

This volume, *Caribbean Cosmopolitanisms and Caribbean Sciences: Inclusive Approaches to the Study of the Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the Greater Caribbean and Beyond*, is a collection of peer reviewed articles that present a critical perspective on the languages, literatures, and cultures of the Greater Caribbean and beyond. The book is part of a two-volume set published annually since 2009, which provides a platform for recent writing from and about the Greater Caribbean in general in one volume and about the Dutch Caribbean in particular in the other. The contributing authors include a wide range of voices old and new from the Caribbean and beyond. The online versions of these volumes and the other 27 volumes in this series can be found on the Caribbean Languages and Culture Platform in the Partner Collections of the Dutch Caribbean Digital Platform of the Library of University of Curaçao at <http://dcdp.uoc.cw/icarplat>.

## Caribbean Cosmopolitanisms and Caribbean Sciences:

Faraclas | Severing | Echteid  
| Delgado | Rutgers |

# Caribbean Cosmopolitanisms and Caribbean Sciences:

## Inclusive Approaches to the Study of the Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the Greater Caribbean and Beyond



Edited by  
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Elisabeth Echteid  
Sally Delgado  
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the Greater Caribbean and Beyond



**Caribbean Cosmopolitanisms and Caribbean Sciences  
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and Cultures of the Greater Caribbean and Beyond**

Volume 2

Edited by

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**UNIVERSITY  
OF CURAÇAO**  
DR. MOISES DA COSTA GOMEZ



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Volume 2

Edited by Nicholas Faraclas, Ronald Severing, Elisabeth Echteld, Sally Delgado, Wim Rutgers,

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## **Introduction and acknowledgements**

The two publications: *Caribbean Cosmopolitanisms and Caribbean Sciences: Inclusive Approaches to the Study of the Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the Greater Caribbean and Beyond* together with *Caribbean Convivialities and Caribbean Sciences: Inclusive Approaches to the Study of the Languages, Literatures and Cultures of the Dutch Caribbean and Beyond*, contain a collection of articles that present a critical perspective on the languages, literatures, and cultures of the Greater Caribbean and the Caribbean diaspora. The contributing authors include a wide range of voices old and new from the Caribbean and beyond.

This book forms part of a two-volume set, with this volume focusing on the Greater Caribbean in general, and the other volume focusing on the ABC-islands (Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao) and other parts of the (former) Dutch Caribbean in particular. Together, these volumes provide a platform for researchers and other cultural workers whose work treats the islands, topics, and/or perspectives that traditionally receive less scholarly attention than others at professional conferences and in academic publications. Special emphasis is placed on ensuring that new voices with fresh points of view find a place in these volumes, alongside contributions by more well-established scholars.

The online versions of these volumes and the other 27 volumes in this series can be found on the Caribbean Languages and Culture Platform in the Partner Collections of the Dutch Caribbean Digital Platform of the Library of the University of Curaçao at <http://dcdp.uoc.cw/icarplat>.

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The Editors



**COSMOPOLITANISMS AND LANGUAGES  
IN THE CARIBBEAN AND BEYOND**



# KRIO AND GULLAH

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## Abstract

The prevailing assumption is that Sierra Leone Krio “did not exist before 1800” (Roy, 1985, p. 2; McWhorter, 1997, p. 61), and that it was taken to Africa from the Americas. Berry and Ross (1962, p. 4) were the first to claim that “the basis of Krio is, no doubt, the Jamaican dialect of the Maroons” who arrived in Sierra Leone in 1800—and more recently and more specifically that it was the secret ‘spirit language’ they brought with them (Smith, 2017). A subsequent hypothesis holds that Krio had arrived eight years earlier with Gullah-speaking Black Loyalists, the ‘Nova Scotians’ (Huber, 2004). My own position has always been that the earliest form of Krio already existed prior to the establishment of the Freetown colony in 1787, and then underwent subsequent input from both Jamaican and Gullah, as well as African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and varieties of West African Pidgin English (WAPE) spoken by some of the Liberated Africans arrivees, who outnumbered those founder settlers fiftyfold. The Jamaican connection has been addressed in Hancock (2021a, 2021b), while the present chapter looks at Gullah.

**Key terms:** Krio, Gullah, West African Pidgin English, Sierra Leone

## Introduction

East to West, or West to East? Claims have been made that Gullah is both the origin of Krio (Huber, 2004), and that it is itself of WAPE or Guinea Coast Creole English (GCCE) origin (Parsons, 1923, p. xvij; Herskovits, 1936, p. 123ff.; Stoney & Shelby, 1939, p. xi; Lichtveld, 1954, p. 60). In this contribution I use the term Gullah as it has traditionally been used, with the understanding that a labelling distinction is increasingly being made between Gullah, spoken in South Carolina, and Geechee, spoken in Georgia, both referred to collectively in some academic papers as Sea Islands Creole.

A non-partisan overview of the Gullah *vs.* Jamaican origin for Krio, as well as of the Jamaican- *vs.* African-origin debate, is found in Deuber (2005, pp. 26-27).

