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Indebted Pasts, Alternative Futures:

Caribbean Digital Imaginations in Twenty-First Century Literature

By

Yairamaren Román Maldonado

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Hispanic Languages and Literatures

and the Designated Emphasis

in

New Media

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Estelle Tarica, Chair
Professor Daylet Domínguez
Professor Abigail De Kosnik
Professor Tom McEnaney

Fall 2020

Abstract

Indebted Pasts, Alternative Futures:

Caribbean Digital Imaginations in Twenty-First Century Literature

By

Yairamaren Román Maldonado

Doctor of Philosophy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures

with Designated Emphasis

in New Media

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Estelle Tarica, Chair

This dissertation, "Indebted Pasts, Alternative Futures: Caribbean Digital Imaginations in Twenty-First Century Literature", argues that Caribbean transmedia writers converge in their integration of new media in literary objects to engage, read, and bring our attention to the erasures of regional history. I propose the concept of *Caribbean digital imaginations* to conceptualize how digital imaginaries have become central to contemporary Caribbean literature and its engagement with the region's past, present, and future. I conceptualize this marginal engagement with the region's history as a form of *indebted pasts* whereby writers reject neoliberal notions of indebtedness (Lazaratto) and instead replace them with alternative notions that show how historical pasts remain indebted to the present. My comparative model—which focuses on Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba-- puts forth an understanding of how decolonized Caribbean subjectivities emerge outside of national or disciplinary boundaries today. I look at contemporary Caribbean writers Jorge E. Lage (Cuba), Rita Indiana (Dominican Republic) and Guillermo Rebollo-Gil (Puerto Rico) to make the case for the relevance of experimental literature in the production of Caribbean imaginations today. These three relatively young writers have received increasing recognition as part of a new wave of Caribbean narrative. However, the complexity and range of their emergent and non-canonical work has yet to be examined more broadly in Caribbean cultural studies. I propose that their literary representations of new media technologies facilitate imagining alternative collectivities, and that contrary to most accounts, literature rescues national memories that have been erased from official histories and remains engaged in the process of forging collective identities with the hope of building a decolonial future. I aim to show how these non-canonical writers configure a new Caribbean episteme—articulating subjectivities through the intricacies of lived contemporary realities and a politics of solidarity—by intertwining technological motifs with a critical revision of recent history. Taken together, these authors constitute a body of works that represent the ever-

changing and tumultuous nature of Caribbean subjectivity while also articulating consistent collective identities in the twenty-first century. Through the framework of Caribbean digital imaginations, I propose that contemporary experimental literature needs to be seen through a regional, pan-Caribbean lens. This approach sheds light on shared political concerns regarding democratic politics in countries geopolitically distanced from one another.

I argue that their aesthetic repertoire includes the appropriation of technological forms such as internet discursive practices regarding identity politics and that through this appropriation they configure a collective yet antinational Caribbean discourse. My research is therefore in dialogue with new media studies as well as with the Caribbean's rich histories of intellectual critique and avant-garde aesthetics.

I propose the concept of Caribbean Digital Imaginations to index how new technologies trigger new literary forms and support the inclusion of alternative collective memory in public discourse. Consequently, my research brings to the fore how these authors adopt digital technology into their fiction to record traumatic episodes omitted in hegemonic discourses. New media scholarship looks at post-digital subjectivities emerging from internet-based media, which is relevant to my project (Manovich, Jenkins, Chun). But it doesn't elaborate on how new technologies impact the content and form of literature as pre-digital media. How can metaphors of digital memory or interfaces and overt inclusion of online references in literature inform the understanding of Caribbean imaginations today? Caribbean scholars have looked at the emerging trends of literary representations of new media (Price, Dorta, Maguire). My project builds on these contributions to add questions about democratic politics seen through the lens of new media studies. I generate a comparative paradigm, working across all three Hispanic Caribbean islands, to highlight the presence of a series of shared concerns among contemporary authors and work against the insular tendencies of Caribbean criticism. It demonstrates that these writers' understanding of new media as an experimental literary form is connected to their anti-racist, anti-colonial and queer democratizing impulses, which we have seen proliferating at their best in digital practices.

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Acknowledgements

The most important thing I learned throughout this process was how central my communities were in my journey to becoming a *doctora*—the only childhood dream I ever had. The person who never failed to remind me of this was my advisor, Estelle Tarica. Estelle, I feel deep gratitude for your unique ability to balance academic rigor with unconditional support. Your patience during times when I considered giving up on the PhD and, ultimately, on myself, taught me more than what I learned in the hundreds of books and articles I read. Thank you for always holding, pushing, and creating the space for me to make this dream come true. Thank you for not only accepting me as an academic, but also as a poet, a dancer, an activist, and, really, a human being. Thanks to your academic mentoring and radical solidarity, I am the first woman and person in my entire family to become a doctor of philosophy, proving that childhood dreams and generational healing of sorts only happen with authentic allies and co-conspirators next to us. For me, you will always be the kind of educator and role model whose liberatory pedagogical and mentoring approaches I hope to replicate wherever I go in life, as they have life-transforming potential for those who may not have a fair chance otherwise. Gracias, Estelle.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to all the members of my dissertation committee whose brilliance, cutting-edge research, and dedicated mentorship have contributed to my growth and formation as a scholar. Daylet, thank you for always introducing me to all-things Caribbean Studies, from networks of scholars and funding opportunities to extensive bibliographies. Thank you for motivating me to make the best decision I made in this journey—studying the entire Hispanic Caribbean. Thanks to your advice and mentorship, I learned things about my regional heritage that I never had the chance to learn while growing up in Puerto Rico. Tom, your mentorship eloquently helped me draw connections between literary and digital culture in the Caribbean, Latin America, and the US. Thanks for always seeing my scholarship from perspectives that allowed it (and me) to grow in ways I couldn't quite see yet and, in doing so, reiterating the value of my intellectual labor. Gail, your mentorship and enthusiasm always brought me joy, whether it was because I was awarded a competitive scholarship or found a stable full-time job outside of academia in the middle of a global economic crisis, your unconditional support made me feel seen and understood. Thanks for your guidance in the study of digital, black, and pop culture through the lens of cultural and new media studies. To the entire *dream team* committee: *gracias totales por su apoyo incondicional*.

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To my community in Puerto Rico that never let go of me in spite of the distance, *lxs amo a todxs tanto* and I am so grateful for every single little thing each one of you contributed to the completion of this PhD. To my parents, Iris Maldonado and Juan Román, thanks for always telling me to keep doing what made me happy and for your unconditional support. You always did so much with very little to make sure I had access to a good education growing up and this is the least I could've done to make your efforts worthwhile. I may be the *doctora* now, but the PhD is all yours, enjoy!

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To my community beyond the walls of UC Berkeley in the Bay Area, thank you for all your support during this process. To my bomba community that became my Sunday church, thank you all for always creating the *batey* to celebrate, laugh, learn the stories of our ancestors, cry if we had to, and always leave knowing that everything would be alright. Especially, *gracias* Shefali Shah for allowing our teacher-student relationship to become one of the most important friendships in my life. Thank you for welcoming me into your life and always reminding me of all the good things about myself that I tend to forget. To all my friends in the Bay Area, old and new, I am eternally grateful for our hangouts, *perreos*, and just living that Californian life on the rivers, in the mountains, on the beach, or on the road. Special thanks to Diego Aristizabal—your care, sense of third-world solidarity, dinners, dog sitting exchanges, endless stream of memes, and the comfort of knowing we could count on each other for both small and big things really meant the world to me during the final stretch of this process, *gracias totales*.

Finally, this project would not have been possible without the financial support of the Ford Foundation Dissertation Fellowship, the UC-Dissertation Year Fellowship, the UC-Cuba Initiative Summer Grant, the Berkeley Center for New Media's Research Grants, and the Department of Spanish & Portuguese's Research Grants. These fellowships not only supported this project financially, but also introduced me to on-the-ground resources and networks of BIPOC scholars and for this, I am eternally grateful.

In concluding, I want to acknowledge the context in which this project was created and what made it possible from my perspective as a writer. I started writing this dissertation in Berkeley, California in 2017, a year when we saw historical climate disasters impact the Caribbean and record-breaking wildfires begin to impact California, only a year after a horrible election leading to a racist and violent administration. To be honest, the world has deteriorated quite a bit since then. I finished writing this dissertation in the midst of an emerging global pandemic and economic crisis. I graduated on a *beautiful* Zoom ceremony and into nothingness; the world had

somewhat come to a standstill. We couldn't leave our homes for weeks at a time and I couldn't hug anyone on the day I submitted my dissertation. I am writing these acknowledgements months later in Puerto Rico, where I moved back to temporarily until things settle. In spite of all the chaos, I would always come back to this project and love it even more, every single draft of every chapter, every word of the more than fifty pages that never made it to the final project, every new piece of literature, history or culture that came with it. This project inspired me to keep dreaming of a better world, it still does. And so, I hope that this dissertation is read as something beyond just scholarship. I hope it is read as a project into which I poured my heart and soul with the deepest hope to contribute to our own liberation as Puerto Rican and Caribbean people. I hope my readers can detect in these pages the love I feel for the Caribbean as a region and literature's ability to inspire hope. And, I hope that in doing so, you see my commitment to designing pedagogical tools that reimagine how we teach and learn about ourselves as Caribbean people.

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San Juan, Puerto Rico
15 de diciembre de 2020

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Introduction:
Indebted Pasts, Alternative Futures:
Caribbean Digital Imaginations in Twenty-First Century Literature

No entendía que sucedía y es qué sin intelné esta gente se moría.
Y es que no pueden vivir sin mí, no saben vivir sin mí, les duele vivir sin mí.
Qué si no sube la cabeza, mirando la pantalla te tropieza.
Qué si no sube la cabeza, mirando la pantalla va a caer.

Entonces, me fui buscando el intelné, hasta que l'encontré y de frente me le paré.
A los ojos le miré, y le pregunté: Hábleme claro, ¿qué quiere usted?
Y me dijo: Yo lo que quiero es que este tipo en las manos me tenga,
como una linterna en una caverna, conmigo te levanta,
conmigo te duerme', yo soy el gobernante de esta vida moderna.
—Trending Tropics, "Elintelné"

In the process of writing the many versions of this introduction, I realized that I wish it was a social media post that can be updated later because this work speaks so strongly to the fast changes—technological, literary, political-economic, environmental, and so on—unfolding in Caribbean contemporaneity. However, this introduction cannot be updated once it leaves my computer and enters the dissertations database of the University of California. Yet, gravitating towards impermanence transcends me. My fixation makes sense since growing up and living in the Caribbean, one becomes quite acquainted with a heightened sense of impermanence. Hurricanes make landfall, destroy, and leave. Foreign investors come, destabilize the economy, and leave. When you sit in front of the ocean, waves come and go in the same way as cruise ships full of tourists enter the Old San Juan port and disappear through the horizon afterwards. Your friends are there one day and migrate the next. The Caribbean has been for centuries a space for the passerby, for the displacement of bodies, for the ephemerality of appropriate living conditions granting subjects the right to survive on the (is)land they were born. Thus, impermanence becomes central to the political economic systems that perpetuate the precariousness in which the region has historically existed.

New technologies and the Internet resemble the Caribbean in so much as they rely on an illusion of impermanence as well. You can post and delete. A webpage that might be accessed today may no longer be there tomorrow. A blog can be completely erased from the web at any given time. And your ability to navigate the beautiful land of cyberspace is always at the mercy of reliable Wi-Fi connection or reception. That is, if you actually own a device or are on the side of the world with a reliable electric grid.

The opposite rings true about literature. The permanence of printed literature equally transcends me, but in a different way. We read the words others wrote hundreds of years ago. And against all promises made by the digital era, literature continues to be published in printed format. Libraries still exist and are packed full of that quasi-mythical object we call a book. There's another book that compiles faces, memes, and events in massive databases called servers, that are somewhere far from the commodity of our screens, unpalpable by us in our immediate reality, we call that one Facebook. As a scholar of Caribbean literature and new media, I often find myself at the center of this tension, which is to say I oscillate between permanence and impermanence. This tension equally permeates the pages of this dissertation.

I decided to start this chapter by quoting Trending Tropics' song because it eloquently discloses the ways in which new technologies and the Internet have become a part of Caribbean daily lives, in ways that may be permanent or impermanent moving forward. Moreover, Trending Tropics as a cultural object, which was a collaboration led by Puerto Rican producer Eduardo Cabra and Dominican singer Vicente García in 2018, also dialogues with contemporary literary avant-gardes beyond the scope of this song. Whether in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, or Puerto Rico, this exemplary piece of the project announces that new technologies and the Internet have become an ubiquitous character in our everyday realities in the same way as reggaeton singer Wiso G narrates through his encounter with the Internet's personification: "Entonces, me fui buscando el intelné, hasta que l'encontré y de frente me le paré. A los ojos le miré…". The Internet, moreover, also organizes our way of acting and producing thought. Wiso G calls the Internet "el gobernante de esta vida moderna", a bold statement, in this three-minute electro-merengue, unequivocally influenced by Rita Indiana's groundbreaking musical production from the early 2010s. Trending Tropic's electro-merengue is paradoxically a humorous and critical take on peoples' relationship with technology today. It is impossible to ignore the celebratory rhythm of merengue when one listens to the song and, maybe even, inevitably dances to it since after all it is "Wiso", a classic reggaeton singer many of us grew up listening to on pre-digital radio. But if closely read, the lyrics reveal a different tone, an ultimately uncanny authoritarian imposing Internet that might as well just be one of those questionable characters that still govern our region today—a very real but not quite magical today. And while the Internet can be impermanent, in this song, the impermanence is deflected to its users: "y es que sin intelné esta gente se moría." The impermanence of the Internet transcends itself, making others impermanent instead, and establishing itself as the central character of our story.

The objects of study I chose to analyze in this project resist impermanence at all costs, Caribbean or cybernetic, somewhat like the Internet in Trending Tropic's song. Writing against impermanence, they defeat notions that perpetuate the erasures of the stories that need to be told in the Caribbean today. They are new media-literary objects that were not born digitally. In some cases, as in Jorge E. Lage's, this is due to limited access to the Cuban Internet. In other cases, like in Rebollo Gil's, the original electronic objects that were once online were removed from the web-pages years later after having been printed. In all cases, including Rita Indiana's work, they problematize the notions of impermanence that often permeate both the Caribbean and new technologies. They are literary objects that were born in the digital era. These works consist of printed literature and, just like that mythical object of the book in the digital era, they persist in their permanence. Yet, somewhat in dialogue with their digital character they simultaneously become many things and nothing altogether. These works are novels, narratives, performances, poetry, art, electronic literature, films and, at the same time, none of these things because of the impermanence that permeates their pages. They refuse to stand still in time. These are, then, some of the coordinates of what I conceptualize as "Caribbean digital imaginations."

Caribbean digital imaginations gestures to a region, an era, and a modus operandi in cultural production. "Caribbean" represents a distinct cultural region within the literary and cultural field of production. In this case, I focus on the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, which includes Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba. "Digital" gestures towards a material era or temporality that, for the purposes of this project, I concentrate on works produced beginning in the early 2000s and beyond, because these years roughly mark the publication of the first works by the authors studied here. Of course, digital culture predates that moment and

continues to unfold as I write about it, while also re-structuring and re-organizing our everyday lives at multiple levels. "Imaginations" speak to acting rather than conforming, a way of producing rather than being, an act of engaging rather than disengaging with alternative forms of thinking the world, whether that is through literature, music, visual art, performance, or digital practices. In this project, I zero in my analysis on a specific corpus of literature and digital practices anchored in the works of Guillermo Rebollo Gil (Puerto Rico, b.1979), Rita Indiana Hernández (Dominican Republic, b.1977), and Jorge E. Lage (Cuba, b.1979), experimental writers who are part of twenty-first century avant-gardes in the Hispanic Caribbean.

The works I group under *Caribbean Digital Imaginations*, similarly to the interfaces they resemble at times, are at the intersection of more than one element, such as literature and new media, prose and poetry, oral and written word, and so forth and so on. Thus, "Caribbean digital imaginations" serves as one way to conceptualize a corpus of works emerging in the Hispanic Caribbean today that put forth different forms of intersection and convergences similar to those of digital culture. I propose the concept Caribbean Digital Imaginations to think of the sociological, cultural, and material aspects of this corpus of works that dialogue with each other without aiming to do so in a pre-meditated way. Ultimately, they are not only representative of the intersections among literature and new media, but intersect with one other through the thematic and literary strategies implemented. The same critical concept could be thought in relation to an extensive list of digital works emerging in the Hispanic Caribbean today beyond the works I discuss here. I make the case for the analysis of these works via not only their implementation of new media but also through their intersecting regional pulsations that announce a different way of enunciating the Caribbean. In so doing, we're not only attending to a new episteme in Caribbean thought, but rather one that is becoming a network without even attempting to do so. The networks they construct function similarly to what Patrick Jagoda, in conversation with a long tradition of scholars who study networks such as Manuel Castells, Edouard Glissant, Wendy Chun, and Alexander Galloway, defines as network imaginary: "the complex of material infrastructures and metaphorical figures that inform our experience with and our thinking about the contemporary social world" (3). In this sense, one could say this corpus creates individual forms of network imaginaries that in the intersections with each other create a larger collective networked imagination. This is what I propose we think of as "Caribbean digital imaginations."

Caribbean Digital Imaginations shows how contemporary writers converge in their integration of new media in literary objects to engage, read, and bring our attention to the erasures of Caribbean history. My analysis is specifically focused on transmedia cultural producers Jorge E. Lage, Rita Indiana, and Guillermo Rebollo Gil. From engaging, reading, and bringing attention to erasures, I want to emphasize the exercise of "engaging," given the possibilities granted by its meaning as an active positioning to take a critical stance and because it would be much easier to disengage from critically approaching the circumstances in which the Caribbean exists today. In fact, some writers and intellectuals still choose to do so. However, Rebollo, Indiana, and Lage engage these circumstances by producing narratives that give readers an entry-point into the failures of twentieth-century nationalism in the Caribbean. They engage with their immediate local surroundings and make them an object of literature that reinstate historical erasures.[1] They also engage with different types of mediums to produce their narratives

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[1] Lorgia García-Peña's uses the term contra*dictions* to speak of a similar process of reinstating erasures in Dominican cultural production. Lorgia García-Peña defines contra*dictions* as the

and aesthetics. They engage with the complexities of Caribbean geopolitics, political economy, and environmental decay unfolding today. Echoing the Latin American and Caribbean historical avant-garde, these writers have chosen to engage with the emerging and ever-evolving field of technology.

Caribbean digital imaginations, thus, proposes that digital imaginaries have become central to contemporary Caribbean literature and its engagement with the region's past, present, and future. Scholars to date have not widely attended to the dialogue between fiction and new technologies in the region, focusing instead on how contemporary narratives are distinct from earlier Caribbean narratives in producing individualistic and globalized subjectivities rather than collective and national ones.[2] I propose that literary representations of these technologies facilitate imagining alternative collectivities and that, contrary to most accounts, literature rescues national memories that have been erased from official histories and remains engaged in the process of forging collective identities with the hope of building a decolonial future. Yet, even though a tradition of anticolonial nationalism informs these writers, they articulate non-nationalist discourses about decolonization in the Caribbean. How do digital technologies contribute to shape these ideas about collective identity? I aim to show how these non-canonical writers configure a new Caribbean episteme—articulating subjectivities through the intricacies of lived contemporary realities and a politics of solidarity—by intertwining technological motifs with a critical revision of recent history.

In this dissertation, I look at the intersection between literature and new media (computer technology and the Internet) as a strategy through which writers pose reflections about national traumas and the decolonization of Caribbean subjectivities. I argue that the generation of Caribbean writers who start publishing after the year 2000, transform new media into an avant-garde aesthetic to rescue and scrutinize locally ignored historical realities. For example, in his novel *Archivo* (2015), Lage poses questions about state surveillance and the failures of the Cuban Revolution; the novel's setting is a Havana existing inside a hard drive. In the futuristic novel *La mucama de Omniculé* (2015), Indiana combines Yoruba mythology with new media technologies to portray time travel, leading to a historical consciousness that challenges the formation of whitened Dominican identity, a legacy of Rafael L. Trujillo's dictatorship. Rebollo Gil's chronicles in *Decirla en pedacitos* (2013) tour us through the physical space of Puerto Rico's foundational fictions—monuments to great authors—but it does so by taking us to virtual space via hyper-text technique that connects to online news about the current politics of colonialism on the island. Taken together, these authors constitute a body of works that represent the ever-changing and tumultuous nature of Caribbean subjectivity while also articulating consistent collective identities in the twenty-first century. Through the framework of Caribbean digital imaginations, I propose that contemporary experimental literature needs to be seen

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erasures in Dominican history that allow for a racialized imagination of subjectivity (*The Borders* 1). Furthermore, García-Peña proposes that the repetitions of silence that result from these erasures sustain said racialized and racist conceptions of Dominican identity (*The Borders* 1).

[2] Here, I'm thinking of the works of Jorge Fornet, Carlos Pabón, and Rachel Price. For instance, Fornet (2006) specifically suggests that narrative paradigms emerging in the current turn of the century are distinct from previous generations due to their focus on self-definition ("soy") rather than collective definition ("somos"). Carlos Pabón and Rachel Price focus on how globalization shifts the subjectivities emerging in Puerto Rico at the turn-of-the-century and in Cuba today, respectively.

through a regional, pan-Caribbean lens. This approach sheds light on shared political concerns regarding democratic politics in countries geopolitically distanced from one another.

Lage, Indiana, and Rebollo Gil might be said to emulate 'antinational tones,' to quote Josefina Ludmer, which are narratives in tension with the foundational fictions that consolidated the nation in the region and which respond to the neoliberalism of the late-1990s (160). These authors generate antinationalist discourse by imagining the Caribbean through the construction of subjects that remain at the margin of the nation, such as Afro-Caribbean transgender subjects, popular everyday life characters, and robots. But I argue that their "antinational tones" should not be overstated. Unlike many of their contemporaries, Lage, Indiana, and Rebollo Gil seem particularly interested in "imagining communities" in the Caribbean, even if they do so beyond the "national narratives" postulated by Benedict Anderson or Doris Sommer.[3]

Caribbean Digital Imaginations as a framework proposes that the year 2000 marks a new and shared moment in literary production from Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. This dissertation offers two main scholarly contributions to the field: it generates a critical comparative paradigm for contemporary Hispanic Caribbean literature, and it elucidates how the dialogue of literature with new media intersects with questions about democratic politics in the region. The scholarly work focused on contemporary literature in the Hispanic Caribbean tends to be delineated nationally. However, my comparative work brings attention to the fact that, across the Caribbean, contemporary authors are dissecting the traumatic episodes of the national past and questioning nationalist discourses, yet remaining committed to thinking about collective experience and a politics of solidarity for the future. Rebollo Gil, Indiana, and Lage question the current political state-of-affairs resulting from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, the Trujillato, and the Cuban Revolution, respectively. They are among a minority group of artists bringing the anti-democratic histories of the region to the fore and reflecting on the human experiences resulting from it in the present moment. My comparative model puts forth an understanding of how decolonized Caribbean subjectivities emerge outside of national or disciplinary boundaries today.

Finally, I use new media theories to show how new forms of reading in the digital era allow reimagining forms of writing (Martin Barbero 31). This dissertation shows how these writers rethink the literary by attempting to resemble digital aesthetics in their works and how this strategy facilitates critical approaches to crises in the region. I argue that engaging with digital culture provides these writers with a model to develop non-chronological, alternative stories, ones where multiple temporalities converge. Resembling the non-chronological aesthetics of the digital highlights how when we use new technologies or navigate the Internet

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[3] In Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1991), as is widely known, printed media becomes central for the consolidation of the nation. In *Foundational Fictions: The National Romances of Latin America* (1991), Doris Sommer proposes that the nation is consolidated through the representations of love stories leading to mestizaje: "The nineteenth-century national novels insist on simplifying the triangle; they straighten and flatten it out into a dyad where no mediation is necessary or even possible for lovers who know they're right for each other" (17). Sommer adds the following on her elaboration of how national brotherhood and mestizaje are constructed in the texts: "As a rhetorical solution to the crises in the novels/nation, miscegenation (an unfortunate translation for *mestizaje,* which is practically a slogan for many projects of national consolidation) is often the figure for pacification of the 'primitive' or 'barbarous' sector" (22).

rather than attend to a chronological order of things, we might instead experience a juxtaposition of elements that can be accessed simultaneously in no predetermined order. In this sense, these texts force upon their narrative a similar operation in respect to chronology to retrieve past episodes deemed relevant for their criticism of present crisis. Of course, a similar critique could be done through a chronological story, but here the engagement with a non-chronological story speaks to the experimental use of new media, of digital culture, that the writers implement in the texts. Ultimately, their works challenge national histories of linear progress in the Caribbean by putting emphasis on the centrality of how a multiplicity of stories coexist in the digital era through platforms such as the Internet.

Indebted Pasts, Alternative Futures: Caribbean Time as Indebtedness

> El futuro, constituido en el objeto del deseo de la Modernidad, ha perdido la capacidad de garantizar o, al menos, prometer la llegada de tiempos mejores. El pasado, por su parte, solo sirve para probar y evidenciar la significancia del futuro.(…) Las crisis han perdido su carácter temporal y ahora son permanentes, son la norma, son el equivalente al presente
> José M. Atiles-Osoria, *Apuntes para abandonar el derecho* 1

Atiles's suggestion of how crisis substitutes present temporality exemplifies the complexities of Hispanic Caribbean histories. Here, Atiles proposes crisis as a temporal framework that stops the continuity of time and is full of present. Historically, at least two other writers suggest a similar notion of temporality. One is Walter Benjamin and the other is César Vallejo, both contemporaries to each other in the context of early twentieth century. In the "Theses on the Philosophy of History," Benjamin proposes that a temporality of crisis emerges from the capitalist notion of progress[4] (257). Historical avant-garde poet César Vallejo also builds a temporality anchored on notions of crises and the stillness of time in his book of poetry, *Trilce* (1922). In Atiles's approach, however, this temporality encompasses the experience of lived coloniality, one that stands still in permanent crisis and that will render the future irrelevant. Moreover, to consider the past also seems futile in contemporaneity, for the only thing it can do is confirm the irrelevance of the future. In Atiles's approach, it seems as if in the continuum of time, history cannot be rescued from the disasters of progress.

Instead, Atiles, who is studying the case of Puerto Rico, proposes here that the temporality of crisis imposes itself through a logic of debt. I would propose, however, that in literature today, Caribbean writers completely subvert this logic by articulating how a historical past is indebted to the present. The question I'm posing is not about whether the Hispanic Caribbean is literally indebted or not, but instead to think how literature reframes the questions who are the debtors and what is owed. The question for these writers, following a subversion of the neoliberal logic of debt is, then, who are we indebted to and why are we indebted to them? To these writers, the past is indebted to the present, which consequently renders the future relevant. In other words, Guillermo Rebollo, Rita Indiana, and Jorge E. Lage's Caribbean digital imaginations suggest that the national projects of the twentieth century remain indebted to the present through the amends yet to be made and much needed for a viable future. The nation remains indebted to the present in so much as it perpetuates forms of oppression implemented by

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[4] For a further discussion on this, please refer to Chapter 2 of this dissertation.

the political classes that emerged throughout the twentieth century and that led these three countries to crises.

These crises are also a product of the failures of nation-states in the face of the emergence of the neo-liberal economy. Debt, uncertainty, and the loss of sovereignty, as Maurizio Lazzarato proposes, are central to the neo-liberal logic of social organization. Lazzarato proposes that debt is the subjectivity of the neo-liberal context and that it surpasses territorial notions and power relations of the nation-state (89). According to Lazzarato, the debtor's future is at the mercy of the inner-workings of neoliberalism (132), and "[n]ational governments and parliaments are mere executors of the decisions and timelines decided outside what one still calls national 'sovereignty'" (189). These overlapping realities of the neo-liberal logic produce what the theorist calls the "indebted man." In so much as Rebollo, Indiana, and Lage, operate in response to a neo-liberal context, they put into question the logic of debt at the center of neoliberalism as a political economic project that was first at the center of the failures of national projects in Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba. There is a relevant distinction to be made regarding the Cuban case, where rather than seeing a response to neo-liberalism, we see a post-communist logic emerge, which at times intersects with the expansion of the neo-liberal logic from the late 2000s and onward. But, in contrast to Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, Cuba experiences the Special Period crisis during the decade of the 1990s emerging as a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. My intention here is not to propose that all islands have the same experience in the context of neoliberalism, but rather to understand the role played by the global destabilization of nation-states in the Hispanic Caribbean as a region. These writers reject the idea of a future controlled by neoliberalism as much as they reject the idea of a future controlled by the current politcal elites in power. They, thus, propose alternative ways in which to think of collective life in the Caribbean beyond the nation-state and subsequent neoliberal logics. Consequently, and contrary to what Atiles suggests about the present, then, they render the future relevant. By tracing this discursive move, one could substitute the subject in Maurizio Lazzaratos's "indebted man" with the temporality of a historical past: a series of *indebted pasts* surface throughout the texts.

With the subject displaced, the writers transfer the accountability for the disasters of the present to a temporality of the past. Thus, the *indebted pasts* become a move through which history remains indebted to the life of the present and the retrieval of historical accountability through literature decolonizes historical consciousness along with constructions of hope for an alternative future. An indebted past, thus, becomes an expression of refusal to owe anything to the political classes of the region. These writers highlight that Caribbean citizens today do not owe anything, but rather that they are owed. Contemporary writers suggest that the past and the agents of the past remain indebted to us and owe us for attempting to erase us from history. By emphasizing a refusal to inherit neo-liberal debt, these writers also claim back the future of the Caribbean by also refusing to take on the social, economic, and environmental debts incurred by past leaders. A past built upon the negation of our future remains indebted to our present conditions, thus, rather than speaking of indebted subjects we can then speak of *indebted pasts*.

If the logic of debt appears as central to neo-liberalism, then debt becomes central to new media: "Every aspect of the modern debt system at the heart of neo-liberalism relies on new media, from the structure of the machine to the logic of the code to the enabling of electronic transactions by the Internet and other electronic networks" (Mirzoeff 348). In his article "You Are Not a Loan: Debt and New Media," Nicholas Mirzoeff further explains that "One of the primary functions of new media (…) is to create, sustain and extend indebtedness. That does not

mean that all new media are bad or that it is only about debt. It does mean that debt needs to be part of the conversation about new media" (349). And by suggesting that debt is directly tied to new media, the critic adds that there aren't any alternative futures because debt implies social paralysis (349). "Your future," he suggests, "is already owned by someone else" (Mirzoeff 348). Finally, the critic points out, in coversation with David Graeber, that "the point of the debt sytem" at the center of the neo-liberal logic "is not to generate money but to make people feel and experience hopelessness about their situation" (Mirzoeff 349). Seen through this lens, it could be said that these authors' subversion of neo-liberal logic engages with new media to contest the hopelessness generated by neo-liberal debt. Again, in the case of Cuba this rejection of the neo-liberal logic has to be considered through the lens of a post-communist context. Therefore, Rebollo and Indiana's implementation of new media not only questions the historical past of the nation-state that can no longer fulfill its promise in the context of global neo-liberalism, but it also defeats the notions of hopelesness generated by the social outcomes of the nation-state's sucessor. A similar operation occurs in Lage's writing that instead highlights the transition from a communist to a post-communist political economy.

The idea of debt provides a useful model to consider the role of literary and new media cultural objects in the contemporary Caribbean. Broadly speaking, cultural producers explore ways in which to subvert certain forms of the logic of indebtedness via their portrayal of an indebted past alongside the re-appropriation of the future. If, in fact, we're in permanent political-economic crisis that would render the future irrelevant, as Atiles holds, then contemporary cultural producers in the region contest this by making futurity a central motif in their works. But this futurity cannot be contested without first scrutinizing the relevance of the past. Furthermore, if neo-liberalism owns the collective's future, to engage with the idea of the future can also open the doors to a different reading and positionality within debt,[5] one that subverts the geopolitics that maintain the region at the margins of capital today.

By spotlighting the future in their narrative, Lage, Indiana, and Rebollo render it relevant. Once rendered relevant, the future serves as a temporality to subvert the model of indebtedness entrenched in both paradigms of the contemporary, crisis and new media. The centrality of the future confirms that, in fact, rather than the future being owned by someone else because subjects are indebted, it has been ripped off of subjects, and consequently, others are indebted to the social collective. In ways, these authors are *pasando cuentas,* to use Rocío Zambrana's wording, to those responsible for the permanent crises that come after the failures of national progress promised throughout the twentieth century in the Caribbean. Zambrana, for example, reminds us that debt is not new in the region and the first form of it in the Caribbean came through Haití's independence: "The only succesful slave revolution in history was neutralized through debt. (…) The case of Haití is exemplary of the operation of debt as an apparatus of capture and predation, but also as a form of coloniality" (Zambrana, "Rendir cuentas"). Zambrana also speaks about "subversive interruption" to describe the act of holding those responsible for debt accountable and interrupting the reproduction of coloniality ("Rendir cuentas"). Thus, I use the idea of debt here in a flexible and metaphorical sense, to consider how these writers underline ways in which the historical past of the region remains indebted to its present moment. Debt is a useful metaphor here because it also remits to a past, as debt is always dependent on its construction in a past temporality, but its impacts are always lived in a present

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[5] Rocío Zambrana discusses the notion of positionality within debt in relation to Puerto Rican activists. I discuss this further on the first chapter of this dissertation.

temporality. In Spanish, we use the word *endeudadx* affectively, for example, by telling someone who does something good for us that we are indebted to them. Thus, in the works I analyze here I propose that the writers are also contemplating how national pasts remain *endeudados* (indebted) in this broader sense to the sociopolitical present realities of the region. Looking back at the past has been deemed relevant in discussions about literature and new media as well, where critics ground the dialogue between new media and literature "as one defined by its continuity, rather than rupture, with the past" more broadly in Latin America (Gentic and Bush 12). Thus, Rebollo Gil, Indiana, and Lage construct and represent what I call a series of indebted pasts to subvert both nationalism and neo-liberalism. Ultimately, to portray permanent crisis and claim back the future would also confirm that not only is our place in the world small in contemporary geo-politics,[6] but also that our time is short because we are running out of both, space and time, to *pasar cuentas*. As one of Lage's characters in his novel *La autopista: the movie* (2015) holds, "Ray Ban tenía claro cuál era su papel, cuál era su misión: contra la velocidad y la intemperie, la memoria y el conocimiento. Porque nada estaba perdido aún, aunque todo pareciera irremediablemente perdido" (179). Consequently, a sensation of urgency emerges through these works as well.

To think of present time in the Caribbean, I would like to also engage with Ludmer's observations about temporality in the twenty-first century. In Ludmer's analysis of contemporary works in the early 2000s, the critic explains that: "…hoy vivimos una transformación de la experiencia del tiempo. Y las nuevas experiencias históricas producen nuevos mundos" (18). She calls this transformation in experiencing time, time zero, and sees it in direct relationship to the emergence of the Internet: "En los últimos años vivimos con Internet una nueva experiencia histórica global: el tiempo cero, la travesía del espacio en no tiempo, lo que se llama tiempo real" (Ludmer 18). This shift in the experience of time, proposes Ludmer, generates a new historical experience that also reorganizes power: "El tiempo cero no solo implica una nueva experiencia histórica sino también otra división del poder y por lo tanto podría ser crucial para nuestro destino latinoamericano, definido por el tiempo según una historia del capitalismo" (19). Following Ludmer's idea of time zero, we can think of contemporary Caribbean literature that engages with the implementation of digital media as partaking in the logic of reorganizing time so as to generate a new historical experience of imagining the Caribbean.[7] In the Cuban case, for example, this idea of time zero directly marked why a younger generation of writers called themselves: Generación Cero. In the case of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, we see Indiana and Rebollo creating connections between the socio-political present of the islands and their pasts.

I would like, thus, to engage with my objects of study from a subaltern studies approach that can also be critical of its place of enunciation. In part, I aim to allow the literary works I study here to support my own contribution to the decolonization of knowledge production about the Caribbean. At times, I let them lead the way in the chapters that follow. For the practice of a decolonial production of knowledge, I still consider Beverley's proposal of subaltern studies particularly useful to consider how an academic intervention seeks not only to produce

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[6] As Jamaica Kincaid suggests in her book *A Small Place* (1988), with which Rebollo Gil also establishes a dialogue.

[7] Rachel Price has noted that in Cuban literature "beyond the pressures of the market and the banalizing analytic of globalization, a particular vision of the present, and future, is taking shape" (7).

knowledge but also to politically intervene in said production from the perspective of the subaltern (56). I think it is important to clarify this especially in studying these particular authors because they not only close the gap between high and low culture at times, but also pose very crucial questions about Caribbean realities today. Additionally, when possible, all three writers made their literary work freely accessible, thus, defeating the impacts of the neo-liberal market on literature, and two of them, Rebollo and Indiana, are activists. In the early 2000s, for example, Jorge E. Lage produced an e-zine titled *The Revolution Evening Post: e-Zine de escritura irregular*, in collaboration with Generation Cero's writers Ahmel Echevarría and Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo, that circulated via e-mail correspondence in Cuba. Rebollo and Indiana, both based in Puerto Rico, have been continuously engaged in practices of activism and work with the community. Indiana, in particular, has publicly claimed that the reason why she makes music is because it is more accessible than literature, emphasizing that not everyone can read but anyone can listen to music. Rebollo, on the other hand, kept a public blog for many years, and published books that were given to people as gifts or distributed in public spaces, as in the cases of *Poetry is silly* (2014) and *Guaynabo City es un país/Pumpiaera y Revolución* (2017).

Rebollo, Indiana, and Lage may emulate forms of "alternative nationalism," as proposed by Beverley as well, whereby rewriting the past resignifies agency in the present (64). And if literature has served as a "práctica constitutiva de las elites" (Beverley 82), then contemporary writers arrive at the twenty-first century with refreshing perspectives and a place of enunciation that requires rethinking where literature stands in the region as a whole. The definitions and forms of subalternity are blurrier today than ever in the context of extreme neo-liberal precarities. How can we think of the subaltern today? Are these subaltern writers? As this project suggests, what Rebollo, Indiana, and Lage have in common is that they in fact speak from and think through the perspective of the Caribbean subaltern today. While they are not necessarily subaltern in the traditional sense of the dispossessed, their positionalities become complex given their treatment and alliance with certain forms of subalternity when it comes to the portrayal of race/gender/class.

Portraying the Caribbean in literature dates back to the early stages of Spanish colonization, from Cristobal Colón to Bartolomé de las Casas and from Carlos de Sigüenza y Góngora to Agustín Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra. However, imagining it in ways filled with the hope of constructing something different, a decolonial or autonomous present-future, perhaps, could be said to be relatively recent. I intentionally chose the term "imaginations" for this project to distinguish it from pre-existing frameworks about Caribbean discourse that I think can be further problematized and may even feel claustrophobic at times. But I also chose the noun in plural rather than the verb (imagined) to underline the atemporal character of how writers and thinkers imagine the Caribbean in contemporary literature and to highlight the plurality of ways in which cultural producers do so in the present.

As a Caribbean female scholar, my work in this dissertation seeks to establish a direct dialogue with the works of other Caribbean female thinkers from a broad range of disciplines including Afro-Caribbean studies and decolonial feminist theory. I find it necessary to situate this work within a specific group of other Caribbean women scholars as part of its own purpose: reconsidering which voices are highlighted in contemporary conversations about the Caribbean region. Throughout the chapters that follow, I engage with a wide range of white male theorists and scholars, which is only symptomatic of the state of the fields and institutions from which I currently operate. However, this project aims to establish a dialogue with the work of other Caribbean female scholars because their contributions make up some of the most complete analyses in the understanding of the Hispanic Caribbean to date. These Caribbean scholars are

Daylet Domínguez, Lorgia Garcia Peña, Dixa Ramirez, Ariadna Godreau Aubert, and Rocio Zambrana. I consider their contributions a new wave of Caribbean thought in the twenty-first century, something I fully delve into when analyzing the case of Puerto Rico. I think that taken together, the proposals of these scholars provide the most useful frameworks and vocabulary to speak of the Hispanic Caribbean today. Their works also show how the field of Caribbean studies is shifting and changing as an epistemological apparatus. Additionally, while the majority of their works are anchored in nationally delineated objects of study, engaging with them from a comparative and regional analytical perspective, following Domínguez's model, can be an intellectually productive endeavor. Taken together, these frameworks add to the understanding of the shifts occurring in regional contemporary literature as a site of knowledge production. All of them, in one way or another, also work with and through the Caribbean past to re-think our present.

Domínguez and García Peña introduce new ways of reading constructions of race and racialized bodies in official archives produced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These are the same archives that contemporary writers contest today. Domínguez finds a first moment of historical erasures in the consolidations of the archive through the disciplinary contaminations among literature and social sciences in the nineteenth century. Erasure comes in through an emphasis on whiteness: "los tropos imaginarios raciales y nacionales en cada una de las islas", suggests Domínguez, "funcionarían como rearticulaciones simbólicas de la ideología de blanqueamiento erigida como respuesta a Haití" (*Ficciones* 31). Dominguez's proposal, thus, shows how the relationship between literature, science, and race becomes a foundational moment of the three nations: Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba (31). Along a similar approach to the twentieth century, García Peña focuses her work *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and the Archives of Contradiction* (2016) on identifying the silences and repetitions that allowed the consolidations of a racist hegemonic discourse in the Dominican imaginary. To elaborate this proposal, she introduces the term contra*diction*, as mentioned earlier, to define "stories, narratives, and speech acts—that go against the hegemonic version of national identity and against the mode of an analysis we tend to value as historically accurate or what most people call the truth" (García-Peña, *Borders* 2). What I want to emphasize here is the erasures. Erasures of certain bodies, of specific subjects. The writers that I analyze in the chapters that follow are negotiating with and contesting those racial erasures through different strategies. In ways, the prose of Rebollo, Indiana, and Lage appear as contra*dictions*, that are rescuing erasures of the national formations of identity from as far back as the nineteenth century.

