixteenth century" that assumes the centrality of Europe "not only as the site from which world history is made but also as the site whence that story can be told" (*Global Transformations* 12).

Báez's reappropriation of the paradise metaphor and the island-Self metaphor scrambles the map of modernity and the nation-state's location within its teleological treatment of its history. Rather than locate the individual and collective Selves within the container of the nation-state, Báez demonstrates that a spiritual identity grounded in silence, oneness, and bliss is truly accessible to all. Silence is the communal space where communion with each other, communion

with the All/Soul, and communion with ourselves happen. Báez's El Nié emerges as a decolonial utopian space that redefines utopia as embodying an ethos and praxis of transnational feminist liberation and community.

As I close this chapter, I return to Báez's call to action to approach her performances and written works from Gloria Anzaldúa's queer, Chicana feminist perspective—"Don't you just Foucault my work, *Anzaldúa* it!" Indeed, Báez's El Nié bears a striking resemblance to Anzaldúa's "El Mundo Zurdo," or "Left-Handed World," which she elaborates in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* (originally published in 1981): "The vision of Third World Feminism necessitates our willingness to work with those people who would feel at home in *El Mundo Zurdo, the left-handed world*: the colored, the queer, the poor, the female, the physically challenged... we women on the bottom throughout the world can form an international feminism" (196). Both Báez and Anzaldúa cultivate what M. Jacqui Alexander calls a "sensibility of a politicized nonbelonging" using metaphors that help us "come to terms with the different cartographies of feminist struggle in different parts of the world" (*Pedagogies of Crossing* 263-64). For Anzaldúa and her fellow contributors to *This Bridge*, the metaphors of borders, crossings, barbed wire, *El Mundo Zurdo,* and bridges remind us that, within the confluence of the local and the global in which transnational feminist work takes place, the transnational part of the equation should not be viewed "as merely a theoretical option;" solidarity with "women on the bottom throughout the world" requires us to decolonize our minds, adopt new ways of being and relating to one another, acknowledge our relative privileges, and take anticolonial actions (264). The metaphors I analyze in this chapter—the paradise metaphor and the island-Self metaphor—are metaphors that had a hand in laying the literary, colonial, and economic foundations of Western modernity. In many ways, Báez's

reappropriation of these metaphors and playful interrogation of the location and formation of identity within modernity (“I dent it why?”) help us come to terms with the gendered and racialized transnational migrants’ struggles around the world and face the colonial and imperialist legacies that continue to shape our lives.

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CONCLUSION

On Endings and New Beginnings

> I think of queerness as a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity.
> -José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009)

As I begin to close this dissertation, I return to the image of the tapestry of apocalypses and how it brings together the individual threads, the particularities of local apocalypses across the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island, to reveal the interconnectivity between threads in the fabric of Western modernity, as well as insights into how this fabric is held together and how it can be unraveled. "Queering Apocalypse" therefore presents new perspectives and approaches for understanding modernity's treatment of time, space, and the telos guiding its version of Human History. In engaging with queer, anti-colonial, and transnational feminist approaches to apocalypse and utopia, I have theorized a queering of apocalypse that explores some of the ways that apocalypse and utopia have shaped the historical and spatio-temporal dimensions of Western modernity as well as how apocalypse and utopia can equip us with creative and discursive tools for relating to the past, critiquing the present, and imagining a new or different futurity. To that end, "Queering Apocalypse" brings together queer and affective approaches to history, temporality, and futurity with queer, feminist, Latinx, and Latin American approaches to theology and religious practice, especially with respect to time, relationality, and the body. Specifically, I have argued for the importance of studying religion and religious experiences to better understand some of the inner workings of how time is organized within modernity.

The religious practices and ritualistic experiences of the women I study, including spirit possession, undressing La Virgen de Guadalupe, and finding bliss from within the pain of

unbelonging, establish the racialized, gendered, and transnational Latinx/a body as the vehicle through which to explore the Self/Selves in relation to time, space, and history. Rita Indiana's engagement with prophecy and apocalypse in *La mucama de Omicunlé* (2015), and representations of spirit possession and time travel in the novel, inspire me to place her novel in conversation with Columbus's *Libro de las profecías* (1501-05) to further our understanding of the coloniality of time in the Caribbean, particularly on Haiti-Quisqueya. As a work of "speculative history," Indiana's representations of spirit possession and time travel in *La mucama* displaces and disperses Western notions of the location of the Self/Selves across multiple bodies and times and brings the past, both distant and recent, into the present and her imagined post-apocalyptic future. In the second chapter, I approach Alma López's desire to undress the Virgen de Guadalupe as a relational desire and act that places López's *Our Lady* (1999) within a larger iconographical history of La Virgen, particularly the history of controversies surrounding her origins, her ties to the iconographic tradition of the Immaculate Conception, and the historicity of early apparition accounts, including Miguel Sánchez's *Imágen de la Virgen María madre de Dios de Guadalupe* (1648). Controversy emerges as an important element in community and national identity formation for Mexican and Chicano national imaginaries and *Our Lady* reveals how queer approaches to La Virgen's history and body interrogate and defy the politics of decency built into these national imaginaries. Lastly, Josefina Báez's reappropriation of the paradise metaphor and the island-Self metaphor in *Comrade, Bliss Ain't Playing* (2008) implicates both paradise and utopia in the perpetuation and propagation of colonial discourse, imperialist ideology, and the creation of the nation-state. By approaching Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) from within the embodied space of El Nié, I place Báez's interrogation of the nation-state and national identity within a longer historical trajectory of