Krio shares much in common with Gullah, structurally far more than it does with Jamaican, widely believed to be Krio's progenitor. The extent to which Gullah owes its original form to an earlier Rice Coast Pidgin English, or Krio shares features with Gullah because of the Black Loyalist Settlers is a vexed issue, and the answer is almost certainly some of both. Huber (1999, 2000, 2004) has argued in detail that Krio is relocated Gullah, a position pointedly challenged by Smith (2015, pp. 92-94, 103-104; 2017, pp. 252-253), who sees it instead as the transplanted 'spirit language' of the Jamaican Maroons who arrived in Sierra Leone in 1800. The reverse (east to west) scenario is also dismissed by Matori, who finds, without discussion or evidence, "the popular notion that Gullah/Geechee language derives from Sierra Leonean Krio ... surprising," (2008, pp. 969-970). As esoteric as the discussion is, it has never given rise to a "popular notion"; nevertheless, it is one that is attracting increased academic attention, since the details of the social and historical links between the Gullah/ Afro-Seminole and Sierra Leone have become better known.

### **Settlement of the Gullah area**

Initially, the British took most of their African captives to Barbados, which they settled in 1627 before distributing them to their other colonies, though by the mid-1700s that island's role as their waystation had tapered off considerably. For example, merchants in Charleston "were attempting to halt in the West Indies cargoes directed to Carolina" (Donnan, 1928, p. 822). After 1698, captives meant for the North American market began to be brought with increasing frequency directly from Africa (Wax, 1973); before then, over half of the ca. 2,000 Africans in South Carolina, founded twenty-five years earlier, had arrived via Barbados.

Georgia at the time was Creek Indian country, and because it was considered too dangerous for British settlers, it continued to be free territory. When it became a colony by charter in 1732, its London-based governors immediately tried to prohibit slavery, but because of the profit-making opportunities derived from slave labour, political pressure from South Carolina easily defeated their attempt. The coastal area of Georgia was rich in fertile land suitable for rice cultivation, and was much in demand by the South Carolina planters. Thus, after the end of the French and Indian War in 1763 which largely removed any threat from the Creeks, the Georgia low country opened up for the development of rice, which had already been introduced from Madagascar in the late 17th century.

Up until 1749, Georgia had been getting its own slaves from South Carolina, but after that date it began to import them from elsewhere—and, unlike South Carolina, it continued to bring in slaves from the West Indies. Until their importation was prohibited in

1770, they were coming from Jamaica, Antigua, Barbados, St. Croix, St. Kitts, St. Martin, St. Vincent, Montserrat, Nevis, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Grenada and Cuba.

Slaves were continually arriving directly from Africa, however, and in considerable numbers; and significantly from the Upper Guinea Coast. Nichols noted that after ca. 1730, most of the slaves coming into Charleston came directly from Africa, with “very few originat[ing] in the West Indies” (1976, pp. 16-19). Rogers (1970, p. 29) estimates that prior to that date, the average annual importation of slaves into the region was 616, thereafter increasing over threefold to 2,089. Between 1701 and 1808, imports from Africa into South Carolina were as follows: from Sierra Leone and The Gambia 76,000, from the Liberia-Sierra Leone region 19,000, from Ghana 28,000, from Benin 4,000 and from Biafra 23,000—and, shipped into Georgia (between 1766 and 1858), 12,000 from Sierra Leone and Gambia, 2,200 from Liberia, 3,800 from Ghana and 5,800 from the ‘Central Coast.’ Thus, for each colony the totals for Sierra Leone and Gambia exceeded the totals for all other regions combined (all figures are from Eltis & Richardson, 2010).

These dates incorporate the time during which Mufwene (1997, pp. 11, 13 and personal communication) believes that Gullah emerged:

Between 1745 and 1760 the growth rates were reversed in favour of the European population. I think this shift makes the period between 1720 and 1750 the critical stage in the emergence of Gullah as a distinct African American variety. The onset of the development of Gullah as a distinct African American variety coincides with the adoption of the naval store and rice plantation industries as very lucrative investments for the South Carolina colony, the massive importation of slaves straight from Africa, the high infant mortality [and] the growth of the population mostly by contiguous importation of slaves.

Winford too (1997, p. 315) supports the same span of time—he estimates 1720 to 1775—during which a plantation economy and the Gullah language became stabilized. Opala (1986) had already made the same case, demonstrating how the introduction of rice farming was the critical factor in the shaping of Gullah. This means that slaves from the Rice Coast of Africa—which extends from Senegambia to Liberia—were in particular demand because of their specific agricultural skills. Despite the sociolinguist’s saw that language is a vehicle of culture, and while he does not “deny the contribution that GCCE, like several African languages, must have made to the development of Gullah as a creole,” Mufwene nevertheless opposes “privileging Sierra Leone in the makeup of Gullah as a language, [though] not in the culture of its speakers” (1992, p. 173).

If Gullah were shaped by the arrival of speakers of a Rice Coast creole, whether natively or as an L2, then the prior existence of stable communities that spoke it has to be demonstrated. Hair wrote “patently there were Africans on the coast speaking English before Freetown. Presumably it was often ‘broken English’ or pidgin” (Hair et al., 1992, pp. 113-114), Bai-Sheka refers to it, and makes the connection with rice:



By about 1750 there was probably a local Creole dialect spoken in Sierra Leone and, perhaps, on neighbouring parts of the Rice Coast—a variant of the broader West African Pidgin/Creole English. Some of the Rice Coast slaves taken to South Carolina and Georgia would have already spoken this Rice Coast dialect, and on the rice plantations their Creole speech become a model for the other slaves. The Gullah language, thus, could have developed from this distinctive Rice Coast Creole, acquiring loanwords from the ‘substrate languages’ of the African slaves from Sierra Leone and elsewhere. In Sierra Leone itself, the Rice Coast Creole continued to flourish throughout the late 1700s, so that when the freed slaves, ancestors of the Krios, arrived at the end of the century, they found the language already widely spoken; thus Krio and Gullah both derive from an early slave trade era Rice Coast Creole dialect. (2006, p. 5)