Dixa Ramírez also speaks to and adds to the conversation about erasures. The critic uses the concept of ghosting which "implies that the acts of erasure that are part and parcel of colonial, imperial, and many nationalist projects have produced not so much actual silence as other unwieldy and recalcitrant presences" (Ramírez 6). Both Ramírez and Garcia Peña conceptualize discursive operations that support the racialized hegemonic versions of national identity in the Dominican case. Ramírez adds, however, that "acknowledgment of these ghosts opens us to the potential for redemption, healing, and, to cite McClintock, 'the possibilities of alternative futures'" (7). Through an acknowledgement of the latent presence of the erasure, Ramírez raises the question of redemption. Can the collective be redeemed after working through the reinstatement of erased pasts? Can *pasar cuentas* to the past allow the collective to move onto alternative futures? Yes. The redemption from the past and the necessary healing to create alternative futures become, in fact, central to the works studied here. These writers work through

the traumas of foundational violence of nationalism: the elitist and nepotistic character of Puerto Rico's colonial status, the extremely racist and sexist politics of the Trujillato dictatorship in the Dominican Republic, and censorship and surveillance of subjectivities that don't fit *el hombre nuevo* in Cuba. Working through these traumas appears as one way in which looking at the past and reinserting erasures can support the creation of discursive literary moves that contemplate alternative futures as a form of overcoming the damages of nationalism, thus, also healing. This idea of healing is central to Godreau Aubert's proposal of a pedagogy of the indebted. Redemption for Godreau, however, is tied to activism and not just lettered work:

> [D]elinear una suerte de pedagogía de las endeudadas y de nuestro rol en el devenir político de la deuda y la austeridad. Quería escribir en afirmaciones que no dejaran duda sobre que el activismo es involucrarnos en la labor de sanar. Ser activista contra los recortes es anunciar los tiempos de pagarnos lo debido aún sin debérnoslo, de cobrarle a los responsables, de reconocer y honrar las deudas pendientes a nuestro favor, en, desde y para nosotras. Nosotras somos las propias, las que no nos debemos a nadie." (Godreau Aubert 76)

I find Godreau's proposal radical in Caribbean studies for many reasons, such as her dialogue with broader Latinx studies and how her argument proposes that political-economic predators are not only global but also local, which I discuss in more detail in the first chapter. However, for purposes of how it serves the main framework of this project, I consider that the debt, as I mentioned at the beginning of this section, can serve as a useful metaphor to think of how contemporary writers are approaching the condition of crisis in the Caribbean. Although, beyond the idea of debt, the centrality in this proposal relies on activism, a form of engaging with reality, as a form of healing. What seems salient about Godreau's approach and the reason why I find it relevant for the authors I study is that, in one way or another, these authors are committed and in dialogue with certain forms of activism through the written form as well. And while they are not the classic archetype of the radical Latin American leftist author, they remain committed to criticizing the sociological underpinnings of the realities in which they live. In this sense, while they produce contradictions that focus on the ghosts of the Caribbean's history more broadly, their works also propose a pedagogy of the indebted to the extent that it remains politically committed while seeking redemption and healing from different forms of traumatic national pasts. Moreover, for Godreau, the "endeudada" is also first and foremost black, trans, and woman, the other subjectivities that Rebollo, Indiana, and Lage bring to the fore in their works. Ultimately, Godreau points out, "Pedagogía de las endeudadas no es una convocatoría al vacío. Nos llama a nosotras: contra los buitres de adentro y de afuera" (74). Putting the Puerto Rican context aside, this statement could apply to the works of any of the authors studied here, who in their work place themselves against the national regimes that have otherwise plundered their country, *los buitres de adentro*, with or without the help of outside intervention, *los buitres de afuera*.

Finally, I'd like to briefly engage here with Alain Badiou's idea of literature as a form of thought or as an entity that can produce autonomous thought. In the *The Age of Poets and Other Writings on Twentieth-Century Poetry and Prose* (2014), the philosopher poses the question "What does literature think?" in a short essay titled after the question itself. Badiou proposes three key aspects about literature that I consider useful for how I would like to conceptualize temporal imagination here. First, he proposes that literature "transforms the inevitability of resignation … to the fact that the world never lives up to the Idea" (132). Using this statement as his point of departure, Badiou then proceeds to outline how literature thinks, in dialogue with

Natacha Michel, by proposing that "The idea that literature thinks, and that writers might be thinkers … can only mean that it opens up the realm of the particular—subtle psychological insights, social differences and cultural specificities—to the field of knowledge" (133). Finally, the philosopher concludes that "the literary fact" becomes a "compact and distinct Idea" (135). I find Badiou's conception of literature useful to think of how Rebollo, Indiana, and Lage imagine the Caribbean. Ultimately, I consider their works as objects that produce new forms of thinking about the Caribbean temporality through their engagement with literary imagination. Instead of giving into resignation, they actually use the literary medium to imagine and think knowledge that contributes to the expansion of Caribbean thought. In this sense, through their constructions of Caribbean digital imaginations, these writers become thinkers of alternative futures.

Caribbean Collectives

Rethinking temporality through a reframing of twentieth-century history in the Caribbean, by reinstating the past and claiming back ownership over the future, triggers alternative regional collectives. Rebollo, Indiana, and Lage's rearticulation of collectivity consists of reinserting the Caribbean subaltern in how they articulate the present-future of the region; that is, representations of race/gender/class hierarchies obscured by nationalism. They bring into question the ways in which the territorial paradigm of the nation-state produced a community that marginalizes specific forms of citizenship from Caribbean collective life. In so doing, they rethink the region through anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-classist forms of collectivity. In the collectives produced here, Caribbean space also includes Caribbean subaltern subjects previously excluded from nationalist constructions of subjectivity and space. Moreover, these representations of collective life also gesture to a regional construction of identity. The Caribbean collectivity constructed in contemporaneity feeds from previous notions of subjectivity while also going further from it. In this section, I discuss some of the key paradigms of territoriality that have shaped debates about community and collectivities in the Caribbean and the rest of Latin America.

A key framework to raise questions about Caribbean collectives, and to establish a genealogy of my own contribution to the field, can be the classic Caribbean studies work of Antonio Benítez Rojo. Benitez Rojo's popular "cierta manera," or a Caribbean certain way, referring to a particular way in which Caribbean subjectivity distinguishes from others through particular or specific embodied and spatial practices, seems to be further complicated in how artists imagine Caribbean subjectivity today. What would be Acilde's certain way? Acilde, the protagonist of Indiana's *La mucama de Omnicunlé,* is a transgender man who is obsessed with the internet and possessed by an Afro-Caribbean deity. How can we think of a certain way in *Archivo*'s VirginBot or Baby Zombie? VirginBot is a Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre doll turned robot, whereas Baby Zombie is an undead communist militant. All of these characters render Benitez Rojo's certain way problematic if not useless. There is a later proposal by the author in an essay included in a 2010 edition of his seminal work, *La isla que se repite* (1992), that may be more helpful to think of contemporary literature and its intersections with digital imagination. In this short essay titled, "¿Existe una estética caribeña?" Benítez Rojo suggests that

> el performance caribeño del momento refleja más las diferencias que las similaridades presentes de la identidad local, se refiere más al futuro que al pasado, se dirige mas a la región que a la nación, es más irónico que beligerante y prefiere la creación popular a la idea de obra de arte consagrada por la tradición occidental (383)

These are, in fact, some of the main coordinates considered in the works I study here. I would add to Benitez Rojo's proposal here that digital imaginaries become central to the emergence of more regional notions highlighted in the passage. But while Benítez Rojo points out that "toda repetición es necesariamente una practica que entraña la diferencia y un paso hacia la nada" (17), this also becomes slightly insufficient to thinking of the Caribbean in the context of the digital era. The digital era, beyond producing repetition, also seems to facilitate the emergence of shared commonalities, rather than difference, in the repetition of the digital itself. These repetitions become visible not in the Caribbean represented through the texts but, rather, in what the implementation of the digital produces: a rewriting of histories that lead to an alternative future. I do not want to undermine here the historical differences among the countries of study, which are extensively outlined in each chapter, but rather to problematize the notions of repetition and differences in the context of the digital Caribbean. Instead, the similarities emerging through the implementation of the digital as an experimental form invite us to rethink the Caribbean altogether, at both the historical and geopolitical levels. The differences celebrated in Benitez Rojo become indistinct in contemporary works, at times through the Caribbean digital imaginations they produce. Because, while the histories of the Hispanic Caribbean differ politically and ideologically, it seems as if the results across the region have led writers and artists to confront similar challenges and engage with cultural production that poses questions about the precarities shared by Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba.

At the turn-of-the-century, the literary horizon shifted as the political economic changes brought about by neo-liberalism settled in. In his work, *Los nuevos paradigmas: prólogo narrativo al S.XXI* (2006), Jorge Fornet sketches a map of emerging Caribbean narratives in the early 2000s. He points out the recurring themes of this new literature: technology, social problems, immediate realities, and history (25). Fornet also creates a distinction between this literature and the literary production of the 1990s. This distinction consists, suggests the critic, of a general identity crisis rather than just an embracing of neo-liberal ideology (45). However, he highlights the relationship/response of Cuban authors to the global market. Finally, Fornet makes the case for thinking about the representation of the physical demolition of Havana as a way to think of the demolition of national imagination itself (107). In this sense, physical deterioration of the urban landscape would be directly related to a critique of the nation. In this view, Fornet already makes connections between the representation of space and identity. As I will discuss in the chapters that follow, writers in the 2010s continue to lay out spatial representations of the Caribbean that force the reintegration of citizenship neglected in previous Caribbean collectivity. The same recurring themes suggested by Fornet—technology, social problems, immediate realities, and History— reappear here with the purpose of proposing alternative collectivities rather than identity crises. In the context of contemporary texts, the crisis is not so much subjectivity as it is the historicity through which it emerges. As a result, the integration of Fornet's demolition of the nation here becomes an exercise through which a viable future can be thought through a critique of foundational violence.

In addition to formal aspects concerning digital media, these contemporary writers are also concerned with territorial questions that require considering the place of the nation in contemporaneity. Josefina Ludmer's *Aquí América Latina, una especulación* (2010) remains the key text to raise questions about the portrayal of national identity in contemporary Latin American literature. Ludmer's work prescribes the specific characteristics a narrative has in order to fall under the category of what the critic calls anti-national, which consist of literary constructions meant to contest the fall of the nation-state as a result of the emergence of neo-

liberalism. And while her conception of post-autonomous literatures continues to be useful to think of the changes occurring in literary production today, her prescription for anti-national tones could be further explored. Ludmer proposes that contemporary literature has to be thought of as post-autonomous, which she defines as: "Las literaturas postautónomas del presente saldrían de 'la literatura', atravesarían la frontera y entrarían en un medio (en una materia) real-virtual, sin afuera, la imaginación pública…" (155). This conception of literature remains helpful to think of the works I study here in so much as they become something more than just fictional texts. As I mentioned earlier, these cultural objects converge different kinds of mediums, forms, and discourses. Through this convergence, the narratives render the Caribbean illegible at times, which is a key aspect of what I define as Caribbean digital imaginations. The illegibility here consists of the representation of intricately local particularities of Caribbean public imagination today. The intricately local characters of the critiques constructed in the texts, then, make the Caribbean illegible for a reader that may not be familiar with the historical particularities of each one of the countries. Ludmer also points out that

> De este modo el género y la retórica de las profanaciones antinacionales aparece como posnacional, pos-genérico y pos-literario. Desafía los preceptos ilustrados y modernos de la literatura tradicional y también de las vanguardias. Se sitúa en lo que podría llamarse una etapa post-literaria, después del fin de las ilusiones modernas: después del fin de la autonomía y del carácter alto, estético, de la literatura. Y se sitúa después del fin de las ilusiones nacionales disciplinarias, edificantes, liberadoras o subversivas, de la literatura. (167)

Ludmer's prescription for the antinational tone can be further complicated in respect to the works studied here in part because, today, the attention has shifted from the emergence of privatization and neo-liberalism to the results that came from these. However, Ludmer's conclusions can help continue to lay out the coordinates for this project. The idea of post-genre stands out, and to think of the end of the national and disciplinary illusions can also be productive. For example, Rebollo, Indiana, and Lage intertwine literature with other media practices, such as blogging, music, and e-zines, respectively.

Ludmer prescribes that the anti-national tone has to be straightforward or literal, such as when characters become the voice of privatization in the process of criticizing the state, and eventually emigrate and leave the territory, the ultimate anti-national move. This is precisely the same aspect for which Ludmer's proposal for the anti-national tone falls short to think of these writers' anti-nationalism. Ludmer sees the anti-national tone directly tied to the emergence of neo-liberalism and privatization in the 1990s (160). For Ludmer, the antinational tone in fiction would correspond to the voice of privatization in social reality, it supports a reformulation of the nation-state and, as a general rule, its protagonist leaves the territory (160-65). Rather than rendering neo-liberalism as the discursive contestation of the nation-state, these works bring about very specific historical erasures that allowed the perpetuation of the nation-state's power in the first place. However, I propose that contrary to what Ludmer envisions as anti-national, the digital era and emerging twenty-first century Caribbean narratives require that we rethink what we consider an anti-national tone or narrative. Does a character need to leave a territory to be anti-national? Is literally criticizing a nation the only way to be anti-national? For instance, Rebollo, Indiana, and Lage, while extremely critical of the national regimes from which they are writing, do not abide to any of Ludmer's guidelines for the anti-national. Their protagonists are in the Caribbean until quite literally the end of times, futures that seem distant from the present

time, no character explicitly or literally criticizes nationalism, and the emergence of neo-liberalism is not quite a concern in these books.

And yet, I propose that these narratives are anti-national because they build alternative collective notions of the Caribbean that contest nationalism and its failures through a deep dive into historical erasures and that they do so by using digital media to privilege subaltern subjects. They then shift our understanding of Hispanic Caribbean nations, which ultimately becomes an anti-national narrative because it exposes national regimes as oppressive, undemocratic and, above all things, obsolete and stagnant in time and place. When speaking of globalization as form, Hector Hoyos proposes a similar idea about the global Latin American novel: "Their works all stage acts of framing the unframeable: they cultivate the tension between the particular and the general, or the local and the global, as their art. In doing so, they attempt, however modestly, to transform the way we understand the world" (22). This is precisely what the critic defines as the Latin American global novel, where he sees a space in the literary tradition of the Americas for writers to imagine and model the world differently through an alternate globality (Hoyos 21). I propose that contemporary Caribbean literature can be understood through these frameworks but goes beyond them. As a result, these works' dialogue with new media transforms the anti-national tone into a historical materialist account of Caribbean contemporaneity in a benjaminian sense. Rather than criticizing superficially, as prescribed by Ludmer, the works situate the narrative in the historical continuum of progress to question the failures of nation-states in the Hispanic Caribbean. But instead of seeing these failures as a mere result of neo-liberalism, they also turn their attention to the historical precedents of these failures. Therefore, seeing national failures not as a unique result of neo-liberalism but also as something that was historically built through the foundational violence of the nation-state. As a result, they transform how we understand the Caribbean in the twenty-first century.

If the protagonists or main characters of Caribbean digital imaginations shatter artificial nationalist notions of community, how do Caribbean collectives in the texts dialogue with global notions of community? In dialogue with Hoyos's contribution, Mariano Siskind and Rachel Price also propose models to think of the novel in relationship to the global. Siskind speaks to cosmopolitan desires and Price proposes the notion of the planetary. For Siskind, "the globalization of the novel and the novelization of the global" emphasize "historical processes on a global scale and the production of global imaginaries" (58). Rachel Price also explores global and worldly conceptions of discourse specifically emerging in contemporary Cuban culture. Price acknowledges that hyper-locality appears in contemporary cultural production: "Simultaneous globalization *and* abandonment of a former internationalism has spurred in literature and art an embrace of the planetary, in contrast with both 'the international' and an asphyxiating nationalism. At the same time, the hyper-local (neighborhoods, rural regions, subcultures) has returned as a space for artistic interventions" (6). Price further explains that "the planetary imagination also alludes to the real planet's challenges" as it relates to eco-critical perspectives (12). When looking at the works I study here, I propose that neither global nor planetary frameworks seem to be extremely outstanding in these works. Instead this works are dominated by the immediacy of crisis as permamnent (Atiles Osorio) in specific Caribbean contexts. Let us remember Atiles Osorio's suggestion on the permanence of crisis in the present. While the global and the planetary appears in these works, what predominates are notions grounded in the region of the Caribbean and an urgent concern about the future of the region. These regional concerns become part of the ever-present crisis suggested in Atiles's proposal and, moreover, of how the region's historical past led to the current crisis. A crisis always

experienced first and foremost within the regional Caribbean space—whether in La Habana, Santo Domingo, or San Juan—and not from any other classic spatial tropes of globalization such as shopping centers, highways, and other non-places.

Finally, in terms of the geopolitics of the region, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba share far more in common than what is accounted for in the hegemonic history of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. Looking at the region through the lens of United States interventionism and national coloniality facilitates outlining three key aspects in how Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba share historical experiences as a regional collective. The first point would be that U.S. interventionism has played a key role in the development of the geopolitics of the region and has, in fact, also played a key role in the distancing of these three countries from one another. In the cases of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, for example, interventionism was straightforward and accomplished by occupying the islands through violence during different historical contexts of the twentieth century. In the case of Cuba, on the other hand, the U.S. was able to intervene during the turn-of-the-century and early twentieth century, but U.S. interventionism of the caliber accomplished in P.R. and the D.R. was not possible during the second half of the twentieth century. Although, of course, U.S. ideologies and sanctions had an undeniable negative impact in the development of the island's socio-political structures. The second key aspect of these geopolitics is that all three countries enter the twentieth century as neo-colonies that still depended on foreign powers to function as semi-autonomous states. For example, while Puerto Rico's commonwealth status with the U.S. is consolidated in the mid-century, Cuba becomes highly dependable on the Soviet Union under the premise of being an autonomous country, transforming both into neo-colonies of external powers. Throughout this time, beginning as early as the 1930s, Trujillo takes power in the Dominican Republic, a move also triggered by U.S. interventionism in the country (I discuss this in mote detail in the second chapter of the dissertation). In all three islands, we see highly undemocratic regimes come to power: two dictatorships and a colony. In part because of these circumstances, three islands that are quite close to each other exist somewhat distanced from one another. To create and maintain close communities among the islands was not part of the political economic interests of those in power. It could be said that trans-Caribbean ties among citizens exists. However, these ties are neither reflected in how national communities are thought of in each one of the countries nor in the political projects that were put forth by said conceptions of the nation. What has predominated in popular collective consciousness relies more so on the distance among the countries built on everyday life experience. In practice, for example, what would be a one-hour flight to Cuba becomes a much lengthier trip for a Puerto Rican. A Cuban may never have the means to visit Puerto Rico. Dominicans migrate to Puerto Rico through extremely precarious conditions only to face racism, marginalization, and discrimination on the island. Geographically, the islands are very close to each other but, politically, they have historically been very far apart.

These complex geopolitics are central to this dissertation. The authors I study are responding precisely to the formation, perpetuation, and oppression of the Cuban Revolution, the Trujillato, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. In so doing, these authors are engaging with a regional politics of solidarity and re-writing the political history of the region. This is not new, since many intellectuals during the late nineteenth century engaged in similar practices, such as *La Confederación Antillana*. What is new about these writers is that they do so in dialogue with the politics of digital culture and new media, and they forge inclusive Caribbean collectives that

also include the subaltern. Thus, generating a new Caribbean episteme that can or will only be understood through the lens of the digital era.

Caribbean Digital Imaginations

> Sus rondas en el mirador apenas le daban para comer y pagar su servicio de datos, sin el que no hubiese podido vivir.
> Rita Indiana, *La mucama de Omnicunlé* 17

> Nacida en MySpace y criada en Twitter y Facebook, Lily Allen era una estrella que brillaba con luz propia en medio de las ruinas de Centro Habana.
> Jorge E. Lage, *Archivo* 30

> De este lado de la pantalla, quien la observa tiene otras siete ventanas abiertas con notas y noticias relacionadas a la crisis financiera que enfrenta el país. Ninguna ofrece solución. Pero, ¡tengo una idea!
> Guillermo Rebollo Gil, *Amigos en todas partes* 15

> [E]l contemporáneo no es sólo aquel que, percibiendo la oscuridad del presente, aferra su luz que no llega a destino; es también quien, dividiendo e interpolando el tiempo, está en condiciones de transformarlo y ponerlo en relación con los otros tiempos, de leer en él de manera inédita la historia, de 'citarla' según una necesidad que no proviene en modo alguno de su arbitrio sino de una exigencia a la que él no puede dejar de responder.
> Giorgio Agamben, *Desnudez* 28

In the last citation above, taken from Agamben's *Nudities* (2009), the author invites us to reflect on what makes a work contemporary. Ultimately, Agamben proposes that the contemporary is the one who can look at the darkness of their time and still embrace the light. Knowing this, the contemporary's job is to create a dialogue between the present time and the history preceding it. The need to engage in this dialogue with history, according to Agamben, would be beyond the contemporary subject itself and, instead, is presented as the demand of their time. The ultimate goal being to transform the darkness of their times into something else. Following Agamben's logic of the contemporary, one could consider digital identity politics and the democratizing character of digital media as extremely contemporary. The same can be said about Guillermo Rebollo Gil, Rita Indiana, Jorge E. Lage, and other transmedia cultural producers in the Caribbean today. In this section, I outline a preliminary framework for the concept of Caribbean digital imaginations taking Agamben's notion of the contemporary as one of the aesthetics concretized in these works.

To work at the intersection of Caribbean literature and new media through a literary approach requires finding common ground among two disciplines and mediums that are not straightforwardly related to each other. The dialogue among both disciplines can be at times

limited to speaking about digital tools for research methods or imposing US digital hegemony onto works that do not quite fit the infrastructures of the digital first world. When adding the layer of focusing on the global south it can become even more complex to find common ground that does not westernize our objects of study. Two recent anthologies fill in some of the gaps in this regard—*Latin American Cyberculture and Cyberliterature* (2007) and *Technology, Literature and Digital Culture in Latin America: Mediatized Sensibilities in a Globalized Era* (2016)—but neither takes on the Hispanic Caribbean as a prominent object of study. In this sense, a lot of labor goes into deconstructing existing new media theory in ways that makes it useful to consider questions that regard the Caribbean as part of global south new media. The opposite is also true, a lot of labor goes into thinking how objects of study from the global south can inform an otherwise predominantly westernized field. The available theories and approaches to consider this ecosystem are mainly dominated by western and first world ideologies, which can appear as limited in considerations of digital culture of the global south. Caribbean digital imaginations proposes a framework for the study of a non-western new media of sorts. Abigail De Kosnik problematizes the whiteness of new media studies in her book *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (2016). De Kosnik's approach to fandom aims to expand on the study of what bodies and voices become central to the study of new media: "fill [ing] in some of the blanks that persist in new media studies around the activity of non-white, non-male, non-heteronormative individuals and collectives on digital networks" (11). Thus, one of the objectives of this dissertation is creating vocabulary and a conceptual framework that can support thinking of digitality through what emerges from new media literature in the Hispanic Caribbean.[8]

As if the region remained offline, the field of new media studies tells us that it produces little to no digital culture, with only a limited number of studies that focus on new technologies in the region. However, cultural production as of the 2000s tells us otherwise. While there is a good amount of work that has been written about Cuba's exceptional case regarding digital culture,[9] considerations about the relevance of digital media in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico or from a comparative regional perspective remain limited. Thus, the framework of Caribbean digital imaginations, the concept itself seeks to register and be useful across both disciplines, literary and new media studies in the region. More importantly, it is a framework deeply entrenched in contemporaneity that reorganizes, along a digital infrastructure at the physical and discursive levels, how we think of the Caribbean in the twenty-first century.

To begin outlining this framework, I must begin by alluding to the undersea fiber optic cable in relationship to its democratic potential and limitations. The fiber optic cable reorganizes space at the physical infrastructural level as well as in hegemonic discourses. The cable defeats and surpasses borders. That is, it avoids them, goes around them, creates its path beyond these with the purpose of connecting citizens to the internet. When looking at a map of the fiber optic cable one is inevitably confronted with a paradoxical representation of space. If the global atlas reminds us of the nations and divisions consolidated during the nineteenth and twentieth

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[8] Here, I am thinking along the same lines as Hector Hoyos in his consideration of the global novel in which he emphasizes a methodology that focuses on what emerges from the texts rather than imposing theoretical frameworks on to them (5).

[9] Some of the key scholars in this area are Rachel Price, Lizabel Mónica, Walfrido Dorta, and Emily Maguire, and my work dialogues with their contributions in the last chapter of this dissertation dedicated to the Cuban case.

centuries, the undersea fiber optic cable imposes itself over these divisions and borders at least illusorily. Scholars such as Alexander Galloway, Seb Franklin, and Nicole Starosielski have discussed the political economic underpinnings of the fiber optic network. Galloway's key contribution in *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (2007), co-authored by Eugene Thacker, reminds us that the fiber optic network becomes an extension of previous political economy ecologies whereby the U.S. dominates as an imperial and hegemonic power. In *Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic* (2015), Franklin suggests that

> the forms of violence that exist under the present arrangement of global political economy are not accidents or problems simply waiting to be solved under the newer, more flexible, communicative, and connected economic mode, but rather features that are internal to the same logic that makes ideas of society as a communication network or an information-processing system possible in the first place (15)

With this proposal, Franklin suggests that while seemingly different, the infrastructures of digital culture still resemble previous logics of capitalist inequality. Finally, in *The Undersea Network* (2015), Starosielski underscores the ways in which, although the fiber optic cable might seem to defeat previous divisions at the surface, in reality, divisions become central to the development of the network itself. Taking into consideration the physical and economic infrastructures of the cable Starosielski concludes that: "When one overlays considerations of control—since a single company might be in charge of all gateways from a country—the network's geography moves further from a decentralized or distributed ideal" (11). Ultimately, these scholarly works suggest that capitalist power dynamics such as inequality, surveillance, and authoritarianism coexist alongside the democratic potential of the internet.

In contrast to the previous observations regarding the political-economy of the fiber optic cable, my approach here, in dialogue with other scholars that have widely discussed the democratic politics of new media such as Henry Jenkins, Abigail De Kosnik, Néstor Garcia Canclini, and Jesús Martín Barbero, considers how its illusory and utopic ideal of connectivity can still be indexed in the social reconfigurations new technologies produced in spite of the perpetuation of pre-existing inequalities. In other words, if political economic inequalities and control pre-date the fiber optic cable and only continue to be supported by it, then considering the aesthetical potential of the utopic ideal therein can make both characters of new media, the anti-democratic and democratic, equally visible. This will be seen throughout the chapters in this dissertation, where a wide range of new media practices are explored: starting with digital protest, moving to the de-hierarchization of knowledge transmission, and ending with extreme surveillance. However, with Caribbean digital imaginations I make the case here for how literature, as a space of producing thought, repurposes the physical infrastructure of the fiber optic cable. By relying on the utopic ideal of the fiber optic cable, literature suggests that the territory of the future could be otherwise, it rehearses in and of itself a different territorial logic.
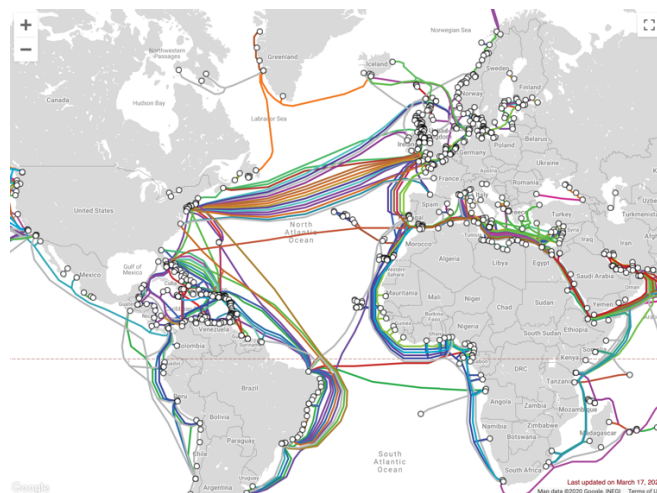
Figure 1: Map of the Fiber Optic Cable, *Submarine Cable Map*, 2020

The cable also illuminates how, rather than a logic of division, the world could still in fact be organized through a logic of connection. It also reminds us that the communications technologies that emerged with it are part of the wake of neo-liberalism and, thus, at the center of the decay of the nation-state. Critics have argued that: "The perception that the Internet rethinks geography is also problematized by the transatlantic circulation of literatures between Latin America, Europe, and North America that predate the development of the Internet and which similarly provided the opportunity for readers and writers to imagine other communities" (Gentic and Bush 15). However, I still consider valuable the ways in which the fiber optic undersea network can be a visual map to bring about alternative forms of organizing territories in so much as it resists the lines previously drawn by national socio-political structures that failed to meet their promises of progress—lines that become ever more dangerous today. Instead, the fiber optic cable draws a line that traces a route less traveled for us in the present time. When looked at on a map, the undersea fiber optic cable makes our eyes travel beyond and through the artifice of territorial demarcations. It shows us on the continental coast, for example, that you can easily make a right, a left, and then another left and skip border control altogether. When we zoom in on the Caribbean, we may actually see the circumference of what some have called *el gran Caribe*.[10] In the Cuban case, for example, the cable was not connected to Cuba until Venezuela intervened. Ultimately, the undersea fiber optics cable follows its own map imposing over and through the somewhat uncharted territory of the ocean.

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[10] For more information, see José Luis Ramos Ruiz's edited volume, *El gran Caribe en contexto* (2014).
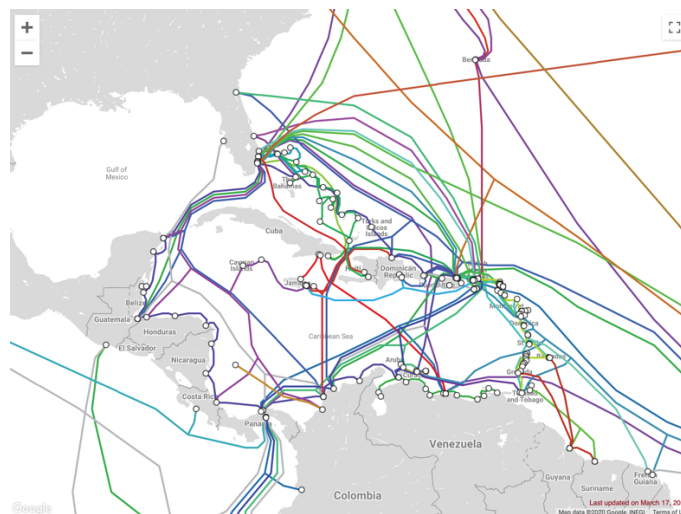
Figure 2: Map of Caribbean Fiber Optic Cable, *Submarine Cable Map,* 2020

It would make sense, then, that such a spatial and territorial organization would trigger discursive re-articulations about identity, subjectivities, and collectives, also symptomatic of the weakening of the nation-state and the emergence of neo-liberal political economy. The discursive-ideological arena of the fiber optic cable would be the internet and the practices that emerge from and through it. The internet reorganizes space at multiple levels. It relies on the metaphorization of it by inviting us to be active agents in the territory of cyber*space,* the realm through which we navigate online culture. Once there, what was once a physical spatial re-organization through the infrastructure, undersea fiber optic cable becomes a discursive spatial reorganization through language by engaging its users in an illusory borderless place of sorts. This borderlessness becomes so threatening that nation-states have felt compelled to control and create new artificial borders around it by controlling what comes in and out of national internet networks. We migrate files from our computers into clouds and defeat the distances of physical space by plugging into video-conversations. Mail women dropping off letters in our mailboxes have never been a more useless yet beautiful symbol of a communications system that becomes ever more obsolete. We gather in groups in the form of chats on our phones, forums in the form of google groups or listservs. We no longer need public service announcements from the president because of Twitter in the United States; governors resign over Facebook in Puerto Rico; people go to the park to connect to Wi-Fi in Cuba; and the hierarchies sustained for so long over the transmission of knowledge are not just questioned but also retraced by younger generations. There was a battle fought long ago on the grounds of emerging nation-states—at the end of the nineteenth century Cuba and the Dominican Republic became sovereign states while Puerto Rico lost its own battle and became a United States colony. Starosielski draws some lines between the historical background of the fiber optic cable and struggles for sovereignty, pointing out that "When some telegraph companies constructed cable stations in remote colonies, tensions were generated with indigenous people who would later resist communications development. The environments that cables stitch together are not always smooth spaces, but turbulent ecologies" (17). There's another battle being fought by civil society today on the grounds of cyberspace, it is an open struggle for representation, inclusion, and defense of democratic citizenship.

De Kosnik, for example, sees the internet as a space were these tensions remain under negotiation, thus, making the case for the promise of democratization in what she calls "rogue

memory." Further exploring the democratic possibilities of internet practices, De Kosnik proposes that:

> [D]igital technologies and networks, the memory-based making they enable, have subverted and counteracted traditional power structures. I have stated that memory has fallen into the hands of rogues, and what this explicitly means is: memory has fallen into female hands, into queer hands, into immigrant and diasporic and transnational hands, into nonwhite hands, into the hands of the masses.[11] (10)

I would add that it has fallen into the hands of all the subjects neglected by national and nationalist paradigms of the twentieth century in the Caribbean. This battle for bringing visibility to the subjects—women, Afro-Caribbean, queer, working class—obscured by the nation becomes ever present through internet practices. And if, as Marx suggested in the *Theses on Feurbach*, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it," perhaps, then, cyberspace does lend itself to bring about these changes long due to citizen engagement with the shifting discursive practices of the internet. While, again, we have experienced for decades the obscure side of these technologies through authoritarian uses of the network, when implemented as an experimental form in literature, new media can often return to this utopic ideal.

It would also make sense then that the literary would rearticulate itself in dialogue to the world reorganization triggered by the fiber optic cable and the internet. When hasn't literature reorganized itself in response to the sociological changes taking place in the world? Does literature articulate digital imaginations emerging in the twenty-first century in a similar way to how it articulated the national imaginations of the nineteenth century? Literature today undergoes a formal and discursive transformation that slightly resembles the operations that critics have discussed as central to the formation of nation-states. Here, I'm thinking of Benedict Anderson's national imagined communities articulated and consolidated through print media as well as Doris Sommer's national foundational fictions consummating the passionate love among subjects otherwise divided by race and class hierarchies in the territory. In *Technology, Literature and Digital Culture in Latin America: Mediatized Sensibilities in a Globalized Era* (2016), Tania Gentic and Matthew Bush make a similar observation regarding the internet and Anderson's process of producing national communities. The critics emphasize that

> The Internet is but one more interface through which this process takes place. The spread of media in the digital age thus complies with the affective impulse that once was employed in the nation-building projects that Anderson outlines. Affect, and the local, regional and global imaginaries that accompany it, continue to spread, albeit in different discursive and visual formats, via the technologies of mass media. (Gentic and Bush 16)

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[11] Additionally, when specifically making the case for fanfiction as a space for memory making, De Kosnik adds: "Fans' archive building and archive maintenance constitute attempts to prove to the future that particular queer and female ways of being and making existed. If fan archivists did not carefully assemble such proof, women and queer fans' digital collective actions would almost certainly be forgotten, go unlearned, or simply be, as Mbembe puts it, the subjects of doubt, of disbelief that they ever *were*. In part this forgetting or doubt would result from the ephemerality of digital production, against which all digital archivists must tirelessly work, but it would also arise from the tendency of hegemonic discourse to elide and ignore what it cannot incorporate" (17, emphasis in original).

Today, maybe in a similar way to that other moment, literature rehearses forms of collectivities, such as those emerging through popular forms of memory (Lage) and Afro-Caribbean transgender subjectivity (Indiana). However, in a different way from the decimononic formation of the nation-states, the collectivities rehearsed in these works respond to anti-racist, anti-patriarchal, and anti-classist forms of community. Jesús Martín-Barbero, for example, has suggested that the integration of new media in literature raises the question of the "emancipatory" possibility of the "destabilization of borders" broadly understood (xiii). The critic further considers how borders "have always separated, in an arbitrary and exclusionary fashion, one country from the next, or the centre from the sides, edges and peripheries, in both spatial and cultural, literary and social, technological and social terms" (xiii). In dialogue with Martín-Barbero, I consider how the collectivities rehearsed in literature now respond to other territorial maps, such as that of the undersea fiber optics network and the discursive re-articulations of identity occurring through cyberspace and internet politics that contain the possibility of defeating borders.

Subjectivities created by literature that implements new media as an experimental literary form respond to space in ways similar to those of the fiber optic cable and ultimately make the territory of the internet their own. New media literature rearticulates movement in space as one that surpasses physical borders and slips through and around these, following the path traced by the cable. For example, Rebollo Gil takes us away from Puerto Rican physical space and into cyberspace through hypertext to further explore the genealogies of despotism on the island's national contradictions. In Indiana's *La mucama,* natural disaster in the Dominican Republic impacts the whole region thereby connecting the island through the Caribbean islands' shared oceans, which no longer exist in the novel in the way we know them today. In this sense, *La mucama* promotes a pan-Caribbean sensibility rather than a nationalist one. Finally, in the case of Lage, Cuban collective popular memory relies on the internet as a form of self-preservation within the confines of the island. This popular memory highly relies on how media circulates offline through the space of Havana.

Thus, Caribbean digital imaginations in literature rehearse subjectivities that defeat the nation by reminding us of those it aimed to erase and neglect: non-white, trans, female, poor bodies. In the Caribbean, contemporary literature reminds us of our sister islands, the connections and the disconnections we inhabit. But above all, it retrieves the erasures from the national histories of the region and bets on the re-organization of space as a form of liberation from the repressive states that emerged throughout the last century. One could say that the digital era, more than any previous moment in history, is in dire need of literature to articulate its utopic ideal.

This dissertation proposes Caribbean digital imaginations as a framework to propose a regional understanding of digitally mediated collectivities appearing in literature. As I said earlier, Caribbean digital imaginations remit to a region, an era and a modus operandi of cultural production. Caribbean digital imaginations defeat nationalism through the creation of new forms and content in the literary medium. I use literature as my main object of study in part because as Ana M. Amar Sánchez points out "las indiscutibles *posibilidades* políticas de las formas mediáticas no se han cumplido o lo han hecho de modo muy parcial, excepto cuando han sido usadas, apropiadas por otras 'zonas' o manifestaciones culturales como la literatura" (18). Elaborating her dialogue with Gianni Vattimo and Walter Benjamin, the author reiterates that "los medios producen una modificación radical" in her analysis of how popular culture and mass media has been integrated into Latin American literature (Amar Sánchez 27). Similarly, Martín-

Barbero has reiterated that "What cyberliterature means today in Latin America is precisely the melting down (and relaunching) of the world of languages and literatures, of oralities and writings, since it is taking shape in the place from which the relations between aesthetics and politics are being re-thought and re-made" (xii). With these perspectives in mind, my analysis here could be said to be centered on literary close-reading that is informed by my avid research into digital culture. It is the radical transformation of literature through its integration of new media that will remain at the center of the analyses developed in the chapters that follow.

More importantly, the analysis elaborated to make the case for Caribbean digital imaginations seeks to look at literature as space of rehearsal, in the sense of the *ensayo* or *ensayar* in the Spanish language. I think of the implementation of technology in these works as an exercise similar to that of an actor or dancer rehearsing before the opening night of a show. This is in part because of my own personal relationship to other embodied practices, such as dance, that go beyond the word, which have allowed me to think of the written word of literature as less than final. Literature is final in so much as it is printed and distributed as a physical object that cannot be changed in and of itself. However, literature as art-form does not stop bringing about changes as it absorbs everything that happens in parallel to the new worlds it creates, as Bakhtin holds (262). Thus, similarly to an actor or a dancer, writers here create a rehearsal through the written word of the possibilities of a final production that, instead of ending at the opening night, leaves the doors open to continue creating other worlds. Literature, thus, continues to be the space to go beyond the page to pursue the utopic ideal.

Adding to the conversation about how literature integrates technology, the edited volume *Technology, Literature and Digital Culture in Latin America: Mediatized Sensibilities in a Globalized Era* (2016) sheds light on the underpinnings of techno-aesthetics in literature.[12] This compilation of essays introduces the concept "mediatized sensibilities" to capture the ways in which technology converges with literature in the context of the global south, particularly taking into consideration that the US digital hegemony does not always translate in other regions. Taking as its starting-point a tension with an otherwise westernized conception of posthumanism, the volume aims to show how "access to ever-growing, ever more intricate, networks in the Southern Hemisphere has not produced a new, posthuman subjectivity" but, instead, Latin American techno-aesthetics show that "the convergence of literary and technological media formats brings the body and emotion of the spectator to the fore in new ways, even when using the same convergence of affect and ideology that occurs whenever an

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[12] At the formal level, I analyze how Caribbean contemporary writers implement a techno-aesthetics in their works that function at the content and formal level. Critics Lizabel Monica and Rachel Price have addressed the aesthetic aspects of digital poetry in Cuba, describing it as a continuous negotiation that starts at the beginning of the twentieth century and continues until today, but limiting the engagement with technology to the flexibility available in the poetic genre (397). On the other hand, Amar Sánchez points out how the contamination among mediums and genres always creates a rupture and a transformation in the literary (21). A key aspect of the authors I study in this dissertation is that they defeat the generic categories available in the field of literature since all of them move from poetry, to short stories, to chronicles, to novels, and in said movement they engage with technology in similar ways. That said, I consider that the flexibility of poetry transverses literature as a whole and is not unique to the genre itself but, contrary to the presumed uniqueness of poetry, other genres lend themselves just as much to the integration of techno-aesthetics.

imaginary about technology circulates to produce subjects and communities" (2). In the introduction to the volume, Tania Gentic and Matthew Bush define mediatized sensibilities as both "an affective and corporeal experience of the public technological realm" (1) and as the product of a negotiation between technology and literature "through which literature may critically interpret the productive codes of mass media technologies and even use them in a way contrary to their intended function" (10). In dialogue with Ángel Rama, the critics reiterate that mediatized sensibility comes after a long tradition that tied technology, society, and space to imagine a better future through modernization that can be traced back to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in the Americas (10). With this in mind, I propose to think of Caribbean writers through the lens of mediatized sensibilities in relation to the techno-aesthetics of 1) social media/digital protest practices, 2) electric Santeria/decolonial posthumanism, and 3) database aesthetics/portable memories. I propose that Rebollo Gil, Indiana, and Lage, by dialoguing with the digital aesthetics produced in these three forms of new media, implement digital media at the formal level to experiment with the literary medium and eventually land their aesthetical experimentation on a political-economic critique of the state of the Caribbean today at the content level. These three areas in digital culture simultaneously dialogue with three forms of reorganization of the circulation (production/transmission) of culture (discourse/knowledge/media) that could be said to dialogue with affective and corporeal experiences of everyday life in the Caribbean, thus, regional forms of mediatized sensibilities represented through literature.

Summary of Chapters

In Chapter 1, I focus on social media practices to emphasize how the production of discourse is no longer only in the hands of the nation-state but rather also in online platforms that democratize the ways in which citizens articulate their subjectivity as digital protest. In the case of Rebollo Gil, this allows him to move between hegemonic discourse and popular discourse in literature, thus, posing questions about the tensions therein. Rebollo Gil integrates the webpage into the literary book page via social media posts, hyperlinks, or YouTube videos to tell different stories about the lived experience of coloniality in Puerto Rico. Through his works, then, he traces a map of how the elites that govern on the island have little in common with the people subject to their ruling while living on the island. The author moves outside of the Commonwealth territory not only through cyberspace to account for the stories that are not told in hegemonic media (official newspapers), but also through the diasporic space of Puerto Rican subjectivity. Thus, Rebollo Gil reinforces that the existence of Puerto Ricans is ever-changing and cannot be understood only through the limitations delineated by the insular territory. Ultimately, this work represents a "way of being," to invoke Benítez Rojo, made up of a multiplicity of voices, bodies, and stories that may never fit in the stagnant paradigm of cultural nationalism. For Rebollo Gil, thus, Puerto Rican subjectivity seen through the integration of new media becomes the living room of an apartment in Rio Piedras where young people gather to rap with a sign in the background that reads "Zona de Libertad de Expresión" in a video on YouTube. Caribbean digital imagination here becomes the literary representation of how new media registers this instance of everyday life otherwise obscured by hegemonic discourse. It reminds us that the nation will never be enough as long as it remains a tool of the colonialism supported by the ruling class which controls public discourse and the public sphere. I conclude

the chapter by tracing the lines between Rebollo Gil's early works in the 2010s and the protests that led to the resignation of the ex-governor Ricardo Roselló towards the end of the decade in 2019. In so doing, I explore the potentiality of literature as a space of thought that prefaces the spontaneous centrality of new media uses for the support of real protests in the street via concrete actions of digital protest.