paradise and utopia in the Caribbean, Abya Yala, and Turtle Island that reveals the colonial legacy of the Caribbean tourism industry as well as the roles paradise and utopia play in the creation of the fiction of "the West." These women tie and untie the threads of the tapestry of apocalypses with their bodies, the movement of their bodies across borders, and the spiritual labor of relational acts that bridge the distant colonial past with the present and future.

Of all the possible contributions I hope to make with "Queering Apocalypse," the pedagogical potential of my theoretical interventions and apocalyptic disruptions are the most important and urgent. "Queering Apocalypse" aspires to invoke a pedagogy of relationality and interdependence. It is a practice of feeling into the past and a reckoning with how the past continues to shape our present lives and future hopes. And my concern for pedagogy is not limited to the theoretical or to research—my concern is also for how we teach history, the connections we make in our classrooms, the perspectives we privilege, and the relationships we explore. In bringing together unlikely pairings of texts and artistic creations that are normally separated by disciplinary boundaries—Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé* with Columbus's *Libro de las Profecías*, López's *Our Lady* with Sánchez's *Imágen*, and Báez's El Nié and bliss with More's *Utopia*—"Queering Apocalypse" challenges us to think about how we teach the past, the works we include or do not include in our syllabi, and the connections with other disciplines and fields of research and study we establish in our own scholarly productions. If the women I study in "Queering Apocalypse" challenge hegemonic and Eurocentric accounts of the story of "the West," they also inspire the following question: Why are Marx, Foucault, Benjamin, Lacan, Adorno, and Horkheimer "household names," so to speak, among cultural and literary critics and often featured prominently on syllabi and reading lists for required courses, while the works of feminist literary and cultural criticism, queer theory, queer of color critique,

and postcolonial literature and criticism are all too often restricted to electives and upper level courses taken mostly by area studies specialists and taught in departments and programs most vulnerable to budget cuts and academic censorship (Ethnic Studies, Women's and Gender Studies, language departments, etc.)?

Following Sibylle Fischer's disavowal of modernity, it is my hope that this dissertation "helps in the effort to think of a political and cultural [and historical] landscape beyond the confines of disciplinary fragmentation and the categories of national language, national history, and national literature" (*Modernity Disavowed* 11). However, Fischer and I are not proposing the abandonment of national identities or borders often espoused by post-nationalist discourse in how we theorize or examine identity within the spatio-temporal matrices Western modernity. Rather, as Shalini Puri has argued, a transnational approach that could "both attend to the politics of location and de-essentialize" is perhaps a more productive approach to national, cultural, and even individual identity formation for it encourages us to ask: "How do I, even as a dissident, participate in nationally mediated structures of power and oppression?" (*The Caribbean Postcolonial* 45). Our identities, our relationships, our desires, and our research and our teaching—we all navigate and are mediated by the power structures and colonial legacies built into Western modernity, its telos, and the invention of the nation-state. The pedagogical and theoretical aims of "Queering Apocalypse" both demand and contribute to the cross-pollination of ideas and approaches made possible by interdisciplinary scholarship and cooperation that demonstrates how local responses to regional and global forces often contradict modernity's universalist claims and official nationalist discourse.

"Los machos matan más k el coronavirus" ("Men kill more than the coronavirus;" March, 2020). Artist unknown. Photo courtesy of the author and taken near the Metropolitan Region Registro Civil, Santiago, Chile.

In many ways, the above image has come to symbolize this tension between the local and particular and the global and the universal within modernity that "Queering Apocalypse" seeks to explore and elucidate. I took this picture shortly after the March 8, 2020 Women's March in Santiago, right after the first reported cases of SARS-CoV-2 were reported in Chile. One of thousands of examples of feminist graffiti covering the city in the wake of the march, this example speaks to the particularities of the Chilean and Latin American feminist movement, the ongoing threat of *femicidios* in Chile, and the history of patriarchal violence inscribed in gendered, racialized, and sexualized bodies. The accusation that "men kill more than the coronavirus" serves as a reminder of this history that we (women, femmes, lesbians, and bisexuals) carry within and on our bodies. Therefore, "Queering Apocalypse" asks: What does it mean to be a woman, a migrant, a racialized and/or queer subject during yet another "end of the

world?" And how can we use our bodies, our prayers, our desires, and our relationships to carve that meaning out of our embodies histories for ourselves and for our hopes for the future?

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