Smith too, was persuaded by the argument for the existence of a pidgin, if not a creole, on the Upper Guinea Coast:

We assume with Hancock (1986a) that the earliest form of pidgin English spoken on the African coast was that dating back to the period around 1600, when settlements of English-speaking traders had grown up in the general neighbourhood of the Sierra Leone and Gambia rivers. As Hancock demonstrates, Krio probably largely derives from this kind of pidgin English. (1987, p. 109)

Mervyn Alleyne also believed that a creole already existed in Sierra Leone that could not be attributed to the arrival of the Maroons; he wrote “[m]y work, as well as that of Ian Hancock, I believe, suggests that the dialect brought by Jamaicans found another similar English dialect already existing in Sierra Leone” (1971, p. 185).

### **Afro-European settlement on the Upper Guinea Coast**

There are two principal arguments against the establishment of permanent settlements consisting of men and boys from the British ships and local Africans, from which an English-lexifier contact language would emerge on the Upper Guinea Coast. Firstly, while like myself and Smith, McWhorter (1997) traces the beginnings of the English lexifier Atlantic Creoles (ELACs) to Africa, rather than to the Caribbean, specifically to the Gold Coast area in *Lower* Guinea, he maintains that they were neither large enough nor stable enough in Upper Guinea for such a (pre)-creole to take root. Secondly, he contends that there was no need for that to happen, because there was already a Portuguese-lexifier trade language being used up and down the coast. Nevertheless, there is plenty of reason to believe that an English-lexifier contact language did become established in some parts of the Rice Coast very early on.

Although an earlier Portuguese-lexifier language was used and became creolized in some places, its function as a trade pidgin waned sharply in the English-dominated areas, from which it eventually disappeared. Hair et al. called Villault’s (1670) claim that everyone spoke Portuguese in Sierra Leone a “wild assertion” (1992, p. 226). The two

were certainly spoken concurrently in places, but the English speakers maintained it only as a medium for trade, and not in their Afro-European domestic households (Hancock, 1972, 1986). While the indigenous languages contain many adoptions from Portuguese (Bradshaw, 1965), there is very little Portuguese-derived lexicon in Krio or WAPE, and the hypothesis that Krio is relexified Crioulo, the PLAC (Portuguese lexifier Atlantic Creole) spoken in neighbouring Guiné, cannot be maintained (Cassidy, 1971; Thompson & Koroma, 2014).

Although Tagliavini wrote that Krio contains “multi elementi portoghese” (1931, p. 834), it contains a very small number of Portuguese-derived items overall. The fact that while the majority of the nearly 100 linguistic features listed in Holm and Patrick (2007) are shared by Krio and Crioulo, some 25% of them are not, which is sufficient to demonstrate the unlikelihood of its having developed as a relexification of Crioulo. A reasoned argument supporting this position can be found in Ola Oke (1977). Unlike Krio, *inter alia* Crioulo does not, for example, pluralize nouns with *them*, or form comparatives with *pass* or adverbials with *one*, or form a serialized instrumental; it distinguishes the progressive from the habitual aspect, has a passive voice and cannot front-focus verbals. Various kinds of English were spoken between Africans and Europeans on the Upper and Lower Guinea Coast before the 19th century. In the Afro-European settlements, varieties of what I call Coast English surely stabilized, especially in those in which permanent households had been established and Afro-European children born and raised (Hancock, 1972, 1986). Records of these varieties are not reliable, because the whites representing them in their books only included bits they recognised and understood, like “me no sabby,” but Creole constructions with *we* or *se*, or constructions such as *na go a de go* or *a tek nef kot am*, or complex TMA groupings (*‘a bin fo don de du am’*, etc.), show up nowhere in those old books.

The Church Missionary Society told its teachers to send them what their converts (supposedly) said, in order to reproduce them in its annual reports, “so that pious hearts be touched by their broken English” (Fyfe, 1962, p. 130), though the earliest samples we have are surely artificial creations cobbled together by its self-serving missionaries; the *Religious Intelligencer* has, for example:

Suppose, Massa, you no been come in this country, we all sabby go fire – we be sabby nothing: we believe that we lie – we do all that is bad. I thank God for send you here, for teach us poor sinners! (Whiting, 1820, p. 40)

If they were not padded with self-penned praise they were often mocking, and again created by the fleeting visitor. Burton (1863), who was in Freetown for only three days, is a prime example of this, and Banbury and Lethbridge’s notion of “Black talk” in Sierra Leone was clearly influenced by their impression of American ‘minstrel’ speech:

As you no bery incline’ to b’lieve in dese witches, massa, I can tell you story about dis bery place which you no p’raps hab heard, and which happen lilly while before you come. Me don’t see him, but ’specks he lib dere. (1888, p. 34)

Jones (1964) has provided examples of other 19th century efforts, noting skeptically that “knowledge of the vernacular appears to have been very quickly acquired” by some of its authors (1964, p. 24). Consider too, that an attempt was being made to speak *English* to the white interrogator, not WAPE or GCCE.

The English began to trade in Guinea in 1553 (Fisher, 1937, p. 2), and by 1557 the Irish politician and trader William Towerson was already able to write of the “many Englishmen” living in Vigo, a settlement on the River Gambia. “The English [also] established themselves at a place called Oranto on the north bank,” as well as in another part of the Gambia which the local Wolofs called Tobab-Kunda, i.e. “white man’s dwelling place” (Gray, 1940, p. 22).