In Chapter 2, I engage the paradigms of electric Santería and decolonial posthumanism to analyze the reorganization of Afro-Caribbean knowledge transmission and literary discourse production. At the center of electric Santería, proposed by Aisha Beliso de Jesus, is the idea that digital media changes how hierarchies are thought of in the Afro-Caribbean religion. In this new configuration, rather than relying on the elderly for the transmission of knowledge, practitioners use new media to access information. Technology also changes rituals whereby practitioners implement video or other digital media in their religious embodied practices. In the case of Indiana, dialoguing with electric Santería at the formal level allows her to introduce a narrative form that produces a type of decolonial post-humanism, one that does not neglect the non-white body. Indiana then intertwines the literary form with the temporalities produced by electric Santería via bodily possession that allows the protagonist Acilde to travel in time across centuries. Acilde's travel in time becomes a temporal interface that changes how we think of history even if it does not result in a change of history through the plot structure itself. Caribbean digital imagination here emerges through these formal aesthetic moves whereby Indiana reiterates a shift in Caribbean discourse, as a form of thought production, which has also to take place in the region.

In Chapter 3, I work with Lev Manovich's database aesthetics and the concept of portable memories to take into consideration Cuban offline practices in the circulation of media in the analysis of Jorge E. Lage's *Archivo* (2015). Jorge E. Lage represents the tension between Cuban national archives and everyday memory as it relates to the offline digital practice of *el paquete*. The Cuban *paquete* [package] consists of a weekly, sometimes daily, curated compilation of media that circulates on hard drives on the island and offline. I analyze how these digital practices mediate several forms of citizenship and unveil Cuban subjectivities that remain at the margins of the nation. Lage integrates the database aesthetic of *el paquete* at the formal and content levels to put forth a Caribbean digital imagination that integrates marginalized forms of citizenship. I also use Lage's work to theorize key concepts of contemporary Caribbean literary and new media studies such as the "novela-paquete" and "new media-literature." In this way, I generate new vocabulary for both disciplines, literary and new media studies, applicable to contexts outside of the US digital hegemony. I see the intersection of the two disciplines as a site for generating decolonial knowledge in Caribbean cultural studies.

What the integration of these three paradigms of the circulation (production/transmission) of culture (discourse/knowledge/media) in literature have in common is that they bring attention to the following questions: Where and how does discourse move? Who has access to it? Who controls it? Going back to the image of the fiber optic cable can help us think of the ways in which the physical infrastructure supporting the internet announces/prefaces one way of reorganizing flows of information. Jesús Martín-Barbero describes this type of reconfiguration as a two-part process: "[O]n the one hand, the dislocation and dissemination of the 'traditionally modern' circuits of knowledge, and on the other hand, the new modes of production and circulation of languages and new writings which emerge from electronic technologies, especially the internet" (xv). In Rebollo's literary engagement of social media, we see a movement from hegemonic to popular online discourse; that is, rather than staying in the hands of the political

elites, the articulation of collectivities spills over into the arena of online platforms. This movement destabilizes state control over public sphere notions. And so, in this instance we deal with a discursive rearticulation happening with and through online culture. Then, it is integrated into literature so as to expand the potentiality of alternative discourses. With Indiana's use of electric Santería we see somewhat of a different movement, the digital logic spills over onto influencing otherwise offline practices such as the religion itself, which has historically relied on oral transmission. While Santería does move into online forums, online and digital culture also accomplishes to shift the logic of the religion through ritual practices. Electric Santería changes the hierarchies of the religion through the implementation of digital media in its everyday practices. Finally, the third discursive movement, which happens through *el paquete*, happens via offline circulation of new media: thus, besides both hegemonic and online popular discourses. In a context where both the public sphere and the internet network are controlled by the State, discourse, knowledge, and media move offline altogether, to the space where circulation can be neither tracked nor seen. Again, the Caribbean reminds us that, although fiber optic cable is not readily visible to users, it is at the center of internet uses and the global circulation of media, like the internet in the Trending Tropics' song cited at the beginning of this chapter. In the same ways that these areas—digital protest, electric Santería, and database aesthetics—impact the form through their reimagining of the production and circulation of knowledge and discourse, they also impact the content of the literary works studied here.

At the content level, the relationship between literature and new media becomes a strategy through which writers work through the foundational violence of the nation and aim to decolonize Caribbean subjectivities. Thus, the implementation of new media as a literary experimental form at the center of Caribbean digital imaginations produces decolonial counternarratives by appropriating and recreating how national and digital cultural forms circulate. Here, my work is in dialogue with two main proposals. One, Rebollo Gil himself and his scholarly work on what he calls a "decolonial moment". In his short critical essay, "Our decolonial moment" in *Writing Puerto Rico: Our Decolonial Moment* (2018), Rebollo Gil analyzes a theater play that has two main female protagonists: one is a working-class domestic worker, the other an upper-class woman and the daughter of an ex-political prisoner. In his reading of the moment in which the domestic worker tells her boss they are not so different, he sees an instance of decoloniality. Rebollo Gil explains that "[In] that forceful moment, in which the most marginal character on stage speaks her truth about dispossession in the colony, the Puerto Rico of today becomes very full. Of tomorrow. This, I would argue, is a decolonial moment of sorts" (274). Rebollo Gil proposes here few key aspects for decoloniality that can tie together Caribbean digital imaginations. Initially, decoloniality appears here as "forceful," a moment of tension, an instance that brings about a negotiation. Similarly, as discussed above, the integration of new media in literature also functions as a tension and negotiation. Moreover, content-wise, all of these texts juxtapose various discourses to create a tension between national paradigms and contemporary collective livelihoods. The tension is not just in the re-mediation of new media but also in what said remediation produces: to bring into question how the past remains indebted to the present. Subsequently, decoloniality here is full of tomorrow. The temporality of the decolonial moment does not remain static in the recovery of the past. Instead, the rescue, the recovery, and the reintegration of the erasure comes into being with the ultimate goal of its preservation for the future. We can then think of how the underscoring of the future in Caribbean Digital Imaginations belongs to a tradition of decolonial literature aiming to produce autonomous thought from the region.

As I briefly discussed earlier in conversation with De Kosnik, the way non-white bodies experience new media can lean more easily onto a way of thinking about its potential to produce democratic citizenship.[13] This is in part because online platforms offer a space, even if small or brief, where subjects can become the narrators of their own stories. In this sense, when the global divide permits, new media allows for women, queer, black, and poor subjects to vocalize their stories, ones that would otherwise remain invisible in national discourses as they do not fit the fixed model of the harmonious national community inspired by nineteenth-century positivist models. It is true that data can be colonized, and it is true that new technologies can be used to strengthen social modalities such as control and surveillance. However, it is also true that within the realm of online platforms we have also seen incredibly democratic uses of these tools. When put in the hands of the collectives, outside of the control of the nation-state, new media also holds the utopic ideal of an endless rehearsal of the self. Integrated with literature in Caribbean digital imaginations, new media becomes a discursive tool that reiterates the urgency of telling a different story about collective lives in the Caribbean. As impermanent and ever-changing as these literatures, media, and stories may be, contemporary writers remind us that it is in these small decolonial instances that we can find alternative futures and not through the grand narratives of a past that remains indebted to the present time.

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[13] Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa's scholarly work on digital protest and hashtivism also highlights the specific benefits of new media for non-white bodies by pointing out how social media "[A]fford[s] a unique platform for collectively identifying, articulating, and contesting racial injustices from the in-group perspectives of racialized populations. Whereas in most mainstream media contexts, the experiences of racialized populations are overdetermined, stereotyped, or tokenized, social media platforms such as Twitter offer sites for collectively constructing counternarratives and reimagining group identities" (6).

Chapter 1: Literature, Digital Culture, and Decolonial Internet Practices in Puerto Rico:
From Guillermo Rebollo Gil to #RickyRenuncia

As I began to write this chapter, Puerto Rico was undergoing its most important political event in recent history: #rickyrenuncia. As a result of a leaked personal conversation between the island's now impeached governor Ricardo Roselló and his closest state functionaries, which exposed their corruption and mismanagement of crisis, people occupied the streets of the island for a period of two weeks in permanent protest. The hashtag #rickyrenuncia became trending topic number four worldwide just a few days after the Centro de Periodismo Investigativo published the full chat containing 889 pages. Prominent celebrities, such as René Pérez, Ricky Martin, and Bad Bunny, used their social media platforms to call protests, publish songs historicizing this instance, and announce their impromptu visits to the island to join forces with the people marching on the streets. Thousands of people from *caseríos* (projects) and other poor sectors of San Juan were gathered by El Rey Charlie—a mechanic/business man/motorcyclist who used his social media to promote massive marches on motorcycles. El Rey Charlie gathered about three thousand people one night and then ten thousand people for another protest five days later by using his social media to announce that he would be stopping through the *barrios* to gather protestors on their motorcycles. This moment was, without a doubt, a historical one. It was also a historical moment facilitated by digital technology. Digital culture permeates almost every single aspect of it. A leaked chat, messages by artists on Instagram TV, Instagram hashtag takeovers, the reporting of Ricardo Roselló's Twitter account, El Rey Charlie's massive gatherings called upon through social media, and the YouTube publication of "Afilando Cuchillos," a song co-authored by René Pérez, Ile, and Bad Bunny, which quickly became the movement's anthem, are some of the instances where digital technology facilitated the most decolonial moment the island has seen in the twenty-first century.

In this chapter, I analyze the dialogue between literary and internet practices in Puerto Rico. I focus on two cases where internet discursive practices and imaginative praxis created decolonial collectivities to contest colonialism and coloniality on the island during the 2010s. The first of these concerns author, blogger, and activist Guillermo Rebollo Gil. I argue that his work best exemplifies, in the field of literature, an imagining of collectivity forged through and mediated by internet discursive practices. Among other things, Rebollo Gil examines the ways in which the internet and social media can propel new forms of political thought and debate on the island. Through the depiction of Puerto Rican everyday life, Rebollo Gil's chronicles elaborate on how to re-imagine decolonial collectivity. The first part of my analysis, thus, focuses on how Rebollo Gil's chronicles overlap with and expand through digital media platforms such as social media and news articles found online in order to criticize Puerto Rican coloniality. These snapshots of the island's everyday life collect and explore a series of metaphors, themes, and formal characteristics that articulate Puerto Rican space and society as intricate to colonial subjugation in the twenty-first century. Yet, new forms of community and solidarity that dialogue with digital culture also emerge through these literary articulations in texts such as *Decirla en Pedacitos: estrategias de cercanía* (2013), *Todo lo que no acontece igual (crónicas y comentarios)* (2015), *Última llamada* (2016) and "*Amigos en toda partes": en defensa de los agitadores* (2016). Rebollo Gil's discourse directly speaks to colonial subjectivity and tells a non-normative story about the Puerto Rican subject's everyday negotiations with colonialism. Ultimately, the writer also engages with the internet's own community and spreadability logics

to advance a politics of solidarity. Through these strategies, the writer uses new media to produce decolonial discourse as part of his literary aesthetics.

The second case discussed here concerns the digital objects related to the events that led to the governor's resignation in 2019, broadly globalized as hashtag "Ricky Renuncia" (#rickyrenuncia), in light of decolonial literary discourse. I analyze instances where digital platforms were key in demanding Ricky Roselló's resignation. The focus of my analysis will be on El Rey Charlie, social media live streamings, and an Instagram takeover. I broadly categorize these objects of study as forms of digital protest. By analyzing these digital objects, I show how, in this particular conjuncture, the internet facilitated different forms of democratic citizenship and participation in the movement of #rickyrenuncia. By concluding with the analysis of digital objects, I show how the implementation of new media in experimental literature that puts forth decolonial thought has the potential to become prefatory to political resistance shifting historical consciousness in the case of Puerto Rico. I don't suggest here that literature has a causal relationship with political resistance, but rather that the imaginaries that emerge through political resistance were also (?) thought through literary practices starting in the 2010s. In the case of Puerto Rico, given the extreme manipulation of mainstream media and hegemonic disregard for non-canonical literature, the latter becomes a key space to advance critical thought. Through this juxtaposing analysis, I show the similarities between a politics of solidarity as articulated in contemporary literature and the imaginaries articulated in digital protest.

Nationalist Coloniality and Anti-national thought in Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico's colonialism spans over five hundred years, initially at the hands of the Spanish empire and then under United States' imperial rule since 1898 (Duany page?). Coloniality in Puerto Rico can be best understood through the ways in which Puerto Rico's national identity paradoxically came to support colonialism over the course of the twentieth century. Contemporary forms of Puerto Rican nationalism, which were first formed in the nineteenth century by intellectuals such as Ramón Emeterio Betances and Eugenio María de Hostos, were first coined by those who continued to defend self-determination of the island early in the twentieth century. Puerto Rican nationalism was criminalized through different power strategies on the island.[14] This criminalization, which lasted up to the 70s, included the prohibition of exhibiting the flag (Flores 164) and persecution or imprisonment of those who defended the independence of the island. However, Puerto Rican national symbols were later co-opted by those seeking to perpetuate US colonization as the status of the island became a commonwealth (Estado Libre Asociado, ELA) after 1952.[15] The social conceptions and acceptance of Puerto Rican nationalism thus shifted greatly with its appropriation by colonial parties to advance their interests and the eventual advent of neo-liberalism during the most recent turn of the century. In this section, I will discuss the main debates regarding Puerto Rican

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[14] Most of the scholars that work with the topic of cultural nationalism in Puerto Rico acknowledge this historical moment of criminalization of anti-colonial discourse as it relates to nationalism. For further discussion, please refer to the works of Carlos Pabón, Jorge Duany, and Arlene Davila.

[15] In her book *Sponsored Identities: Cultural Politics in Puerto* Rico (1997), Arlene Davila points out that "the colonial government developed an 'official nationalism' (Anderson 1983) that emanated from and served the colonial state" (4).

cultural nationalism from the turn-of-the-century and then, I will contextualize changes that occur in the debates surrounding Puerto Rican subjectivity as of 2010, during the economic crisis, the island's external debt and the recent approval of PROMESA.

In his key work about Puerto Rican nationalism *Nación Postmortem: ensayos sobre los tiempos de insoportable ambiguedad*[16] (2003), Carlos Pabón enumerates the permutations of Puerto Rican nationalism in the twentieth century leading to a capitalist co-optation of its symbolism. The post-modern historian sees a first moment when Puerto Rican nationalism and political identity were one and the same in the movement for independence led by Don Pedro Albizú Campos during the 1930s (Pabón 38). However, with the creation of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, led by the Partido Popular Democratico (PPD), governor Luis Muñoz Marín resignified and co-opted Puerto Rican nationalism to perpetuate the island's colonial project: "el muñocismo postuló que podía haber nación sin Estado nacional y cultura nacional sin independencia" (Pabón 39). Pabón points out that after the 1970s, a decade of extreme political repression and persecution against defenders of sovereignty by the pro-statehood politicians supported by US government organisms such as the FBI, cultural nationalism became part of the de-radicalization of the independentist movement, which was consequently co-opted by the party defending the Commonwealth status (40-41). Pabón suggests that cultural nationalism in Puerto Rico has served as a tool for consensus in the context of an emerging "capitalismo *lite*" [light capitalism] (41-42). The historian concludes that Puerto Rican national symbols—such as the flag, national anthem, and folkloric symbols of indigeneity, among others—became a product mostly benefitting capitalist corporations on the island as we entered the twenty-first century (41). Pabón adds that an alternative discourse that recognizes the multiplicity of characteristics composing Puerto Rican identity can be imagined only once the hegemonic cultural nationalism is abandoned (53).

Juan Flores expands on Carlos Pabón's early contribution about capitalist co-optation of Puerto Rican nationalism by elaborating on the concept of "colonialismo *lite*" [light colonialism]. Juan Flores defines *light colonialism* as the ways in which Puerto Rican coloniality also shifts as a result of the logic of neo-liberalism. Flores, in dialogue with Stuart Hall, proposes that the idea of *lite* implicates a shift of coloniality whereby it becomes controlled by the market rather than by the state (173). Following Pabón, the critic reads *light colonialism* as part of nationalist consensus among citizens: "El colonialismo *lite* es un colonialismo eminentemente discursivo, una forma densamente simbólica de dominación transnacional que pone énfasis [tanto] en una identidad consensual ("todos somos puertorriqueños, por encima de nuestras diferencias")" (Flores 173). More importantly, Flores adds that *light colonialism* neo-liberalizes the demand for decolonization, which under this discursive and symbolic shift also becomes "flexible, dinámica y democrática en el sentido de un esceptismo frente al planteamiento de una sola fuerza de vanguardia" (Flores 173). Ultimately, light colonialism in Puerto Rico, suggests Flores, simultaneously perpetuated and defied hegemony through an unproductive fight over the symbolic meaning of national identity, mainly carried out in the cultural arena up to the late 1990s and early 2000s (189). Through the consensus created by *light colonialism*, any political party—whether pro-sovereignty, pro-commonwealth, or pro-statehood—was able to co-opt both nationalism and the concept of decolonization to advance its political interests. Thus, the transformation of Puerto Rican nationalism at the turn-of-the-century becomes part of the colonial scaffolding that maintained national consensus as the status quo on the island.

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[16] This essay was originally published in the mid-1990s.

Jorge Duany views the aforementioned consensus emerging from cultural nationalism under a more optimistic light. Duany points out that the paradox of the existence of a nation without a state contained in Puerto Rican cultural nationalism can actually be better understood through the lens of transnationalism and translocality. Duany sees the Puerto Rican diaspora as key in understanding how Puerto Rican nationalism is not bound to territorial notions of a nation: "Population displacements across and within the boundaries of the imagined community have resulted in the weakening of political nationalism and the broadening of cultural identities in Puerto Rico" (7). Taking the mobility of Puerto Ricans into account, Duany proposes the idea of *nation on the move* "to suggest that none of the traditional criteria for nationhood—a shared territory, language, economy, citizenship or sovereignty—are fixed and immutable in Puerto Rico and its diaspora but are subject to constant fluctuation and intense debate" (3). In his elaboration of "nation on the move," Duany seeks to "redefine the nation not as a well-bounded sovereign state but as a translocal community based on a collective consciousness of a shared history, language and culture" (4). Duany also points out the role of the "local intelligentsia" in consolidating "national culture against what it perceives as a foreign invasion" (16), thus, reiterating the role of intellectuals in the formulation of colonial cultural nationalism. This point in the critic's contribution is key because we will see how this is drastically shifted by cultural producers in the 2010s, including the work of Rebollo Gil. Duany reminds us, however, that "[t]oday, cultural nationalism transcends political party loyalties on both the left and the right. It is now the official rhetoric of the three political parties on the Island—pro-independence, pro-commonwealth, and even pro-statehood" (17). Finally, Duany, in dialogue with Yolanda Martínez San Miguel, reiterates a long thought tradition initiated by José Luis Gonzalez in *El país de cuatro pisos* (1980) stating that "[t]he nationalist discourse in Puerto Rico has traditionally omitted racial and ethnic minorities and other subaltern groups from its nation-building project, whether they were inside or outside of the Island's frontiers" (24). The shift in collective consciousness that we've witnessed in the twenty-first century and that I am exploring here in the work of contemporary writers and digital media producers has restored these omissions of the subaltern into decolonial collectivities.

We can see this shift at work in the book, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (2003), by Puerto Rican decolonial sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel. He uses the case of Puerto Rico to further elaborate Wallerstein's capitalist world-system. The critic questions the idea of decolonization of the contemporary global capitalist system through the idea of "coloniality of power" as a perpetuation of colonialism regardless of the sovereignty accomplished by Third World countries (Grosfoguel 3). The implication in Grosfoguel's notion of coloniality of power is that nationalist discourse perpetuates colonialism in the Caribbean region. In regard to Puerto Rico, Grosfoguel argues that "Nationalist discourses (…) fall into the trap of a colonialist underestimation of Puerto Rican agency and subalternity" (9). Thus, the sociologist suggests engaging with the notion of 'colonial difference' in order to decolonize conceptions about subjectivity on the island:

> Nationalist and colonialist discourses are thinking from a power position in the colonial divide of the modern/colonial world, while subaltern subjects are thinking from the subordinate side of the colonial difference. Colonialist discourses reproduce the North-South global colonial divide, while *nationalist discourses reproduce an 'internal' colonial divide within national formations*. The knowledge, critical insights, and political strategies produced from the subordinate side of the colonial difference serves as a point of departure to go beyond colonialist and nationalist discourses. Rather than

underestimating the subalterns, we should take seriously their cosmologies, thinking and political strategies as a point of departure to our knowledge production. (Grosfoguel 10, emphasis mine)

What Grosfoguel suggests here in engaging with the subaltern for the Puerto Rican case is to go beyond the infertile debates surrounding Puerto Rican nationalism in the most recent turn-of-the-century. Thus, this approach can lead to a decolonization of cultural nationalism and instead shift the focus onto the everyday realities of Puerto Rican subjects to expose the sociological underpinnings of coloniality on the island. Such a process of decolonization should lead to new ways of thinking about sovereignty in the Puerto Rican case that also move beyond the framework of the nation.

Beyond Cultural Nationalism

Canonical literature in Puerto Rico was key in the configuration of cultural nationalism. Juan Gelpí's seminal work on paternalism and Puerto Rican literature sheds light on this topic. The critic traces the metaphor of "la gran familia" as it is elaborated since the early twentieth century and then contested later during the second half of the century (Gelpí 173). More specifically, Gelpí sees a figure of the triad founded in Antonio S. Pedreira's *Insularismo* (1934) that permeates the figure of "la gran familia" sustaining national identity in Puerto Rican canonical literature (163). Gelpí sees projects of a Puerto Rican paternalist canon and nationalism as intertwined: "El canon paternalista y, como él, los discursos nacionalistas, pretenden contrarestar todo tipo de dispersion dislocación o desintegración" (173). However, the control over dispersion or fragmentation is later contested by writers such as Manuel Ramos Otero, Rosario Ferrer, and Ana Lydia Vega, suggests Gelpí (173). Although many of the writers from the second half of the twentieth century contested the island's literary canon, Myrna García Calderón (1998) reminds us that these writers were also still attempting to narrate the nation and thus, engage with national identity on the island even if they do so by emphasizing fragmentation. Finally, Jorge Duany discusses how some of these authors also reproduced colonial nationalism in literature. More specifically, Duany analyzes texts like Ana Lydia Vega's story "Pollito-Chicken" as an example to demonstrate the role of literature in ridiculing the Puerto Rican diaspora in pursuit of sustaining cultural nationalism and its apparent coloniality (30).

More recently, since the early 2010s, a new wave of intellectuals, artists, and writers—living within Puerto Rico's current economic crisis and writing from the context of a re-colonization of the island—have begun to produce scholarship about sovereignty and decolonization that goes beyond nationalist dichotomies. After decades of sharp focus on the question of sovereignty that tied decolonization to the affirmation of a colonial-national identity, the twenty-first century brings about refreshing decolonial approaches to Puerto Rican realities that disengage from debates about national identity. Namely, for these scholars the nation is not a central part of their contributions to Puerto Rican decolonial thought. The wave of decolonial thought—what I call "new"—takes on points of departure that are not directly related to cultural nationalism discourses traditionally associated with the intellectual elite. Instead, decolonial Puerto Rican intellectuals such as José M. Atiles-Osoria, Rocío Zambrana, Ariadna Godreau, and even Rebollo Gil, among others, take as their point of departure the complete failure of cultural nationalism in advancing Puerto Rico's sovereignty. Hence, contemporary decolonial work in Puerto Rico, as I will explore here, moves beyond cultural nationalism and assumes other points

of departure concerning Puerto Rican everyday realities—such as the construction of colonial exceptionality, colonial debt, failures of the commonwealth, and subalternity—to re-think how decolonization and sovereignty can be attained through real life events rather than just at the discursive level. The majority of these voices articulating decolonial approaches to Puerto Rico's contemporaneity take the 2016 Puerto Rico Oversight, Management, and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA) as a landmark from which to rethink colonialism and coloniality on the island.[17]

José M. Atiles and Rocío Zambrana are two key scholars in Puerto Rican decolonial thought today. Atiles, following Agamben, explores how law-making created a state of colonial exception on the island that allows the US to selectively apply state laws to the territory but not grant the rights that come with being a part of the union (17). The critic points out that the state of colonial exception also depoliticized collective imagination (183). Through this argument, Atiles concludes that both power and legality played a key role in the legitimization of colonialism on the island leading to what he calls the "condición colonial despolitizada" (183). Law-making, suggests Atiles, was key in the criminalization and silencing of anti-colonial and counter-hegemonic struggles (185). In the context of neo-liberalism, Atiles adds that the scarce power of colonial administrators becomes further reduced, which "puso de manifiesto la incapacidad de desarrollo del ELA, dando paso a una intensa crisis económica y de las estructuras coloniales que no ha sido solventada" and conceptualizes it as "neoliberalismo-colonial" (Atiles 186). Atiles concludes that political emancipation and decolonization can only be attained if sought outside of the state of colonial exception and, thus, outside of the realm of law (187). An important aspect of abandoning the law, suggested in the title of his work, consists of resisting or subverting the law. That is, if law has served the purpose of colonizing and creating indebted subjects in contemporaneity, then resisting said laws would be the closest path to decolonizing collective imagination according to Atiles.

Rocío Zambrana, in dialogue with Atiles's colonial neoliberalism, interprets this resistance to law in her analysis of the potential to reverse debt in Puerto Rico. She calls this possibility "subversive interruption" and it is precisely the illegality of the debt in the case of Puerto Rico that permits such an interruption ("Rendir cuentas"). Zambrana suggests "When activists in the archipelago demand that 'the guilty pay,' that 'they owe us,' and that 'it's time to pay,' they locate themselves within debt to subvert it" ("Rendir cuentas"). These demands are based on the fact that a debt is reversible and, thus, auditable ("Rendir cuentas"). Consequently, Zambrana highlights that "an audit—a citizen audit—establishes whether the debt is illegal" ("Rendir cuentas"). For the critic, the debt brings about the possibility of its own subversive interruption by holding accountable those who produced it. This subversive interruption becomes an act of "dismantling the structures that reproduce coloniality" in so much as debt can only function and was historically built from and through coloniality ("Rendir cuentas"). Debt, thus, shifts collective decolonial imagination away from cultural nationalism to questions about

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[17] Paraphrasing Ariadna Godreau, PROMESA is a bill that was passed in Congress and approved by president Barack Obama in 2016. This bill assigns an oversight board (Junta de Control Fiscal) to the island whose seven members were undemocratically elected by President Barack Obama. That is, Puerto Ricans did not participate in the election of these individuals. The oversight board is in charge of ensuring that the debt of the government is paid, even if this happens at the expense of the complete collapse of Puerto Ricans' access to basic human rights on the island such as education, health, retirement, and a minimum wage enough to afford basic costs of living (Godreau Aubert 55-57).

the livelihoods of those impacted by the potential repayment of debt as part of the approval of a law such as PROMESA and the election of the oversight board. In this time and space, the nation is not relevant anymore because it cannot provide an anti-colonial platform to subversively interrupt contemporary colonialism. Civil society's resistance to PROMESA as an imposed law would be a more viable route to decolonization and self-determination.

Zambrana's understanding of colonial debt and coloniality in Puerto Rico closely dialogues with Ariadna Godreau Aubert's *pedagogía de las endeudadas* [pedagogy of the indebted]. Godreau's approach to coloniality, austerity, and debt in Puerto Rico is one of the most important, if not the most, when it comes to contemporary Puerto Rico. The writer uses her own experience as a lawyer, community-based activist, and feminist to generate decolonial thought and vocabulary to speak about "La deuda del gobierno de Puerto Rico—que no es igual a decir que es la deuda de Puerto Rico" (Godreau Aubert 63). Through her work, one can understand how the debt of the government of Puerto Rico impacts citizens proportionately to their time and place within colonial hierarchies that existed even prior to the creation of debt (17). Godreau also highlights the importance of thinking debt in relationship to gender because ultimately women—black, poor, trans women—become the most impacted by the austerity measures that began after the economic crisis. Godreau's understanding of the debt of the government of Puerto Rico will be key to understanding the power with which people demanded the governor's resignation in 2019 as a high point of decolonization of the Puerto Rican collective consciousness. For now, I would like to outline more specifically her framework of a pedagogy of the indebted as it will be the most useful framework to understand Puerto Rico's cultural and resistance ecosystems discussed throughout the rest of the chapter.

Godreau proposes to expose the inner-workings of coloniality through the analysis of Puerto Rican everyday experience of austerity resulting from the government's debt. In doing so, rather than entering the logic of debt guilt (in dialogue here with Lazzarato), citizens on the island should feel empowered to resist the predatory measures (65). According to Godreau, individuals should find an ability to heal colonial wounds through their resistance to PROMESA's measures facilitated by the embracing of their own bodies (las propias) as it is all they have within reach to fight against colonialism (Godreau Aubert 73-76). Godreau, in dialogue with Gloria Anzaldua's *nosotras,* defines the pedagogy of the indebted as a form of collectivity pertinent to contemporary Puerto Rico: "La pedagogía de las endeudadas no es una convocatoria al vacío. Nos llama a nosotras: contra los buitres de adentro y de afuera" (Godreau Aubert 74). Furthermore, a pedagogy of the indebted also involves understanding that, as colonial subjects, Puerto Ricans don't owe anything to anyone and, that it is through resistance that we can begin to heal from the traumatic and violent experiences lived in the colony:

> delinear una suerte de pedagogía de las endeudadas y de nuestro rol en el devenir político de la deuda y la austeridad. Quería escribir en afirmaciones que no dejaran duda sobre que el activismo es involucrarnos en la labor de sanar. Ser activista contra los recortes es anunciar los tiempos de pagarnos lo debido aún sin debérnoslo, de cobrarle a los responsables, de reconocer y honrar las deudas pendientes a nuestro favor, en, desde y para nosotras. Nosotras somos las propias, las que no nos debemos a nadie. (Godreau Aubert 76)

Godreau, thus, sees the process of healing as a necessary step in moving towards liberation. She also sees a notion of collectivity, *nosotras/las propias*, that supersedes the nation as another necessary step in the decolonization of the Puerto Rican as an indebted subject. Godreau's approach dialogues very closely with Rebollo Gil's politics of solidarity, whereby it is precisely

through the central role of affect and humanization of the everyday realities in Puerto Rico that decoloniality can be achieved. I will discuss this further in my analysis of Rebollo Gil's chronicles.

What I find most interesting about these recent decolonial approaches to Puerto Rico's contemporaneity is the fact that the nation is not a central part of their discussions. Atiles, Zambrana, and Godreau do not engage with previous concerns surrounding Puerto Rican cultural nationalism or even the question of sovereignty. Instead, they engage with the economic crisis and the debt of the government of Puerto Rico as sites from which coloniality can be retrieved, questioned, and subverted. To an extent, their approaches also speak to a shift that began to take place in the Puerto Rican cultural scene as of the 2010s, which I consider a shift of historical consciousness where national symbols become obsolete for the generations that did not experience the years of economic "progress" of the Commonwealth (ELA). Most Puerto Rican citizens have lived through the blatant government corruption of the late 1990s, the beginning moments of the economic crisis in the early 2000s, and the implementation of PROMESA in their adulthood.[18] This shift of consciousness initially began to appear in the literary works of the early moments of the decade by writers who lived through the collapse of the Commonwealth and became fully consolidated in culture once PROMESA was approved. Puerto Rico's decoloniality truly begins to flourish after the symbolic death of cultural nationalism. In so much as Puerto Rico's cultural nationalism represents the hierarchies of coloniality that perpetuated colonialism on the island throughout the second half of the twentieth century, it is no longer a point of departure—not for these decolonial thinkers, nor for cultural producers, nor for other citizens.

Contemporary Culture: Decolonial Discourse as Praxis

Writers and artists living on the island have put forth a multiplicity of imaginaries to contest the dire economic crisis that began in the mid-2000s and continued throughout 2010s, leading to the implementation of PROMESA. For example, five days after the approval of the law, a collective of artists painted an iconic Puerto Rican flag mural in Old San Juan black and white. After public speculation regarding the meaning of the newly painted black and white flag—whether it was an act of vandalism or a symbol of mourning [luto]—the artists, who had painted the original colored mural, published a statement on Facebook explaining the intentions and meaning behind their actions

> Art as a vehicle of expression has been used throughout history to transmit ideas, to provoke reflection, to transform and to (re)create realities. Patriotic symbols help reinforce our identity and values. Since its beginning, the Puerto Rican flag has been a symbol of resistance upon the colonial condition that the Island has faced, and for many years it was considered a crime to raise it. Later, under the colonial law of 1952 (ELA), the flag was officially adopted. In present times, the blue

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[18] In an article titled "La generación del 'yo no me dejo' exige la renuncia de Ricardo Rosselló," investigative journalist Joel Cintrón Arbasetti underscores the importance of the generational differences in the perception about Puerto Rico's government. Primarily highlighting how those born in the late 1990s and thus suffering the consequences of years of corruption leading to PROMESA are key in taking the lead in contemporary resistance to the Puerto Rican government.

> triangle represents the three branches of the Government: executive, legislative and judicial. The three red stripes symbolize the blood that gives life to those powers. The laws, the governors and the courts, up to this moment, have not served in the interests of the people. To replace these colors with black (the absence of light) creates new readings. Ours is a proposal of RESISTANCE, not to be thought of as pessimist. On the contrary, it speaks about the death of these powers just as we know them, but hope is still present in the white stripes that symbolize individual liberty and its capacity to claim and defend their rights.[19]

The artists, thus, aimed to raise questions about the Commonwealth status and its dead-ends as represented through the maxim symbol of cultural nationalism, the Puerto Rican flag itself. Furthermore, as a symbol of resistance, the black and white flag has also been widely embraced in protests on the island.

Later that year, the collective "Anartistas" ['Anartists' in English] appeared during Puerto Rico's local governmental electoral campaign. This collective used digital media to promote a "political campaign" for their independent candidates for Puerto Rico's next election—an election that was simultaneously seen as questionable in a post-PROMESA context.[20] The Anartistas' candidate for governor was Rafael "Al Rafah" Acevedo, a contemporary writer and director of the independent publishing house La Secta de los Perros. The Anartistas' slogan "Imaginación es nuestra nación" [Imagination is our nation] continuously appears in the promotional videos for governor and congressional candidates. It gestures to a sense of elimination where, instead of Puerto Rico being our nation, the country is removed and instead we're left with imagination. This slogan, which in part has inspired the main concept of this project, suggests imagination as a strategy to re-ignite a sense of collectivity.[21] This video-art is symptomatic of what has been entering non-canonical cultural discourse inside the island: an overall urgency to think of collectivity in alternative ways and to reject previous ideological paradigms of the nation in so much as these also supported the commonwealth/colony.

Some of the earliest anti-national voices representing subaltern subjects and the impact of the economic crisis first appeared through literature. For example, Josué Montijo's novel *El killer*, published in 2007, narrates how the capital city is saturated with *tecatos* [homeless drug users], probably one of the most immediate signs of the failure of "progress" in Puerto Rico. But, as abject subjects produced by poverty, *tecatos* do not enter nationalist discourses in any way. Pedro Cabiya, a Puerto Rican writer living in the Dominican Republic, also works with alternative representations of Caribbean subjects zombified by the neo-liberal economy in the region in works such as *Malas Hierbas* (2010). Another important key work in the representation of subaltern subjects in Puerto Rico is Luis Negrón's collection of short stories about the gay scene in Santurce published under the title *Mundo Cruel* (2010). Shortly after this transitional year, Mara Pastor published *Poemas para fomentar el turismo* (2012), a collection of poems in which the author explores the impact of forced migration in the lives of Puerto Ricans. The book

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[19] The full statement can be accessed here: https://www.facebook.com/notes/la-puerta/un-llamado-a-la-solidaridad/1756205121315928/

[20] During the summer of that same year, an Oversight Board that can overrule any decision made by the Governor of Puerto Rico had already been created as part of PROMESA.

[21] Guillermo Rebollo Gil, Jose Raul "Gallego" and Marisol Plard Narvaez, key Puerto Rican contemporary writers and artists, participated in their first press conference, which took place at the now closed Nuyorrican Café in Old San Juan.

is dedicated to "los 300,000 puertorriqueños que emigraron del 2005-2009," which to an extent foreshadows the distinctive characteristic of this migratory wave, as it led to a shift in population numbers where, for the first time, there were more Puerto Ricans living outside of the island than in the territory.[22] Throughout the same decade Eduardo Lalo published *Simone* (2010) and *Necropolis* (2014), a novel and poetry collection respectively, which explore the precarious condition of the Puerto Rican subject as he returns to the island and experiences its urban decay. More recently, younger writers such as Xavier Valcarcel have published literary work that deals with the traumatic experience of Hurricane Maria's aftermath.

Rebollo Gil: An Aesthetic of Bits in a Broke(n) Island

Guillermo Rebollo Gil's work is inserted within this broader cultural atmosphere on the island. Because he often uses the genres of chronicles and blogs, his work closely dialogues with the articulation of the ideologies emerging from the artistic class and social movements in Puerto Rico throughout the 2010s. Since the early 2000s, he has been an avid literary writer and blogger who often comments on Puerto Rican nationalism vis-à-vis colonialism and its contradictions. Guillermo Rebollo Gil also has his fair share of social activism and practices through his legal support of social movements—his attendance record to protests and his active involvement in struggles for decolonization such as the liberation of ex-political prisoner Óscar López—which play a central role in books like *Amigos en todas partes: en defensa de los agitadores* (2016). I first heard Rebollo Gil's poetry in one of his spoken word performances during the 2000s. Some years later, I also saw Rebollo Gil being part of a group of lawyers who made sure our rights as student strikers were not violated during the 2010 strike at the University of Puerto Rico. In 2013, I received a package from home at my San Francisco apartment which included Puerto Rican coffee and a book titled *Decirla en pedacitos: estrategias de cercanía* (2013) by Guillermo Rebollo Gil. The friend who mailed it wrote a note inside: "Aquí el libro nuevo de G. Rebollo para acercarte más a nuestra cotidianidad." Unlike the Puerto Rican government, my friend was not selling me a false promise. For someone who had to leave the island in search of better opportunities three years earlier, Rebollo Gil's book seemed like a tiny 75-page window into the island's reality, in which I couldn't participate in while living in the United States. There were corners and intimate places in it I couldn't fully enter or understand. From the distance, I knew what this book was about, it was about what news coverage didn't show, it was about my friends' precarious everyday lives, it was about all the contradictions of living on an island like Puerto Rico. But as the chronicles brought me closer, some things seemed harder to grasp. These hard-to-grasp instances make Rebollo Gil's aesthetic unique and of an unprecedented literary strength on the island. These moments that he calls *estrategias de cercanía* to Puerto Rican everyday life are precisely what guides Caribbean imagination in his literary work.

In Rebollo Gil's prose, the local is brought to the fore so strongly that the flow of the text becomes hermetic at times—this is also true for Lage and Indiana's Caribbean aesthetic—so that

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[22] Eduardo Lalo, for example, points this out in his essay "Puerto Rico como condición": "El Puerto Rico de comienzos de siglo XXI ha quedado marcado por un fenomeno poco común: por primera en su historia demografica la población se ha reducido y todos los indicadores apuntan a que esta tendencia continuará. Desde hace unos años, segun los censos, vivirían en Estados Unidos más personas que se identifican como puertorriqueños que en su territorio de origen" (32).

one could think that the strategy here is to counter perceptions that see the Caribbean as a consumable good. In his book *Decirla en pedacitos,* the writer precisely announces it in the title: "pedacitos"—bits. This "bits" aesthetic, or strategy, establishes a close tie between Rebollo Gil's narration and Puerto Rico's most intricate locality. Since his early works in poetry, Rebollo Gil has explored this closeness as it relates to media culture. Alexandra Pagan Vélez suggests that Rebollo Gil's strategy also brings writers closer to their audience: "Tenemos una poesía que observa, se apropia y utiliza los esquemas y códigos de los medios audiovisuales como medio en común con sus lectores, aunque asimismo supone que su audiencia tiene en común consigo esos referentes mediáticos" (133). Other studies of Rebollo's work have also explored how his engagement with media tracks the migratory flows and influences of the US on the island (Ceruti 461). In my approach to Rebollo's work, I focus on how his intervention/commentary on local media renders closeness and fragmentation in Puerto Rican society that are not always readable unless there is some familiarization with the context in question, whether that be through direct experience on the island or digitally mediated experience through social media. Parallel to this fragmentation and closeness, Rebollo Gil also creates a meta-narrative that suggest affect as one possible way to decolonization of discourse. Using an affective closeness through his gaze at physical and ideological space, Rebollo Gil creates a meta-narrative of solidarity that functions as a strategy to disrupt colonial history and generates decolonial discourse in literature.

An aesthetics of bits, thus, finds moments through which collectivity or solidarity becomes a potential form of decolonization and/or healing for Puerto Rican subjects. For example, in *Todo lo que no acontece igual* (2015), the sequel to *Decirla*, the writer poses an ironic question about life in community and collectivity with an example mediated through advertising: "Como en el anuncio de Coca Cola, con la canción de Bowie de fondo, en que el muchacho le devuelve la cartera al señor en la playa. Son esos *diminutos* actos de heroísmo cotidiano, imperceptibles pero hermosos, los que dan forma a nuestra vida en comunidad" (22, emphasis mine). Saying it in bits is also saying it, suggests Godreau Aubert in dialogue with Rebollo Gil's work:

> Es entonces una práctica política feminista reconocer que hablamos y escribimos en palabras que están rotas a razón de tanto moldearlas. Entre otras, enumero a modo de ejemplo las siguientes: colonia, responsabilidad, ley, austeridad, deuda, mujeres, las propias, en lucha. Decirla en pedacitos es una forma de decirla también. (55)

Godreau Aubert elaborates on the broken temporality of the crisis and how living within austerity can only happen in bits in the footnote accompanying this citation: "Aludir al tiempo roto que nos ocupa vivir a quienes nacimos y vivimos en la crisis no es una nota marginal sobre la fragmentación social . . . Vivir en austeridad es también subsistir en pedacitos, a saltitos, con palabras robadas y que nunca dicen lo que deberían decir" (55). And yet, Rebollo Gil builds an aesthetic of bits that aims to collect the potential in finding moments of collectivity and solidarity within the crisis, austerity, and the precarious conditions of livelihood on the island. How can the pieces of a broken reality be put back together? Rebollo Gil's work always goes back to a politics of solidarity/collectivity via these bits, these small moments of everyday life, where hope can ultimately be found.[23] These bits also track moments and realities that could otherwise be

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[23] In this sense, Rebollo's proposal dialogues with Slavoj Žižek's notion of lost causes, which in fact the writer reiterates in one of his chronicles by quoting the philosopher almost verbatim: "Pues no se trata de obtener una Victoria. Desde Žižek, se trata de repetir la hazaña fracasada una y otra vez. Cada vez más y mejor fracasada" (Rebollo Gil, *Amigos* 108). Žižek's original

lost in the void of knowledge democratization generated in the context of colonialism in Puerto Rico. Rebollo Gil counters the erasure, counters the attempts to forget that allow for colonialism to continue exploiting citizens. Instead, he restores and records these moments that can seem politically insignificant and yet hold the most powerful tool to interrupt the fragmentation and broken realities generated by colonialism and coloniality. Rebollo's focus on collecting these bits is also a form of resisting the everyday violence of coloniality as lived by Puerto Ricans in contemporaneity.

The broader underlying questions/concerns I see in Rebollo Gil's work are the following: What is the role of affect and everyday life in imagining Caribbean community and how is this contesting hegemonic perceptions of cultural nationalism in the case of Puerto Rico? How is the Puerto Rican subject rearticulating notions of community through practice and social inter-relationships in the twenty-first century? What role do representations of media play in Rebollo Gil's construction of a politics of solidarity? How does the work of Rebollo Gil foreshadow or dialogue with decolonial praxis in Puerto Rico towards the end of the 2010s? I propose to think of Rebollo Gil's work as an instance where literature, by engaging with internet dynamics, articulated many of the decolonial discourses and practices we will see fully expressed in the demands for the resignation of Ricardo Roselló during the summer of 2019. Through this aesthetic of bits, whether real or virtual, throughout his chronicles, Rebollo Gil articulates a decolonial politics of solidarity that goes beyond the nation and that permeates public discourses of protest in the post-PROMESA context.

Discursive Bits in *Decirla en Pedacitos: estrategias de cercanía* (2013)

In *Decirla en pedacitos: estrategias de cercanía,* we encounter a reconfiguration of literary representation of the Puerto Rican context and subjectivities through thirty-five short chronicles. The narrative voice highlights two aspects through its experiences in the capital city of the island: fragmentation and closeness. The title of the text also dialogues with the work of 1960s Puerto Rican Marxist poet José Maria Lima, who was exiled in Cuba. The epilogue reads: "Hay una canción, pero está rota y es *inútil* decirla en pedacitos" (emphasis mine). The text, effectively, creates this tension between what is said and isn't, between what is useful or useless, thus, taking failure as a point of departure. The aesthetic and poetic figures appearing in the text function as representations of a spatial closeness that are at times incomprehensible in their totality. Rebollo Gil represents Puerto Rico's fragmentation through the inclusion of insular/*isleño*/a experiences[24] that dialogue with national realities, colonialism, and precarity.

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quote, in its translation to Spanish, reads as follows: "tras fracasar es posible seguir adelante y fracasar mejor; en cambio, la indiferencia nos hunde cada vez más en el cenagal del Ser estúpido" (14).

[24] For purposes of my project, I find more appropriate to use terms such as island, islander, or isleño/a to refer to the experiences lived in Puerto Rico. The term insular/insularity is politically charged due to its intrinsic association with Antonio S. Pedreira's text *Insularismo* (1934). Arcadio Díaz Quiñones speaks about these canonical texts: "Leer estos textos es asistir a la fundación de los mitos y modos de toda una generación." (27). The generation of the 30's and 40's that Díaz Quiñones refers to here was key in the consolidation of the commonwealth as well. In this sense, insular or insularity, as it is associated with cultural nationalism, doesn't conceptually coincide with Rebollo Gil's literary proposal and that of other contemporary

These components of Puerto Rican everyday reality are interweaved to represent colonial crisis and how crisis can generate fragmentation in spite of the closeness experienced through isleño/a experience. The pieces here function as a shattered glass yet, rather than distancing each piece, they are brought back together and reflect each other as broken pieces of a mosaic. There is separation, yet all the pieces are tightly placed next to each other so as to also suggest that closeness can be a form of building collectivity if what was broken is put back together in a different way. However, this new configuration of pieces will never be the same as its original.

Rebollo's aesthetic/discourse of bits allows for a critical approach that globalizes the reconfiguration of Puerto Rican subjectivities at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Puerto Rican coloniality triggers fragmentation in the formulation of an identity, which leads us to the *pedacitos*. Thus, how colonization functions on the island is characterized by a divided Puerto Rican collectivity.[25] A series of local sociological realities emerge from the resulting duality in Puerto Rican colonial subjectivity and permeate Puerto Rican everyday life: dual physical spaces, dual political beliefs within the same family, bipartisan politics, the commonwealth's translation into "estado libre" yet "asociado." Arcadio Díaz Quiñones globalizes this duality through the meaning of consolidating the island's commonwealth status: "A falta de un Estado independiente, teníamos dos ciudadanías, dos lenguas, dos banderas" (37). Díaz Quiñones also suggests that through the formation of the Puerto Rican imaginary emerges a *memoria rota* [broken memory] that aimed to continuously erase previous temporalities.[26] It is from division, pieces, dualities, and erasures that Rebollo Gil builds an imagination of and for the present, making his aesthetic of bits a contemporary contribution to the reconstruction of the Puerto Rican broken memory. Rebollo Gill produces this imagination by including traditional formal characteristics from Puerto Rican hegemonic identity in order to construct something that instead speaks to colonial difference. It uses pieces to build collectivity, duality to track coloniality, and erasures to remember history. In *Decirla en pedacitos,* Rebollo Gil points out: "Muchos de los aquí 'presentes' lo somos- un 'yo' plural y rutinario: leer, postiar, escribir y comentar lo político cotidianamente y a distancia, el uno del otro y de lo acontecido" (53).

Through the closeness [cercanía] of *Decirla,* Rebollo Gil is already speaking in the early 2010s of what will later become a politics of solidarity for a decolonial collectivity; a form of building alternative collectivities to counter national coloniality and oppression, that embraces

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cultural producers. Yet, as with every country in the Caribbean, living within the enclosed space of an island determines many sociological components of everyday realities as we can see in texts such as Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place*, another author Rebollo dialogues with at some point. For these reasons, I use concepts such as 'isleño/a' or islander in order to engage with the broader discursive reconfiguration in which I locate my scholarly approach within Puerto Rican studies.

[25] For example, Eduardo Lalo observes that "La sociedad puertorriqueña crea distancias máximas en espacios mínimos", which lead to divisions that are continuously repeated and generate a sense of anti-solidarity in society (33).

[26] Arcadio Díaz Quiñones points out the twentieth-century context that "La memoria social se nutría de los rituales y las conmemoraciones que reforzaban el mito fundacional de 1940. La temporalidad anterior quedaba casi abolida: la memoria rota" (25). In this project I consider broken memory more broadly. Namely, I propose to think of how broken memory repeats itself as an event in the colonial context and, thus, in today's context we can think how previous temporalities are erased from immediate realities through this broken memory.

affective forms of community to break from the confines of colonial distance. Rebollo's stake consists of observing everyday reality beyond national community, and instead shifting the focus towards moments capturing the human experience of colonialism in order to propose a politics of solidarity. Although it may seem counterintuitive to an island context where closeness (in its dual meaning of close to and enclosed in a space) has more traditionally been considered in a negative light through the paradigms of insularity, Rebollo Gil in fact privileges closeness [cercanía] to imagine this alternative politics of collectivity. Thus, closeness becomes a strategy through which the writer can reconfigure the representation of coloniality in the Puerto Rican context in order to generate a literary discourse that dialogues more directly with the social experience of crisis than the meta-narrative of the hegemonic nation or post-modern resignation. Since his early works, Rebollo Gil has resisted post-modern resignation postures that don't advance a project of liberation. He continues his critique in his late work. In *Amigos*, for example, he engages with Carlos Pabón's scholarship to criticize said resignation/conformism: "Recién todas las preguntas dizque urgentes, autorizadas, ante los eventos que nos marcan suponen partir de la premisa de que hablar de heroísmo es hablar de pendejaces, pues no se trata ya de transformar al mundo, sino de interpretarlo. Bullshit" (Rebollo Gil 113). In the footnote to this citation, he refers the reader to Pabón's text *Polémicas: política, intelectuales, violencia* (2014), where he posits a criticism of intellectual indifference and the distance between intellectuals and the island's realities, betting on a different mode of proceeding, a politics of engagement and solidarity.

This *cercanía* also initiates a literary project that rescues the pieces produced by the destruction of memory (as thought by Díaz Quiñones) from a place of urgency in the present time. Thus, becoming a project that also rescues the possibility of a politics of solidarity from the space of literary and intellectual labor and in response to the precariousness taken to its extremity in the twenty-first century. As a literary project, Rebollo's works remind us of the literature's potential to be politically engaged in our times. Ultimately, Rebollo Gil's *cercanía* becomes a way out, or maybe a way into, stepping outside of the stagnation produced by colonial crisis in the lives of citizens on the island. This politics of solidarity uses rupture to create the possibility of a critical dialogue regarding coloniality and producing decolonial discourse: bits and closeness as strategies emerging from and for Puerto Rican everyday realities. This re-significations of the bits and pieces, then, transform them into useful pieces from which contemporary collectivity on the island can be retrieved. Thus, in becoming useful they also lead us to an alternative way of thinking collectivity. Ultimately, Rebollo shifts the pre-existing notion of the fragment as intricate to the colonial condition. By turning our focus to these real-life instances that appear as bits, they become, opposite to Maria Lima's "es inútil Decirla," useful points of departure to re-imagine what it would take to decolonize Puerto Rico in the future.

Puerto Rican Bits and Hypertext in "Breve relación sobre las obligaciones"

The chronicle "Breve relación sobre las obligaciones" exemplifies Rebollo's exploration of the pieces/bits announced in the title of the book through the use of hypertextual form. "Breve relación…" was originally published as a hypertext online, thus, making its original format

digitally born, as is the case with many of the texts published in this book.[27] It was then published in printed format in the book *Decirla en Pedacitos: Estrategias de Cercanía*, which is primarily a collection of texts originally published either in online magazines or Rebollo's blog. What should be the "main" text of "Breve Relación…" includes the following ten very short sentences:

> Tener que leer *La Charca* [1]. Tener que estudiar derecho [2]. Tener que correr para Gobernador [3]. El hijo de McClintock, el hijo de Roselló y yo [4]. Los últimos dos están en desorden. Es Ricky el que tiene que correr para gobe. Yo me hice abogao. Como el viejo [5]. Pero, ambos de seguro leímos *La Charca*. Como el nene de McClintock. Obligao [6].[28] (Rebollo Gil 30)

A footnote accompanies six of the ten short sentences, included above in brackets, which visually remind us of the pieces or bits that Rebollo collects. The thickness of the chronicle, however, can be found in the information included in the notes for each sentence. These notes are not the only thickness of the text, but they also include the hypertextual character of the chronicle with links to seven other different websites. Rebollo engages with printed (traditional footnotes) and digital (hyperlinking) forms of hypertext to elaborate on a comparison between the sons of two politicians of Puerto Rico's pro-statehood party and himself as the son of a questionable judge.

As the chronicle's title suggests, the text satirizes the degree of obligations a Puerto Rican citizen can have and, more specifically, how these obligations relate to class and family lineage as hierarchies that reproduce coloniality. Rebollo Gil remits the reader to a national past as the literary canon appears in the first obligation: "Tener que leer *La Charca*" (Rebollo Gil 30). Through the footnote of the obligation the text expands through physical and virtual space: "Recientemente el Secretario de Estado, Kenneth McClintock publicó una foto de su hijo en la plaza de Manuel Zeno Gandía con la siguiente descripción: 'En vísperas de tener que leer "La charca'"" (Rebollo Gil 30). The description is also hyperlinked to the post it describes, eventually leading the reader to the social media platform Facebook. The plaza monumentalizing a text that Rebollo later refers to as "una novela vieja…y por tanto nada relevante en mi actualidad" (Rebollo Gil 31) becomes a space that can represent the contradictions of cultural nationalism on the island and allows him to call Puerto Rican colonialism/coloniality into question. In this case, McClintock, as secretary of state, was the one in charge of developing the plaza, a symbol of the national literary canon, yet he is also a politician of the pro-statehood party seeking to incorporate the island into the United States. Rebollo also opens the text with the idea of a literary origin or foundational text that simultaneously dialogues with nepotistic Puerto Rican politics, which is further explored as the text moves forward. The contradictory appearance of *La charca* in the first obligation foreshadows what Rebollo will question throughout the rest of the chronicle. That is, has the control of power on the island changed in any tangible way since Zeno Gandía's 1894 classic novel?

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[27] The digital text used can be accessed through the following URL: http://www.revistacruce.com/letras/item/1184-breve-relacion-sobre-las-obligaciones. The text has now been taken down and can no longer be found online. Instead, it is only available through its printed version in the book *Decirla en pedacitos*.

[28] I use the numbers in brackets here to represent the placement of the footnotes in the original printed text.

Rebollo, through the engagement with printed hypertext format and digital hyperlinks, further develops a critique of Puerto Rican politics through the juxtaposition of *La charca,* a text canonized by the literary Generation of the 30s in Puerto Rico, and McClintock's Facebook post of his son at the monument. Here, McClintock and *La Charca* represent the space of hegemonic cultural nationalism, a cultural nationalism made up of a coloniality that makes it hard to separate nationalism from the lack of sovereignty that allows colonialism to exist until this day on the island. Under the fourth footnote, for example, Rebollo questions this by referring to *La Charca's* author Manuel Zeno Gandía as part of "ilustrísimos hacedores de la patria (en minúscula)" (Rebollo Gil 31). By emphasizing the smallness of the idea of homeland for the case of Puerto Rico [(en minúscula)], Rebollo questions here the coloniality within national hegemonic identity and thereby attempts to think of it from a space of rupture or distance. If there is a homeland ["patria"] that has been built in Puerto Rico, what does the homeland of a colony look like? Better yet, whose homeland is it? And ultimately, can the formation of said homeland be questioned?

Rebollo pauses as he stops to question and close-read the Facebook post as if it were a literary text itself rather than just letting it function as one more piece of information found online. McClintock's intimate moment with his son, now mediated by social media, becomes the subject of critical questioning. Rebollo reminds us of this by commenting on the event as one may on an actual social media post. However, he does not do so it in the post, but instead in the footnote within the confines of the literary text. Through this commentary, Rebollo re-writes the hegemonic narrative—the aura in a Benjaminian sense—surrounding the image where McClintock tries to appear as an average citizen by pointing out how his son too has to read *La Charca* just like every other Puerto Rican. Rebollo reiterates several times, "Pero es distinto" (30), emphaszing the difference and distance between the politician who can build a plaza and the average Puerto Rican citizen. Through this strategy, Rebollo demystifies the objective of the politician to appear as an average citizen. Moreover, rather than commenting on a Facebook comment, which can ultimately be deleted or ephemeral, Rebollo turns the social media object into literature. By turning the post into a literary object, the writer defies the impermanence of both Díaz Quiñones's "broken memory" and the ephemerality of social media.

The second obligation concerns the author: "Tener que estudiar derecho" (30). However, Rebollo creates a tension by starting the footnote highlighting, "Nadie *tiene* que estudiar derecho" (30). Later in the chronicle, Rebollo comes back to said obligation pointing out, "Yo me hice abogao. Como el viejo" (30), followed by the fifth footnote in the text. In the fifth footnote we're introduced, via two webpages, Wikipedia and La Rama Judicial de Puerto Rico, to the author's father ["viejo"], judge Francisco Rebollo López and the details of his career. Whereas the Wikipedia page explains that the governor of the island appoints this position, the second website confirms that he has in fact been appointed to the position by governors from both colonial parties, and that one of them was Carlos Romero Barceló—a former governor best known for [masterminding?] the assassination of independence political leaders in 1978's Cerro Maravilla. By contrasting his own obligation to the obligations of other elite politicians' sons, Rebollo underscores that although one should put forth familial legacies, this is in fact more so a matter of personal choice and, thus, there is a way to step out of it. By including his personal story, he also distances himself from his father as well as from the corrupt and nepotistic governments that rule the island. Thus, he opposes colonial hegemony by moving away from his obligation through the critical review built in the chronicle regarding obligations and his own re-positioning as a writer.

This critique is strengthened through the third obligation: "Tener que correr para Gobernador," in reference to "el hijo de Roselló", namely, Ricardo (Ricky) Roselló, son of the former governor of Puerto Rico, Pedro Roselló (Rebollo Gil 30). Here, three years prior to the election that brought Ricky Roselló to administer colonial power, Rebollo Gil tracks and questions some of the early views on Roselló's candidacy and how these were articulated through social media as he represents them in the text. Additionally, the writer also brings about the close connection between nepotistic politics and corruption given that former governor Pedro Roselló's administration was best known for the latter.[29] First, Rebollo points out the comments of supporters on social media: "Por otro lado, en su página de Facebook, amistades y fans animan a Ricky a aspirar al puesto con comentarios como 'NUESTRO FUTURO LIDER QUE DIOS LO BENDIGA' y 'hummm… ese muchacho tiene porte de gobernador!'" (30, capital letters in original). Second, Rebollo elaborates on the familial lineage and obligation: "Algo así como que lo que se hereda es no resistirse. Sobre todo si el monto de la herencia va por cuenta de un chorrete de hijos de nadie (http://derechoalderecho.org/2009/02/13/los-hijos-de-nadie/)," and finally concludes with a question regarding what it takes to be a governor on the island: "¿qué más se puede pedir de un futuro candidato a la gobernación? Que lea. Que estudie. Que lo lleve en la sangre" (31). In commenting on coloniality, as it is reproduced through the support of Ricky online, Rebollo breaks down and critiques what is at stake in the short-term memory behind these supporters, and their ignorance regarding past corruption and the notion that familial lineage qualifies a citizen to govern the island. In this moment, Rebollo tracks the infrastructure of coloniality as it is displayed through the praxis of those who, rather than resisting it, are a product of it. Rebollo also writes history in so much as he indirectly reminds the reader that Ricky's wealth was taken from the many citizens whose lack of connection to a particular lineage will keep them at the margins of power. By including the URL right after "hijos de nadie," Rebollo refers us to a critical essay not only on how these structures of power come from colonial administrators, but also on how wealth determines the access and recognition a citizen can have on the island—in this case, those being officially recognized as lawyers—to the detriment of others' future. Eloquently enough, Rebollo highlights that coming from the right family is the most important requisite to become governor and that what the constitution stipulates as requisites for being professionally prepared for the position is not relevant. By emphasizing this, Rebollo also invokes the importance that the metaphor of the family has played in Puerto Rican nationalism and, thus, exposes the dangers of these notions for everyday life praxis on the island. The metaphor of "la gran familia"—advanced in 1930s Puerto Rican literature and then transgressed during the second half of the century in works such as Luis Rafael Sánchez's *La guaracha del Macho Camacho* (1976)—responds to the nationalist tendencies of seeing affective ties in a national community as a form of homogenization.

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[29] In a recent article about the generation leading recent protests on the island against Ricky Roselló, investigative journalist Cintrón Arbasetti reminds us of the overt corruption during his father's administration: "No vivieron los arrestos por corrupción de más de 40 funcionarios públicos durante la administración de Pedro Roselló, padre del actual incumbente que pende de un hilo en La Fortaleza. Apenas tendrían entre dos y cuatro años cuando arrestaron a Víctor Fajardo, entonces secretario del Departamento de Educación que en 2001 fue acusado del desvío de $4.3 millones también bajo la administración de Rosselló padre" (Centro de Periodismo Investigativo).

Through these affective bonds, consensus becomes part of the status quo resulting from cultural nationalism, as I explained earlier. The dangers of "la gran familia," Rebollo suggests in this chronicle, consist of its potentiality to perpetuate colonial, classist, and dangerous structures of power.

In the closing remarks of the text, the writer directly contrasts himself to Ricky Roselló: "Pero, ambos de seguro leímos *La charca*. Como el nene de McClintock. Obligao" (Rebollo Gil 30). The novel *La charca* (1894) still functions as a stereotypical foundational fiction on the island. The text represents a lettered petit-bourgeois [hacendado, sacerdote, médico] who has little control over the docile peasants [jíbaros] working the land and wishes to implement a project of modernization to make the island fit bourgeois and capitalist parameters of progress. The figure of the *jíbaro* becomes a symbol of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism in the beginning of the nineteenth century and up to the present time.[30] This figure, and the book in general, I would agree with Rebollo Gil, has little to no relevance in Puerto Rico's present reality. The last sentence mentioning *La charca* comes with the sixth footnote where the author remits us one last time to the foundational canonical text. Along with pointing out its irrelevance for the present time, as mentioned above, he also adds, "Al menos no en los noventas cuando el papá de Ricky fue Gobernador por lo que parece ahora una eternidad" (Rebollo Gil 31), referring here to his own experience under the rule of Pedro Roselló's corrupt administration. Following these statements, he refers to the opening lines of the novel "Dato curioso: La charca comienza 'En el borde del barranco'" followed by a hyperlink to a page that should contain a digital version of the text, and finishing with "y aunque precisamente hoy me invade una sensación de barranco, no recuerdo haber leído nunca esas líneas. Después de todo, lo que se hace por obligación no se piensa. Uno se tira y ya" (Rebollo Gil 31). Here, Rebollo emphasizes that reading the foundational text is the only thing the three of them have in common, thus, emphasizing the text's weakness in reproducing the national identity it aims to support. Furthermore, Rebollo also points out the weaknesses of the book in its ability to perform national identity. Instead, the writer emphasizes that although an obligation, just as other obligations (like following in the steps of family), the function of reading the book becomes a void. Thus, Rebollo distances himself from an ideology that sees obligation above ethical action because, ultimately, in this case, obligation becomes yet another form of reproducing coloniality through racism, classism, and sexism. Through this move, he generates a rupture with notions that use or favor the perpetuation of coloniality and colonialism on the island.

The engagement with hyperlinking throughout the chronicle underscores two aspects regarding access to the internet in Puerto Rico: social media's function as a space that can reproduce coloniality and how it can subsequently be appropriated to subvert it. Social media reproduces coloniality because it collects already existing sociological and political scaffoldings related to politics in Puerto Rico. However, Rebollo proposes that, through the textual and visual materiality that this coloniality acquires in social media, one can approach it critically and deconstruct it as a cultural object. In this way, Rebollo critically engages with the idea of reading between the lines as he will eventually continue to do and concretize in his future chronicles, which appear in books such as *Todo lo que no acontece igual* (2015) and *Amigos en*

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[30] For a broader discussion on the formation of Puerto Rican nationalism during the nineteenth century and how the figure of the *jíbaro* becomes central for this project to erase blackness, see Daylet Domínguez's *Ficciones Etnográficas: Literatura, ciencias sociales y proyectos nacionales en el Caribe hispano del siglo XIX* (2020).

todas partes (2016), among others. Rather than focusing on big events, he turns his attention to smaller ones as they appear through social media. Engaging with this strategy, the writer positions himself against the Puerto Rican press as well as History books, where hegemonic versions of Puerto Rican realities appear. Rebollo elaborates a critique of these discourses, or events at times, through the visual and discursive margin occupied by the footnote and the hyperlink. Through this strategy, and by invoking historical discourse in the title "Breve relación…" which reminds us of Bartolomé de Las Casas's historical text *Brevisima relación de la destrucción de Las Indias* (1552), Rebollo emphasizes the shortness, brevity, and the lack of space for critical thought within contemporary hegemonic discourses. The brevity also suggests that we can cut through the meaningless and often demagogic discourses of the political. The writer moves to the footnote, and eventually out of the page, so that he can expand on these matters and deconstruct them by engaging with social media as well as information sourced online. By close reading these social media comments, Rebollo foresees the repetition of mistakes given the ideological control that colonial parties can have over their supporters in spite of their plunder of the citizenry throughout decades. Hyperlinking here also engages with the suggestion that one can find the information needed if a citizen chooses to engage in looking beyond mainstream media. This is a posture that will be better consolidated in Rebollo's later work, as he becomes more explicit in pointing out the role of hegemonic mass media, specifically the press, in sustaining coloniality and corruption in power.

In a chronicle titled, "How to Become Governor," published in *Writing Puerto Rico: Our Decolonial Moment* (2018), Rebollo Gil further develops the topic of familiar relations in Puerto Rican politics as it relates to media in the post-PROMESA context. After taking the maxim "Political science is not an exact science" (Rebollo Gil 43) at the beginning of the text to speak of how familial lineage is more likely to determine an individual's participation in Puerto Rican politics, Rebollo Gil concludes towards the end of the text:

> Austerity, while not a science, is exacting . . . I'm holding back a metaphor on how family trees do not bear the fruit of the political, but the history of politics can still be told by looking up at the branches of certain family trees on the island. Somebody should, at least, write a column about this for the paper. But I fear that this type of political analysis does not run in the family.
> The owners of the island's major newspaper are the sons and daughters of another former governor. I'm unsure if this classifies as blame or responsibility for the crisis. Regardless, it is unlikely that they'll be sacrificed as they have consistently published editorials in favor of the board. (44)

Seeing the results of decades of corruption and nepotistic politics on the island under the new light of PROMESA, Rebollo confirms the lack of transparency existing within national hegemonic media. The writer, thus, through the genre of the chronicle, places himself in direct opposition to counter the damages that these platforms, as they also perpetuate coloniality, can cause in everyday realities on the island. This passage can help us understand the purpose the author sees in engaging with hyperlinking as it relates to looking back to the family tree, as hyperlinking similarly to a family tree can facilitate connecting links between present and past. Furthermore, Rebollo represents the processes through which a citizen may have to navigate in order to find underlying layers of history and decolonizing discourse through a critical approach to politics. The writer accomplishes the task through the textual space of a literature that appropriates new media as strategy to decolonize Puerto Rican discourse.

From Representation Crisis in Mainstream Media to Self-Representation in Social Media

In his later work, Rebollo Gil continues to strengthen an aesthetic of *pedacitos* [bits] that tracks coloniality in Puerto Rican everyday life and criticizes these instances. Rebollo Gil, thus, continues to delve into the nuances of Puerto Rican politics through works such as *Todo lo que no acontece igual* (2015), *Última Llamada* (2016), and *Amigos en todas partes* (2016). In these works, binaries such as nationalist/anti-nationalist, government/resistances, family, and (social) media begin to function as the central themes of his overall works. For example, he revisits Ricky Roselló's candidacy for governor and the legacy of his father's corrupt government in *Todo lo que no acontece igual*. In *Ultima Llamada,* the writer engages in an unproductive Google search to understand the meaning of his own last name, while intercalating this poetic writing with essays of cultural criticism. Finally, in *Amigos en todas partes* he returns to the genre of the chronicle to articulate contemporary crisis in Puerto Rico through bits and closeness and to contest obsolete nationalist views.

In a chronicle titled, "Café, bombas, cercanía" appearing in *Amigos*, Rebollo Gil finds himself watching a theater piece about a political prisoner who is unable to use a cellphone upon his return to the island. He wonders if he was born too late to learn from the pro-independence leaders: "Me pregunto si nací muy tarde para que un prócer me enseñe a poner bombas" (Rebollo Gil 61). However, he also points out how the protagonist of the play, Teófilo, "insiste en ideas y conceptos de más de dos décadas atrás, como decir que el futuro del país está en la siembra y cosecha del café" (Rebollo Gil 61). Here, while sitting across from real life ex-political prisoner Rafael Cancel Miranda (1930-2020) in the audience, Rebollo Gil wonders about the metaphors that allowed the country to go from an armed revolution in the fifties to Puerto Rico's present moment. He concludes by paying homage to Cancel Miranda, "En el 1954, Don Rafa supo hacer la revolución," and emphasizing the value of the political leader in his own time, the 1950s (Rebollo Gil 62). The writer generates a tension between old paradigms and present realities, however, by foreshadowing this recognition with commentary on the obsoleteness of the ideas of the fictional ex-political prisoner in the play. In this case, the political prisoner represents a symbol of nationalism for the island's left. Yet, it appears as if although heroic, their strategies are useless in today's context. Rebollo Gil says right after paying homage to Cancel Miranda "Yo sé hacer café y metáforas. Podría aprender a hacer bombas," announcing and reiterating that while there is hope for change it may not come via the same strategies (Rebollo Gil 62). This tension permeates other chronicles in the collection as well whereby he aligns these obsolete conceptions with nationalism in order to bring other possibilities to the forefront.

In another chronicle on the same collection titled, "Crisis de representación," Rebollo Gil explores questions of representation by engaging with the footnote commentary format once again. Here, the writer juxtaposes the words of a foreign billionaire investor, of a former first lady, and of an organization against non-heteronormative families. This chronicle comes at the end of three texts where Rebollo close-reads passages citing the words of people in power from politicians to bureaucratic functionaries that have appeared in official media. He announces in the first chronicle titled "Juego de Palabras" that the texts deal with the misuse of discourse: "Las palabras son crisis, revolucionario, feminista, disidencia y libertad. El juego es quien las utiliza peor en una oración" (Rebollo Gil 67). Often throughout these three chronicles he uses literary texts to counter the misuse or senselessness emerging from the quoted passages depending on who enunciates the words. In the chronicle exploring the crisis of representation, Rebollo comments on the billionaire's use of "puente de negocios [48]" to describe Puerto Rico through a

footnote: "¡Es una metáfora! ¿Quién dijo que la literatura no sería útil en el mundo de los negocios? ¡Esa es otra metáfora! Estoy on fire" (Rebollo Gil 73). With sarcasm, Rebollo Gil questions here the fictionalization that allows the billionaire and other people in power to put forth forms of representation on the island that neglect Puerto Rico's true crisis.

In the next quotation appears the idea of Puerto Rico as a religious country, which has also been strongly linked to cultural nationalism,[31] as told by a former first lady: "Nosotros somos un país principalmente Cristiano [49]" (Rebollo Gil 73). Here, the writer invites the reader to choose from twenty-three options to fill in a blank through a foot note

> Somos un país principalmente _____ a) violento b) jodío c) caótico d) carcomido por la corrupción e) ingobernable f) hecho mierda g) inhabitable h) invisible a nivel mundial i)maldito j) en manos de imbéciles k) entregado a la maldad l) desentendido de todo lo que exista más allá de los mercados m) muy, muy lindo, sobre todo cuando lo miras desde la ventanilla de un avión n) super feo, cuando consideras el desparrame urbano, la falta de planificación y eso o) cocolo hasta la muerte p) imaginado q) chiquito y juguetón r) de poetas y rufianes y jevas s) calabaza, todo el mundo para su casa (porque asaltan) t) complejo u) acomplejado v) có-có-cómodo w) crustáceo x) acorazonado y) maravillado con el mar por todos lados z) ahogándose, sin embargo. (Rebollo Gil 73)

In a format that reminds us of Cortazar's *tablero de lectura,* Rebollo Gil invites his reader to interactively engage with the book. By choosing this participatory request, rather than repeating the patterns of the discourses, Rebollo aims to deconstruct, leaving the space open for self-representation. The reader can either chose from the various options offered, or choose to write whatever seems more appropriate in the space, evidenced by the space being left blank. Ultimately, this move dialogues with the rhetorics of self-representation available through digital platforms as well, but the writer is unable to make up his mind about what option to choose. In the last quotation, while citing an anti-gay parenthood group in their Facebook page saying "'Seguiremos siendo la voz del pueblo y de los niños de este país…'[53]," its accompanying footnote brings us back to literature: "De Manuel Ramos Otero: 'Dejé las calles de la patria mía/ abrumador templete de relajo/ catedral desacrada de carajo/ burdel del vacilón que a todos fía'" (Rebollo Gil 73). At the content level, both of these footnotes propose alternative ways to think of the island that supersede the nation and privilege everyday realities. Puerto Rico, in spite of what mainstream media portrays, suggests the author, is ultimately drowning, "ahogándose, sin embargo" precisely because of all the other options offered prior to this last option but mostly because of these types of demagogical representations that keep people under the subjugation of the status quo of the "nation."

Rebollo Gil resolves the crisis of representation towards the end of the collection in a chronicle titled "Práctica poética, tópico político" (127) where he explores the meaning of freedom of speech on the island and the spaces available to practice it. Ultimately, this will be in a hip-hop scene performance in a closed-doors living room, recorded and posted on YouTube. The chronicle begins by citing a newspaper president's dedicating his participation in a forum to seventy-three journalists who died in 2013: "Le recuerda al público que hay otras jurisdicciones en el mundo donde la libertad de expresión y prensa fueron el sueño de cada periodista muerto" (Rebollo Gil 127). Right after this, he introduces a YouTube video: "En Youtube hay un video de cuatro raperos universitarios cantando en la sala de un apartamento riopiedrense. En la pared de fondo hay un cartel que lee 'área de expresión pública'" (Rebollo Gil 127). This observation

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[31] See Duany and Pabón for further discussion.

is followed by a statement that refers to the implication in the newspaper president's statement that no journalists are killed on the island (127). But, Rebollo Gil suggests, "Aun así, la libertad de expression y prensa son un sueño" (Rebollo Gil 127). Finally, after explaining that part of the hip-hop/rap scene consists of singing about what does not appear in the newspapers, the writer concludes: "Es política cultural en Puerto Rico mantenerse neutral y agradecido por dizque no vivir como se vive en otras jurisdicciones donde raperos, estudiantes y periodistas son perseguidos. En YouTube, sin embargo, hay videos de estudiantes puertorriqueños huyendo de la policía. Vladi tiene una canción sobre el tema" (Rebollo Gil 128). Thus, YouTube appears here as an alternative platform for two main objectives: self-representation and an archive that can also trace the memories of those who experience repression on the island. Ultimately, neither of these are accessible through mainstream media.

The ability of self-representing and archiving through platforms on the internet becomes key in the post-PROMESA context because, through the active engagement of citizens with new technologies, the resistance is able to counter mass-mediatic misrepresentations of their actions. As mentioned earlier, actions such as painting the flag mural black and white and the Anartistas' campaign highly depended on online platforms such as Facebook and Vimeo to circulate their artistic proposals. In the next section, I will analyze the ways in which Puerto Rican uses of new technologies, previously tracked in Rebollo's literature as shown so far, will be key in the recent demands for the governor's resignation. In this context, what Rebollo sees as a potential tool and platform for decolonizing Puerto Rican everyday life through literature, later becomes a massive practice to advance decoloniality in real-life politics.

Internet Practices and Puerto Rico's Decolonial Moment

As I mentioned in the introductory section of this chapter, I was working on the beginning stages of this part of the dissertation when the movement calling for the resignation of Puerto Rico's governor known as #rickyrenuncia infolded during the summer of 2019. During the first few days of this political process, when only a few pages of a chat between Ricardo Roselló and his cabinet had been leaked, I arrived at my Puerto Rican friends' house to find them starring at a cellphone on the coffee table that was functioning as a television while the traditional television was turned off. They were watching a Facebook Live posted by San Juan's mayor Carmen Yulín, where she was reacting to the publication of some of the first pages that were leaked. On these first few pages, Christian Sobrino says "estoy salivando por entrarle a tiros," in reference to San Juan mayor Yulín, to which Ricardo Roselló responds that he would be doing him a big favor. Sobrino was the executive director of the *Autoridad de Asesoría Financiera y Agencia Fiscal*, the governor's main financial officer, his representative to PROMESA's Oversight Board, interim director of the *Oficina de Gerencia y Presupuesto*, and primary advisor to the governor in *Desarrollo Económico*.

The Saturday after Yulín's speech was live streamed on Facebook, the Centro de Periodismo Investigativo, an independent press organization on the island, published the full chat containing 889 pages (Valentín and Minet). By Sunday morning, notorious Puerto Rican celebrities René Pérez, Ricky Martín, and Bad Bunny had tweeted demanding Roselló's resignation. By Monday, the internet was saturated with posts using the hashtag #rickyrenuncia. During the morning, there were multiple Instagram stories that showed someone named El Rey Charlie arriving to La Fortaleza (the governor's palace) with about two hundred motorcycles and lighting fireworks as a form of protest. By the early afternoon, people were gathering in front of

the governor's mansion to protest; I was personally receiving regular texts from family members sending pictures of the protest. In a WhatsApp group with my friends who live on the island, I received live updates from within the protests up to the late hours of the night, when the protests turned into violent confrontations between the police and protestors.

Like millions of Puerto Ricans that live outside of the island, I was living the first few moments of the most important event in Puerto Rican modern history through the fiber optic cable. Some key moments include: a leaked chat, Instagram Television (IGTV) videos by celebrities demanding the governor's resignation, the hashtag #rickyrenuncia occupying fourth place in *online* trending topics world-wide, an unending repertoire of *memes* that would flood social media every time Ricky Roselló offered a message, and Spotify playlists compiled for the movement #rickyrenuncia. Millions of Puerto Ricans were able to follow the events minute after minute by staring at a cellphone plugged onto a portable battery or refreshing their computer browsers every two minutes:

> Nadie duerme, nadie trabaja, todos estamos permanentemente conectados a las redes, para no perdernos nada, porque lo hermoso de la protesta no es lo mismo el día después, casi como si la realidad fuera virtual, porque aún los que están físicamente en la protesta están también conectados, y nada deseamos más que estar conectados veinticuatro horas al día con todos los otros, literalmente millones de boricuas conectados virtualmente comentando los mismos acontecimientos para derrotar la soledad y la humillación de esta década tan miserable. No queremos perdernos nada . . . Hay que decir, entonces, que las redes sociales han fungido un papel fundamental en la sociabilidad (y en la seguridad) de estas protestas, organizando las mareas de gente tan diversa que se une, expandiendo la conversación hasta incluir la diáspora, ofreciendo otra narrativa muy diferente a la de los medios corporativos de Puerto Rico que son tan mentirosos, y también documentando los atentados cada vez más absurdos de la policía de justificar su comportamiento criminal en estas protestas. (Othoniel)

The connecting thread in all these instances is precisely new technologies and the internet as a great deal of this political moment also happened online, as Othoniel's chronicle eloquently summarizes. The takeaway from this moment is that it was simultaneously taking place in two territories: the island of Puerto Rico and cyberspace. In this moment, the fiber optic was key in bridging the distances existing between those who were protesting on the island and those who protested from the diaspora. Throughout these two weeks, the internet served as a platform were Puerto Rico's collectivities were unified even if just in digital form.

Thus, at this point of the chapter, I'd like to turn my attention to the decolonial potential of everyday practices and uses of new media in Puerto Rico. As I will discuss more in depth in chapter three, the internet and new technologies can be used to increase social control and surveillance.[32] However, in the case of Puerto Rico, I'd like to focus on the role of new media in building a democratic citizenship.[33] Following, or better yet, tracing this aspect of new media, I

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[32] See the chapter on Jorge E. Lage and Cuban new media practices for a broader discussion in Alexander Galloway, Wendy Chun, and Anne Watkins Fisher's contributions to the discussion of new media, control, and surveillance.

[33] See the introductory chapter for a discussion of democratic citizenship in the works of Abigail De Kosnik, Jesús Martín Barbero, and Yarimar Bonilla. Also, a key work in this area is Henry Jenkins's scholarship on new media practices and participatory culture, which I cover in the second chapter of the dissertation.

will focus my attention on three uses of new media on this conjuncture that can be analyzed from a perspective that highlights the value of new media for democratic purposes and fall under the category of digital protest. The first two cases are: El Rey Charlie and the streaming of real-life protests through social media (Facebook and Instagram). Although I only focus on the role of social media in these two, both events played key roles in street protests. The third case I analyze is the hashtag #rickyrenuncia through an Instagram takeover that took place on Thursday, July 18th at 3:00 p.m (Puerto Rican time), which was exclusively digital.

El Rey Charlie: decolonial un-hero and #LaNuevaRevolución

In his essay "The Author as Producer" (1934), Walter Benjamin points out that a politically revolutionary subject (in this case, he speaks of intellectuals) is the one who uses the medium to advance the interests of the working class. El Rey Charlie appeared as such a subject in the midst of the protests demanding the resignation of Ricky Roselló. El Rey Charlie was able to gather thousands of people, who hadn't been politically engaged by other political and intellectual sectors, in a matter of a week and half. He accomplished this in part thanks to his use of social media. An online influencer of sorts, El Rey Charlie is a mechanic, who sells motor vehicle parts online and who gained an audience of almost two hundred thousand followers on Instagram in a matter of two weeks. Although social media was his main platform to announce the motorcycle protests, his strongest political power lay in the fact that once the marches started, the "King" made multiple stops at projects and marginalized neighborhoods to motivate more citizens to join the motorcycle marches, which ended up gathering up thousands of protestors.[34]

In this sense, El Rey Charlie's work, facilitated by new media, can be seen through Rebollo Gil's observations of Puerto Rico's decolonial moment in an analysis of a working-class character in a theatre play:

> But for that forceful moment, in which the most marginal character on stage speaks her truth about dispossession in the colony, the Puerto Rico of today becomes very full. Of tomorrow. This, I would argue, is a decolonial moment of sorts…What happens when we look for the political not in the drama surrounding our decolonial heroes but on the people cast as nobody's heroes or more precisely, as unheroic nobodies? Unheroic nobodies are like non-incorporated territories—they're just there for the taking …
> Focusing on Yanet [marginal character], one would have to say that if the conditions that endanger her [unheroic nobodies] in the world are left unattended and unchanged, the colony and the longed for sovereign nation are the same thing. (74-75)

Following Rebollo here, the idea of a Puerto Rican decolonial moment consists of that moment when an un-heroic citizen, an average citizen, transgresses coloniality or the status quo. It is outside of the hegemonic or more traditional decolonial heroes that Puerto Ricans can find a way into decoloniality. Thus, El Rey Charlie was exemplary of this un-heroic character in so much as he was just an average citizen with no prior history of aligning with leftist sectors on the island.

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[34] In an article published in *El País,* Rita Indiana describes El Rey Charlie's protests: "Una columna de luz blanca atraviesa la capital de Puerto Rico, son miles de motociclistas convocados por el Rey Charlie, un experto en motocicletas que se ha hecho popular en las redes sociales por lograr este tipo de aglomeración. Esta vez la razón de la caravana no es solo el placer de la velocidad."

In an IGTV video from his last march, El Rey Charlie says "Si el miércoles había cinco mil, yo creo que hoy pasamos la cifra de los diez mil. Señores, esto es histórico, esto es grande. Y yo quiero, *a través de mis redes sociales, que hoy día están mundiales, que ustedes exijan el reclamo*. Cuando yo diga "Ricky", ustedes "renuncia". ¿Cómo dice?" (@elreycharlie). Highly aware of his role in history as well the power of social media, El Rey Charlie effectively assigns a decolonial value to his work here in dialogue or facilitated by new media as a tool. This is Puerto Rico's decolonial moment in so much as an un-heroe (El Rey Charlie) with complete understanding of the reach of the medium in his hands (social media) incites, exposes, and demands transgressing coloniality not only at an insular level but 'world-wide' ["hoy dia están mundiales"]. El Rey Charlie demands the governor's resignation not only in real life but also through social media so that it can be known in any place reached by the fiber optic.

#LaNuevaRevolución, as El Rey Charlie tagged and continues to tag in some of his publications, consists precisely of the one where El Rey Charlie, as well as thousands of citizens regardless of their race, class, gender, sexual orientation, or educational level, were the protagonists of a shift in political and historical conciousness. A great deal of #LaNuevaRevolución was articulated through the form, aesthetic, and discourses of the internet and new media in Puerto Rico rather than through the intellectual and leftist elites that have more traditionally dominated or lead this type of political movement. Some of the early moments of #LaNuevaRevolución received less attention on the island's more traditional broadcasting networks[35] and were mostly transmitted through ephemeral social media videos posted by average citizens. Older generations, for example, questioned El Rey Charlie because they weren't too sure of who this person was. However, millennials and the youth of Generation Z (la generación del "yo no me dejo") knew who Rey Charlie was because of his spectacles and strong online presence, which can be traced back to the early 2010s on YouTube. These younger generations, also leading #LaNuevaRevolución, were mainly the ones permanently protesting for a period of two weeks and would welcome Rey Charlie's late-night arrivals of motorcycle marches to join the ongoing protest in front of La Fortaleza. They would also be the ones streaming through social media stories or videos, which were then infinitely reposted to the point that El Rey Charlie became somewhat of an online sensation. For the Puerto Ricans living in the diaspora, like myself, the reason why we could fully attest to #LaNuevaRevolución was because it was consistently streamed online through social media by the citizens who were in the midst of the protests, regardless of whether the disseminator was El Rey Charlie himself or other participants, or whether a general full-day strike or late-night confrontations between police and citizens were taking place. Ultimately, El Rey Charlie's use of social media and its role in the protests as a decolonial moment is representative of the ways in which thousands of other "marginal" citizens engaged with new media throughout the protests.