Three years later in 1560, Queen Elizabeth fitted out an English expedition to Upper Guinea (Fisher, 1937), while John Hawkins visited Sierra Leone three times between 1562 and 1567, and made voyages to other parts of Guinea between 1564 and 1566. In 1585 there were resident agents of the English Trading Associations on the Sierra Leone coast, men such as Rainolds of Exeter and Dassel of London, both also sponsored by Queen Elizabeth. They were joined later in 1588 by “certain English merchants”, who included Messrs. Gregory and Pope of Taunton. By 1590 the English had established a fort and a factory on Tasso Island, and built two more on Bunce Island and on the Sherbro Islands.

In 1591, forty Englishmen were ambushed by local Africans on the Gambia, an indication of their numbers there at the time. In 1618, the Company of Adventurers of London was established to maintain trade along the River, and was given permission to do business from the factories or residences north and south of the Sherbro River down the coast in Sierra Leone. In 1631, Sir Richard Young was commissioned to be an Adventurers’ agent in Upper Guinea by King Charles 1, and in 1638 the new African Company was founded, whose ownership passed to Oliver Cromwell in 1651. In 1670, Nicholas Villault described in his journal three English settlements, one on the Sierra Leone River, another at Cape Mount and another at Cape Mesurado. Barbot, reporting on his voyages there *prior* to 1682, noted “many of the coast Blacks speak a little *English*” (p. 249).

The Royal African Company was established in 1672, and built a settlement at Sherbro and a fort on Bunce Island, both in Sierra Leone, and in 1752 The Company of Merchants of Great Britain also established colonies in the same region. Butt-Thompson writes that eventually,

the success and increasing numbers of private traders (single shipment) ended the long monopoly of these chartered companies in Sierra Leone ... as the demand on the other side [of the Atlantic] for slave labour increased, the ship-men began to rely more and more on local slavers. These were residents, mostly Europeans, who had trained grumettas (slave-soldiers) and built baracoons (slave-barracks) and waged private wars to gain slaves ... other local slavers known

were Bowie of the Banana Islands, Andrew Pinches of Aberdeen who used the buildings put up 1680-1725 by Howie Davis, Bartholomew Roberts, and other pirates, and Domingo of Lokko and Kissy. (1952, pp. 4-6)

By the 1770s, says Kup (in personal communication, letter dated February 17<sup>th</sup> 1985, and in Kup 1975, p. 124), colonies such as the one in Bulama, north of the Sierra Leone River, also “contained a good number of British ne’er-do-wells” sent there as a means of getting them out of England.

The process of European traders establishing a client relationship and later on affinal ties with different indigenous ruling groups, thereby producing Afro-European, i.e. Creole, descendants, is illustrated by the family history of John Ormond, who was also known in the 1750s along the Sherbro Coast as Mungo John, or the ‘Mulatto Trader.’ He was the son of an Englishman who married an aristocratic African woman, and he worked as an apprentice in the trading settlement on Bunce Island in the Sierra Leone River (Robertson & Klein, 1983, p. 278). The present-day Krio families descending from Zachary Rogers and John Tucker date back to their residence in Sierra Leone in 1665, while the fifteen-year-old Thomas Corker began the present-day Caulker lineage in 1684 (Caulker-Burnett, 2010). The Sherbro-Creole Caulker family controlled much of the Sierra Leonean coast, including the Banana and Plantain Islands. Rodney wrote that after 1665,

few Afro-Portuguese were present on the Sherbro ... However, the gap was filled by a community of English traders and pirates, all subject to ‘erotic expediency’, so that Afro-English half-castes increased rapidly, augmented by black *grumetes* sharing their values ... These mulatto families were cradled in the English trading companies. (1970, 216)

Afro-European women in particular, thus became a powerful force on the Upper Guinea Coast, as business-brokers, as well as linguistically (Williams, 1988, Buschor, 1999, Faraclas 2012). I wrote about this in Hancock (1972), and ask yet again what were the Rogers and Tuckers and those before them speaking to each other for all those years, if Creole were not brought into Sierra Leone until 1792 with the Nova Scotians, or until 1800 with the Jamaican Maroons? What was the common language used between the runaway slaves and the white sailors in Deserters’ Town, built on Wilberforce Hill in 1766 by the Egba Thomas Peters, and which lasted for 30 years until the arrival of the Nova Scotians? And what languages were spoken overall by the Black majority? Sierra Leone became *the primary source of captives* in the slave trade to Savannah after the American Revolution, while Gambia dropped out of the Savannah market in the same period. That, and the fact that Georgia lost most of its slave population during the Revolutionary War, would account for the fact that almost all the Mende and Vai texts Turner recorded came from Georgia, and not from South Carolina.

Opala writes (in personal communication):

On historical grounds, I would expect a creole to start taking root in South C[arolina] after a black majority settled there after about 1710 to 1715. Gullah would have taken root in coastal Georgia much later, I imagine, when rice cultivation finally arrived there in a big way after the French and Indian War ended in 1763. That is when freedom from Indian attacks gave South Carolinian planters confidence to move south with their rice-growing Gullah slaves. Georgia's rice lands were smaller, but more fertile.

He notes further that the overall figure for South Carolina at the end of the legal slave trade in that state in 1808 was the same from Upper Guinea and from Congo/Angola—both about 42%. As for Georgia, slaves from Upper Guinea accounted for about 40%+ at the time of the American Revolution, though the Gold Coast was the second choice in Georgia, rather than Congo/Angola. Many more Nova Scotians came from South Carolina, however, than from Georgia.