Live streaming: "La poli controla la plaza frente a Nono"

Social media live streaming was key in the democratization of information throughout the two weeks of permanent protests demanding the governor's resignation. In many instances, it was the medium used by politicians to talk to the country, including the now overthrown

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[35] For an in-depth study of how Puerto Rican local media perpetuates specific forms of coloniality, such as classism and racism, see Yeidy Rivero's *Tuning out Blackness: Race and Nation in the History of Puerto Rican Television* (2005).

governor Ricardo Roselló's final resignation message. However, online and live streaming were also often used as a tool for the free circulation of information inside and outside of the island. When mainstream media stopped covering the protests late at night, citizens participating in protests would progressively start activating their live streaming from their personal social media accounts. Thus, while mainstream media did not offer an unbiased coverage of these violent confrontations, focusing instead on how protestors and not police had become violent, live streaming offered an outlet for protestors to show the other side of the confrontations, which oftentimes evidenced police abuse not shown in mainstream media. In this way, citizens took the democratization of information into their own hands through their use of personal accounts in social media.

Protestors also used live streaming as a tool for self-protection in the midst of these violent encounters since they could communicate through comments on the lives and strategize on how to move through Old San Juan. For example, at one point, I joined one of these live streamings and someone stated in a comment "La poli[cia] controla la plaza frente a Nono. Estoy tratando de identificar al otro grupo." Namely, rather than becoming just another image for the spectacle of social media, live streaming turns here into a tool that can contest mainstream media's invisibilization of citizens as well as police oppression. Equally important here is the fact that, through this engagement, citizens actively engage in a politics of solidarity. Here, then, new media becomes key for democratic citizenship and resistance in the streets.

Votamos o te botamos: #rickyrenuncia and the digital invasion

The most important historical moment in Puerto Rican contemporaneity was headed by a digital object: #rickyrenuncia. Besides becoming the number four trending topic online in a matter of days, this hashtag was also part of massive digital protest. I would like to engage here with Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rosa and their hashtag ethnography about #Ferguson. Bonilla and Rosa propose that in political events of big magnitude, social media platforms "offer sites for collectively constructing counternarratives and reimagining group identities" (6). On July 18, 2019, many Puerto Ricans, including myself, received multiple texts with a call for an Instagram Takeover that would happen at 3:00 p.m. (Puerto Rican time). The goal of the event was to massively post on Instagram an image that read "Ricky Renuncia" accompanied by #rickyrenuncia on the caption and tag Ricardo Roselló. In a matter of minutes, both the hashtag #rickyrenuncia, as well as the overthrown governor's tagged photos section, were flooded with the image.

I'd like to focus on the analysis of two main aspects of this IG Takeover: its aesthetical value and the data produced. On the one hand, the social media platform's aesthetic produces a counter-narrative that insists on the demand and seems impossible to ignore. If Roselló was hiding throughout the many days that people were permanently protesting on the streets of Puerto Rico, the message of the takeover was the following: it doesn't matter where you are, our narrative is real and we will make it invade one of your most personal objects, your cellphone. This action simultaneously generates a massive amount of data that allows assessing the number of people demanding the resignation. In this sense, if Roselló's narrative in refusing to resign was that he was elected in 2016 and had to finish the job trusted to him, then the digital invasion consolidated another message: these are the numbers that matter now and you cannot disregard them. Thus, the data generated by this action produces a counter-narrative facilitated by new media's possibility to track who takes part in the action and its reach when politically

appropriated by citizens. Mainstream media could control the estimated head counts of protestors attending marches, but social media allowed citizens to show these numbers through digital invasion without mediation of third parties. Through this action, then, protestors showed that even if a minority had voted for Roselló, there was now consensus among a majority that could take him out of his governor position.

Closing Remarks

While these examples of digital practices are not exhaustive, I have more so tried to lay out here an overview of how literature and new media have intersected in the Puerto Rican case since 2010. Rather than attempting to be an exhaustive overview, my main goal has been to show the potential new media has as a space that can facilitate thinking about decoloniality on the island. This is particularly important in the Puerto Rican case because mainstream and corporative media on the island, although seemingly democratic, remains mostly in the hands of the political elite that controls the island's government. Thus, the literary and digital become instances that allow for the emergence of alternative discourses and thought in this context. In the case of Puerto Rico new media literature dialogues with alternative forms of collectivities that speak to the anxieties and urgency for decolonization, which have often been articulated in new media platforms as well. Ultimately, this case shows that when not controlled by the State, the digital network can potentiate the dissemination of alternative discourses that leave nationalism behind and are advanced through practices of democratic citizenship online.

Chapter 2:
Caribbean Interface Imagination and the Re-birth of Caribbean Discourse in Rita Indiana's
Dominican Black Consciousness

Introduction

In this chapter, I analyze how Rita Indiana focuses on Caribbean embodiment of digital practices in her novel *La mucama de Omnicunlé* (2015). Through this representation, Indiana also questions the region's past and future, specifically the Dominican Republic's history of dictatorship. However, in *La mucama,* and in contrast to Rebollo Gil and Lage, Indiana highlights a shift in Caribbean decolonial thought that is more discursive than aesthetic or formal. The contrast between the three writers' main focus corresponds to the different concerns that each raises regarding the region's history; accordingly, each writer's integration of new media in literature responds to the socio-political dynamics surrounding the national paradigms on their respective islands of origin. Contemporary writers are generally interested in questioning the recent past, its effects on the present, and re-thinking the meaning of futurity through the use of new media as experimental literary form. But the ways in which they repurpose digital media varies, depending each author's immediate context and the concerns they find most pressing. While Rebollo or Lage's use of technology regards citizen's agency over new media as a tool for democratic or anti-democratic ends, Indiana uses technology to imagine Afro-Caribbean agency over the course of history.

More specifically, Indiana represents how digital media has been integrated in Afro-Caribbean religious practices since the 1990s. In her key Caribbean studies work *Electric Santería: Racial and Sexual Assemblages of Transnational Religion* (2015), Santera and anthropologist Aisha M. Beliso De-Jesús points out that technology has become central to the understanding of Santería as an embodied practice today. Beliso-De Jesús calls this integration of technology practices *electric Santería* to define how Santería evolves through and with the embodiment of digital culture in ritual practices globally and mainly in the United States. Through the use of electric Santería as an experimental strategy for literary representation, Indiana counteracts recent and historical Caribbean nationalist attempts to erase the Afro-Caribbean's performative, non-textual, and, at times ethereal, cultural expression. How is Indiana's work shifting twenty-first century Caribbean imagination through the implementation of electric Santería as an experimental literary form? In this chapter I look at Indiana's reconfiguration of Caribbean imagination through her representation of Caribbean embodiments (black, indigenous, technological) and agency to historicize contemporary racial, technological, and toxic consciousness in the text *La mucama de Omnicunlé*. Thus, through the depiction of a near future, Indiana introduces Afro-Caribbean embodied practices otherwise left at the margin of the Dominican nation and brings black indigenous bodies to the center of rethinking contemporaneity. Ultimately, Indiana's strategies privilege oral and embodied practices in Afro-Caribbean religious and technological culture rather than attempting to make her critique from fixed, lettered categories.

Olokún: Spirituality, Materiality, and the Course of History

Indiana's implementation of electric Santería has three key purposes: 1) to portray catastrophe in the Caribbean as deity Olokún's vengeance, 2) to question who has agency/power

over the course of history, gods or humans, and 3) to suggest that the future of the region, just as its past, is Afro-Caribbean.

In *La mucama de Omnicunlé*, Indiana constructs a mythic Caribbean of Santería deities intertwined with a modern or historical Caribbean of nation-states. The mythic Caribbean she represents is linked in her novel to a popular or subaltern culture that undermines the hegemony of the modern nation-state and its coloniality. The Dominican Republic's nation-state—the one with which Indiana engages—is colonial because it depends on racist conceptions to define the national subject. Indiana puts bodies and voices of color at the center of this text, links them to Santería deities, and attempts to decolonize modern Caribbean national identity by reimagining black and brown bodies in Hispaniola and highlighting these in her portrayal of the region. Thus, if Dominican coloniality erases bodies and voices of color, then Indiana integrates them into Caribbean literary discourse in order to articulate a decolonized Caribbean imagination.

In the novel, a mythical Caribbean is symbolized by Santería deity Olokún, while the historical nation-state is symbolized by the humans that Olokún possesses. Transgender protagonist Acilde's possession by androgynous Santería deity Olokún facilitates the decentralization of nation-state power**.** If the nation is territorial land space, an Afro-Caribbean subjectivity that contests it emerges through Olokún, the owner of rivers and oceans; thus, the contestation of the nation also emerges through the metaphor of deterritorialized oceanic space. Ultimately, the fate of the island, and of the Caribbean region by extension, depends on Olokún's will.

Olokún's will power is manifest across temporalities, from colonial times to the twenty-first century, through the motif of time travel. Indiana constructs a temporal network where everything intertwines in a way that is similar to that which occurs in digital networks.[36] The appropriation of ancestral afro-centric knowledge and traditions becomes key to constructing this temporal network in *La mucama*. Indiana uses Olokún to intervene in a Dominican historical past through his omnipresence in the material world and his ability to inhabit different times. Olokún possess a buccaneer during the seventeenth century; Giorgio Menicucci, an art entrepreneur living on Sosúa during the 1990s; and Acilde, a young transgender living in Santo Domingo during the year 2027. In this way, Indiana builds a plot that has time travel at the center of it through the possession of bodies, which is central in Santería religious practices. This strategy also allows her to bring up a critique of the last term of Joaquin Balaguer's government (1986-1996)—one of the strongest perpetuations of the *Trujillato* on the island. In the future, the writer imagines how the country's past has led it and the region to catastrophe. However, although these stories are told through marginal and mythological conceptions, Olokún needs to

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[36] I think of the network here in direct dialogue with Patrick Jagoda's conception of a network aesthetic defined as "…aesthetic strategies to render, intensify, and influence the way we understand and interface with a network imaginary. They enable readers, viewers, and players to think about networks not merely by knowing or representing them but by feeling and inhabiting them, often through ordinary scenes, interruptions, and contradictions. Cultural works, then, open up concentrated access to forms of participation, interaction, absorption, and apophenia as well as less controlled experiences of overload, confusion, distance, and paranoia that defamiliarize a networked historical moment. . . Across sites and situations, network aesthetics emphasize not merely that everything is connected but that people and things connect, intersect, disconnect, become, atrophy, transform, or emerge over time" (28-29).

inhabit Dominican bodies to intervene in the material world. Thus, Indiana uses this afro-centric motif to land her intervention in the history of dictatorship and its repercussions on body materiality.

At the center of Olokún's power and the motif of time travel in Indiana's text lies a fundamental question about agency: who is the driver of Dominican and Caribbean history? Who will win the battle over the region's sovereignty/autonomy, the nation-state or Afro-Antillean deities? The main protagonist, Acilde, travels in time as Olokún with the seeming purpose of changing the past so as to save the Caribbean from future catastrophe. Yet, challenging time travel conventions, we quickly learn that Acilde-Olokún allows catastrophe to take place and does not change the future. In this process, however, a multiplicity of new discursive conceptualizations emerge in and through the literary discourse articulated in the text. First, Indiana rewrites Dominican-Caribbean history as an iteration of Olokún's myth, creating a tension between materiality and spirituality. Second, through this re-writing and the motif of time travel, our understanding of history changes; we learn that what determines the future is Afro-Caribbean deities. As a result of this shift, although we could've thought the nation-state had power over the course of history, we learn that the catastrophe was Olokún's work. Far from an idyllic portrayal of Caribbean history, Indiana unveils the Caribbean as an African diaspora space through these discursive moves. Ultimately, *La mucama* shows a redoing of history in which the orisha has agency, whether positive or negative. Through these strategies, Indiana actively seeks to shift Caribbean imagination.

Networks of Characters, Temporalities, and Spaces

As mentioned above, *La mucama de Omnicunlé*'s plot unfolds across three temporalities corresponding to different moments in historical time: the seventeenth century, the turn of the twentieth century (1990s to early 2000s), and the future (2027-2037). Olokún's spirit possesses the main protagonists: Acilde Figueroa, a young transgender man living in 2027, and Giorgio Menicucci, a man who arrives to Sosúa in the1990s. Olokún's bodily possessions of humans connect these temporalities. Each temporality introduces a different sub-story through the protagonists and their ability to travel in time. The protagonists' stories mirror each other in a parallel fashion, but Acilde's actions in the future control Menicucci's in the past.

The character Giorgio Menicucci is embodied by the spirit during the most recent turn of the century. The character arrives on Earth through a sea pool filled with anemones under the waters of Playa Bó in the town of Sosúa in the Dominican Republic in the early 1990s. The narrator describes the pool as "la puerta a la tierra del principio" (Indiana 105) because of its sacred indigenous value. Once Menicucci arrives on Earth, every decision he makes is controlled by 2027's Acilde as a result of Olokún's possession of both bodies. Giorgio Menicucci and Acilde are the main characters able to see two or three temporalities simultaneously, a process recurrently described with new media lexicon such as a double screen, windows, or holograms that I will explain in greater detail below.

In the year 2027, Acilde is able to afford Rainbow Bright—an injection that can provide an instant sex change—after stealing her boss and *madrina* Esther Escudero-Omnicunlé's[37] valuable sea anemone. An ocean catastrophe, which took place prior to the beginning of the

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[37] Esther Escudero's double naming comes from her initiation into Santería. This resonates with the double discourse generated in Santería practices as a form of resistance.

novel, some time before 2027, causes the steep cost of sea creatures such as the anemone. Once Acilde is able to steal the sea anemone, he escapes and hides in *Villa Mella*, a city slum from where he contacts Eric Vitier, the Cuban doctor who helped him find the job with Omnicunlé after paying for his sexual services in the *Malecón*. Both Esther Escudero and Eric Vitier were initiated into Santería by the same person in Matanzas, Cuba and they were prophesied to be the protectors of Olokún, the Santería deity of ocean depths. Once Eric Vitier arrives in *Villa Mella*, the Cuban doctor conducts a ritual involving the sea anemone biting a circle of moles in Acilde's head after injecting the Rainbow Bright. After this, Olokún posseses Acilde's body.

When Acilde wakes up, he is able to see a reality in the nineties, which is described as "esa ventana que se había abierto en su mente hacia el pasado" and "[el] clon que allí dominaba a control remoto" (115). The clone that Acilde controls is Giorgio Menicucci in the Domincan Republic of the 1990s. Through the implementation of new media metaphors such as "ventana" [window/tab] or "control remoto" [remote control], Indiana merges the bodily possessions and Olokún's unfolding through multiple realities with the functions and uses of media. Thus, Olokún's presence in multiple realities is constructed as a type of techno-spiritual interface that intertwines distinct historical times. Through these strategies, Rita Indiana represents the legacy of colonialism in Dominican national identity and the absolute destruction of the environment caused by Olokún's techno-spiritual interface. Ultimately, using time travel in an unconventional fashion, the text intervenes in the history of political oppression and environmental exploitation of the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean region by extension.

Caribbean Interface Imagination

Rita Indiana introduces the ways in which digital culture transformed Afro-Caribbean religious subjectivities into contemporary Caribbean literary discourse. This strategy speaks to what I consider a Caribbean interface imagination. A Caribbean interface imagination is a construction of the region through the merging of a series of temporalities, spaces, and subjectivities that cannot be isolated from each other. It seeks to generate a decolonized Caribbean thought that emerges from/through the region's own critical contemporary realities. Rita Indiana's work can, thus, be seen as a cultural expression that instantiates different literary and new media theoretical frameworks such as Walter Benjamin's historical materialism, Henry Jenkins's convergence culture (2006), and Lev Manovich's cultural interfaces (2016), among others. I also delineate this imagination through three main conceptual categories: temporality (past, present, future), space (ocean, island, land) and subjectivity (power, agency, autonomy). I think of Indiana's novel as an expression of this Caribbean interface imagination; it binds these temporalities, spaces, and subjectivities to create a discourse that updates and speaks to the paradigmatic changes and renewal occurring in the field of Caribbean literature and culture today. Furthermore, the term gestures to the implementation of new media in literary works by contemporary writers and artists in the region. In the case of *La mucama,* the literary artifact of the book, rearticulated through new media's metaphors and through historical materialism, becomes an interface—in this case, a boundary connecting various media and objects together that would not typically be among each other—whereby Indiana shifts Caribbean discourse in the twenty-first century. I lay out each aspect of what I call Caribbean interface imagination throughout the rest of this section before moving forward to the context and analysis of the text.

To think of this imagination through the idea of an interface, I would like to engage with Jenkins and Manovich. In his now-classic work on "convergence culture," Jenkins proposes the

concept of "transmedia storytelling" to speak about how a single cultural object may be created across different media. More specifically, with this concept, Jenkins captures the ways in which specific narratives surpass their own medium. For example, films that further develop their narrative through video games, web sites, comic books, fan fiction, or any other supporting object. In this sense, Jenkins's paradigm allows for thinking about the ways in which the story or narrative transcends one medium and outpours into others. Yet, I engage with Jenkins to suggest that in Indiana's text we see the opposite movement, wherein literary narrative discourse integrates other media.

Manovich's concept of 'cultural interface' can help to further elaborate the idea of this intra-movement between media and literary discourse. Manovich coins the concept "cultural interface" to "describe a human-computer-culture interface" as "the ways in which computers present and allow us to interact with cultural data" ("Language" 37). The critic argues that, "as distribution of all forms of culture become computer based, we are increasingly 'interfacing' to predominantly cultural data—texts, photographs, films, music, virtual environments," and as a result, "we are no longer interfacing to a computer but to culture encoded in digital form" (Manovich, "Language" 37). How, then, can we think of the classical printed media of the literary in a context where the digital dominates culture?

Manovich uses two key starting points to further explain cultural interfaces that can help answer this question: the highly metaphorical language used to conceptualize digital interfaces and the contrast between pre-digital media and computerized interfaces. "Cultural interfaces rely on our familiarity with the 'page interface'," suggests Manovich, "while also trying to stretch its definition to include new concepts made possible by the computer" ("Language" 40). Following this logic of stretching the definition, one key characteristic particular to the computer would be the lack of hierarchy introduced by Random Access Memory (RAM), where "any [RAM] location can be accessed as quickly as any other. In contrast to the older storage media of book, film, and magnetic tape, where data is organized sequentially and linearly, thus suggesting the presence of a narrative or rhetorical trajectory, RAM 'flattens' the data" ("Language" 41).

I propose we think of cultural interface and RAM in relation to Indiana's narrative discourse. I specifically consider that the interface character of *La mucama's* narrative discourse, although rooted in literature, brings back the expansion of digital media via a RAM logic into the literary. The novel, to an extent, as a genre that absorbs what already exists socially (Bakhtin), seeks to resemble the organizing structure of a computer. If, as Manovich suggest, the page interface is key to understanding digital cultural interfaces, then this narrative discourse absorbs the characteristics of digital media that are particular to the computer interface in a contaminating fashion that corresponds to the context of convergence culture. In this case, I propose that RAM's lack of hierarchy likewise triggers a historical materialist imagination in this text through a non-linear plot that merges distinct components of subjectivity, temporality, and space.

The function of this Caribbean interface imagination is to produce a subjectivity that merges a historical consciousness concerning the region's past, present, and future as a single unit. It is not made of a single temporality but rather forces concurrent/simultaneous indivisible temporalities into a single, temporal framework. Indiana, thus, constructs temporality in the same way that Benjamin describes the historical materialist's encounter with history as the crystallization of a "historical subject" through or as a monad containing "the entire course of history at once" (which text?262-63). This historical totality, suggests Benjamin, is key for a historical materialist approach through which human redemption can be achieved (which

text?254). Looking at the Dominican case, Dixa Ramírez also sees the possibility of this redemption in the visibility brought to historical erasures in contemporary cultural production more broadly[38]. In this way, *La mucama'*s plot contains a temporal framework that becomes past, present, and future at once and as it unfolds. Acilde appears in 2027-37, which functions as a futuristic narrative construction for the reader, yet it is Acilde's present that is simultaneously inseparable from observing the past as the result of Olokún's possession of his body as well. Temporality in the text, thus, becomes Benjamin's monad that crystallizes the entire course of Dominican history by combining multiple historical consciousness to understand the singularity of Caribbean historical outcomes today.

To elaborate on the construction of subjectivity through a Caribbean interface imagination, I analyze how Rita Indiana constructs a decolonized Caribbean imagination by representing the Afro-Dominican body and consciousness through the use of electric Santería. In order to do so, I focus on the subjectivities built through the character of Acilde and its unfolding as Afro-Antillean deity Olokún. In *La mucama,* Olokún possesses bodies of different races in different Caribbean times and spaces. In doing so, this spirit functions as an Afro-centric independent force or power that, when combined with a human part, rearticulates black consciousness at the discursive level. The main characters'—Acilde and Giorgio Menicucci— bodies are inhabited by Olokún and, thus, have the ability to experience two or three temporalities. The interfacing—here the interaction among two different consciousness through a body—between the orisha spirit and the protagonist becomes key to generating other interfaces in the narrative discourse, such as the convergence of past, present, and future or the coastal and capital city spaces. The centrality of ocean catastrophe—a tsunami followed by a nuclear spill— caused by Olokún in the text connects the future with the past in order to bring marginalized indigenous and black bodies and consciousness to the fore. In the text's present time, Acilde's Afro-Dominican subjectivity becomes central to the plot while Giorgio Menicucci's arrival to indigenous peoples' land in the 1990s temporality allows for the inclusion of indigenous subjectivity.

The historical materialist approach emerging through the construction of temporality also forces the merging of multiple spaces, which organically unfolds into questioning agency over the Caribbean's fate. Through the questioning of who has agency over the course of history, whether it is the humans (Acilde and Menicucci) or the deity (Olokún), Indiana juxtaposes two spatial categories: the national territory of the island and the ocean. Ultimately, Indiana uses Afro-Caribbean myth and oceanic catastrophe to construct a transfer of power from national territory to water that places Caribbean agency in the hands of Afro-Antillean deities. Namely,

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[38] In her book *Colonial Phantoms: Belonging and Refusal in the Dominican Americas, from the 19th Century to the Present* (2018), Ramírez uses the concept of "ghosting" to speak of historical erasures that have supported colonial and imperial scaffoldings. The author explains that "'ghosting' implies that the acts of erasure that are part and parcel of colonial, imperial, and many nationalist projects have produced not so much actual silence as other unwieldy and recalcitrant presences" (6). Furthermore, she proposes that "acknowledgment of these ghosts opens us to the potential for redemption, healing, and, to cite McClintock, 'the possibilities of alternative futures'" (7). Rita Indiana's work can be read alongside this idea of ghosting as elaborated by Ramírez as well.

rather than placing agency in Acilde or Giorgio, citizens residing in Dominican territory, the ultimate power over catastrophe belongs to Olokún, the deity of the ocean.

Through this Caribbean interface imagination—defined as an amalgamation of Caribbean temporalities (past, present, future), subjectivities (agency, historical consciousness), and spaces (the city, the coast, the ocean) and an amalgamation of printed and digital media—the writer resists seeing historical events in isolation. Instead, decolonizing the Dominican imaginary requires looking at history as a whole. This vision contests coloniality insofar as it makes it impossible to consider contemporaneity from a void, that is, to participate in the process of historical erasure. Indiana's narrative discourse doesn't quite suggest that the future will be different as the result of decolonial thought. However, it does force a vision that problematizes questions about power, agency, and autonomy with the objective of thinking critically about how and under what circumstances the Caribbean space and its citizens exist today.

Race in Dominican Republic

Rafael Leonidas Trujillo's dictatorship (1930-1961), or the *Trujillato*, institutionalizes a racist Dominican national identity rooted in late nineteenth-century racial imaginaries that relied on anti-haitianism and used indigeneity to erase blackness. As is widely discussed in scholarship about race in the Dominican Republic, the consolidation of national identity in the twentieth century depended not only on fear being instilled in citizens by the government but also on highly racialized discourse. Anti-blackness in the Dominican Republic can be thought in relationship to the prioritization of the *mestizo* in national discourse foregrounded in the nineteenth century and the ways in which the *Trujillato* renewed discursive erasures of blackness by reiterating whitened notions of Dominicanness.[39] Lauren Derby finds an immediate precedent to the reiteration of a whitened Dominican identity during the United States intervention in the years 1916 through 1924 and the subsequent political crisis on the island; a context that led to Trujillo's regime in the early twentieth century.[40] Thus, the regime used archetypes of creole racial identity along with Dominican "manhood" as a response to a political climate of chaos fabricated by external forces. The regime used these archetypes with the ambition that passing as white would be symbolic of progress in a context in which imperial power was shifting from the Spanish to the Anglo-Saxon model. Eventually, the state's promotion of these racial and gender models in the development of Dominican identity equally contributed to the perpetuation of the dictatorship through a culture of fear and racism.

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[39] Torres-Saillant points out that, by 1894 "the term race had become synonymous with nation" in consonance with "the construction of the multiple ethnic groups of Latin America as forming a single race" (Torres-Saillant, "Tribulations of Blackness" 136). Andrés Serbin also discusses the beneficial character of the figure of the mestizo in perpetuating racism in Hispaniola throughout twentieth-century political-economic relationships between the Dominican Republic and Haiti in "La dinámica etnia-nación en el caribe y sus efectos regionales."

[40] Derby elaborates: "Indeed, during the U.S. occupation, sanitary inspectors commenced round-ups of rural *curanderos* (herbalists), jailing these 'malefactors of humanity' on the grounds that they were unhygienic and lacked licenses. Marine efforts at modernization via sanitization became efforts to whiten the nation through the extirpation of syncretic practices associated with blackness, and several Haitians were accused of the evils of sorcery and worse" (Derby 34-35).

Trujillo's dictatorship succeeded in overlapping the promise of progress and restoration of order with the whitening of the nation, which, in turn, produced a discourse of anti-blackness and anti-Haitianism. As Derby suggests, "Creole identity holds the promise that all Dominicans can possibly pass as white, yet it also means that everyone potentially carries the stigma of blackness," and as a result, "the Era of Trujillo thus promised to make whiteness available to all Dominicans by incorporating them into the modern nation" (24). Along with the reiteration of "manhood" through violence, partly in response to violent foreign invasions, anti-blackness became key to assert what it meant to be Dominican throughout the twentieth century.

Dominican coloniality was built in and through *Trujillato*'s violent regime, thus leading to a racist and patriarchal Dominican identity.[41] Silvio Torres-Saillant looks at the racist dimension of Dominican identity through the lens of Eurocentrism. The critic defines the *Trujillato* as "the period when the Dominican State became most emphatically committed to promoting Eurocentric and white supremacist views of Dominicanness" (21). Torres-Saillant makes the case that the concept of race acquires a certain elasticity as a result of privileging national identity, "which implies participation in a culture, a language, a community, and the sharing of lived experience" (24). Through this conception of national identity, suggests Torres Saillant, blacks and mulattos also partake in negrophobic nationalism by embracing "Eurocentric definitions of Dominicanness" (25-26).

Thus, external geo-political influences become key in the formation of a Eurocentric Dominicanness. In her book, *The Dominican Racial Imaginary* (2016), Milagros Ricourt expands on the influence of external forces in the formation of Dominican identity by pointing out that in the previous turn-of-the century "…US racialization of Haitians and Dominicans became a catalyst in the evolving 'official' Dominican racial discourse" (11). The state also renewed the historical tension with Haiti via a political-economic pact securing Haitian cheap labor and the proliferation of anti-Haitian discourse during the twentieth century.[42] However, considering both external and internal influences on Dominican identity, Maja Horn points out that, although external forces have historically been influential on the island as well as in the context of globalization, the nation-state still determines Dominican identity today.[43]

Dominican national identity, as configured in the twenty-first century, continues to reproduce the coloniality consolidated throughout the past century, yet, alternative subjectivities have also become more visible. Milagros Ricourt proposes that if the erasure of Afro-Caribbeanness was necessary for imagining Dominican citizenship, then popular Afro-Dominican subjectivities, in tandem with national identity, are instances in which the Afro-

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[41] Racist and patriarchal notions in Dominican identity can be traced back to the eighteenth century. In her book, *Ficciones Etnográficas: Literatura, ciencias sociales y proyectos nacionales en el Caribe hispano del siglo XIX* (2020), Daylet Domínguez identifies a first instance of racialized constructions of Dominicanness in the texts *Descripción de la parte española de Santo Domingo* (1796) by Médéric L.E. Moreau de Saint-Mery and *Santo Domingo. Past and Present: With a Glance ay Hayti* (1873) (38-39).

[42] For further discussion, see Max Puig's "La migración haitiana en la Republica Dominicana."

[43] Horns suggests that "The case of the Dominican Republic also strongly suggests that despite the ever-increasing impact of outside forces associated with globalization the nation remains a primary determinant of national cultural identity, and the state continues to play a vital role in shaping its citizens' political and economic realities on the island" (4).

Caribbean can be retrieved throughout history and in the contemporary moment.[44] Dominican self-perception, suggests Ricourt, results from a series of Afro-Dominican subjectivities imagined by citizens as resistance to national identity discourses (5). Ricourt broadly divides this dichotomy/tension into two categories: subversive imaginary (Afro-Dominican) and colonized imaginary (Dominican nation) (Ricourt 6). It is precisely through a subversive imaginary that contemporary literature alters the ways in which *trujillismo* ideology permeated Dominicanness (Rodríguez 95). Current literary debates about nation and race situate Rita Indiana within this subversive imaginary.

The subversive imagination articulated by Rita Indiana's narrative recurrently tackles the *Trujillato*'s underpinnings. Through this interest, Indiana approaches the complexities of what it means to be Dominican from a perspective that questions the traumas of a violent past that served as a foundation for national identity. Indiana's work can thus be examined as decolonial Dominican discourse to the extent that it represents other forms of subjectivity in literature, particularly Afro-Dominican and indigenous imagination. As a consequence, the author reformulates what it means today to be a Dominican and, by extension, Antillean by rescuing the Afro-Dominican and indigenous subjectivities erased from national discourse.

The Universe of Rita Indiana's Caribbean Imagination

The treatment of Dominican identity, race, and subjectivity in Indiana's literature has been widely discussed in the anthology *Archivos: Rita Indiana* (2017). This compilation of essays, written by cultural critics, shows how questioning identity plays a key role in her body of work. From Indiana's early cultural production, such as *Rumiantes* (1998), *La estrategia de chochueca* (1999), *Ciencia Succión* (2001), and *Papi* (2005), to more recent projects, such as *El juidero* (2011), and the novel being studied in this chapter, Indiana's work has posed numerous concerns regarding Dominican citizenship. Race, gender, sexuality, diasporic identity, and historical revision make up the universe of Indiana's cultural production.

The majority, if not all, of Indiana's work continuously constructs the contemporary Dominican Republic as the intricate aftermath of a dictatorship that spanned the twentieth century and the racial, gender, and class inequalities stemming from it. Rosana Díaz Zambrana has noted that the *Trujillato* is an unavoidable conjuncture in approaching Dominican national identity (105). In works such as *Papi* (2005), Indiana "expande el arquetipo del dictador" (Díaz Zambrana 114) and elaborates on how contemporary society reflects this archetype. María Vera Rojas also points out that Indiana "no limita el cuestionamiento de las identidades a lo nacional, sino que también entiende la heterogeneidad dominicana desde la ambigüedad de cuerpos que superan binarismos y divisiones sexuales y raciales" (222). In "El mecanismo de la memoria: entre la niñez y la adolescencia" Sara Rosell has discussed that Indiana also works with the topic of memory and dictatorship. Finally, in *Masculinity after Trujillo* (2014), Maja Horn proposes that Indiana's early work constructs a "rewriting of the country's hegemonic forms of relations" (108). All of these concerns regarding Dominican identity and imagination serve to foreshadow the elaboration of subjectivity in *La mucama de Omniculné*. This text reflects a renewal of

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[44] Ricourt elaborates that "This resistance to official Dominican imaginaries does not only emerge at the margins, but also surfaces in the lettered class and cultural production" (7).

Indiana's interest in problematizing the legacy of the dictatorship. In this instance, however, Indiana expands her aesthetic repertoire through representation of Santería culture and new technologies, as will be further explored in this chapter.

Some of the approaches to Indiana's *La mucama de Omnicunlé* focus on the representation of monstrosity as resistance to hegemonic discourse.[45] Other approaches have highlighted the relevance of subalternity and its relationship to art in the contemporary Dominican Republic.[46] However, the representation of afro-centric culture in the novel has not been studied extensively even though the novel so clearly dialogues with the erasures of black subjectivity in the Dominican nation. Thus, my analysis of the text examines this gap. I propose that an anti-racist, and thus anti-colonial, Caribbean imaginary—one that inscribes memories, alternative communities, and national dead-ends—emerges in Indiana's text through the representation of Afro-Caribbean subjectivity and bodies of color. The subjectivities included in contemporary Caribbean imagination make marginal bodies central for the production of literary decolonial discourse.

Afro-Dominican Subjectivity in Rita Indiana

The representation of black culture in Dominican imaginaries preceding Indiana's work has been widely discussed in the field. Silvio Torres-Saillaint's scholarly work offers an extensive account of Afro-Dominican contributions to cultural practices in the Dominican Republic. The critic delineates how an intellectual elite has been partly responsible in the development of Eurocentrism in dominant discourses, but Torres-Saillant also traces a strong genealogy of black imagination in Dominican cultural production. Torres-Saillant identifies Gaston Fernando Deligne, Salomé Ureña, and José Joaquín Pérez as the first black voices that emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century, characterizing them as the "founders of modern Dominican poetry" (18). The critic identifies the works of Ramón Marreo Aristy and Aída Cartagena Portalatín as key expressions of Afro-Dominicans in the twentieth century (19). Ricourt, meanwhile, points out that "a wave of thinkers and activists rewrote history searching for [a] Dominican African component" as of the 1970s.[47]

The writer brings up to date many of the pre-existing models of Afro-Antillean representation. Rita Indiana Hernández has produced numerous cultural objects inclusive of afro-centric culture. In her earlier works, such as *La estrategia de chochueca,* Caribbean blackness is present through the construction of characters in the city who reflect on the Dominican Republic's complex perceptions about race and citizenship while navigating Caribbean urban

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[45] See Fernanda Bustamante Escalona's "Stories of an"other" Caribbean: monstrous and dystopian simulations in recent cinema and narrative works."

[46] See Carlos Garrido Castellano's "'La elocuencia que su entrenamiento como artista plástico le permitía.' Subalternidad, cultura e instituciones en La Mucama de Omicunlé de Rita Indiana Hernández."

[47] Ricourt adds "The works of Carlos Andújar Persinal, Celsa Albert Batista, Franklin Franco, Blass Jimenez, Fradique Lizardo, Dagoberto Tejada, Hugo Tolentino Dipp, and Ruben Silié have fiercely challenged the official historical narrative in arguing for the relevance of Africa in the racial and cultural formation of the Dominican Republic" (8).

centers.[48] Indiana more straightforwardly confronts the issue of race in her transmedia project *El Juidero*,[49] and in the novel *La mucama de Omnicunlé* (2015). For instance, she takes from the historical avant-garde her account of Caribbean dialects and the sounds of everyday life practices.[50] And similar to Miguel Barnet, she also constructs narrative representations of Afro-Dominican voices.[51] Indiana masters these tasks by relying on *flaneur*-like characters and the trope of the third-world city, which also functions at times as a character in her narrative.[52] Indiana's representation of the city allows for a Bakhtinian polyphony of voices to emerge throughout her work. Thus, organically mimetizing a Caribbean day-to-day from which black culture cannot to be erased.

In the majority of her works, Indiana represents Caribbean blackness with the intention of contesting the racist legacy of the *Trujillato* and an intellectual elite that supported Eurocentric

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[48] Although Indiana makes Santo Domingo the setting for most of her works, her latest publication, *Hecho en Saturno* (2018), explores a third-world aesthetic in the representation of La Habana, Cuba in the first half of the novel.

[49] Indiana confronts the issue of race more straightforwardly in her transmedia project *El Juidero* (Jaime; Martinez Hernandez)*,* and in the novel *La mucamá de Omnicunlé* (2015). For instance, she takes from the historical avant-garde her account of Caribbean dialects and the sounds of everyday life practices.

[50] The historical avant-garde of early twentieth century quickly caught on to this key aspect and produced texts, mostly within the genre of poetry, that accounted for blackness in the Hispanic Caribbean. The best-known examples of this work are the poets Nicolás Guillén and Luis Palés Matos. Both poets represent the sounds of the black dialect or highlight blackness in popular culture through poetry. If, in the works of the nineteenth century, the black character mimetizes the white master through the representation of slaves that are highly educated and behave like the slave-owner class in works such as Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda's *Sab* (1841) or Juan Francisco Manzano's *Autobiografía de un esclavo*, then the historical avant-garde includes black voices and black culture in literature. In his work about the historical avant-garde, Hugo Verani notes that the aesthetic proposal of the *diepalismo* connects the Puerto Rican avant-garde movement with the Cuban one. Furthermore, the critic uses the term Afro-Antillean to describe Pales Matos's late poetry (Verani 17-18). Additional genealogies to the inclusion of Afro-Caribbean subjects can be traced back to the anti-slavery novel and *costumbrismo* as well (Domínguez, *Ficciones Etnograficas)*. However, because of the experimental character of Indiana's work, I see a more direct connection to the historical avant-garde in the literary and performative works she produces.

[51] Miguel Barnet introduces a new form of Afro-Antillean self-representation in his key work *Biografia de un Cimarron* (1966). In this *novela-testimonio*, Barnet challenges conventional divisions between disciplines and borrows anthropological methods to produce a literary text. The end result consists of reading the testimony of the last living slave in Cuba. Although well-intentioned, Barnet's work does not pose any critical question regarding the history of black people on the island beyond the revolutionary endeavor to include those who had been marginalized. However, it does open the possibility for the inclusion of a more authentic black voice—even if still worth problematizing—in the literary field for the first time.

[52] Néstor Rodríguez in *Escrituras de desencuentro en la República Dominicana* (2005) and Rita De Maeseneer in *Encuentro con la narrativa dominicana contemporánea* (2006) further elaborate on this idea.

discourse throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.[53] In Indiana's narrative, perceptions about race cannot be separated from the national imaginary strengthened during the *Trujillato*. For example, in *La mucama,* the writer questions the discursive whitening of Dominican identity through the inclusion of an afro-descendant protagonist and afro-centric religious practices. Lorgia García-Peña notes that a key aspect of the text is:

> [la] reivindicación del conocimiento indígena y africano—simbolizado por el Ser del Mar que se encarna en diferentes cuerpos a lo largo de la novela y por el acto de posesión corporal—como antídotos a la "verdad histórica" que perpetúa la borradura y ciertas formas de conocimiento de la Historia oficial. (204)

The *Ser del Mar* noted by García-Peña is the Santería spiritual deity Olokún, which is the main motif in the novel connecting different historical temporalities mentioned earlier.

Thus, Rita Indiana's take on Afro-Dominican subjectivity in *La mucama* happens via the inclusion of Santería. Regarding folk culture, Torres-Saillant considers African roots as key in the understanding of religious practices. The *Trujillato* prohibited popular practices known as *vudu dominicano* (Torres-Saillant, *Introduction* 21). As a consequence, "Afro-Dominican religious and cultural practices were persecuted and banned" during the Trujillo dictatorship (García-Peña, "Translating" 14). However, in spite of the prohibition, "Trujillo was known to consult spiritualists and on occasion to resort to curses" (Sellers 87). Milagros Ricourt suggests that the importance of religion in the contemporary period lies in the fact that it functions as a uniting practice between Dominicans and Haitians. The historical background of these religious practices—their prohibition and marginality—is key to understanding Indiana's move to take on Santería as a central motif to advance a decolonial critique of Caribbean history.

Rita Indiana, thus, uses Afro-Caribbean and indigenous culture as a site from which to narrate a history of the margins and intervene in the construction of history. By making electric Santería—which I discuss later in relationship to the creation of alternative virtual communities—a central motif in *La mucama*, Indiana privileges Afro-Dominican subjectivity. Therefore, through this inclusion, Indiana also poses questions about community that dialogue with how the centrality of new technologies in contemporary Santería practices supersedes national borders. Thus, Indiana not only highlights Afro-Caribbean subjectivity, but also the ways in which religious embodied practices similarly put forth imaginaries alternative to the national paradigm in Dominican everyday life.

Decolonizing Literary Discourse through Afro-Caribbean Embodiment and Santería

In his work about Dominican blackness, Torres-Saillant notes the importance of lived experience when looking at the historical conception of Afro-Dominican culture. The critic points out that the study of Dominican blackness should not be limited to the study of the "negrophobic" and "anti-Haitian" perceptions of the ruling class (Torres-Saillant, *Introduction*, 8). Instead, Torres Saillant argues that researchers of Dominican blackness "ought to make an effort to assemble instances of active participation of Afro-Dominicans in building and defining their history. Those instances, compiled from the field of social action, an invaluable *living text*, an indispensable document that is hardly detectable through archival research (Torres-Saillant,

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[53] For example, Torres-Saillant describes Dominican blacks and mulattos as "targets of the systematic disparagement deployed . . . by the Eurocentric discourse of the country's intellectual elite" ("Tribulations" 136).

Introduction, 8, emphasis is mine). It is precisely within this conjuncture that Rita Indiana makes her intervention of Dominican perceptions about race in her art. Particularly in *La mucama*, Indiana privileges the concept of afro-centric religious practices as living culture as ways to construe a critique of racial conceptions in the Dominican Republic. Thus, Indiana portrays the complexities of living in a society where dictatorship legacies, or the legacies of an undemocratic past, permeate daily experiences and interactions through the literary representation of embodied Caribbean spiritual practices.

The tension between archival and living culture pointed out by Torres-Saillant resonates with Diana Taylor's concepts proposed in *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003). The repertoire, as defined by Taylor, "enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing—in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge" (20). Rita Indiana works with this embodied knowledge in most of her artistic productions.[54] The treatment of afro-centric culture in *La mucama* proposes a representation of body materiality as a site of embodied knowledge. Indiana privileges body materiality to advance Olokún's actions in the plot. However, emphasizing the materiality of black and indigenous bodies also puts forth a critique about racial perceptions in the Dominican Republic. We learn about what bodies of color socially signify through the construction and treatment of the characters' bodies in the text.

First, bodies become a medium for Santería, an afro-centric religion mainly dependent on orally transmitted knowledge. This is reiterated when Olokún takes possession of Acilde's body through the enactment of a Santería ritual. Eric Vitier approaches the recently-possessed body, "te dimos el cuerpo que querías y ahora tú nos has dado el cuerpo que necesitábamos," underscoring the body given to Olokún now (70). The fact that the black deity possesses the body represents a juxtaposition of Acilde's whitened body resulting from Dominican national conceptions with Olokún's black body (in image portrayals of the deity) and spirit. Through this strategy, the black body—physical, spiritual, and epistemological—is brought to the fore. Furthermore, bodies, whether physically presented or removed from Dominican space, also become a metaphor to speak of plunder and disposability in the Caribbean region for the sake of political-economic progress. This is seen in the description of the disappearance of an indigenous character's father at the hands of the government, "El papá de Ananí, Jacinto Guabá, había desaparecido por órdenes del Trujillato, que quería quitarle las tierras" (Indiana 102); an area that later becomes a tourist destination as well. Body materiality, thus, become a medium through which embodied memory emerges. In this section, I analyze how Indiana's representation of embodied memory in the text poses various critical comments on Dominican national perceptions about race.

Several aspects in the description of Acilde's childhood illuminate how racism functions in the Caribbean and what her Afro-Dominican body represents in Dominican society. The biological origins of Acilde, in a somewhat determinist fashion that links race to inferiority as was foundational in Caribbean thought,[55] predetermine the dispossession from her body before Olokún inhabits it. As it is noted in the text, Acilde is the daughter of "una trigueña de pelo

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[54] This embodied representation of Dominican subjectivity is particularly important in her transmedia project *El Juidero*, where movement and song are central in leading the viewer through Indiana's narrative about Dominican subjectivity in the piece.