Of consequence too, is the fact that there was an ongoing, two-way connection between Sierra Leone and South Carolina/Georgia. Joseph Opala (in personal communication) counts, for the eastbound groups besides the slaves taken from Bunce Island to Savannah, Charleston, and St. Augustine, the 'semi-free' grumettoes from Bunce Island who settled temporarily in the St. Augustine area and who were employed as construction workers on Richard Oswald's new plantations, and who later returned to Sierra Leone, and the free Afro-English slave trading families who had purchased rice plantations in South Carolina, some of whom settled there permanently. The Cleveland family from the Banana Islands is the best-known example, but not the only one. Among the west-bound groups, besides the American-born Nova Scotians there were the several hundred who had been born in Africa—one of them was John Kizell, a Sherbro man (Lowther, 2012)—and the free, wealthy Gullahs who came to Freetown in the early decades of the 1800s, before Liberia was well established. The best known is Edward Jones, first principal of Fourah Bay College.

While it is clear that Gullah, like Jamaican, Guyanese, Belizean and so on, is the product of multiple inputs, and that the earliest were almost certainly from the Caribbean, its similarity to Krio has been noted for a very long time, and indeed a persuasive case has long been made for Gullah's deriving much of its linguistic input from Sierra Leone. The impact of Sierra Leonean languages upon Gullah is paralleled by the same African lexical influence upon the Jamaican Maroon Spirit Language, discussed in Hancock (2021a, 2021b).

In 1965 the British historian P.E.H. Hair reviewed the linguistic data collected by Lorenzo Turner and found that a "remarkably large proportion" of the four thousand African loanwords in Gullah derives from languages of the "Sierra Leone region." He pointed especially to Mende, spoken almost exclusively in Sierra Leone, and Vai, spoken in Sierra Leone and neighbouring Liberia. Turner identified African loans in three categories – personal names (ca. 3,500), words used in conversation (ca. 350 words),

and terms found only in stories, songs and prayers (85 words). Using the linguistic derivations advanced by Turner, Hair calculated that languages of the Sierra Leone region account for 25 percent of the personal names (Mende 13 percent, Vai six percent); 20 percent of the words used in Gullah conversation (Mende nine percent, Vai eight percent); and 100 percent of the terms used in stories, etc. (Mende 75 percent, Vai 25 percent). In numerical terms, this means that on the basis of Turner's data, more than one thousand of the roughly four thousand African lexical adoptions in Gullah are derived from languages spoken in Sierra Leone; and of the ca. one thousand Sierra Leonean adoptions, about eight hundred are either Mende or Vai.

The "astonishing" figure of 100 percent for stories, songs, and prayers reflects the fact that *all* of the African (as opposed to Creole) texts and phrases recovered by Turner were in Mende or Vai. He collected an entire song in Mende, some lyrics in Mende and Vai, and Mende sentences embedded in Gullah stories. The remarkable story of just such a song providing the link between a Gullah family and a Mende family in Sierra Leone is told in the 1998 documentary film *The language you cry in* (Serrano & Toepke). Hair's own conclusion (1965, p. 81-82) was that

[f]rom these figures, it can hardly be doubted that Sierra Leone languages have made a major contribution to the Africanisms in the Gullah dialect. This is the more important to students of Sierra Leone, because we know of nowhere else in America where the influence of Sierra Leone languages can be traced to anything like this extent.

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### **Similarities and differences between Gullah and Krio: Directions of transmission**

Lexical evidence for an east-west transmission is overwhelming, though the reverse is not the case. It is hardly likely that words from those specific African languages were brought *into* Sierra Leone *from* North America, and in fact most of the Sierra Leonean items in Gullah are not found in Krio at all (exceptions are *pojo* 'heron' from Vai, and *kenki*, discussed below). The obvious question—but one that seems to have been avoided—must be, was WAPE/GCCE brought in *along with* the Mende, Vai, Fula, Temne, etc., from Sierra Leone as well?

Influence upon Krio, though not its origin, might be attributed to post-1792 Gullah, and while a quarter of the Black Loyalists came from coastal South Carolina and Georgia. More easily demonstrable is the influence of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) upon the emerging Krio, if they were not much later adoptions. Items that seem to be from this source include words such as *dɔgɔn* 'doggone,' *paluka* 'palooka,' *rangla* 'wrangler,' or *fiks* 'fix (a spell),' and phrases such as *fat kondo fɔ snɛk* ('fattening frogs for snakes', that is, expending energy for someone else's benefit - *kondo* in Krio is a lizard, not a snake). A better case may be made for the origin of the mid-high Krio vowels in *po*, *do*, *sho*, *kot*, *glori*, *pot*, *ed*, *bred*, *beg*, *Meri* ('poor,' 'door,' 'shore,' 'court,' 'glory,' 'report,' 'head,' 'bread,' 'beg,' 'Mary' etc.), and possibly *l*-less forms such as

*sef, fim, bob, wuf, ep* (‘self,’ ‘film,’ ‘bulb,’ ‘wolf,’ ‘help,’ etc.) In his book on teaching English to (mainly) Africans, predating the arrival of either the Black Loyalists or the Jamaican Maroons, Granville Sharp, one of the founders of the Sierra Leone settlement, indicated that the vowel in ‘bed,’ ‘bread,’ ‘heavy’ and ‘head’ (Krio *bed, bred, ebi, ed*) “has exactly the sound of the Italian or French *é*” (1767, pp. 8, 24-25). He also noted that the locals pronounced ‘water’ with “the French *a*” (cf. Krio *wata*).