[55] I am referring here to the determinist discourse that dominated the construction of the nation in the nineteenth century throughout the Caribbean's foundational ficitons.

bueno que había llegado a Milano con un contrato de modelo, se había enganchado a la heroína y terminó dando el culo en el metro de Roma" (Indiana 18). Rita Indiana's inclusion of the expression "trigueña de pelo bueno" dialogues with the forms in which Caribbean blackness has been whitened through everyday language uses. As is commonly known, terms such as *trigueña, morena, café con leche* are all expressions used to minimize blackness in describing the black body in the Caribbean while *de pelo bueno* o *malo* are also forms in which spoken language praises whiteness or undermines blackness.[56] By pointing out that her mother was a "slightly black person with good hair," the narrating voice signals that Acilde's body is not perceived as fully black. The fact that Acilde cannot be perceived as black speaks to how the whitening of Dominican identity undermines Afro-Dominican subjectivity.

Ultimately, Indiana intertwines the complexities of Acilde's race with a difficult past and a problematic upbringing that speaks to Afro-Dominican bodies as recipients of violence, at both an ideological and physical level. Acilde's body, for example, functions as a recipient of violence through others' perceptions of and interventions with it. Acilde represents not only Afro-Dominican but also transgender subjectivity. In lieu of growing up in a functional family, she is raised by abusive grandparents who organize a rape with the hopes of changing her androgynous appearance: "Los viejos aborrecían sus aires masculinos. El abuelo César buscó una cura para la enfermedad de la nieta, y le trajo a un vecinito para que la arreglara mientras él y la abuela la inmovilizaban y una tía le tapaba la boca. Esa noche Acilde se fue de la casa" (Indiana 19). The grandparents think of Acilde through the category of the sick body. Once again, a determinist conception of the body surfaces in the text through the older generation, who represents the *Trujillato* past and its ideology. However, Indiana quickly subverts this when the narrating voice follows the story by explaining that on the day of the tsunami, that caused the catastrophe in 2027, Acilde: "fue al Mirador . . . a ver cómo la ola terrible se tragaba a sus abuelos" (19). The sudden shift in the narration from one scene (the violation/rape) to the other (the tsunami swallowing her grandparents) sets the stage for a rupture with the past through the inversion of power relations. Foreshadowed by Acilde's childhood experience, the appearance of the natural disaster functions as a representation of the destruction of an obscure national past that used violence to eradicate the body of the "other"—in this case, black and queer bodies. Acilde purposefully observes them from the heights of the Mirador; she inhabits a symbolic space of agency in this scene. Although Olokún has not possessed Acilde's body yet, the repositioning presages the agency that will fully emerge once Acilde becomes Olokún. At this point though, ripped from her family lineage, Acilde can finally pursue becoming who she wants to be.

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[56] For example, Silvio Torres-Saillant explains that in the Dominican Republic, "the ethnic vocabulary of Dominican is rich in words describing gradations of colors" (*Introduction* 24). García-Peña also touches on this topic: "Historians of the language differ in their opinions of the genealogy and chronology of the various terms that eventually came to replace negro in Santo Domingo and of those invented to depict the various gradations of skin color among descendants of slaves" ("Translating Blackness" 13). Mary Ann Gosser-Esquilín in "Trayectorias, tensiones, transiciones y transgresiones: escritoras dominicanas de hoy" discusses how hair is a marker of blackness in Dominican subjectivity and neglecting this blackness is part of the Trujillato's legacy (49). Furthermore, Gosser-Esquilín looks at the trope of hair in contemporary Dominican literature, specifically the works of Kersy Corporan y Marivell Contreras.

Following the permutations of Acilde throughout the text unveils a body going through multiple forms of dispossession, possession, and repossession. Dominican social constructs pre-determine Acilde's bodily dispossession through race and gender violence. However, Acilde becomes who he truly desires to be through Santería and Olokún's possession of his body.[57] A Santería priestess named Omicunlé adopts Acilde and introduces her to Olokún, the deity who has chosen Acilde and will possess her body. Through this process, Omicunlé becomes Acilde's *madrina,* which in Santería is the person who guides and teaches you about your practice and initiation into the religion. Effectively, Omicunlé gives *elekes* [beaded necklaces] to Acilde, which mark the first level of initiation into Santería (do you have a page # for Beliso-De Jesús?): "Esther le había traído un collar de cuentas azules consagrado a Olokún, una deidad más antigua que el mundo, el mar mismo . . . 'Llevalo siempre porque aunque no creas te protegerá'" (28). Through this process, Omnicunlé counteracts Acilde's orphanhood through the offering of motherly, yet also ancestral, protections as Acilde's *madrina,*[58] "No podía evitar sentir cariño por aquella abuela que la cuidaba con la delicadeza que nunca habían tenido con ella sus familiares de sangre" (29). Santería displaces traditional notions of familial lineages here. This displacement contributes to rearticulating Acilde's notion of family through the afro-religious ritual. Her traditional family, representative of the previous nationalist paradigm, dehumanized her through the dispossession of her agency as the result of a planned rape. Countering this, Acilde's Santería family possesses her body as part of the shift of consciousness alluded to through the inclusion of the afro-centric religion in the text.

What changes through the rearticulation of family through Santería is that Acilde's own agency to repossess her body in order to change her gender becomes a condition to Olokún's possession of her body, namely, the spirit's possession of Acilde's body does not occur until after the sex change. After abandoning her biological family and being welcomed by the Santería family, Acilde's main goal is to go through a gender change, which is one of the ways in which she recovers her agency. However, the affect and care Omicunlé shows Acilde does not stop the

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[57] In *Haiti, History and, the Gods* (1998), Joan Dayan suggests that something similar happens to characters being possessed by Haitian voodoo deities in fiction. She explains that "The gods' appearance in the visible world has externalized these women's inner needs, impulses and thoughts" (112). Yet, in the case she studies being possessed is not a condition for subjects to become their true selves, rather, this becoming one's true self is one of the outcomes of being possessed. Ultimately, the process of being possessed facilitates the ability to become more than one thing, including a more authentic self. This is part of the "double meaning" resulting from Haitian voodoo's inscription in history: "The history told by these traditions defies our notions of *identity* and *contradiction*. A person or thing can be two or more things simultaneously. A word can be double, two-sided, and duplicitous. In this broadening and multiplying of a word's meaning, repeated in rituals of devotion and vengeance, we begin to see that what becomes more and more vague also becomes more distinct: it may mean *this*, but *that* too" (33).

[58] In an article titled "'El manto que cubre el mar': Religion, Identity, and the Sea in Rita Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé*," Paul Humphrey further discusses the spiritual contrast of Acilde's newly-acquired family: "Importantly, Acilde comes to consider Esther the caring grandmother she never had, cementing in a certain fashion the familial bonds in the physical world that exist in the spiritual one: though born of Olokún, Yemayá is the mother of the orishas" (114).

maid from planning to steal the sea anemone, now steeply valued, from her Yemayá altar. Acilde needs the money from the anemone sale in order to afford Rainbow Bright, an injection that will provide an instant sex change. Thus, Indiana makes the possibility of the sex change inseparable from the sea creature, as well as Olokún, as a condition for Acilde to become himself. As the plot unfolds, we learn that it is not until Acilde becomes a man that Olokun's possession of his body follows as if the gender change was, in fact, necessary for the androgynous deity to inhabit his body. At this point, Acilde has recovered his agency, yet a stronger force/power also possesses his body. Thus, Olokún's possession of Acilde's body emerges as a constant tension between the protagonist's agency and its limitations. Olokún's possession of Acilde liberates him insomuch as the recovery of his agency and the realization of his gender identity are inherent to it. Yet by simultaneously being possessed, Acilde loses power given that his actions have now merged with Olokún's will.

Acilde's desire to physically be a man becomes inseparable from his fate to be possessed by Olokún; it is precisely at the time when Acilde physically becomes a man that Olokún's spirit possesses his body through a bite of the sea anemone. Acilde finally becomes who he always wanted to be. Not only does Acilde redeem himself through the physical gender change but also Olokún redeems his body through its possession. The black body, represented through Olokún's spirit, again occupies physical material space here and occupies Dominican space as a result. Olokún, "el más misterioso de todos los Orishas" (Indiana 143), "el mar mismo . . . 'El dueño de lo desconocido'" (Indiana 28), now in Acilde's body, represents the return of the spirit of the black body to both the Afro-Dominican body and Afro-Caribbean space, coming out of the darkness of the deep ocean to occupy the material world, no longer dispossessed but rather taking possession of the physical dimension. The soul, and with it the history, of the black body is restored through Olokún's newfound body. Indiana thus subverts how the configuration of power over the body functions and assigns agency to both the black body and spirit through the character of Acilde. Through this distribution of the black body and spirit, Olokún forces Acilde to accept his otherwise-negated blackness.

Transposing Santería, Embodied Indigenous Knowledge

The spirit of Olokún needs a body not only in order to inhabit the material world in the present time but also to intervene in the past. Once Olokún, "una criatura marina que caminaba atrás en el tiempo" (144), occupies Acilde's body in 2027, another human incarnation of the spirit simultaneously appears through an indigenous ritual in the early nineties, one of the past temporalities unfolding in the text. This allows Indiana to use the figure of Olokún as a strategy to articulate yet another layer of critique about racial perceptions in the Dominican Republic through the use of myth. In this layer of critique, Indiana brings our attention to indigeneity, the land, and Joaquín Balaguer's attempts to physically erase indigenous peoples from their native territories. In this sense, the whitening of the Dominican nation can be thought of not just discursively but also through indexing genocide. In the past temporality of the 1990s, Olokún arrives as Giorgio Menicucci through a sea pool called Playa Bó guarded by an indigenous couple: "Nenuco prestaba especial cuidado a la poza y monitoreaba el túnel poblado con las anemonas" (Indiana 105). Ananí and Nenuco, a couple of indigenous Dominicans, welcome him and carry out the traditional ritual done to the "hombre (s) de agua" (105), a creature that effectively arrives "cuando el tiempo los necesita" (105).

At this point of the novel, Indiana shifts the attention here to the description of Ananí's

past, thus restoring or bringing to the fore the bodies erased by past dictatorial power. Ananí starts with her own birth, explaining her family history, and, finally, landing in the present moment. "El papá de Ananí," says the narrator early in the story, "había desaparecido por órdenes de Trujillo, que quería quitarle las tierras" (Indiana 102). For this reason, even though the government sends gifts to keep the family content, Ananí "No aceptaba los regalos porque para ella Balaguer era cómplice de la muerte de su papá" (Indiana 103). Through the arrival of *el hombre de agua* (Olokún) in the nineties, Indiana creates a parallel between indigenous religious practices and the Afro-Dominican culture of 2027.

Although Ananí's character is secondary, she functions as the embodied memory of Dominican indigenous experience juxtaposed with state power. In fact, Ananí's character functions as Taylor's embodied knowledge that makes up the repertoire found in lived experience. In this way, Indiana uses the indigenous counterpart of the water deity to bring about historical events related to Dominican dictatorship. Ananí's knowledge and lived experiences creates a tension between the material goods of the dictatorship meant to erase violence and her resistance through memory. In order for Ananí to reiterate her agency through the occupation of her land, she ought to reject Balaguer's gifts ("No aceptaba los regalos" in the quote above) that seek to compensate for harms caused through the loss of family and land during the *Trujillato*. However, a generational tension emerges once again when Ananí's daughter, Yararí, resents the rejection of the gifts. Ananí, in contrast to Acilde's grandparents, resists national power; she represents a threat to and a rejection of the state. On the other hand, Yararí functions as a seemingly-indifferent generation—in contrast to Acilde—that has already assimilated the erasures of history resulting from national hegemonic discourse. Ultimately, Ananí's will to resist state power remains as the embodied memory of violence, even if the forces of the context she lives in seem to go against it.

Furthermore, Ananí represents the importance or value of an oral history that can trace the indigenous body. Ananí knows that what people read in history books about her ancestors is not true: "Gozaba de las imágenes de sus antepasados en las ilustraciones del libro de historia . . . y sabía, además, que cuanto estaba escrito allí no era correcto" (Indiana 103). Ananí, who also hates writing (Indiana 103), becomes, through this description, a living archive who instead knows the importance of the arrival of the water deity. This knowledge of indigenous traditions appears as more relevant than the constructions of indigeneity appearing in the books used to teach the national history of the country. Thus, indigenous knowledge cannot be fully grasped by the nation-state.

Indiana engages Olokún's power to travel into the past in order to shift the temporality of her narrative and introduce a different historical moment and consciousness. By using the image of water deities, Olokún and *el hombre de agua*, Indiana uses a temporal displacement to privilege the importance of another aspect of the non-white body: embodied memory. In this case, the indigenous body represented by Ananí becomes the legacy of a memory that national power attempted to physically erase from both the territory and the lettered world. This embodied memory carries with it the knowledge that agency over the fate of the region belongs to the deities rather than the state and, just as Santería, has been transmitted through oral tradition. Ultimately, Ananí knows via lived experience far more than what is accounted for through national history; moreover, she knows the importance of the arrival of the water deity. This knowledge is privileged over state power in the text. To an extent, Ananí appears as the counterpart of Omniculé, as a protector of the land and with a certain level of agency to determine the course of history through the appropriate rituals upon the arrival of *el hombre de*

agua. Through this unfolding that mirrors the main plot about Acilde, Indiana accomplishes the merging of two historical moments appearing as equally important for advancing the idea that agency over the course of history ultimately lays in the hands of Antillean deities.

Afro-Dominican Embodied Virtuality

Acilde's Afro-Dominican body as embodied memory and consciousness also manifests as a technological body through virtual embodiment and technological consciousness. The relationship between his body and technology is a constant element throughout the novel. Acilde uses technology from the very beginning until the end of the text through a camera connected to his eyes, an unlimited data plan he accesses through a device worn on the wrist and the internet on an old computer in prison. Katherine Hayles's conception of embodied virtuality can shed some light on the posthuman condition of Acilde's technological body.[59] Embodied virtuality, suggests Hayles, can be thought of as part of a "posthuman view" configuring "human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines" (3) and the general condition of virtuality as one with a "cultural perception that material objects are interpenetrated by information patterns" (13-14). Thinking of Acilde as posthuman and closely entrenched with new technologies allows an analysis that shows the interrelationships between Afro-Dominican and technological consciousness as strategies seeking to decolonize discourse.

Indiana often juxtaposes Acilde's use of technology to black consciousness and bodies in the text. In the opening scene of the text, technology mediates Acilde's gaze over the black body: "Juntando meñique y pulgar, Acilde activa en su ojo la cámara de seguridad que da a la calle y ve a uno de los muchos haitianos que cruzan la frontera para huir de la cuarentena declarada en la otra mitad de la isla" (Indiana 11). In this instance, technology appears as one with Acilde's body as embodied virtuality. Indiana accomplishes this by also making Acilde a technological body. This scene becomes a portrayal that somewhat exaggerates contemporary uses of technology in everyday life (technology fully integrated within the body), but that still dialogues with how we interact with technology in the twenty-first century (technology as an extension of body). Digital culture's performativity can be thought here as inherent to how Acilde approaches reality. For instance, virtual reality requires users' performativity as agents who determine how to navigate cyberspace.[60] Technological mediation in approaching physical reality through the use of virtual technology, thus, require a similar performativity. In this case, Acilde rather than seeing through her eyes, sees through the eyes of technology by activating the camera [cámara de seguridad] within her physical body [en su ojo]. In this sense, technology informs and mediates his experience of reality and more specifically, how and what he sees in the Haitian subject in a clearly racist context supported by technology itself. Yet technological performativity and mediation are also central to the ontological character of electric Santería and will become key in Olokún's possession of Acilde as well later in the text.

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[59] Paul Humphrey in his article titled "'El manto que cubre el mar': Religion, Identity, and the Sea in Rita Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé*," sees the merging of the physical body and technology through Donna Haraway's approach to the conception of the cyborg, whereby the use of technology has been normalized and it appears as such in the text.

[60] Even if such agency has its own limitations as it has been widely discussed by new media scholars such as Alexander Galloway, Anna Watkins Fisher, and Wendy Chun, among others.

Furthermore, in this scene, technology specifically mediates the representation of anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic. Two bodies are juxtaposed: Acilde and the Haitian migrant. As the scene continues, the symbolic value assigned to the bodies appears as equally important in this regard; Acilde's technological body and its relationship to the Haitian body as waste: "Al reconocer el virus en el negro, el dispositivo de seguridad de la torre lanza un chorro de gas letal e informa a su vez al resto de los vecinos, que evitarán la entrada del edificio hasta que los recolectores automáticos, que patrullan calles y avenidas, recojan el cuerpo y lo desintegren" (Indiana 11). Acilde's technological body cannot be separated from the rest of the machines used to exterminate Haitians crossing the border; it appears as a continuity of the machine's work. It is, in fact, after Acilde activates the camera that the exterminating machine is activated as well. This metaphor introduces into the novel discourses of anti-Haitianism that have historically served as a key aspect of whitened Dominican identity, renewed in the twenty-first century after the appearance of cholera following the 2010 earthquake, and used by Dominicans to spread anti-Haitianism on the island (Ricourt 140) and through the internet (Ricourt 150). Moreover, the treatment of the Haitian body as waste can be understood through Acilde's own toxic consciousness, which I discuss in the last section of this chapter.

At the level of the action in the text, the positioning of Acilde's technological body becomes a part of the scaffolding that sustains racist coloniality in the Dominican Republic in relationship to the Haitian's black body. Yet, this juxtaposition, as a literary discourse strategy, decolonizes technological and Afro-Dominican consciousness. By turning our attention to these events at the very beginning of the text, Indiana raises questions about how technology can also serve racist purposes. However, after seeing multiple machines along the street, persecuting and disposing of the Haitian migrants, Acilde activates an app on her wrist to find out more about the machines that were donated by China following the Caribbean disaster (12). Although his technological body continues to function, Acilde's consciousness becomes quickly overwhelmed at this point, "La lluvia de datos que bloquea su vista complica la limpieza . . . y cierra el programa para concentrarse" (Indiana 12), and attention shifts to the interior of the house. Two forms of excess dominate this scene: technological and informational. The excess of technology and its domination over bodies appears as normalized for Acilde. However, the excess of information halts the scene as if something has shifted in Acilde. At this point, the scene generates the same effect at the discursive level whereby, Indiana also generates a critical consciousness by bringing our attention to the potential extremely violent results of Dominican coloniality. In this way, using technological and Afro-Dominican consciousness allows Indiana to fictionalize Dominican racism not too far from reality as well as generate critical discourse about this outstanding issue among the two countries on the island.

I'd like to turn my attention now to the virus in the Haitian body: "Al reconocer el virus en el negro" (Indiana 11). The concept of virus holds equally important meaning in the articulation of racism as it does in new media; in fact, the category of the sick body has been key in supporting both categories of thought. The idea of "virus" in the Haitian body virtually speaks to how biological discourse is used in new media to also attempt to conceptualize the field—a virus can equally appear in a biological body as it does in a computer or technological apparatus.[61] New vocabulary to talk about technology was not created for new media register and

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[61] See Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green's *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (2013) for a broader discussion about the evolution and use of

discourse, but rather the field of new media absorbed pre-existing conceptions to explain the functioning of machines as explained in the beginning of this chapter in dialogue with Manovich. To an extent, this may seem as if understanding machines requires a certain level of humanization in order to make sense of them. Thus, machines become more familiar through the use of pre-existing thought categories pertaining to human experience and culture. In the opening scene with the Haitian migrants crossing the border, however, Indiana inverts this logic. A sick and dehumanized Haitian body appears as a burden to society and the only way to unburden society is with the assistance of seemingly humanized machines. Thus, through this strategy Indiana also dehumanizes, or better yet, computerizes the Haitian body containing the virus, which is also the black body, through its disposal with the machines activated by Acilde's gaze. This fictionalization may facilitate the creation of distance from the terrifying possible outcome of both, racism and technology. Yet, it also generates a strong critique of the condition of the black body in Dominican Republic because of the equally graphic yet normalizing character that Acilde's embodied virtuality produces in the scene. Just as technology, racism on the island, and national coloniality, it is an everyday thing, and, ultimately, forms part of the extreme violence that conforms Caribbean imagination.

The merging of the sick body, the black body, and the machines also speaks to new media as a space that although seemingly democratic, can also reproduce hate and racist discourses. As Lisa Nakamura suggests in her conceptualization of "cybertypes," the internet re-inscribes previous racist discourse in virtual interactions rather than eradicating it (6). This notion can help us think about how the centrality of new technologies in *La mucama* may seek to highlight its role in perpetuating anti-black and anti-Haitian discourses in the Dominican Republic. Somewhat skeptical of these technologies, similarly to Lage's perspective discussed in the following chapter, the narrator here makes some of the dangers of technology explicit. Indiana's skepticism regarding technology organically results from her privileging of a thorough (rather than one-sided) approach to technology that brings our attention to both the positive and the negative aspects of technology's outcomes depending on who has power over it. Nonetheless, while Indiana creates this continuum of black-sick-technology body to emphasize the role of technological advances in supporting racism, new media lexicon continues to facilitate the articulation of black consciousness throughout the novel. It is, indeed, through the articulation of this black consciousness intertwined with new media that Indiana advances a potential decolonial discourse of the post-human.

Electric Santería and Black Consciousness

While most scholarship about the post-human has been centered on first-world social integration of technology and white bodies (Iman Jackson 2015), there are some approaches that allow us to think critically of what it means to become post-human for non-white bodies. For instance, Zakiyah Iman Jackson suggests that dehumanization and erasure of blackness in post-humanist views result from the emergence of the field at the end of a long tradition of Western philosophical dominated by racist views (216). Iman Jackson concludes that "terrestrial movement toward the nonhuman is simultaneously movement toward blackness, whether blackness is embraced or not, as blackness constitutes the very matter at hand" (217). In this

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the concept virus in technology, from its original use to more recent uses such as "viral" media content.

sense, the critic invites us to think of post-humanism or the non-human through a decolonial lens that renders the black body visible. In this section, I analyze how the intertwining of black consciousness[62] and embodied virtuality advance a decolonial perspective of post-humanism through literary discourse.

The convergence between black embodied memory/consciousness and technological embodiment/consciousness cannot be separated from how new technologies have shifted contemporary Santería practices. I would like to turn now to some key scholarly works on new media and Santería in order to refrain from the tendency to only see new technologies through a US-centered lens. Instead, while Hayles's embodied virtuality is key to understanding how new technologies change our relationship to our surroundings, I find scholarship on new media and Santería particularly useful to understand the multiple layers through which *La mucama* dialogues with Caribbean-centered digital culture today as well.

Santería's episteme has historically been oral and embodied. In his article "From Oral to Digital: Rethinking the Transmission of Tradition in Yoruba Religion," George Edward Brandon describes this characterization of Santería as "spatial concepts, ritual gestures, and patterns of physical responses [that] also served as supports and embodiments of memory" (Brandon 462). Yet, with the emergence of new technologies, and specifically the internet, the ways Santería practitioners learn and transmit knowledge have changed in recent history. Whereas the transmission of knowledge was something that happened only via real-life encounters, the internet opens the possibility for Santería practitioners to share knowledge through virtual communities. Joseph M. Murphy analyzes how the "globalization of orisha traditions in the virtual communities of the Internet" (471) and the "florescence of orisha traditions into cyberspace" produces "changes in the understanding of orisha and changes in the individuals and communities devoted to them" (475). Thus, the internet generates a shift in how Santería knowledge is embodied and how its embodiments of memory circulate in the contemporary world.

A key aspect that emerges from this shift is the notion that the internet facilitates the creation of alternative communities. After the 1990s, Santería became a highly monetized religion in the context of the Cuban Special Period leading to economic exploitation of new practitioners.[63] In this context and under such conditions, "The internet," suggests Murphy, "becomes a way out for the isolated and distrustful to enter into contact with a trustworthy community of believers or at least a community in which one's vulnerability to ill will and exploitation is minimized and more under the person's immediate control" (465). In this way, the internet generates a new mode of community in Santería, one that challenges traditional forms of relationships based on hierarchical structures of power that determined who owned access to knowledge within the practice based on age, heritage, and location. Moreover, questions regarding agency can be raised from this challenge to traditional belief systems that previously reserved access to the religious practice to those who could receive it from previous generations

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[62] I use the term black consciousness here in dialogue with Paul Gilroy's conceptualization of double consciousness and the black Atlantic as the cultural convergence of English, American, African, and Caribbean cultures in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993).

[63] Beliso-De Jesús suggests: "Transnational Santería is thus crucial to racial-ethnic politics and commercialism in U.S.-based diaspora communities, and to the reinvigoration of the Cuban economy through tourism since the 1990s" (16).

through real life encounters. These changes in the practices of Santería allows problematizing access and agency. Who has the right to access Santería's embodiments of memory? Is a shift in agency implied within the virtual reconfiguration of community over access to embodiments of memory in Santería?

Murphy suggests that previous expansion of Santería, resulting from 1950s and 1980s migrating Cuban Santería practitioners, is reinvigorated in the digital era: "With the advent of easy access to the Internet, these lines are rebounding with electric speed. Individuals who have never met an *olorisa* face-to-face are constructing identities as *orisa* devotees and linking to Web sites to acquire and pass on information" (478, italics in original). These new forms of community can be seen, suggests Murphy, through the "electronic networks of bulletin boards, chat rooms, list-serves, e-groups, and other methods of electronic communication" (480). The lack of face-to-face interactions, besides being new to the practice of Santería, can also be thought of as a form of democratization of knowledge facilitated by the internet. In this case, a highly hierarchal and discreet religious practice becomes publicly accessible to a bigger audience through its insertion into virtual space. Building on Murphy's mapping of Santería virtual communities, Beliso-De Jesús coins the term "virtual ochascape" to encompass Santería's digital practices such as "e-botanicas," "cyber elders," and "even an iPhone app to instruct drummers to learn Havana-style batá" (52). In this way, Santería appears as fully integrated with and in virtual reality as an extension of its more traditional embodiments of memory reserved for face-to-face interactions dependable on real-life hierarchies of power over knowledge.

Santería's insertion into cyberspace and more traditional forms of memory embodiments in the religion need not be mutually exclusive, but rather the former can be seen as an extension of the latter. Or at least that is where Aisha Beliso-De Jesús's fascinating anthropological intervention adds to the conversation. In dialogue with previous Santería scholars, Beliso-De Jesús elaborates the conceptual category of electric Santería to speak of the multiple ways in which Santería and new media intertwine. Beliso-De Jesús adds that "Many transnational Santería practitioners reconceptualize religious community in the everyday negotiations between distance, proximity and practice . . . and the uses of new media have drastically altered its previous positioning" as a "counter-hegemonic practice," "popular tradition," and "alternative 'cult' spirituality," among other key characteristics of the religion (15). For example, Beliso-De Jesús discusses the reconceptualization of religious community in terms of the migratory movements of Santería practitioners and how this resulted in expanding the Santería community outside of Cuba (15). Through this process, Santería was also commercialized and inserted into the neo-liberal market (Beliso-De Jesús 15-16).

For Beliso-De Jesús, transnational Santería not only contests notions of racial backwardness sustained by westernized misconceptions of the religion, but she also identifies two ways in which new media becomes central in Santería practices, that is, the stimulation of copresences through video screens and the practice of technorituals.[64] Engaging with Santería's concept of *corriente spiritual* [spiritual current], Beliso-De Jesús elaborates on how copresences,

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[64] Beliso-De Jesús explains that attempts to discredit Santería as a backward religion have failed to gain track: "…the fantastical mythos of racial backwardness has not led to a decline in these practices or the uses of new media; rather, Santería has emerged as a growing transnational religion, and, as I will show, media technologies are central to contemporary understandings of travel and mobility" (5).

that is, when a spirit force enters a body, function and are conceptualized similarly to electrical currents in traditional Santería practice (42). "Like electricity, when a spiritual current is "strong" (*fuerte*) priests are "shook" or "mounted" as if shocked by the power of copresence," Beliso-De Jesús points out and adds, "Through videos, copresences are similarly stimulated and stimulate" (42). Furthermore, videoscapes function as a way to expand "Santería fluidity" as opposed to "fixing or making static Santería ontologies," suggests the author, when speaking about "how copresences operate through videos and electrical spiritual currents" (Beliso-De Jesús 36). Thus, videoscapes in television screens can become a tool in an orisha's possession of a practitioner. The practice of techno-ritual, on the other hand, concerns a physical convergence of technology and the Santería practitioner similar to, or perhaps following, Hayles's logic of embodied virtuality. Beliso-De Jesús explains that in technorituals "technology is not simply a tool of practice but an integrated element of ritual gestures . . . Similarly, long distance messaging in techno assisted rituals extends the [physical] bodily capacities of orisha and other co-presences, collapsing, time, space, and place" (62).

The centrality of new media in contemporary Santería practices ought to be considered in reading Indiana's convergence of Afro-Dominican/indigenous embodiment/consciousness and technological embodiment/consciousness. New media lexicon becomes fundamental to describe Acilde's engagement with technology and ability to travel in time throughout the text. In this process, black consciousness becomes inseparable from technology because the process of Olokún's possession of Acilde appears described through the register of new media. Here the text dialogues with Beliso-De Jesús's electric Santería and the idea that technology can serve as an extension of bodily possession. The following is the description offered when both Acilde and Giorgio Menicucci fully become connected across times: "Igual que un rato antes [Menicucci] había dicho el nombre de la sacerdotisa, dijo también el suyo: <Acilde Figueroa>, y su mente, reaccionando al password, hizo asequibles todos sus contenidos…" (Indiana 109). This is a key moment in understanding the significance of new media in the text because Olokún's possesion is described as one would describe accessing digital technology. As it would be required to log into a password protected computer, hard drive or cloud, there is a required password to access "content" consisting of Olokún capacity to make the bodies he inhabits see different temporalities. Indiana appropriates new media discourse, a literary take on electronic Santería, to describe the occurrence of the two bodies connected across time and with the spirit of Olokún as an interface. The description assigns the bodies an embodied virtuality that later determines how the narrating voice speaks of the access to multiple temporalities. Acilde equates his newly acquired power to travel in time with technological visual culture: "*¿Tengo dos cuerpos o es que mi mente tiene la capacidad de transmitir en dos canales de programación simultánea?*" (Indiana 110, emphasis in original). Thus, the vocabulary offered by new media discourse allows Acilde to articulate the experiences brought about by Olokún's possession of his body. Even though the character cannot fully make sense of his ability to travel in time, by alluding to his own relationship to technology, he begins to engage with accessing Giorgio Menicucci's reality. As a result, a type of videoscape becomes the lens/form through which Acilde makes sense of his bodily possesion's shared reality with Giorgio's in the nineties.

Acilde not only makes sense of his newly acquired ability to travel in time through digital technology visualization, but also uses the internet as practical support to find out what to do in the past temporality. Giorgio Menicucci's mind and body in the 1990s are controlled by Acilde's access to his reality in the twenty-first century: "Como antes utilizaba PriceSpy, Acilde ahora utilizaba la computadora que tenía en la celda para buscar palabras o nombres que

desconocía y que surgían en una conversación" (Indiana 139). It is important to note here the ochascapes generated by those who seek access to Santería knowledge through the internet mentioned earlier. Contently dispossessed of his biological and Santería families at this point, Acilde seeks guidance precisely from the internet to understand how to navigate Olokún's possession of his body. In spite of a lack of community, Acilde finds his way through real life with the assistance of a world made of virtual communities.

These parallel navigations, the internet and temporal, permeate the text form as well whereas the actions occurring are intercalated within the sentences in a single paragraph, thus, generating an aesthetic similar to that of the glance:[65] "Acilde baja la última pastilla con un buche de agua de su lavamanos y se recuesta en la camita. El peso de sus parpados clausura el acceso de Giorgio a la celda en la que ha vivido su cuerpo original" (Indiana 180). This exemplary passage shows how the characters' experiences of multiple temporalities are constructed in a computerized aesthetic through which we can access multiple screens or contents interchangeably. The narration rejects staying within a single temporal framework of the classical construction of a scene. Instead, the narration begins to intermittently shift between temporalities and spaces within the bounds of a single event. The narrating voice reiterates this when Acilde/Menicucci's actions are described as "jalando los hilos de Giorgio y Roque desde su celda en La Victoria como si se tratara de un videojuego" (Indiana 176). Ultimately, new media's lexicon, platforms, and practices become key to articulate how the action evolves throughout the plot. At times, more so than the powers granted by Olokún's possession of the bodies.

Re-birth of Caribbean Discourse: Agency, Historicity, and Toxic Consciousness

Acilde is not only a black body and a technological body, but also a body of water: Olokún. Early in the text, Omiculné describes Olokún as ultimately the ocean itself. For this reason, the spirit of Olokún embodied by Acilde appears crucial to the events taking place in 2027, the novel's primary temporality, a time when the ocean, Olokún's material manifestation, has recently been destroyed due to political leaders' negligence. Indiana extends her depiction of Afro-Caribbean subjectivity through the implementation of the ocean as a metaphor. The ocean metaphor—its previous quasi-mythical beauty and its current destruction after a nuclear spill— brings about an eco-critique to views that see the earth, the ocean and specifically the Caribbean region as exploitable for economic progress. In 2027, the Caribbean is now "Ese desastre por el que llegaban al país oceanógrafos y médicos y por el que ahora el Caribe era un *caldo oscuro putrefacto*" (Indiana 114, emphasis is mine).

Once Olokún possesses his body, Acilde's travel in time is meant to save the Caribbean from current catastrophe, yet it fails to meet this goal. Acilde's possession will allow him to act as Menicucci in the 1990s and tell the young Said Bona, current president, about how the nuclear weapons can cause the ocean catastrophe. Thus, the Afro-Caribbean body appears as subject to the precariousness in the region, yet also as the sector with the most power over the region's fate. The idea that Afro-Caribbean deities have the ultimate power regarding the future of the region intersects all the layers of the text. Indiana uses Afro-Caribbean myth to create a different way of thinking Caribbean catastrophe. Thinking catastrophe through the black body, Indiana suggests

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[65] A full discussion of the aesthetic of the glance can be found in the chapter on Cuba and Jorge E. Lage's text *Archivo*.

that marginal subjects have distinct ways in which to negotiate with life-changing or traumatizing events through spiritual practices. Indiana posits agency in these beliefs and their ability to create their own circumstances, even if these were to be disastrous. In this section, I analyze how ocean catastrophe and its connection to Olokún consolidate decolonial discourse in the text. Moreover, I argue that decoloniality of the imagined Caribbean in *La mucama* emerges through the unmaking of idealizing views of the Caribbean. More specifically, Acilde's posthuman subjectivity and toxic consciousness, resulting from living within the ocean catastrophe, function as the foundation for the unmaking of such views.

Across the novel, the image of the ocean—as Olokún, as a steeply valued anemone, as catastrophe, as an idealized ocean—ties all the different stories and temporalities together. The centrality of the ocean in the narrative dialogues with a long-time tradition of the ocean's functionality as a literary trope in the Caribbean. This includes determinist nineteenth-century discourse, which connected the tropical Caribbean region to the degenerative character of the subjects inhabiting it. However, in the novel, it is Afro-Antillean deities, not landscape, that determines the region's fate. Indiana traces the ocean catastrophe back into original plunder from colonial times and through the dictatorships of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo and Joaquín Balaguer. Indiana thereby rewrites twentieth-century political history in the Dominican Republic so as to afford agency and power to the orishas. In Indiana's work, the Caribbean subject is not inherently doomed, as was once assumed by determinist approaches.

Olokún incarnates the ultimate power over the fate of the region. Rather than following their mission, both Acilde and Giorgio "decide" to allow for the man-made and natural disaster to take its course. Yet, it is Olokún who ties both characters together and, thus, although the decision of the bodily incarnations (Acilde and Giorgio) may appear as a form of neglect, it can also be argued that agency over the course of history ultimately appears as dependable on the Afro-Antillean deity. Olokún's agency over the future of the region functions as a rewriting of the deity's original myth to put forth a different version of history.

Before going further into analyzing the function of Afro-Caribbean myth in Indiana's decolonial discourse, it is helpful at this point, to introduce some of the accounts regarding Olokún's origins. Understanding Olokún's myth sheds light on Indiana's strategy to put this deity's agency at the center of causing future ocean catastrophe and toxicity. Indiana accomplishes decolonizing discourse through the inclusion of Santería in the text because her inclusion of Olokún, effectively, functions as a contemporary 'spin-off'/remake of the orisha's original myth that can speak to pressing concerns in the twenty-first century. In general, the few existing scholarly accounts of Olokún coincide in that this orisha, fueled by discontent, violently utilized his power against others. I find Cañizares' explanation of Olokún the most useful to understand the relationship between the deity's myth and how it functions in *La mucama* even though there are different accounts of the deity's original myth.[66] Cañizares explains the following:

> Back when there were only six orishas in Ile-Ife, the androgynous deity of the sea, Olokun, dared to challenge Obatalá's supremacy over orishas and humans alike. Olokun was enormously powerful; Olofi had made the mistake of bestowing too much power on the ruler of the seas. To show Obatalá his or her power, Olokún made the waters rise,

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[66] For other takes on Olokún's myth, see John Mason's *Olokun: Owner of Rivers and Seas*. Brooklyn: Yoruba Theological Archimistry (1996) and Paul Humphrey's "'El manto que cubre el mar'": Religion, Identity, and the Sea in Rita Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé*" (2016).

totally covering the earth and killing everything except the orishas and the few animals and humans who were able to hang on to a silver ladder Obatalá sent down from Ilé Olorun, the heavens, where all orishas had gone to seek refuge. Not even Obatalá could contain Olokun by himself, but Olodumare, who had earlier made a vow never to interfere in worldly affairs again, made an exception and increased Obatalá's awesome power. Obatalá— with the help of Olodumare himself— tied Olokun down with seven huge silver chains. Olokun gave up but asked Obatalá to give him one human life per day, to which Obatalá agreed. (62-63)

Cañizares's account of Olokún allows thinking about the parallels between the deity's myth and contemporary history in the Caribbean. The excess of power conferred to the deity could dialogue with the political economic power distributions that have allowed oppression in the Caribbean whether through local power (nationally installed dictatorships) or external power (imperial intervention in the region). Another important aspect here could be the deity's decision to make the waters rise in order to create a flood. This aspect of the myth dialogues with the ways in which these powers could also be held accountable for the environmental exploitation/climate changes resulting in the deterioration of the environment and worsening of natural disasters experienced in the present. Yet, in spite of how ironic or problematic, Indiana transfers Olokún's power to Acilde, an average citizen, thus, granting him the power and agency to decide the fate of the region. As a result, Indiana rewrites the past to make Olokún's revenge the cause for disaster rather than neocolonial disregard. This concern for how disasters have worsened in the region is something that appears across many different contemporary works and has become central to contemporary Caribbean imaginaries.[67] In *La mucama*, the concern for environmental deterioration poses an eco-critique that subverts previous discourse about the Caribbean landscape, thereby privileging a decadent and toxic (is)landscape to advance a way to decolonize subjectivity.

Rita Indiana merges Acilde with Olokún in order to develop parallels with the deity's mythical story and the Dominican Republic's political-economic history. In doing so, Indiana is actively challenging racialized discourses that whitened Dominican identity. The power is no longer in the hands of the nation-state here, but, instead, is in the hands of marginal racialized subjects, whether these subjects know what to do with it or not. By turning Acilde into Olokun the author accomplishes the horizontality of the divine merged with the mundane, arguably, a primordial characteristic of Santería's own belief system. In the beginning, Acilde as Olokún does not know his mission nor does he change his way of interacting with his surroundings.[68]

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[67] Some examples include Jorge E. Lage's *La autopista: the movie,* Erick Mota's *Habana Underguater*, and the music project *Trending Tropics*, among others.

[68] This aspect of Acilde's reaction could be a result of the fact that Olokún is not a deity made through initiation (installed in santeros' head) by Santería practitioners due to the overwhelm caused by his *ashé* [spiritual force] but rather received through other ritualistic practices. Cañizares explains the difference between the orishas known as *ochas*, who are seated or installed in the process through which a practitioner becomes a santero known as *kariocha* [making saint] from those who aren't seated and can only be received through other spiritual practices. Cañizares makes this distinction by explaining the following: "Orishas that are received: Because their ashé is not meant to be contained inside a person's head—either because it is too overwhelming, as in the case of Olokun . . . These orishas . . . never possess humans, but songs and dances of praise are performed in their honor" (Cañizares 53).

Although we learn the purpose of Olokún's possession of earthly bodies should be saving the Caribbean from the current catastrophe, Acilde ends up imprisoned and surfing the web for ten years: "Como antes usaba PriceSpy, Acilde ahora utiliza la computadora que tenía en la celda" (Indiana 139). This is the same time it takes him to understand what his mission was: in the previous life of the turn of the century, as upper class Giorgio, he was supposed to alert a younger version of president Said Bona of the potential catastrophe but instead he chooses to continue enjoying his luxurious life by the coast. However, at the exact moment when Acilde learns his mission, he is unable to prevent catastrophe. Thus, Indiana activates here Olokún's capacity to cause disaster. By rendering the power onto Olokún, Indiana's portrayal of catastrophe attempts to decolonize black subjectivity while also posing an open-ended question about who is truly responsible for the disaster. Instead of relegating responsibility to state power only, this question shifts the perspective about what type of power do citizens have over a present that may have been pre-determined by the past. To an extent, Acilde should be empowered to create change based on his experience of the present time and catastrophe, but he cannot change the future. Indiana also makes a commentary here about the impossibility of changing the past's impact on the environmental state in the present time. This decision directly aligns with one of the most important characteristics of Olokún as a deity that causes massive floods when upset. Ultimately, Indiana's portrayal of the catastrophe as Olokún's revenge/punishment privileges a view that sees both Afro-Caribbean and natural powers as capable of shattering the artificial/westernized constructions of the Dominican nation.

Moreover, a type of 'toxic consciousness' emerges in the text as part of representing this catastrophe. The term 'toxic consciousness' was coined in eco-criticism to conceptualize literary representations of waste generated by humans and how this toxic waste progressively becomes a part of and creates a shift in subjects (Deitering 196-198). For Cynthia Deitering, toxic consciousness also implicates a change of historic consciousness whereby subjects shift their perception of their surroundings and start perceiving parts of themselves in the waste produced by society (197-98). This heightened sense of one's role in the production of toxic waste can be thought in relationship to our agency in relationship to the environment's toxicity. The consciousness shift from historical to toxic—understanding the self through the imminent physical damage/results of toxicity rather than through a connection to the past—also privileges a perspective that sees waste as an extension of the body, thus, it is the potential embodiment of toxicity. An early example of toxic consciousness in *La mucama* appears in the opening scene with the portrayal of the Haitian body as waste discussed in the previous section. I borrow this term to explore how Indiana constructs Caribbean toxicity in the text, where sea life has ceased to exist due to a nuclear spill and where nuclear toxicity triggers the representation of a toxic consciousness through the characters' relationship to their environment. A discussion about toxic consciousness in *La mucama* also advances an understanding of how decolonial discourse functions in the text and allows a new perspective that goes beyond the generalized notion of approaching Indiana's work as speculative fiction.[69]

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[69] Although there are many scholarly contributions in studies of Rita Indiana that consider her work speculative fiction, I argue that her work is tied to real concerns regarding the environment in the Caribbean. Furthermore, Rita Indiana has also rejected this notion through her personal social media, by accompanying news about environmental disasters in the Caribbean with quotes such as "I'm not writing speculative fiction…" (@ritaindiana).