Although some of these may be found in Gullah too, in terms of numbers they may equally well have an AAVE rather than a regional British dialect origin. Huber (1999, p. 62) initially believed that the Black Loyalists who were born in Virginia and who made up ca. sixty percent of the total number, spoke Black English. He later revised his position, suggesting instead that they spoke a (presumably Gullah-like?) pidginized or creolized English (2004, p. 77), but—as Smith has pointed out (2017, p. 253)—“direct evidence for this is lacking.”

A case can be made for an AAVE input being greater than a Gullah one. The raising of the low-mid vowels in Gullah is inconsistent, and more in evidence with the low-back [ɔ]/[ɒ] than with [ɛ], according to the phoneticized texts in Turner (1949, pp. 240-248):

Gullah:

Gullah [dɔ] ‘door’	Krio <i>do</i>
Gullah [mo] ‘moor’	Krio <i>mo</i> (but <i>mɔ</i> ‘more’)
Gullah [glɔri] ‘glory’	Krio <i>glori</i>
Gullah [fɔ] ‘four’	Krio <i>fo</i> (but <i>fɔ</i> ‘for’)
but	
Gullah [kɔn] ‘corn’	Krio <i>kɔn</i>
Gullah [stɔm] ‘storm’	Krio <i>stɔm</i>
but	
Gullah [bɛd] ‘bed’	Krio <i>bed</i>
Gullah [brɛd] ‘bread’	Krio <i>bred</i>
Gullah [hɛd] ‘head’	Krio <i>ed</i>
Gullah [dɛ] ‘there’	Krio <i>de</i>
Gullah [ɛwɪ] ‘heavy’	Krio <i>ebi</i>

The Gullah diphthongs /ai/ and /au/ are [ɔɪ] and [ɔʊ] (Turner, 1949 p. 21), cf. AAVE [a:], [a:ʌ]

Gullah [dɔɪ] ‘die’	Krio <i>day</i>	AAVE [dæ:]
Gullah [sɔɪd] ‘side’	Krio <i>say</i>	AAVE [sæ:d]
Gullah [ʃɔɪn] ‘shine’	Krio <i>shayn</i>	AAVE [ʃæ:n]
Gullah [nɔɪt] ‘night’	Krio <i>nɛt</i>	AAVE [næʔ]
Gullah [kɔʊ] ‘cow’	Krio <i>kaw</i>	AAVE [kæʊ]
Gullah [hɔʊ] ‘how’	Krio <i>a(w)</i>	AAVE [hæʊ]
Gullah [nɔʊ] ‘now’	Krio <i>nɔ</i>	AAVE [næʊ]

And cf. Krio [a] for /ai/ and /au/: *kansul* ‘council,’ *bansul* ‘bounce,’ *adu* ‘how do,’ *granat* ‘groundnut,’ *bandri* ‘boundary,’ *flan(ship)* ‘flying ship i.e. aeroplane,’ *kanaba*, *kamba* ‘kind (of a),’ *oblaj* ‘oblige,’ *basikul* ‘bicycle,’ *ban(-bele)* ‘bind belly, i.e. cos-tive.’

We can also look at phonology for a clue to direction of transmission. Derek Bickerton pointed out (in personal communication) that there is greater probability that Krio *bɔ 'bɔ* (‘small boy’) for example, was reshaped as Gullah *bʌbə* rather than the reverse, i.e. *bʌbə* becoming *bɔ 'bɔ*; its predicted Krio form would otherwise have been \*[bàbá]. Gullah phonology also incorporates English secondary and lax vowels that do not occur in Krio or WAPE (cf. *bʌbə*, above, and e.g. Krio *una*, with the variants (y)*unə*, *hʌnə*, Afro-Seminole *hənə* ‘you/you-all’).

Gullah [ˈjɛɾɪ] and Afro-Seminole [ˈjɛɾɪ] mean ‘hear.’ The original English south-western dialect source-form ‘heary’ is with a rolled [r], not a [d], so Krio [jeˈɾi] is arguably closer to the [r] source-form than is [ˈjɛɾɪ], and therefore is a better candidate to be the earlier chronologically. The pronunciation of early Krio /r/ was a flap or tap [ɾ] as it still is for second-language Krio speakers, before the Creoles acquired the velar [ɣ] in imitation of the German teachers in the early 19th century (Hancock, 2016). If Gullah had inherited it from the Caribbean, where it is [ˈjɛɾɪ] and not [ˈjɛɾɪ]/[ˈjɛɾɪ], the Caribbean rolled [r] would *not* yield [d], but [ɾ] would.

Furthermore, while English is stress-timed, West African languages are for the most part syllable-timed. Krio (though not Gullah) is a tone language, exhibiting “a two-tone system with downdrift ... [and] syllabic isochrony, instead of stress isochrony, the basic rhythmic principle of English” (Johnson, 1985, p. 79), thus pairs such as e.g. *présent* ~ *présént* ([ˈprɛznt] ~ [prəˈzɛnt]) generally do not occur in a syllable-timed language. One of the main characteristics of English is that words with open final syllables are typically stressed on the penult. Once speakers have been exposed to English stress patterns, it is not likely that they would change them to accommodate a non-compliant African form. Someone who spoke Gullah natively would be reluctant to re-phonologize on relocation to West Africa.