Acilde's toxic consciousness in the text becomes evident in how he relates to a landscape inseparable from poisonous agents and unfamiliar to the reader due to the extremity of environmental wrongs (death of sea life, acid rain, epidemics).[70] Ocean catastrophe in *La mucama* produces this notion of toxicity in the text. In fact, in his unfolding as Olokún, Acilde should've had agency over the production of the toxicity he experiences throughout the novel. But ultimately, neither he nor the deity prevents the catastrophe from taking place. As a catalyst for environmental toxicity, and toxic consciousness by extension, ocean catastrophe plays a central role in defining how characters relate, how their actions take place, and how space is re-configured in the city. The catastrophe becomes a catalyst for all the key events that take place in the text; these are all related to the ocean, its catastrophic state, and an outstanding toxic consciousness: "Desaparecieron especies completas en cuestión de semanas. La crisis ambiental se extendió hasta el Atlántico" (Indiana 113-14). This toxicity has killed all sea life, but also it becomes very present in the everyday life of characters, specially Acilde. In fact, the narrative consistently describes how Acilde thinks or feels about her environment. For example, Caribbean humidity has turned into a hazard: "Esta humedad que antes permitía una fertilidad excesiva, que alimentaba el follaje de la selva tropical en Sosúa, era en el 2037 una opresiva molestia irrespirable" (Indiana 169). Once in prison, Acilde also prefers the indoor environment over the toxic environment "en ese futuro de lluvias ácidas y epidemias en el que la cárcel era preferible al exterior" (Indiana 176).

However, Acilde's toxic consciousness also generates a type of rupture with previous national discourse, especially nineteenth- and twentieth-century discourses such as geographical determinism, exoticism of the landscape, and tourism industry's portrayal of a beautiful Caribbean. Through Olokún's decision to allow catastrophe resulting in toxicity, Indiana materializes Acilde's role as an implicit producer of this toxic waste and his eventual relationship to the disaster. With the Caribbean ripped off of its beauty and becoming a space where even prison appears more appealing than the exterior environment, Indiana reimagines the Caribbean through a portrayal that honors lived experience in the region while also reiterating the power of Afro-Caribbean subjectivity. This construction of toxicity as rupture and Acilde-Olokún as an agent in the production of said toxicity, thus, reiterates Afro-Caribbean characters or powers as historical agents with the power to determine the course of history.

Thinking of Olokún as the ultimate agent who caused the catastrophe and toxicity allows us to further explore Indiana's discursive move. To consider how Indiana shifts Caribbean imagination here, I'd like to turn to one last function of Olokún in Santería practices. As part of his discussion of Olokún in his book *Olokún: Owner of Rivers and Seas,* John Mason explains that in a Yoruba femininity ritual, Olokún along with Yemayá are honored as "champions of women . . . who represent the means of salvation and rebirth for those that have been abandoned, exiled and given up for dead" (17). Similarly, to the scene with the protagonists' grandparents mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Acilde-Olokún's agency over the possibility of causing catastrophe gives way to complete destruction, not only of the present but also of anything that came before. What is implied in generating a toxic environment through

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[70] Not so unfamiliar in relationship to contemporary environmental struggles faced in the region. Hurricane Maria's landfall in Puerto Rico, a viral clip coming out of Dominican Republic showing a shore flooded with trash, or Cuba's own struggles with Havana's massive floodings in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma are some key examples of the environmental changes that are happening concurrently to the production of Caribbean fictions raising eco-critical concerns.

catastrophe is the end of the Caribbean as we know it. However, even though toxicity disables the ability to grant a rebirth of the region at the fictional level, the rupture generated by the emergence of this consciousness in the text speaks to the author's own ability to re-generate, rearticulate, and, why not, rebirth Caribbean discourse itself.

The rebirthing of Caribbean discourse proposed by Indiana seeks to bring to light the obsolescence of previous paradigms when it comes to thinking about Caribbean contemporary realities. Rita Indiana has become, without a doubt, a key figure in twenty-first century Caribbean thought through her work that also extends outside of literature such as her musical projects and accompanying media or her critical columns published in the newspaper *El país*. Indiana's musical project *El juidero*, for example, best exemplifies the writer's ability to update Caribbean cultural production through the blend of merengue, the Dominican Republic's national/dictatorship music (Sellers 81), with electronic music. Indiana makes a similar move with the literary. By generating a Caribbean interface imagination that encompasses multiple temporalities, spaces, and agents she brings about the decay experienced in the Caribbean as a result of twentieth-century national formations. The form given to the re-birthing of Caribbean discourse articulated by Indiana, thus, also speaks to the ways in which Caribbean subjects negotiate with state neglect through the disavowal of the nation and consume culture through digital media. The impossibility of regeneration at the fictional level in the novel integrates the idea that there will be no positive outcomes through the continuity of old paradigms. Yet, Indiana's own work with Caribbean discourse announces the possibility of a regeneration of Caribbean thought. And it is precisely through regeneration of this thought that contemporary experimental literature advances decolonization. If a new way of thinking or questioning the Caribbean is possible as we stand in the midst of the most terrible outcomes from past history, then, it is also possible to generate decolonial ways of existing within catastrophic realities.

Chapter 3: Mediated Subjectivities, Portable Memories, and Database Aesthetics in Cuba: A Theory of the Novela-Paquete in Jorge E. Lage's *Archivo*

Jorge E. Lage's *Archivo* (2015) is an exercise in imagining social aspects neglected in Cuban national discourse; therefore, this imagination also elaborates a critique of the national paradigm on the island.[71] Lage accomplishes these goals through a strong commentary about state control in Cuba throughout the years 2009 through 2012, which serve as one temporal framework in the novel and coincide with the period when access to the Internet was expanded in Cuba. Simultaneously, *Archivo*'s literary form as digital memory puts forth notions of technology as a tool for both greater agency as well as the repression of citizens. This tension also emerges in Cuba after the introduction of the Internet. The implementation of these strategies in the text facilitates the creation of a fictional archive, closely tied to Cuban reality, that collects the erasures resulting from state control and resonates with the ever-growing Internet archives. As a result, the representation of the relationship between cultural producers and state control in the text also dialogues with an archive made of genealogies left at the margins of national discourse. In this way, Lage's construction of an imagination in *Archivo* is strongly intertwined with contemporary anti-national tones (Ludmer) given its attempt to recover instances silenced by national official discourse.

In this chapter, I propose that Lage's creation of *Archivo* as a *novela-paquete* becomes a key strategy in said contestation of official national discourse. The introduction of new technologies in Cuba became a way in which citizens exercise a certain level of agency over their cultural consumption. The technology of el *paquete* is one venue in which Cubans exercise this agency. This technology consists of a hard drive containing up to one terabyte of different media such as US television shows, online websites, or magazines that circulates extra officially among Cubans as an alternative to the difficulties of navigating online. Early in *Archivo*, Lage uses the image of a hard drive (portable memory storage) as a metaphor for narrative discontinuity. In this way, the subjective memory constructed in the text is presented as a random collection of bits of information, or data, that the narrator has compiled for a book project about State Security. These fragments, presented as files, tell the stories of citizens' subjective experiences with contemporary technological practices in Cuba. Moreover, the centrality of the hard drive dialogues with Cuba's economy of el *paquete*. Specifically, the novel's use of the hard drive metaphor as a structuring device highlights the ways in which citizenship is negotiated in terms of access and engagement with Internet-based information, that is, digital archives. Through this relationship with Cuba's own digital practices, the text becomes a *novela-paquete*, which functions as a cultural object that uses printed book and digital media technologies to converge a polyphony of voices or mediated subjectivities that make up Cuban imagination existing outside of official national discourse.

The technology of the book facilitates Lage's ability to delve into topics of Internet access and surveillance in ways otherwise unattainable through the use of digital media. Broadly speaking, *Archivo*'s plot primarily focuses on the relationship between Cuban writers and state surveillance. The action takes place in a futuristic Havana existing inside a hard drive while the narrator in the text is attempting to write a book about State Security. Part of the narrator's

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[71] An important distinction regarding national discourse in Cuba is how the concept of nation is intertwined with the concept of the Revolution. Once the Revolution begins, nation and revolution are inseparable. Thus, nation and revolution are used interchangeably as well.

endeavor requires him to be in communication with a State Security (SS) agent, named El Agente, who oversees his behavior and establishes boundaries for his writing. The research undertaken by the narrator involves interviewing citizens that work on either end of surveillance (the ones surveilling as well as the ones surveilled). The citizens that surveil are primarily Yoan/Yoanis and Baby Zombi, who work in the prostitution and undead populations respectively. The citizens surveilled are represented mainly through the prisoners in Villa Marista—a questionable detention center in Cuba. The narrator appears as a neutral entity at first; however, as the list of events in the text progressively come to an "end," the narrator-protagonist seemingly becomes an agent as well. The collection of interviews, encounters, notes, and thoughts resulting from his research become the main content of the fragments found in *Archivo*. At the end, the narrator protagonist reiterates that what we are reading is the unfinished draft of the book he attempted to write. The emphasis of, or negotiation with, the book technology underlines the format of the text as a form of resistance to surveillance. By using a printed book as his main medium, Lage opts out of trackable digital objects that can be more prone to surveillance, and instead chooses to create an offline object, just like the *paquete*. Thus, *Archivo* as a book chronicles digital practices in Cuba yet resists the vulnerability to surveillance more likely to result from using a format bound to Internet connection.

Critics include Lage's work within the broader group of writers known as Generación Zero. This group of younger writers emerges during the early 2000s as part of a scene that paid special attention to topics of technology and dissent in literary works. Generation Zero's irreverence to nationalism has been a recurrent theme in scholarly criticism. More specifically, their extreme critique of conformist nationalism has been broadly studied by critics such as Emily Maguire (343).[72] By developing a criticism of the Revolutionary nation and in dialogue with a broader generational move, Lage elaborates alternative forms of memory and community that are primarily founded in unconventional temporal and formal constructions. First, destabilizing temporality contributes to creating distance from the immediate present. This is intrinsically related to the generation's refusal of national time.[73] Secondly, in spite of placing a post-modern pastiche at the forefront, Lage attempts to foreground a narrative that is deeply rooted in overcoming national, as well as dictatorial, trauma.[74] These two aspects are also related

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[72] Emily Maguire emphasizes this aspect about Generation Zero's general approach to the nation: "These narratives are either highly critical of conformist national (i.e., Revolutionary) collective perceptions of time and/or experience (Lage and Mota) or they are pessimistic about the ability of individuals to control their own destinies (Echeverría and Flores)" (343).

[73] Maguire also proposes that within the group of writers in the Generation Zero "The dominant time that these narratives react against, the reality that haunts these alternate temporalities, is a national one" (344).

[74] Thus, even though Lage's *Archivo* gestures to Cuban frivolity as perceived by Jose Manuel Prieto, the text's persistence on themes such as surveillance and repression is also an act of healing, or mourning in Avelar's words, by imagining what has been erased from insular Cuban hegemonic and national discourse. When Idelber Avelar discusses the imperative to mourn in postdictatorial literature, he points out that, in addition to overcoming trauma, some of "those postdictatorial texts remind the present that it is the product of past catastrophe, these texts carry the seeds of a messianic energy, which, like the Benjamin angel of history, looks back at the pile of debris, ruins, and defeats of the past in an effort to redeem them, being at the same time pushed forward by the forces of 'progress' and 'modernization'" (3).

to the key tension in the text between the traditional archive alluded to in the title (national history/memory) and the metaphor of the hard drive as container of subjective memory (the recovery of national erasures). Ultimately, these main strategies create a tension between an alternative subjectivity and revolutionary national discourse while also functioning as the foundation of an anti-national tone in *Archivo*.

The narrator in *Archivo* categorically appropriates state secrets, surveillance, and repression in order to put forth a construction of subjectivity that is in tension with the Revolutionary national paradigm. Thus, the subjective memory generated in the text is strongly anti-national. Not as straightforward as other anti-national tones, Lage transgresses state narrative through the use of more subtle strategies than those included in Ludmer's archetype of anti-national narratives (do you have the page number for Ludmer?). This means that rather than generating an anti-national tone in an explicit way, the text codifies it and requires some deconstruction to understand this criticism. However, even though criticism to the nation appears subtle, the book becomes only publishable outside of the island due to its strong critique.[75] Lage criticizes the national paradigm through the representation of the Cuban State Security (SS) and its relationship to cultural producers. Ultimately, this anti-national tone also triggers the convergence between the political and personal experience necessary to put forth a subjective memory. This is accomplished in the text through the character of the narrator and how he deals with the meta-fictional manuscript he is attempting to write.

The text builds a narrative that defies national history by accounting for it from a counter-cultural perspective. It registers the failures, the negative/erased spaces, and unexpected turnouts of national politics, whether past or present, as perceived in the twenty-first century—an aspect shared by all the writers included in this dissertation. It also unveils the results of an unsuccessful national project as perceived by younger generations in contemporaneity. Using cyberpunk—a sub-genre of science fiction—as the genre for his text, Lage maps a tangible state of failure where institutions are no longer functional nor trustworthy.[76] Through this mapping, the narrative brings about a spatial territory where multiple dimensions coexist and yet only some are seen by citizens while all are seen by the State. For example, this is the case with a *marabú* infestation taking over Havana with which State Security is dealing with and is described as follows: "No se

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[75] Such a relevant task is only possible through publication outside of the island and as Walfrido Dorta points out "Lage ha publicado textos dentro de Cuba más corrosivos, en términos de vaciamiento de la sacralidad de lo cubano o de cualquier esencia identitaria nacional" ("Fricciones y lecturas" 48), however *Archivo* is the first one that becomes unpublishable in Cuba for thematic reasons.

[76] As discussed by Dorta in conversation with Fredic Jameson and Maguire "Según Fredric Jameson, el *cyberpunk* puede asumirse como la "postmodern expression of paranoia in the face of the elusive multinational entities of late capitalism" (Toledano: 447). Se destaca por su combinación de la predilección por la tecnología propia de la ciencia ficción con la actitud desafiante y antiautoritaria de la cultura punk (Maguire, "El hombre lobo": 506). Una de las diferencias del *cyberpunk* con respecto a modos anteriores de la ciencia ficción radica en que presenta "the unholy alliance of the technical world and the world of organized dissent" (Bruce Sterling, cit. en Maguire, "El hombre lobo": 506). Emily Maguire (506) propone que, a diferencia de otros tipos de ciencia ficción, el *cyberpunk* no resalta la novedad de la tecnología y el mundo virtual, sino la manera en que las interacciones humanas cambian dentro de esta tecnología" ("Fricciones y lecturas" 40).

ve a simple vista, está en otra dimensión, dijo la Microbióloga ofreciéndome unas gafas" (Lage 78). Yet although the state sees everything, it is unable to control it. The state's surveillance is not enough for controlling the decadent society that appears in the narrative. Hence, if in a dystopia, the state has succeeded in fully controlling society, in *Archivo*, the state is not even minimally granted this power. To this end, the work on subjective memories, developed through an anti-national tone here, goes hand-in-hand with contemporary imaginations of community that bring to the fore the dead-ends of the nation-state. There is no longer a way through which the Caribbean nations nor its citizens can be rescued from its disasters. Yet, the subjective memory built in the text grants brief instances or moments of agency to citizens; hence, articulating the potential of notions stemming from alternative communities.[77]

In this chapter, I look at both the common and uncommon places that map an alternative paradigm of territoriality in Lage's work, which often intersects with Revolutionary Cuba. However, in order to construct an alternative imagination, it often supersedes the state's conventions because it evades some of the spatial maps that have traced a simplified or exotified Cuban reality such as, for example, the Cuban police novel or special period photography or fiction.[78] Deterritorialization is constructed in the text along with temporal destabilization; both aspects result from the introduction of new technologies and the Internet on the island along with its representation in the text. New technologies, thus, become a recurring trope in Lage's works. This is in part founded on the texts' cyberpunk character. Lage raises a concern about the negative implications of technology developments. Particularly in the Cuban and the Caribbean contexts as territories that have been historically exploited to support global capitalism's economic progress and where technological innovations have been controlled by governing classes. What is the implication of new technologies in the current historical phase? Keeping this question in mind, I approach Lage's text to consider how new media interacts with the literary in order to bring to the fore some of the main pressing issues of a very recent past. In this chapter, I argue that Cuban imagination is strongly intertwined with the representation of technological tropes as a strategy to re-write recent events that are part of a living memory rooted in contemporary subjectivities. These subjectivities are mediated by a database aesthetics, emerging from the Internet, implemented in the literary form of the text. Altogether, this generates a text that appropriates a global medium (the Internet form) to codify a strong locality (Cuban subjective memory and imagination).

Havana in A Hard Drive: A List of Notes, A Collection of Events

Simply put, *Archivo* consists of a collection of notes of the narrator's attempt to write a book State Security (SS) that Lage represents in the form of a hard drive. The collection, appearing as fragments, or what I will later analyze as the code-language of a website, primarily consists of odds and ends from research completed by the narrator. His research includes interviewing State Security agents and prisoners, thus, surveillers and surveilled citizens. It also brings about the relationship between Cuban writers and the state through the depiction of the writing process. Because the nature of the text is to function as a *paquete*, all of the events are

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[77] Guillermo Rebollo Gil, for example, sees decoloniality as a moment whereby any average citizen makes coloniality visible as discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation.

[78] See Duanel Díaz's *La revolución congelada, dialécticas del castrismo* (2014).

presented in a disorderly fashion rather than a finished book. Therefore, Lage wrote *Archivo* as a collection of notes simultaneously linked to a list of events related to its own production.

Jorge E. Lage implements new media as an experimental strategy in *Archivo*. The premise of the text is that the action takes place inside a hard drive, which is established at the beginning: "Pero no era tanto la desesperación de vivir anclado en La Habana como de vivir en el interior de una memoria portátil" (Lage 9). This aspect becomes key for the content and form of the text because it situates the action of *Archivo* as occurring within a hard drive. Moreover, the image of the hard drive is the single most iconic hardware in contemporary Cuban technological use. On the one hand, this opening is important because it contextualizes the narrator-protagonist's subjectivity as stagnant or petrified. On the other hand, however, it situates the text in direct dialogue with current uses of technology in Cuba, which by contrast are ever-changing and evolving. The hard drive as a representation of digital/portable memory, but also subjective memory, stages how Cuban imagination is constructed in the text. As a result, this metaphoric use of digital memory mediates the content and form of the subjective memory constructed in *Archivo*. Ultimately, Lage constructs a subjective memory in the text that absorbs the form of digital memory; therefore, putting forth a textual configuration closely linked and determined by technological motifs. The imagination built through this configuration is also the alternative archive that Lage attempts to build in the text. However, rather than with a traditional archive, the text brings about digital archiving as a mediation of a wide array of contemporary subjectivities optherwise neglected by the ideals of national paradigms.

While the text's title, *Archivo*, gestures to traditional and hegemonic archives, the text's content brings our attention to what is left outside of these by mediating anti-national subjectivities through the representation of digital memory. In this sense, there is a wide array of questions that lend themselves for critical exploration about the archive alluded to in the title as well as in the first fragment. What is contained in the archive? To whom does it belong and what is its purpose? What is this archive's form? If the fragments are a representation of data collected and saved inside a hard drive, what is the literary form of a text with this goal? My answer to these questions focuses on analyzing the text through its contextualization within the years 2009-2012. Establishing a dialogue with the text's context helps elucidate how futuristic time in *Archivo* is, in fact, closely related to an immediate present. The analysis of the fragments shows how revolutionary official discourses are infiltrated and deconstructed throughout the text. I then use new media theory to argue how formal fragmentation, more than a legacy of twentieth century Latin American novel, functions in the text as a textual representation of database aesthetics and digital media as it relates to the use of hard drive technology and the Internet in twenty-first-century Cuba.

Lage imagines the archive in the text through the representation of technology. The excess of technological motifs in the novel simultaneously dialogues with state destabilization occurring in Cuba when the Internet was introduced early in the twenty-first century. To the end of representing a turmoil of changes, the text is saturated with tropes through which Cuban locality converges with metaphorical referents taken from new media register. Loyalty to Fidel Castro and the Revolution turns into "High-*Fidel*ity o Hi-Fi." Religious worshipping of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre is represented by VirginBot, a small doll-turned-robot that seeks to update itself in Havana. A fictional Interior Ministry (MININT) also appears in the text; the institution directs hyper-technological experiments taking place in underground bases spread throughout the island. In other words, there is a wide repertoire of tropes and images that connect Cuban society to new media: data miners who hold a literary workshop during their free

time, a younger generation obsessed with social media, and a potential clone of former United States President Barack Obama. This hyper-technological environment, thus, populates the archive contained within the hard-drive serving as the setting of the text.

Lage connects the representation of new technologies to questions of state control in *Archivo*. The intertwining of technology and surveillance also dialogues with the state's control issues—the inability to fully curate what enters public discourse—after the opening of the Internet.[79] The exercise of state-control is initially challenged in this new context because the Internet offers an infinite space to freely access and publish information and Cuban citizens quickly caught on to this newly acquired source of agency. However, the Cuban state gained control over the network shortly after the initial destabilization resulting from the opening of the internet. At the time of publication of *Archivo* the internet could only be accessed in public WI-FI hot spots, typically located in public parks, in Cuba. Limited access to the Internet in Cuba also triggers negotiations with access to digital culture such as the *paquete* technology as a result of both surveillance and economic constraints. Ultimately, through writing a *novela-paquete*, Lage gestures to Cuban citizens' agency and their everyday strategies to evade state control.

In close dialogue with network control in Cuba, Lage represents the relationship between technology and surveillance as intricately related to the Interior Ministry (MININT) and SS. All of the new media-related metaphors, images, and characters appear as the archive produced by state control and surveillance. Through these connections, the text problematizes national politics about new technologies and surveillance through the fictionalization of a state surveillance archive. On the one hand, this archive is a collection of the instances where state surveillance permeates the social body through technology; portrayed, for example, in the description of a rally as a *"Database* móvil": "¿Qué sale, quienes salen (y haciendo y diciendo qué) en esos micro-multitudinarios archivos?" (Lage 50). On the other hand, this archive is also the product of the narrator's research for writing a book about State Security and his subjective experience as a Cuban citizen. The novela-paquete *Archivo*, the one that we read, turns into the archives that Lage aims to imagine and intersect through a meta-fictional manuscript appearing in the text: the state-control archives supported by new technologies and the paquete as a parallel archive escaping this control.

The narrator is trying to write a book about SS and the MININT. A character named El Agente, who works for the governmental agency, is intermittently in conversation with the narrator-protagonist and knows him from when he did obligatory military service at Villa Marista. We learn this through one of the interactions between the narrator and El Agente, where the latter suggests: "Tú hiciste aquí [Villa Marista] el Servicio Militar Obligatorio, me dijo. De octubre-1997 a julio-1998. Desde entonces, siempre has tenido miedo de volver sobre tus pasos" (Lage 26). El Agente helps the narrator make contact with other agents from State Security such as the Meteorólogo, La microbióloga, and Dr. Marca. These four characters are the main figures who represent the institutional spirit of State Security and appear in its spaces, which consist of hyper technological underground stations distributed throughout the island: "Debajo de la Villa Marista habitual había una Villa Marista hipertecnologica, desconocida para mí. El Agente me

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[79] Antonio José Ponte discusses this extensively in regards to the Cuban case in his book *Villa Marista en Plata: Arte, política, nuevas tecnologías* (2010). Furthermore, Alexander G. Galloway and Eugene Thacker also discuss this more broadly in their book *The Exploit: A Theory of Networks* (2007). Galloway and Thacker discuss at length how networks renew state-control over society paying special attention to the United States' control over global networks.

informó que estábamos en la Nave Madre, la Central de una serie de Estaciones distribuidas por el subsuelo del país" (Lage 33). We see a representation of official discourse—state-control and surveillance as a necessary means to defend the Revolutionary nation—in these characters and their corresponding spatial mapping of state institutions and the island.

However, representing the Cuban revolutionary ethos would be incomplete without the inclusion of the popular masses and their role in sustaining the national scaffolding through their everyday surveilling practices. Another group of characters who interact with the narrator, and who coexist in opposition to the more institutional ones, include: Baby Zombi, Yoan/Yoanis, Claribel, VirginBot, and a street homeless. These characters have been forced to work for State Security although they are representative of more popular Cuban stereotypes. For example, Baby Zombi is blindly loyal to communism, Yoan/Yoanis is a transgender who works as a prostitute in the *Malecón* and Claribel's body is occupied by the State Security towards the end of the novel. Many of the fragments also include appearances by either prisoners or mental health patients kept captive in Villa Marista—a controversial Cuban detention center portrayed throughout the text. The lives of all the "popular characters" are permeated by State Security, making them either citizens who surveil or are surveilled. They also represent how citizens relate to the state, whether that is through excessive loyalty to the revolution or complete apathy. Although ultimately, the function of all characters in this novel is to represent the panoptical nature of the Cuban state-control.

State Control in Cuban Cultural Imagination

As it is widely known, the Cuban Revolution impacted cultural imagination not just on the island but also across the Americas. This political phenomenon was a marker in the history of Latin American politics, and an array of unprecedented concerns regarding cultural production flooded different intellectual scenes. A highly anti-intellectual discourse arose on the left as a response to literary autonomy seeking to separate revolutionary discourse from literary production (Gilman 2003). As the popular revolutionary slogan "Dentro de la revolución, todo. Contra la revolución, nada," categorization of artists was reduced to "artistas comprometidos" or "contrarevolucionarios," which also went hand in hand with the loss of literature's autonomy in order to be fully considered a revolutionary writer (Gilman 2003). Thus, the political and creative become inseparable in culture, from a revolutionary perspective, and if separated, then the production in question had the potential to be counter-revolutionary. Besides this general animosity permeating the cultural scene of the Americas, it was more strongly encouraged within the Caribbean island.

Mass media and literature became key platforms to strengthen revolutionary success and ideology. In the early years of the revolution, from 1959 to the early 1970s, portrayal of the Revolution's success was highly dependent on mass media. The international portrayal of mass rallies, local government agencies launching media campaigns, and the eventual control of what entered public media discourse were all key in the consolidation of the revolution in its early years (Guerra 2012). Film was also key in these developments as campaigns such as *cine-móbil* and *cine-debates* were used to bring and spread revolutionary ideology throughout the countryside of the island (Guerra 81-82). In the famous discourse *Palabras a los intelectuales* (1961), Fidel Castro stipulates clearly the rules of the game for cultural production: the issue at stake wasn't freedom of form but rather freedom of content (Castro 1961). With this stipulation, the discourses about revolutionary and counter-revolutionary cultural production were

consolidated and, as a result, state control over cultural production began. Literature, in particular, was key in these early ideological developments. In the 1970s, the *Caso Padilla* became key in enforcing state intervention in cultural production and imagination. During this same decade, socialist realism, and the specific genre of the *novela policial revolucionaria*, became key didactic tools in the configuration of the revolutionary state (D. Díaz 158-161). However, after the violence unleashed during the Mariel exodus, the *policial* began to lose the grounds to serve as an accurate depiction for exemplary citizen behavior, which led to a crisis of the genre during the 1980s (D. Díaz 199-200). Even though controlling discourse through mass media and literature were key during the first few decades of the Revolutionary process; once the Berlin wall fell, a key rupture emerged during the Special Period declared in the nineties.

The Special Period rupture resulted from the "Special Period in Times of Peace" law, which allowed writers living on the island to publish outside of the island due to the scarcity following the fall of the Soviet bloc (Hernandez-Reguant 4). "Special Period literature" (Whitfield) is a key precedent to understand Generation Zero's production. During the Special Period, writers began to move away from state-controlled narratives and started constructing imaginaries that respond to the crisis of socialism. A subjectivity intricately tied to a type of *anti-ciudadanía* emerged as the result of representing marginal subjects as a strategy to emphasize national decay (Domínguez 573). "At the same time, as the state loosened its grip over social life," suggests Hernandez-Reguant, "popular discontent was increasingly expressed in the open, leading to a disruptive civil unrest and, eventually, to a political crisis and the centralized government's fall" (8). All these aspects of the Special Period led to a partial recovery of literary autonomy through the rejection of state narratives that sought to sustain its national scaffolding through literature. Thus, Special Period literature generated a rupture from a highly controlled cultural scene and became a marker for the literary production of the twenty-first century.

Many of the changes in the cultural landscape emerging during the Special Period are strengthened through Generation Zero's literary production in the twenty-first century. The interest in marginal subjects survives the turn-of-the-century and is renewed in the works of Generation Zero writers such as Lage, Ahmel Echevarría, and Legna Rodríguez Iglesias, among many others. Claiming back literary autonomy, which was facilitated by the ability to publish outside of the island, is also an important aspect in Generation Zero's success that has its roots in the Special Period. The rupture emerging in the nineties, and its continuation into the twenty-first century, entails not only a rupture with state-control narratives but also with the state itself. These highly futuristic narratives, consistently recurring to technology, experimenting with form, and published outside of the island reiterate a separation between literature and the state that began during the Special Period.

A key difference in the context specific to Generation Zero is that a new configuration of political economic power emerges in Cuba as of 2008. Raúl Castro took over state power and this change impacted how culture was produced and circulated. Along with this change at the state level, changes in social life also began to take place as new technologies and the Internet became more accessible on the island. As Paloma Duong suggests, the blogosphere emerging in Cuba during this period and the complicated relationship between the Cuban state and bloggers "yield(s) a 'social text' where the cultural policy of the Cuban Revolution and the emergence of new political subjectivities intimately intersect" (376). Furthermore, Duong also makes the case for how "bloggers' discourse" becomes a "strategic position where citizenship can be articulated from a new place of enunciation that challenges institutionalized forms of cultural and political

criticism, charting both the effects of digital media and the role of cultural capital in the formation of political subjects" (376). Consequently, information started flowing differently with new technologies. The introduction of new technologies and the opening of the Internet marked a new period of openness on the island differing from the isolating conditions of the Special Period. Ultimately, if in the Special Period cultural production began to be exported, then in the twenty-first century, information began to be imported through new technologies. Lage's *Archivo* as an object allows understanding these transformations in state power as well as citizenship articulations in the public sphere.

If the rupture of the nineties is created content-wise by representing the crisis of late socialism through literature; Lage's text rather emphasizes a breach in literary form as well. In this sense, Lage puts his work in dialogue with the Cuban literary tradition with the purpose of rejecting it. *Archivo*'s fragmented form—as is the case with many other texts in Generation Zero's production[80]—generates questions surrounding the finished and progressive narratives of the state. It takes the rupture initiated by Special Period literature a step further by creating a literary work that also distances itself from completed and finished narratives. Instead, the text poses the question of a literary work presented as an unfinished draft, the process of writing as a possible performance and formal fragmentation pointing to the representation of digital technology, as strategies to reject/defy national narratives. Thus, the text generates a type of anti-literariness that in the Cuban case can be thought of in relationship to the anti-national as well.

However, this anti-literariness can be distinguished from Ludmer's anti-national or post-autonomous literature in that it is not inherently tied to an interest in entering the world market. In fact, *Archivo*'s disregard for globalized codes of social understanding and embracing of Cuba's most insular locality creates a tension with the world market. This tension with the world market conforms part of a broader shared moment in the Caribbean. The situatedness of the region's contemporary experience becomes key in generating this tension with the market. Thus, part of this tension is to also render the Caribbean illegible through literature for a reader unfamiliar with local codes. Thus, this anti-literariness is not easy to consume or cannot function as a pedagogical apparatus and as a result breaks with the classical purposes of the literary. The social scaffolding in the Hispanic Caribbean resulting from the particular, yet closely shared, historical and political baggage among the islands triggers this illegibility for the global market literature reader. As a result, *Archivo* is anti-national yet not necessarily a neo-liberal text in so much as its hermetic character can hardly allow for such a status in the global market.

Archivo's anti-literary writing also targets delicate topics such as the role of surveillance in state policing of literature and literary genealogies. As a start point to approach these topics, Lage fictionalizes the Interior Ministry (MININT) and State Security (SS) to pose questions regarding the historical roles of state-controlled literature and media. As counterintelligence agencies, these institutions have the task of defending the Revolution through surveillance and control over anything happening on the island.[81] In a quite ironic remark, the Agente in *Archivo*

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[80] Ahmel Echevarría's *La noria* and Legna Rodríguez Iglesias' *No sabe/no contesta* are great examples of fragmentarity in Generation Zero.

[81] State Security was created as the main counterintelligence agency during the early years of the Revolution. Other surveillance units were also consolidated through it, as for example the neighborhood-based surveillance system Comités de Defensa de la Revolución (CDR). However, as State Security's control over civilian safety kept extending and the power over it was centralized through Fidel Castro's government, the MININT emerged as the broader umbrella

explains: "Igual pudiera llamarse MINCUBA, o ya de plano: La Patria con Todos y Para el Bien de Todos que soñó José Martí" (52). Defining MININT as the all-encompassing institution that knows everything about affairs within Cuba reinforces the parody permeating the text to create an anti-national approach. It emphasizes this totality as it seeks to criticize it. Ultimately, the power of these institutions spreads throughout the narrative and becomes key for the development of the plot as well as characters. Thus, the representation of these institutions sets up the content counterpart of a text whose formal aspects also reject national literary traditions.

Surveillance has been a part of Cuban imagination throughout different historical periods, from the early stages of the revolution to the twenty-first century; the topic, as Rachel Price suggest, is a ubiquitous trope[82] (151). Similarly, representations of State Security and Villa Marista have appeared in works from different fields such as literature, film, plastic art, and new media. What can these works tell us about how these Cuban institutions relate to artists? How did new technologies renew interest in controversies regarding State Security and surveillance?

Reinaldo Arenas's work is key to the tradition of literary work accounting for surveillance. His chronicle titled "Villa Marista," appearing in the posthumous text *Antes de que anochezca*, published in the early 1990s, recounts his experience of imprisonment in the center. Arenas describes how the passage of time becomes indiscernible and upon arrival he spends four days without seeing anyone (226). An agent of State Security also appears threatening Arenas, "aquí te podemos desaparecer, te podemos aniquilar, y nadie se va a enterar" (226), suggests the office at the beginning of the interrogation process. In the chronicle, Arenas also insists in State Security's accumulation of information about citizens as a tool for state control (227). Lage's text consistently alludes to this accumulation of information about citizens by gesturing to how surveillance is connected to new media and, thus, the ways in which it generates an archive.

There are many other contemporary works that sought to bring state-control in cultural production to the fore. Cuban script writer and film director Eduardo del Llano's short film *Monte Rouge* (2004), Carlos Garaicoa's *Las joyas de la corona* (2009) and Ahmel Echevarría's *La noria* (2013) are exemplary works that sparked conversations about the relationship between the state and cultural producers. Del Llano's short film treats the topic of surveillance as an open secret through the portrayal of two State Security agents installing surveillance technology at a home in the presence of its resident.[83] Garaicoa's piece brought international attention to the

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institution that was above all sub-units concerning counterintelligence, including State Security (Rodríguez Menier 39). Hence, some of the main roles of the MININT and SS are to neutralize counterrevolutionary behavior via surveillance of the Cuban territory (Rodríguez Menier 44).
[82] Rachel Price dedicates a portion of her work in *Planet/Cuba* to the relevance of surveillance in contemporary works. A repertoire of works that have alluded to surveillance, including works from the early years of the revolution, is presented in Price's work.
[83] This fifteen-minute short film shows two State Security agents arriving to a Cuban household to install microphones. The agents install the equipment in the presence of Nicanor, the resident of the house, and explain why they need to surveil him. However, the topic of state control over citizens is also brought up. Because the agents only have two microphones, they tell Nicanor where he should say bad things about the government. The conversation between the characters becomes absurd as their dialogue quickly moves from Nicanor's complaints to the agent demanding his gratitude because there are families of ten people who don't get a single microphone. The agents know everything about Nicanor. They have learned the details of his life

headquarters of State Security, Detention Center Villa Marista, and the lack of access to information about it by displaying a model of Villa Marista amongst other widely known torture centers in a sculptural piece exhibited in the *Decima Bienal de Artes Plasticas* in Havana.[84] Finally, similar to Lage's work, Echevarría develops a plot filled with paranoia about a writer and his assigned surveilling *agente*, who also becomes his lover.[85] These works, just as much as Arenas's piece, are part of an archive focusing on state-control of cultural production preceding Lage's text publication in 2015.

There are a number of other artistic interventions that also dialogue with *Archivo*. More specifically, *Obra Catalogo #1* by Cuban artists Yeny Casanueva and Alejandro González, blogger Yoani Sánchez's interventions, and Tania Bruguera's performance *El susurro de Tatlin* (2009). Concurrently with the *Decima Bienal,* artists Yeny Casanueva and Alejandro González released *Obra Catalogo #1,* which consisted of a media art piece generated by sharing State Security's files through e-mail (Ponte 36). In this intervention, the duo published eight State Security files recording the surveillance of artists that they had obtained during the *Novena Bienal* (2006) when an agent came to their home demanding that they save all information regarding the Movimiento de Artistas Cubanos Independientes—a group led by the artists—on his hard drive[86] (Ponte 38). Another instance of state surveillance and censorship that is

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through surveillance, but also through neighbors' gossiping. The absurdist skit suggests in a humoristic tone that surveillance is an everyday life issue for Cuban citizens.

[84] Similar to *Archivo,* Garaicoa's piece brings up the topic of Villa Marista in our contemporaneity via a controversial juxtaposition with other centers of torture and violations of human rights. The piece consists of eight silver and wood models of State Security centers from around the world. The descriptions, according to Ponte's remarks, had been taken out of the Internet, thus, representing the availability or lack thereof information about the centers in the public sphere (40-42). Garaicoa includes Villa Marista in the artwork next to East Germany's Ministry of State Security (Stasi), the Soviet Union State Security Committee (KGB), Argentina's *Escuela de Mecanica de la Armada* (ESMA), the United States' Pentagon, and Chile's National Stadium. Antonio José Ponte's analysis of several contemporary artists and recent debates in his book *Villa Marista en plata* offers great insight into the interweaving of all three institutions— MININT, State Security, and Villa Marista—in surveilling and censoring Cuban cultural production today. The other two models are Cuba's DGI-Linea y A and Guantanamo Naval Base. Detention center Villa Marista stands out from other centers due to the lack of information provided in its description.

[85] In his novel *La noria* (2013), Generation Zero's writer Ahmel Echevarría also delves into the topic of surveillance. In this fictional text, sharing many other aspects with *Archivo*, we are presented with two protagonists: El Maestro and David. El Maestro, similarly to *Archivo*'s protagonist, is starting a new book after over a decade out of the writing office. David, on the other hand, has been El Maestro's romantic partner for fourteen years while also surveilling him and believes is being surveilled himself. El Maestro oversees Centro Habana from his apartment wondering about the surveilling police in the novel: "¿Acaso forman parte de un plan de control y vigilancia? A quiénes o a quién vigilan. La patrulla permanece estacionada, quizá se comunican por la radio" (Echevarría 124). Yet again, we encounter the trope of surveillance as a normalized aspect of Cuban life as has been already discussed in regard to Monte Rouge.

[86] As per negligence of the Agent, who waited for them outside the house, they were able to download the files in the hard drive while uploading the ones that were demanded from them

contemporaneous to the time period described in Lage's novel is the case of blogger Yoani Sanchez. Ponte emphasizes how surveillance became a means of intimidation with the goal of stopping documentation Cuban everyday life in the case of Yoani Sanchez[87]. Moreover, Sánchez's production becomes an online archive of text and short clips where the normalization of censorship become the main topic. Most of Sanchez's interventions were published through a blog platform, Twitter, or videos on YouTube. Both of these interventions were highly dependable on access to the Internet and the inability of state control to curate what enters the public sphere through it.

Finally, Tania Bruguera's performance *El susurro de Tatlin* consisted of recreating Fidel's first speech in 1959 by having a podium with an open mic where participants could say anything for one minute and two performers dressed in revolutionary military gear were in charge of placing the iconic dove on their shoulder or taking them off stage after the one-minute mark. *Archivo* begins specifically with a literary take on Bruguera's performance: "Ahora imagina un performance, dijo el Agente. Se le pide al público que exprese con total libertad, por escrito, durante un minuto" (Lage 10). Lage's dialogue with the work of these three female artists stipulates two aspects regarding the text in question: reiterating the relevance of digital archives for the democratization of information in contemporary Cuba and proposing performative writing as a form of anti-national literature.

This constellation of works sheds light on the insistence in Lage's text to coin alternative subjectivities mediated by digital technology. Like many of his contemporaries, Lage also makes sense out of a suffocating political reality through the creation of a fictional archive.[88] Digital platforms have been key in the articulation of these subjectivities seeking representation outside of state-controlled national narratives. Therefore, the author maps a cultural genealogy that exists in parallel to institutional cultural production. However, Lage also satirizes Cuban official discourse regarding surveillance and state-control of cultural production. In fact, the character Dr. Marca points this out when describing the narrator's task in a meeting: "La oportunidad de explicar muchísimas cosas que, por ignorancia o por ingenuidad, la sociedad civil no comprende del todo" (Lage 74). Rather than offering a comprehensive account, the collection of fragments found in *Archivo* is an attempt to reveal information that has been distorted or left at the margin of national imagination proper. Lage takes on the task of generating, through fiction, the material that would fill the erasures of official memory, something that has also been questioned in other artistic interventions about State Security and surveillance in Cuba, such as the ones mentioned

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(Ponte 38). The piece is now hosted on a website as media art. Although currently under construction, the website is meant to host all eight transcripts from the files previously sent by the artists through e-mail. This piece stands out because the information was obtained through a hard drive.

[87] This is also discussed in Laura Loustau's "Cultures of surveillance in contemporary Cuba: the literary voice of Yoani Sánchez." The critic points out that "Sánchez depicts the personal and the collective experiences of living under surveillance and under forced immobility by a state that persists in tightly controlling the bodies and minds of its citizens and overseeing their political culture" (Loustau 248).

[88] As a final commentary about the revolving topic of surveillance in contemporary production, Price points out: "Contemporary Cuban artists and writers draft aesthetic maps that assemble past details in newly illuminating ways, laying out possible geographies for a future that would depart from received guides or frightening predictions" (180).

above. My analysis aims to bring about how the author accomplishes this through the formal construction of the text resembling digital code and memory.

The centrality of state-control over cultural production in Lage's text produces relevant questions about surveillance archives. A futuristic temporality disconnected from Cuba's present time is actually a commentary on close realities as the island navigated a series of major changes at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In fact, year 2009, a key year for the majority of the artistic interventions mentioned above, is the same one appearing in the opening fragment of the book: "A principios del año 2009 recogí de la basura un ejemplar del periódico…" (Lage 9). State Security functions as a node that draws together all technology tropes towards state control and surveillance. This node-like character of surveillance is also how the narrator's manuscript functions.[89] Thus, *Archivo* brilliantly asks: What would be contained in an archive generated by the recovery of state-controlled erasures?

To answer this question, *Archivo* becomes a representation of the narrator's book manuscript, which is simultaneously a collection of data about State Security and a living archive withdrawn from Internet control. However, we are repeatedly reminded that this archive resists being accessed: "Si las notas se resisten a organizarse en forma de libro, pensé, entonces lo mejor es escribir únicamente las notas, el supuesto plan del supuesto libro, el borrador que borra cualquier posibilidad de escribirlo" (22). This resistance can be linked with two formal aspects of the text. On the one hand, there is a question or concern about the function of literature: is literature sufficient to represent contemporary subjectivities? On the other hand, this unfinished and draft form directly dialogues with how the text consists of a digital mediation of literature, resulting in a fragmentary text that resembles the formal aspects of digital media. The text aims to imagine marginal subjectivities through the construction of this digital mediation, but the mediated text is not readily available for this process, yet, because it is in consonance with the nature of the Internet, it constantly changes or can be changed. It is no casualty then, that the State Security agents helping the narrator in the process of collecting stories and data consistently emphasize that "…solamente un loco puede ponerse a escribir sobre lo que tú vas a escribir" (78). The ever-changing state of Cuban digital and Internet infrastructure, at both the institutional and popular level, make the task at hand nearly impossible. The narrative of *Archivo* is an impossible task in real life within Cuban national space, yet its becoming is possible inside and through the existence of the fictional text.