Krio high-tone is also typically word-final, a feature also matched by Gullah stress placement: “the Gullah, contrary to English usage, places the accent on the last syllable of a number of words which otherwise they speak correctly or with little change” (Whaley, 1925, p. 162). A much more extensive examination of the form and distribution of specific lexical and grammatical items in each language remains to be made, in order to reach a consensus regarding directionality of transmission, and the extent of the influence of each upon the other. Consideration must be given to items shared and not shared between them, as well as those shared or not shared with other ELACs. A few such items are given here as examples:



### *for*

*The Dictionary of American Regional English* (Cassidy and Hall 1996 II, pp. 528-529) indicates that the occurrence of *for* as the infinitive marker is found only in African American speech, and in the speech of Whites that has been influenced by it; McDavid and McDavid (1951, p. 15) say “Many white folk speakers along the South Carolina coast have taken *for* as the particle with the infinitive of purpose ... rather than the widespread folk form *for to*.” Its origin is probably in the regional British dialects formerly spoken in areas from which departed the ships bound for Africa and the Americas (Orton et al., 1976, Map S3), the towns of Liverpool and Bristol in particular, and so was likely a feature of their crews’ speech.

In Gullah and ASC, the corresponding item is *fə*. Was this introduced into Gullah from Africa, or from the Caribbean? The Caribbean forms are predominantly *fe* [fi] and *foo* [fʊ] (Hancock, 1987, p. 298); Kittitian had both (Baker & Bruyn, 1998, p. 423), while in Krio and WAPE, it is only *fə*. It is unlikely that this was introduced from Gullah, since [fə] would have yielded \*[fa]. In any case the Krio infinitive *fə* (like the auxiliaries *bin* and *done*) was used on the Coast before either the Nova Scotians (1792) or the Jamaicans (1800) arrived: “What, you go for catch people, you go for make war?” (Matthews, 1791, p. 165) “About 5 clock we done put Duke for ground” (Duke, 1786 cited in Forde 1968. p. 97).

### *kin*

Both Krio and Gullah, but not Jamaican, share *kin* as a habitual marker, as distinct from its meaning of *be able*: cf. Gullah “I kin drink early in de mornin’ off de grass, and in de day off de cow tracks” (Scudder, 1868, p. 506), Krio *a kin go de* ‘I customarily go there,’ cf. *a ebul go de* ‘I have the ability to go there.’

### *kanki/kenki*

There is some evidence of Ghanaian influence in Sierra Leone before the Nova Scotians or Maroons arrived; the obsolete Krio *canky-bread*, recorded by Atkins (1735), Park (1793) and Burton (1863, as *kankey*) is the Twi *ɲkanɲkyé* or *kãkyew* ‘pounded corn food/starch.’ In modern Krio, it is *kenki*. The word is found in Kittitian, Guyanese, Bajan and Afro-Seminole (though not now Gullah), as well as in Guadeloupian FLAC (French lexifier Atlantic Creole), all referring to a maize-based food. Its occurrence in a number of coastal African languages (Mandinka, Bambara, Fon, Yoruba) besides Twi suggests that it was part of the sailors’ shipboard fare.

### ***buchra***

Another Gullah item recorded in Sierra Leone twenty years before the Nova Scotians arrived was *buchra* “white man,” now obsolete in Krio. In 1772, according to testimony provided by George Yonge, a seaman on a Liverpool slaver anchored off the Sierra Leone Peninsula, the captain of that ship left with a woman who had been provided only temporarily by the local King Tom, who complained that this was “buchra, or white man’s panyarring” (Lambert, 1975, p. 148). It was recorded again in the 1850s by Hewett, this time from the Gambia: “Look you face; him red for true. Buccra hab two face—one white, toder red. Buccra face, one while white (pale) with sickee (illness); noder time red with drinke” (1862, p. 68). It is found throughout the American ELACs, but not in Pichí or Cameroonian.

### ***wan***

Not found in Gullah or Jamaican, but in Krio, Pichí and Nigerian Pidgin, is the item *wan* functioning as an adverbializer:

Krio: *di bra ala pan mi veks wan* ‘the guy shouted at me angrily.’

Pichí: *den bin chɔp an rɔn-wan* ‘they ate it in the wrong way’ (Yakpo, 2009, p. 503).

NPE: *à swim bèta won*. ‘I swam well’

Belizean appears to be the only Caribbean ELAC that also has this: “An adjective can also be made into an adverb by adding -wan, but this is not required, and may be an archaic feature: Kwik-wan ih jomp op; Di tik juk ahn shaap-wan eena ih said” (Decker, 2005, p. 58; Decker, 2013, p. 65). The construction with *wan* is common and widely distributed in the ELPC (English lexifier Pacific Creole) Bislama. Examples are *mi slip strongwan*, *mi swim gudwan*, *mi laekem yu bikwan*, *mi wok smolwan tude*.

### ***nɔto***

One possible introduction from Gullah into Krio is the negative of existential *na*, viz. *nɔto*, from ‘not.’ It is unique to Krio and Pichi, but may have been influenced by Gullah [nʌ də]. Stewart (1919, p. 394) spelt this as “notta me” (Krio *nɔto mi* ‘not me’) in her collection of Gullah folktales. Krio authors fairly consistently write this as two words—*nɔ to*.