The narrator's co-optation of state discourse and State Security's support of his project contribute to the construction of an imaginary archive in the novel. The discursive co-optation appears early on in the text: "Si los apuntes se vuelven demasiado literarios, pensé, mejor detenerse y recordar qué significa escribir. Escribir tiene que ver con la Seguridad de Estado. Con ninguna otra cosa. Lo que importa no es la pregunta por la Literatura, lo que importa es la

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[89] At both levels, this character resonates with Foucault's definition of the book as a "node[s] within a network" that is inherently linked to a multiplicity of sources (*Archaeology* 23). It is through this drawing effect that Lage effectively develops questions about surveillance that acquire renewed importance as new technologies and the Internet were opened to the public on the island. In doing so, the author pays attention to important unanswered questions regarding the center or what Ponte calls "la tortura de la información," which is simultaneously the lack thereof of information regarding the center and the limitations in accessing the Internet for the release of information from and about Cuba (41).

pregunta por el Enemigo" (25). The text accurately imitates the ultra-nationalist rhetoric of the state. In doing so, it also emphasizes that there are no aspirations to make literature because in the Cuban context literature is synonymous with that state. By co-opting state-discourse in the fictional version of the State Security's archive, the narrative brings about the tensions within current political infrastructure, which ultimately also functions as a critique of it.[90] Ultimately, this appropriation functions as a satire of official discourse. Yet it also suggests that State Security progressively controls the narrator. Thus, the interest in compiling an archive of alternative subjectivities appears to be possible only if it happens under the control of State Security itself. This is the main tension upon which the text is built—a state-controlled narrative versus an attempt to function outside of it.

From National Imaginary to Mediated Subjectivities and Digital Memories

Lage's *Archivo* brilliantly articulates a juxtaposition of state-controlled national imaginary and the function of the Internet in the proliferation of alternative subjectivities. The representation of Cuban state-control of culture channels the hegemonic national imaginary in *Archivo*. Moreover, this control is constantly overlapping with digital media and more specifically, the Internet. In a scene with the Agente, institutionally controlled space in Cuba is defined through the metaphor of a universal resource locator (URL) for a web page sourced on the island: "Cubadentro punto cu. O sea, toda Cuba" (Lage 52). Defining the island through this metaphor shows how new technologies reinforce traditional conceptions of control within national space; however, Lage's approach to the representation of digital media through the form of *Archivo* also gestures to the destabilization of national boundaries and control resulting from the opening of the Internet on the island.

Fiber-optic networks, the fundamental technology behind the Internet, are key in understanding how cyber space impacts real territorial notions. Although fiber-optics are difficult to control by the state, they are equally challenging in regard to providing true privacy. This medium is rather used under a false premise of privacy, in Wendy Chun's phrase, an "illusion of privacy" (*Control and Freedom* 15). In reality, since anything done while surfing the Internet is trackable and, thus, lends itself to facilitate state prosecution, Chun concludes "Fiber-optics networks open the home" (*Control and Freedom* 15). This image of the open home facilitates understanding the struggles faced by the Cuban state after the introduction of the internet and new technologies. Once the Internet is open for public use on the island, dissenting voices start to spread faster than ever before. In fact, they proliferate globally faster than what is possible for the Cuban state to control. Thus, there is a slight loss of state control that precedes the use of Internet as a surveillance tool. Hence, by using the URL as a metaphor, Lage creates a tension between a historically closed geographical space (the Cuban island) and how the beginning of democratization of the Internet in Cuba opened up that space at the local and global levels. This tension between digital media (category under which I include the Internet, cellphones, social media, and hard drives) and state-control is at the center of the construction of Caribbean

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[90] In addition to this, through this co-optation the narrator's manuscript also dialogues with the "género policial" sponsored by the same institution during the early years of the Revolution. Duanel Díaz elaborates a discussion about the Cuban género policial, pointing out that the genre was mainly focused on developing narratives where the problems of bourgeoisie society would be resolved through the revolutionary process (160).

imagination in the text. Subsequently, this Caribbean imagination brings about what I call mediated subjectivities, which are alternative subjectivities whose representation is facilitated by the appropriation of digital media and its implementation in the literary form.

      The Internet challenges traditional notions of archives as well. The nation-state determines the politics of hegemonic archives, who has control and access to them; subsequently, the democratization of information remains in the hands of state power.[91] The etymological meaning of archive, which implies that its configuration depends on who controls it, suggests Derrida, has been historically erased when we speak of traditional archives (2). This oblivion is key in the attainment of power and control over social remembrance. The process of forgetting is deemed imperative in articulating the nation as well. Justifying "fratricide" among national subjects is part of the forgetting that sustains national narratives.[92] This obligation to forget, suggests Homi Bhaba in "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Nation" (1990), sustains a discursive operation by which minority discourse does not enter national narrative. This is in part accomplished by the erasure of difference at the root of the national paradigm or imagined community.

      The Cuban state controls what enters cultural discourse as a form of imposed oblivion necessary to sustain the Cuban national paradigm after the revolution. *Archivo*, for example, brings our attention to events—especially those occurring during the *Decima Bienal*—that received distorted coverage in the Cuban national press.[93] However, by dialoguing with the Internet it points to the state's loss of political power over what enters digital archives. Even though the Internet can still be controlled at the state level, it is a living archive where publications can only be censored after publication. In addition, even if the Internet is controlled by the state at the local level, cultural materials can still be accessed by global audiences. This text, thus, attempts to inscribe the act of remembering an archive of contemporary life existing parallel to Cuban official discourse; this literary object therefore questions contemporary national discourse through its representation/appropriation of digital media.

      Lage's text brings attention to State Security's control over the Cuban cultural scene and the different archives this type of surveillance produces—one with dissenting cultural production and another one resulting from surveillance of it. Some of the questions implicit in the text regard how silence or complacency enables the status quo while access to these archives threatens state power.[94] This is where Lage's work in *Archivo* has the potential to destabilize

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[91] Furthermore, Derrida explains that "There is no political power without control of the archive, if not of memory. Effective democratization can always be measured by this essential criterion: the participation in and the access to the archive, its constitution, and its interpretation" (4).

[92] The notion that forgetting is necessary to national unity was articulated by Ernest Renan and taken up by Anderson as central to his argument about imagined communities. For a further discussion on the centrality of fratricide in the formation of the nation, see Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (1983).

[93] Ponte points out in *Villa Marista en Plata* that there were two discourses surrounding each of the contemporary pieces mentioned in the previous section (*Monte Rouge, Las joyas de la Corona*, and *Yoani Sánchez*). More commonly, the state would create its own version of how to think of the cultural interventions.

[94] From Mbembe's perspective on "The Power of the Archive and its Limits." the archive is a two-sided source of power for the state; it is simultaneously control of power and a threat to it (23). As

Cuban state power by voicing a reflection about the existence or erasure of archives resulting from state control over cultural production. This strategy in the text dialogues with the double register of official national imaginary and the imaginations/subjectivities built outside of it.[95] The text aims to compensate for the lack of access to both by imagining a fictional version of state surveillance archives while it also reflects about state fears regarding citizens' open access to readily available information as well as generation of it.

The form of the text contributes to questions about inaccessibility to information. Although hegemonic national archives are traditionally composed of fragments of stories that link together to make a coherent narrative, this is not the effect created in Lage's text.[96] In fact, the text creates the completely opposite effect. Even though the narrator aims to find this coherence and continuity in constructing a collection of the erasures resulting from official national narratives, he is not able to accomplish an all-encompassing narrative. Instead, the fragmented form in *Archivo* cannot attain either totality or continuity. This impossibility reflects the difficulty to access information about both State Security's archives and the archive of Cuban cultural production built through individual contributions on the Internet. Thus, the novel's imagined archive is a representation of how a subjective approach to national discourse can bring about both what is included in it and what is left outside of it. By the same token, this imagined archive cannot acquire the completeness of its official counterpart in reality due to the limited access to both state secrets and Internet connection on the island. Ultimately, while imagined, Lage's archive highlights the constrains of Cuban reality, which he calls our attention to via his fictional representations of them.

Surveillance, Technology, and Everyday Life

The representation of technology at the content level plays a key role in representing the panoptical ontology of Cuban state institutions in the text. Part of the commentary about surveillance is elaborated through characters such as El Agente or Villa Marista's prisoners; however, the other two main characters working in the field, Yoan/Yoanis and Baby Zombi, also portray strong surveillance practices. Yoanis and Baby Zombi work undercover in a fully surveilled Havana. Whereas popular subjects like them appeared as antagonists of State Security

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a product of this threat, at times, also emerges the intent to "reduce them [the archives] to silence" (Mbembe 23).

[95] Furthermore, in it we can find the imaginary conceptions as a result of the archive's displacement: "Material destruction has only succeeded in inscribing the memory of the archive and its contents in a double register" (Mbembe 23). On the one hand, *Archivo*'s attempt to represent the testimonies of those who have been subject to the power of State Security in a multiplicity of ways aligns with the "imaginary thoughts" of the inscription of the archive in Mbembe's double register (24). The novel also inscribes the second aspect of this double register by representing the state as paranoid of not only these archive/s as specters of judgment but also of future judgment (Mbembe 24).

[96] Mbembe observes in the archive a fragmentary form by which "we are presented with pieces of time to be assembled, fragments of life to be placed in order, one after the other, in an attempt to formulate a story that acquires its coherence through the ability to craft links between the beginning and the end" (21). Thus, for the author, the archive is "A montage of fragments [that] thus creates an illusion of totality and continuity" (21).

in the earlier Cuban detective genre, we see them here working for the institution, whether by means of coercion or voluntarily.[97] This transformation in the portrayal of social types can be attributed to the text's intention to emphasize national and institutional failures in reproducing the *hombre nuevo*, which is any heteronormative subject who respects and complies with the Revolutionary government. For example, Yoan/Yoanis appears as a transgender sex worker who also surveils the main spaces involving prostitution activity:

> Yoan maniobraba para empujarles el micrófono hasta el intestino grueso. Antes o después del sexo, ella se ocupaba de colocar los micrófonos en la casa o en la habitación del hotel. Si era necesario, ponía micrófonos hasta en el carro que la recogía en el Malecón y la llevaba a la casa o al hotel. Iba soltando micrófonos como si fueran feromonas. (27)

The description of Yoan/Yoanis's work exaggerates how State Security sustains the surveillance apparatus, yet also reminds us that this is hardly the heroic work of the "hombre nuevo" envisaged by Cuban revolutionaries. Using the metaphor of "feromonas" for the microphones is particularly illuminating as it emphasizes how this apparatus can also generate specific behaviors, in this case, perpetuate social control via the use of technology. Yet, it also likens the work of the state to sexual seduction, again deviating from the image of the strong, masculine revolutionary citizen-subject.

This is further developed regarding different social sectors. Baby Zombi's area of surveillance, for example, is the undead population: "Querían información actualizada sobre los otros muertos vivientes, cuyo número no hacía más que aumentar" (76). This leaves no space in Havana free of surveillance. As Baby Zombi suggests in one of his interventions when the narrator asks about what he knows, he responds "… en realidad están vigilando atentamente los ejercicios de los otros" (24), referring to how people are surveilling others even if they appear to be doing something else. The most susceptible population to surveillance appears to be the younger generation that is constantly connected to the Internet. The characters Lilly Allen and Claribel are exemplary of this. The relationship between new technologies, social media, and State Security is made apparent in a somewhat paranoid tone: "Nacida en MySpace y criada en Twitter y Facebook, Lily Allen era una estrella que brillaba con luz propia en medio de las ruinas de Centro Habana. Toda su vida había estado bajo la lupa de la Seguridad del Estado" (Lage 30). Thus, the text reminds us of Chun's open house in the fiber-optics era (*Control and Freedom* 15), but with a sinister edge. Technology appears here as a tool that generates broader precariousness for citizens and decreases agency by exposing them to surveillance on an everyday basis while they are also surveillers. Ultimately, the representation of technology as part of everyday life illustrates that there is no outside of the state. State control results in citizens becoming the state and vice-versa. Ultimately, digital technology not only represents the potential freedom of information but more so renews the surveilling pact between the citizens and the state. In contrast, the technology of the printed book has the advantage of not being able to be seen by outside invisible forces.

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[97] Duanel Díaz summarizes the literary criticism of the género policial and the general concept of representing social types, as for example homosexuals or prostitutes, as delinquents (177).

Database aesthetics, the Internet, and Digital Memory

The text *Archivo* relies on the technology of the book to integrate digital imagination into the literary. Written in an unconventional fragmentary format, the text is composed of a hundred and fifty-three fragments that present snapshots of different events occurring inside the text's world as hard drive. Each fragment is numbered from beginning to end in chronological order; however, the events presented in each fragment are not ordered chronologically. Some fragments have a sub-label that describes a category corresponding to the information presented in it. For example, there are series of fragments titled "Materiales" (18) and "Grabación" (16). Lage does not build a chronological logic throughout the fragments, thus, there is no fixed beginning and end to the text besides the chronological numbers assigned to the fragments. These can be grouped generally into specific encounters or materials. Roughly speaking, there are fragments where State Security appears, others focused on Yoanis and Baby Zombi, yet others that present specific situations regarding the narrator-protagonist and finally, there is a series of fragments that consist of direct citations aimed at representing the paper cuttings referred to in the first fragment: "Eran los tiempos en que yo siempre estaba recogiendo y recortando, recogiendo y recortando. Guardando. Todo tipo de cosas" (Lage 9). This unconventional collage form of the text can be approached as a collection of materials or stories that are not logically connected.

Even though fragmentation is a legacy of the new Latin American novel of the twentieth century, it is evidently intertwined with new media in *Archivo* due to recurrent references to technology. Thus, this fragmentation can be thought in relationship to Lev Manovich's database logic in "Database as Symbolic Form" (2007). Manovich coins the concept "database logic" to distinguish fragmentary, ever-changing, and endless narratives in computerized society from modernity's all-encompassing, finalized, meta-narratives of progress ("Database" 40). The database form is fully consolidated with the emergence of the World Wide Web, suggests the critic, because a web page is a list where "It is as easy to add new elements to the end . . . as it is to insert them anywhere in it" ("Database" 41). This list-form generates the "antinarrative logic of the Web" whereby, Manovich suggests, "If new elements are being added over time, the result is a collection, not a story" ("Database" 41). The fragments that make up the text do not have a logical connection between them and challenge the conventional structures of a story, whether chronological or fragmentary.[98] The narrator reminds us of this consistently. The following description shows how the narrator's manuscript is continuously undone as it moves forward: "Si las notas se resisten a organizarse en forma de libro, pensé, entonces lo mejor es escribir únicamente las notas, el supuesto plan del supuesto libro, el borrador que borra cualquier posibilidad de escribirlo" (22). This metafictional manuscript, which is also the fragmentary text we read, begins to take the shape of a list, a collection of notes or files saved in a hard drive of digital memory.

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[98] The anti-narrative of *Archivo* acquires precisely a shuffling character that coincides with an aesthetic of "glance" rather than "gaze" in digital media as well. In *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Bolter and Grusin propose that in new media "…the viewer experiences such hypermedia not through an extended and unified gaze, but through directing her attention here and there in brief moments. The experience is one of the glance rather than the gaze . . . The aesthetic of the glance also makes the viewer aware of the process rather than just the product—both the process of creation and the proves of viewing" (54).

The form of *Archivo* resembles a numbered list such as the ones found in digital code language.[99] The text's second-to-last fragment reveals its approach to this list-form: "A lo mejor este es (también) el secreto de las listas negras: una vez empezadas, no se les puede poner fin" (Lage 111). The "lista negra" points to the erasures resulting from state control, but also the alternative subjectivities mediated in the text through the construction of its form as digital media. The following and last fragment includes only the number "153." yet no text is inserted, as if to reiterate what has been previously stated. It is in this final section where the text is consolidated as a list, namely, a collection of notes about an infertile research. The fictional archive in the text is thus navigated as one would a list, a web page, or a series of files saved onto a hard drive. There is another image in the text that explores this notion when the narrator reveals that "Todo lo que yo había escrito hasta ese momento estaba en esas hojas. Una capa encima de otra. La fui envolviendo. Empecé a picar las hojas, la escritura, en tiras" (79). In this list/collection, information (i.e. the story) is accessed in small portions of data throughout different iterations. The full picture becomes inaccessible. This unmaking, rather than remaking, of an archival meta-narrative reflects the inaccessibility to information, digital or analogue, in Cuban national infrastructure highlighted elsewhere in the text.

Achivo's form dialogues with the database aesthetic's list logic inherent to digital code and the Internet. This relationship sheds light on how the representation of new media, not only at the content but also at the formal level, is a key strategy in the text to generate subjective memory in contrast to national discourse. In the same way that new technologies destabilize state-control, *Archivo* suggest a destabilization of fixed national narratives due to its fragmentation. These ambiguities are constructed by how the form of the text resembles the Internet and its ever-changing character; specifically, these aspects resonate with the Internet's constant change and unmappability.[100] This is illustrated in the narrative through descriptions of technology changes impacting State Security: "La tecnología arrasaba rápidamente los soportes, los formatos. [El estado] No iban a poder recuperarlo todo. Era una carrera contra el tiempo. Sí, muy bien, ¿pero una carrera hacia dónde?" (Lage 85). Change appears juxtaposed to nation-state obsolescence, which is the more commonly used trope in Cuban literary tradition. Lage's emphasis on the concept of change and technology evidences the state's weaknesses: surveillance is challenged by the introduction of new technologies. Technology, as it appears here, is first a threat to the state, which later evolves into a tool for control—it shows a transitioning phase. A type of skepticism regarding technology is reiterated through this shift. The emphasis on fast or constant change permeates the form of the text as the narrative constantly changes—the text does not linger for too long on any specific event presented, before a situation concludes it moves on to something different. The constant change in the text reinforces the archival discontinuity as it organizes, in a disorderly fashion, pieces of could-be stories that remain unfinished and turn into a list that can continue to be modified indefinitely.

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[99] This literary form—text presented in an enumerated list—is best exemplified in Julio Cortázar's novel *Rayuela*. In addition to the enumerated fragments, the "tablero de lectura" at the beginning of the text also creates the form of hyper-text in the novel. However, a distinct aspect of *Rayuela*, in comparison to a work like *Archivo*, is that it still maintains and/or reproduces a narrative in its classical definition whether read in an orderly or shuffled fashion.

[100] Wendy Chun proposes that "cyberspace is constantly changing and fundamentally unmappable" ("Digital Ephemeral" 39).

Early in the text, Lage intends to use the image of a hard drive (portable memory storage) as a metaphor for narrative discontinuity. In terms of digital media, a hard drive saves data, drawn from the Internet or otherwise, and organizes materials in files [archivos]. Hence, allowing the user to store information and access data from anywhere. Thus, *Archivo* most specifically assumes the form of a hard drive through its structure, which is constituted by fragments that resemble the interface a user attends to when navigating through a series of files in a drive. In Chun's definition of cyberspace, she elaborates on how "data travels as discrete packets between locations and can be cached in a number of places" (*Control and Freedom* 39). The content in Lage's text is presented at the formal level in a way that resonates with this form of data. Of course, there is an added layer whereas data is now in a medium separated from fiber optic network: it has been cached in the hard drive as represented in the text. The fictional archive created is then navigated by the reader as one would navigate cyberspace by having access to bits of data in every interaction but not being able to map all available information.

In this way, the subjective memory constructed in the text becomes a collection of bits of information, or data, that the narrator has compiled for the book project about State Security. These fragments, presented as files, tell the stories of citizens' subjective experiences in Havana. This is exemplified in a scene where the narrator crosses to the other side of the "Espejo Que Deforma & Pone En Crisis La Primera Persona," which the Agente brings to him emphasizing to be careful with it because it is "una preciada reliquia de la Revolución" (58). In this scene, the narrator crosses to a different dimension and finds himself in Vedado, La Habana. The narrator-protagonist starts following a younger version of himself and taking pictures of what he is doing. The younger version is walking around the city and makes several stops. First, he stops at a book stand and looks at an anthology of science-fiction stories. Then, he goes into Acapulco cinema where he watches the movie *Black Swan*, but leaves before it is over. Finally, he goes inside of an apartment where a man sells him a hard drive. Once he is back on the bus, the narrator-protagonist drops off an envelope with the pictures he has taken throughout the process and that he was able to develop when his younger version was buying the hard drive. The younger version ignores the pictures and after leaving the bus he begins throwing up on his knees.

This fragment is particularly illuminating because it condenses several images that tie the form of the text back to a collection of data in a hard drive and *el paquete*. The mirror through which the narrator-protagonist crosses to the other dimension has two functions. First, it gestures to how individual expression is limited/censored in the context of the Revolution; it shows back what the revolution forces the subject to be. Second, it is indeed the panopticon through which the state is able to see everything. By connecting the younger version of the narrator with the hard drive at the end, and subsequently the vomiting related to State Security's occupation of citizens' bodies elsewhere in the text, this scene suggests that the narrator-protagonist was co-opted by state-control in the past. In the first few sentences, the narrator sees himself in destabilized temporality: "Filtración. Lo primero que hice en el otro lado fue buscarme. Allí. Aquel joven era yo. Aquel joven que caminaba por la calle, las mismas calles de Nuevo Vedado. Todo estaba más o menos igual. Era el presente estándar, cotidiano" (Lage 92-93). In fact, the phrasing used resonates with both a mirroring vision of himself as well as with a vision entrenched in the past: "Aquel joven *era* yo." The description of the state-of-affairs, which "estaba más o menos igual," blurs both the notion of simultaneity and past-time. The observation regarding the present "Era el presente estándar, cotidiano" reinforces the idea that there are several dimensions intertwined in the text. In this scene, the narrator is simultaneously experiencing past and present. This temporal simultaneity reinforces the idea of the narrator

entering a parallel reality that coexist in synchronicity to the one where he is staring at the mirror (and the one where the novel takes place). It is in this parallel reality that the narrator exists prior to his current circumstances. This is also the moment when he acquires the hard drive appearing at the beginning of the novel and that becomes the spatial metaphor for the text. The mirror represents the possibility of accessing the different dimensions seen by the state but not the citizens. It gestures to the double discourse that the novel aims to represent through its form. This convergence of temporality offered through the mirror dialogues with the discontinuity produced by the Internet and digital memory as living archive that contest national archives.

There are two more aspects in the fragment that shed light on the text's database aesthetic. When the transaction to get the hard drive is taking place, the young narrator is offered a hard drive with a bigger (unspecified) capacity: "Tengo otros mejores, con más capacidad, si te interesa" (Lage 93). To what the narrator's response is ultimately "No quiero más capacidad . . . no quiero más memoria" (Lage 93). In "The Digital Ephemeral, or the Future Is a Memory" (2008), Chun points out:

> Crucially, memory is an active process, not static. A memory must be held in order to keep it from moving or fading. Memory does not equal storage. While memory looks backward, according to the OED, to store is to furnish, to build stock. Storage or stocks always look towards the future. In computerspeak, one reverses common language because one stores something in memory. This odd reversal and the conflation of memory and storage glosses over the impermanence and volatility of computer memory. Without this volatility, however, there would be no memory. (164)

In this scene, the narrator engages with the tension between memory and storage that Chun points out above. Engaging with what Chun defines as 'computerspeak,' Lage appropriates technological terms to engage with a more profound statement regarding memory. The narrator rejects the better capacity of the hard drive, "No quiero más capacidad," yet the inclusion of "no quiero más memoria" is also a rejection of memory, digital or otherwise. Therefore, the younger/parallel version of the narrator engages with this volatility of computer memory pointed out by Chun and by converging memory with storage he refuses temporal constraints of past and future. In regard to the memory/ies that the text aims to collect, we could consider how the potential memory in the text is subject to the volatility of computer memory via formal re-mediation. The work that both the narrator, and Lage as well, aim to accomplish is presented as fragile, ephemeral, vulnerable, and incomplete—characteristics that Chun also suggest are pertinent to digital memory. Ultimately, the subjectivity articulated in the text also gestures to the fragility/ephemerality of memory. The text's drive to recover subjective memories and erasures is equated to the volatile condition of digital memory, which is the same condition in which subjective memory disputing the national archive exists.

One last, yet key, observation about the mirror scene regards the closing action of the fragment in relationship to State Security's surveillance and control. After the narrator who crossed to the other side to take pictures of the parallel narrator, prints these, and tries to hand them to him (with certain urgency) during a bus ride, the fragment closes with the following event: "Nada más poner los pies en la calle, el joven se dobló y empezó a vomitar" (Lage 94). This is an important aspect because it connects the scene to the rest of the novel and why the image of the hard drive seems relevant. The fact that the narrator throws up in the parallel reality after buying the hard drive can be linked to moments in which other characters, such as Baby Zombi, Yoanis, Cristabel, and VirginBot, appear in similar states. We see this explicitly happening with the character Cristabel, who after going through a physical state that Baby

Zombi describes as "Pero si es la niña de *El exorcista*" (Lage 99), it is revealed that her body has been occupied/possessed by State Security: "Vi algo mientras estaba dormida dentro del demonio. Dentro de la Seguridad del Estado, le dijo Yoan" (Lage 102). Thus, the open-ended fragment of the hard drive transaction can potentially be read as the beginning of the State Security appropriation of the narrator's body. In this mirror scene, the narrator has crossed over into Revolutionary discourse and his individual subjectivity ceases to exist. Instead, the narrator has been coerced into the state's surveilling apparatus. The narrator appears to be, even if unwillingly, turning into an agent, as is the case with all the other characters.

Thus, it is revealed that the narrator and his book project are a tool for State Security as well. This can be connected to the very beginning of the novel, which looks at the past and creates a tension between Havana and the interior of a hard drive "no era tanto la desesperación de vivir en La Habana como de vivir en el interior de una memoria portátil" (Lage 9). This tension appears as if somehow there was a punishment to live in relationship to the "suspicious" hard drive transaction. The narrator in the main reality of the novel is living under the coercion and limited possibilities of a dimension fully controlled by State Security and its technological scaffolding.

As a result, this resonates with the evasive temporality characteristic of digital media, where temporalities converge in a nearly impossible-to-grasp present.[101] It also resembles the narrator's interaction with time and space within the plot. He can simultaneously be in the past, present, or future, as well as multiple dimensions. In addition to these formal aspects regarding the relationship between the narrator and hard drive inside the novel, there also seems to be a dialogue here between the novel and the politics of technology in Cuba.

Hard Drives and *Paquetes*

Considering Cuban citizens' use of external hard drives and the economy of *el paquete* can expand the understanding of *Archivo*. In this sense, it is imperative to consider what having access to the object means on the island. I propose to think of Cuban contemporary use of hard drives in a two-way fashion: as an object, it is an intimate/affective archive, and as praxis, it represents exercising a certain level of agency. It is impossible to think about hard drives in Cuba today without considering the value it acquires in its exceptional context. As is the case with hard drives anywhere else in the world, the artefact is used by individuals to collect important data from a subjective experience/approach. In the context of Cuba, a hard drive means both access to and collection of materials that would otherwise not be readily available for citizens. Though the data collected might be mostly popular culture, access to the "paquete" also provides other forms of information, software and digital culture. However, the point I'd like to stress here is, the hard drive as an object, maybe more so than the Internet, represents a form of connecting with the rest of the global community via insular real-time actualization of what

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[101] Chun elaborates on new media's slippery ontology regarding temporality due to simultaneously existing in the past and future time while being an object nearly-impossible to grasp in the present moment. This characteristic is not uncommon in Lage's narrative. As Dorta suggests of *La autopista: the movie*'s narrative making impossible its own summary because it is challenging to adjudicate a temporal and spatial frame to *Archivo*. That is, the plots refuse to fit fixed boundaries.

exists outside of the island.[102] This had not been achievable for citizens prior to the introduction of this new technology.

In signifying this relationship with the global community via the Internet, the use of the hard drive could be thought in relationship to a prioritization of subjectivity. Arguably, there are ties to the hard drive that prioritize the individual needs while transgressing the politics of the Cuban Revolution. Therefore, the object also becomes a personal archive because although the "paquete" is the same for everyone, each person that buys access to it has a period of time to go through the material in order to curate what they're saving in their personal drives. The "paquete," unlike television or the Internet, is not quite curated by the State, although it is common knowledge that it lacks political material and porn—things that are banned by the government. This brings me to the second aspect of what the hard drive, as image and metaphor, signifies in the Cuban context. In being able to choose what to keep, the Cuban citizens exercise agency when consuming *paquete*'s media, which is not found in the same way through other digital culture consumption. For example, the state also controls what web pages are accessed through the Internet. Connecting these aspects regarding the technology of the hard drive in Cuba to *Archivo* can shed light on why the text stresses the importance of the hard drive and partly functions as a *novela paquete*.

The function of the fragment in the text resembles the form of the hard drive as a personal archive. The fragments are divided into three main general categories: fragments where the action of the narrative takes place, fragments that start with one-word sentences in tag format, and fragments that are direct citations. The glance aesthetic, one in which the gaze is shortened and becomes a brief moment of attention as mentioned above, is key for how the fragments flow in *Archivo*. As I mentioned before, there is absolutely no logical chronology in how these fragments are ordered. In this sense, its form resembles that of shuffling through digital archives. Unlike television zapping, in digital memory there is no clear notion of what browsing comes first or second but rather this is determined by the user. I will spend some time here discussing how the fragments support the formal construction as a resemblance of hard drive or computer memory.

The fragments that accomplish this effect more strongly are the ones that begin with one-word sentences, similarly to digital folders' titles. Along with the ones that consist of direct citations, the insertion of these fragments in the narrative are attached with a mechanical sensation that generates a form closely tied to how digital data is stored. The book has almost an equal amount of each category, five fragments with the tag titles and six with "direct" citations. The fragments starting with tag-like words are categorized as follows: "Imágenes," "Métodos," "Recuerdos," and "Nota al pie. Infusión." These fragments present a certain type of description or notes about data that seems to be either the information collected in order to write the book about the State Security or the "archive" the narrator consulted in order to develop the book he is attempting to write.

These labels resembling digital folder titles also work with and through digital mediations of subjectivity that reinforce the resemblance of computer memory at the formal level. The

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[102] Price points this out when defining "el paquete": "And if internet connections on the island remain famously scarce, controlled, and slow, since about 2013 Cubans have had real time access to a wide array of pirated global television programs, films and "apps" through the *paquete*, a weekly curation of digital information circulated for a low price via flash drives and computers" (2).

categories used to label fragments go hand-in-hand with the mediation of subjectivity in the text. In the two fragments labelled "Imágenes" there are descriptions of citizens gathered in public spaces, namely, citizens that have been under the eye of surveillance. The first one suggests the images have been collected by the government itself: "Imágenes. En la Calle G, la Antigua Avenida de los Presidentes, los últimos frikis, los últimos mikis, los últimos repas, los últimos emos pálidos mirándose las caras bajo la mirada atenta de los policías, las patrullas, los perros, la luna del tedio y el sopor urbano" (23). This can be material the narrator has seen in the "official" archives of State Security and has kept in his personal archive for the purposes of the book he is writing. However, more importantly there is an apparent digital mediation here of the subcultural scene space of Calle G and the "frikis." Once again, we encounter the representation of an instance in which Cuban citizens have and still exercise some level of agency. This time, the agency exercised concerns body, communities, and space. The inclusion of this strong and lasting Cuban subcultural scene of Calle G early in the novel also opens up the mapping and tracing of Havana's spaces occupied by those who remain outside of national discourse. The characters introduced as the novel develops reinforce the representation of communities existing at the margin of national discourse. Baby Zombie is technically a "repa," which is Cuban slang for someone who likes the reggaeton genre. Yoanis is a transgender who works in *El Malecón*. These characters are not the "hombre nuevo" highly desired by the nation-state. Instead there is a portrayal of the "hombre nuevo" as described by Ivan de la Nuez as "El Hombre Nuevo que vivirá en el futuro tendrá siempre algo de contrabando . . . Quizás habrá en él algo de un *hacker* que estetizará su revolución en lo virtual, allí donde las leyes van detrás y no delante de los acontecimientos" (13). By contrast, in the remaining fragment titled "Imágenes" appears a more stereotypical Caribbean portrayal of a group of Cubans talking about baseball (25). In each of the cases, the text uses the digital form to represent subjectivities that exist in spite of official discourse.

Introducing these instances in the form of digital data creates distance, eliminating the more conventional picturesque character attached to the representation of Cuban scenes and arguably, reject the post-colonial exotic.[103] Through the mediation of these otherwise picturesque scenes of Cuban everyday life, the text manages to distinguish itself from previous literary approaches. It is possible that this is a way in which Lage's ruins are different from his predecessors. These ruins are petrified objects presented as data rather than the real object itself. In this sense, it is possible that these mediations serve as a metaphor to represent the ruination of the nation rather that the ruins of Cuban landscape. Representing this process does not require a realistic approach to the landscape. The additional layer, the becoming into digital, thus escapes a literary representation that resembles a more raw and realistic approach and instead allow room for other venues for the exploration of the nation's dead-ends. The anti-narrative of text as digital code becomes this national impasse; this form makes it distant, and at times, renders it illegible.

The impasse was announced early in the text in newspaper clippings appearing in the third and fifth fragments. These have been taken out of the "Boletín Interno del Ministerio del Interior" called *Minint hoy* and, as is common among Generación Zero's writers, the clippings invokes the figure of José Martí. While these fragments appear as if they were direct citations from the *boletín*, they seem rather fictional in their portrayal of the Cuban icon. The fifth fragment "cites" the following:

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[103] In her book *Cuban Currency: The Dollar and 'Special Period'* (2008), Esther Whitfield, in conversation with Graham Huggan, discusses this regarding Cuban "novísimos" literature.

> Para alcanzar la independencia y enfrentar a los enemigos de Cuba, Martí advirtió a sus compatriotas tener presentes las siguientes palabras, que aparecen con frecuencia en sus escritos y discursos: silencio, vigilancia, discreción, desconfianza, reserva, desinformar, fingir, cuidado, sigilo, cautela, invisible, sombra, persecución, redes, acecho, clave, secreto y tinieblas. (Lage 11)

It is unclear if this citation is a direct citation from real government propaganda. More importantly, instead of citing Martí directly, the *boletín*'s text presented rather represents a curation of the words that are most important to emphasize for the Interior Ministry. The fragment as presented becomes a citation of a distorted citation—again, the text adds layers to create distance. The list of words included prescribe the unfolding of the text's anti-narrative. In fact, this fiction is made out of the "silencio" regarding all the other elements "vigilancia, discreción, desconfianza, reserva, desinformar, fingir, cuidado, sigilo, cautela, invisible, sombra, persecución, redes, acecho, clave, secreto y tinieblas" (11). The "tinieblas" that emerge through these silences and erasures are also a key component of the list of fragments. This is true not only of the characters that represent and appear in the more institutional spaces but for the characters residing in Havana as well. Even when the interviewees from Villa Marista appear telling their stories there is darkness [tinieblas] within the clarity provided in their testimonies, there are loose ends in their stories. Through these strategies, *Archivo* becomes obscure and hermetic. The latter is foreshadowed when the Agente advises the narrator "la escritura es *low profile*. Autoficción. Autismo" (Lage 10). Therefore, autism becomes the metaphor that best describes *Archivo*'s attempt to become a cartography of Cuba's layers of political, popular, and urban life. National discourse, urban life in La Habana, and their many labyrinths are all autism; they are interior and can only be defined within their insularity. Digital media, a database or hard drive become perfect metaphors to encompass this obscurity, the autistic ontology of a ruined nation, at both the content and formal level.

Closing Remarks

Archivo is a fundamental text for understanding the national and technological politics of Cuba today. I have discussed here some of the elements in the text transgressing Cuban national discourse. Although the narrator seems to be unwillingly becoming an agent of State Security, more so than defending the revolution, he seems to be unveiling its failures because it has also failed him. By constructing a novela-paquete, Lage puts a multiplicity of layers of Cuban social reality alongside one another to bring attention to the most pressing issues in Cuban contemporaneity. Lage's implementation of new media in the literary form generates new perspectives on how to approach complex topics such as Cuban nationalism, surveillance, and democratic citizenship in the digital age. Lage constructs a subjectivity mediated and elaborated through new technologies and the Internet, as is also the case with other contemporary Caribbean writers. In this way, Lage also articulates a Caribbean imagination facilitated by an interpellation in global networks. By imagining the Cuban archive's correspondence to a web page or hard drive memory, Lage opens up the possibility for this archive to be scrutinized and altered via fiction in the twenty-first century. And crucially, he understands that this intervention must arise from the subjective perspectives of those who experienced a nation at the breaking point firsthand.

<u>Conclusion: On Caribbean Lost Causes and Hope</u>

In closing this dissertation, I would like to engage one last time Slavoj Žižek's notion of the lost cause, which I briefly discussed in the first chapter. Žižek defines as a lost cause the act of defending a cause even if we fail at it because if we continue to defend it then we fail even better next time (14). Doing the opposite, not defending the cause, suggests Žižek, would be to perpetuate stupidity (14). It is hard to think of something more literary than a lost cause. In these works, I see not only the literary as Žižek's lost cause, but also how the treatment that writers give to defending autonomous Caribbean thought functions as a lost cause. Namely, they defend what may seem at first to be lost causes—claiming back our past, decolonizing collective life, thinking of alternative futures—even when doing so may seem futile. But the alternative, which Žižek calls indifference, does not seem to be an option for these writers. Thus, at the center of *Caribbean Digital Imaginations* lies the lost cause and the impetus to continue failing even better as part of Caribbean thought production.

In ways, the alternative futures constructed become forms of hope. Rocío Zambrana has considered hope as a form of decolonial thought. In her reading of colonial debt, where she draws lines between the conditions of Caribbean debt today to a history that begins with Haiti itself, Zambrana proposes that an organization of pessimism can lead to a hopeful tone, by proposing that

> To organize pessimism is to labor from the concrete conditions that compose actuality. It is to bet on what is possible from the actual. The opposite of pessimism is not optimism . . . It is hope. Optimism, like utopia, draws from abstraction. It bets lacking a ground. It lacks not a reason (Grund), but contact with conditions here and now. It is therefore naive. Pessimism, in contrast, draws from catastrophe. It knows that the detritus left by a downturn—κατά (down) στροφή (turning)—are tasks. To organize, to articulate, to form alliances guided by such tasks is hopeful, then. Pessimism excises moral metaphors that turn us away from the tasks at hand, from alliances in need of articulation. It clears the political space for the construction of new images that respond to actuality. It thereby makes possible responses to the specific dangers exhibited by the present. (15-16)

I propose that Zambrana's use of pessimism as a structuring devise to articulate decoloniality can be seen in light of the lost cause in producing a Caribbean discourse of self-determination. Zambrana goes further in considering the power of using pessimism as a form of rearticulating what would otherwise remain as political-economic and/or historical defeats:

> Drawing from catastrophe, pessimism makes possible tracking common projects, articulating shared responses. Critical responses to climate change, the eradication of economic structures that breed inequality, debt cancellation, dismantling racism and heteropatriarchy are overlapping goals guiding multiple resistance movements in and beyond Puerto Rico. Beyond decolonization, decolonality is a capacious project that admits such alliances. It seeks to dismantle race/gender/class hierarchies at work within and beyond the colony. It has the potential to ground political alliances in concrete conditions here and now, while tracking their position within systems of oppression that reach far and wide. It has the capacity to address division, fragmentation, and disarticulation within catastrophes by articulating subversive resistance to capture, exceptionality, and slow death. (26-27)

In thinking resistance in and beyond Puerto Rico, Zambrana suggests that through articulations of decoloniality we can find or index the elements through which different countries can create

the alliances necessary to potentiate self-determination. These alliances imply a need to go beyond the divisions drawn by nation states and geopolitics so that we can build a different collective life in the Caribbean; one that becomes more regional and less insular. Throughout this dissertation I have analyzed these overlapping resistances to inequality, racism, and the heteropatriarchy in today's new media literature from the Hispanic Caribbean. I propose that in considering said interweaving threads of solidarity blankets of sorts, we look at the role of new media in supporting these processes and alliances in the twenty-first century. And then, again, hope becomes visible through literature, which organizes into hope what would otherwise remain as pessimism. And so, above all other things, these writers are relevant because they organize pessimism into hope. Their works have "a way" of producing hope about how can we think otherwise. They appropriate the tropes of pessimism—social control and the catastrophes therein—and organize them through the literary to produce works that seem full of hope as an act of decolonial solidarity.

Juan Ramos, in *Sensing Decolonial Aesthetics in Latin American Arts* (2018), has discussed this type of strategy as part of the framework proposed as "decolonial aesthetics." Ramos suggests that the "decolonial intellectual as artist . . . employ[s] his or her artistic medium to critique injustice, and to inform and educate the oppressed, but also to learn from them, to engage in dialogue with them in a horizontal relationship of mutuality as a decolonial strategy" (197). A decolonial aesthetics becomes one that relies on "principles that generate a common approach to viewing and critiquing social problems and inequities" (Ramos 210). Throughout this dissertation, my analysis has highlighted how the historical consciousness produced by Rebollo Gil, Indiana, and Lage intertwine with different decolonial strategies and aesthetics ultimately aiming to make injustice and inequality visible. In the chapter on Puerto Rico I elaborated how Rebollo Gil creates a tension between popular discourse and hegemonic nationalist discourse, by bringing forth coloniality through his engagement with new media. In the chapter on the Dominican Republic, I further elaborated how indigenous and black bodies become central to Indiana's treatment of the posthuman anchored on the idea of a renewal of Caribbean discourse in contemporaneity. Finally, in the Cuban case, I showed how Lage creates a tension between national official archive and archives constructed by citizens through the offline circulation of new media. Through these strategies, all three writers delve into the historical past of the region, to put forth its erasures through their dialogue with new media. In doing so, they rehearse alternative collectivities and imagine other ways in which citizens can exist in the Caribbean. Thus, a politics of decolonial solidarity emerges because the idea of uniting and including those previously excluded becomes essential in their constructions of and for the future.

Caribbean digital imagination as a concept and as a project seeks to reorient our understanding of the Caribbean today. By engaging in the analysis of these three writers—Rebollo Gil, Indiana, and Lage—I take on in-depth considerations about how contemporary Caribbean literature can function as a site for knowledge production. What I conclude through my different analyses is that by following the different logics of digital culture, these works have already begun to generate a new Caribbean episteme. This new Caribbean episteme is what I ultimately call Caribbean digital imaginations. Centered in its time, then, Caribbean digital imaginations considers how new media literature generates decolonial discourse and a new historical consciousness of the region through the emergence of a cultural production wave strongly influenced by new media and Internet practices. Additionally, these imaginations can also be thought of as ways in which literature captures what would otherwise be impermanent

Caribbean realities by engaging with new media's own reliance on the illusion of impermanence and constant change mentioned in the introductory section. In other words, Caribbean digital imaginations does not consist of one fixed subjectivity, but it is rather constructed with many different subjectivities in mind that can be in constant change as well. Ultimately, Caribbean digital imaginations puts forth new forms to think of Caribbean subjectivities intricately related to the sociological changes resulting from the emergence of new technologies and the Internet. Yet, their construction through the literary medium opens up the hopeful possibility to make them a permanent representation for the Caribbean imaginations of the future.

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