Over the past two-plus centuries, Gullah and Krio have grown apart, due to increased Africanization as well as metropolitanization and independent grammaticalization in the case of Krio, and increased metropolitanization in the case of Gullah. Dr. Ruth Holmes Whitehead, who grew up in South Carolina and whose first language is Gullah, and who is now Curator Emerita and Research Associate at the Nova Scotia Museum in Halifax, told me (in personal communication) that “on speaking to the director of the

Freetong Players when they were here from Freetown, he said he could not understand my spoken Gullah, nor could I understand his [Krio].” The same was true for the Jamaican Maroons who visited Sierra Leone in 2012; they had difficulty understanding Krio, and vice versa. David Ingleman who accompanied them, told me (in personal communication), that “because there was a bit of a language barrier, most of the time we spoke English with our Freetown hosts.”

Albert Stoddard (1949), whose Gullah recordings are invaluable, wrote over seventy years ago that:

As a result of schooling and communication with the outside world, the Gullah dialect has changed greatly, and one can no longer hear it as I learned it as a youngster. The only exception to this is to get the very older Negroes excited—they then occasionally lapse into the old Gullah. (1949, p. 1)

Afro-Seminole Creole, spoken in Texas and northern Mexico, on the other hand, while severely endangered, remains much closer to earlier varieties of east-coast Gullah, and is fairly easily understood by Amadu Massally, a Sierra Leonean that works closely with the community’s language-preservation project.

To summarize, the arguments against Gullah’s having been the origin of Krio are

1) Only ca. 25 percent of the Black Loyalists in Canada were from Gullah-speaking areas in the North American colonies; it is unlikely that the remaining 75 percent would have abandoned their own often restructured varieties of *English* for Gullah. Opala (personal communication) makes the important point that the small number of Gullah speakers among them would have had an advantage in their ability to talk to the natives and might therefore have become linguistic role models for the remaining 75 percent. That said, the nearly one third of the Black Loyalists who were born in Africa, and who would have already been acquainted with WAPE or GCCE, could also have filled that role, as well as having contributed to the formation of Gullah had they remained on the Georgia-South Carolina coast after their arrival; their numbers are included in the 75 percent that were *not* native speakers of Gullah.

2) Some of these African born Black Loyalists in fact came from the Rice Coast themselves, the area from which a significant number of the African words in Gullah originate.

3) The two thirds of the  $\pm$  25 percent of the Black Loyalists who *may* still have spoken Gullah natively only amounted to fewer than 180 people altogether, some sixteen percent of the ca. 1,100 who arrived in Freetown in 1792.

4) The Black Loyalists spent nearly ten years in Nova Scotia surrounded by English before only a third of them left for Sierra Leone, and all *documented* evidence of their speech indicates a non-standard English rather than Gullah. Huber admits that the collection of letters written by the Nova Scotian Settlers in Nova

Scotia and Sierra Leone between 1791 and 1800 (Fyfe, 1991) “do not in themselves offer firm proof that the language of the NS [Nova Scotia] settlers was Gullah-like.” Huber, 2004, p. 8).

5) Liberia was also settled by people from the Gullah region directly, and not after spending ten years in Canada. Yet John Singler, referring to the linguistic features of the varieties of English in Liberia, wrote (personal communication) “The seeming lack of Gullah influence baffles me ... speakers from the Gullah-speaking region seemed especially important in the settlement of Sinoe. The people who dominated the Sinoe capital of Greenville, hence Sinoe as a whole, were free people of color from Charleston and Savannah. Beyond that, there are the 140 emigrants from the Jacob Wood plantation in Macintosh County, Georgia, thus very definitely in the Gullah region. So where did these 140 go, and where is their Gullah impact?”

If anywhere, one would have expected to have found it in Liberia.

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# **“PEOPLE WILL ALWAYS JUDGE YOU; MY ACCENT IS BEAUTIFUL” HOW YOUNG PEOPLE ARE VALIDATING PUERTO RICAN ENGLISH**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to investigate if the self-perceived English accents of young bilinguals impacts their speaking confidence and communicative competence in the unique context of Puerto Rico, where negative attitudes towards Hispanic accents in English have been normalized. It tests the hypothesis that young Puerto Ricans orient towards native U.S. standards when speaking English and internalize negative feedback. Data was collected using a convenience sample with the potential influence of snowball sampling among 157 bilingual participants between the ages of 16 and 20 who responded to an online survey between August 2019 and February 2022. Results suggest that negative attitudes towards Hispanic accents in English are weakening among young bilinguals. Participants indicate that they have positive self-perceptions of their English accents that do not target U.S. standards, they value communicative competence over perceived accuracy, and they demonstrate apathy towards measurement against U.S. native-speaker standards. Consequently, young Puerto Rican speakers of English as a second language demonstrate high levels of confidence based on the effectiveness of their own communication in English, and they readily dismiss negative evaluation based on exonormative U.S. standards. The implications of these attitudinal shifts support calls to recognize Puerto Rican English and align teaching practices with endonormative standards.

**Key terms:** communicative competence, speaking confidence, English as a Second Language, accent, Puerto Rico

## Introduction

For Puerto Ricans, English as a second language serves a critical role in relation to academic achievement and professional opportunity. Barreto explains that in Puerto Rico, “knowledge of English is not only a status symbol but also a marketable skill” (2000, p. 14). In addition to its value as a socio-demographic marker of affluence (Eisenstein-Ebsworth et al. 2018, p. 82), the ability to communicate effectively and efficiently in English is a highly valued communicative tool in gaming and social media platforms that have international reach (Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012, p. 315-316; Anwas et al., 2020). Although English education in Puerto Rico was forcibly imposed by the U.S. administration in 1902 and has been a controversial issue among the island’s population ever since, English competency remains a significant educational goal and continues to be a notable obstacle for young people who either do not acquire fluency or do not gain sufficient confidence to use their second language (Pousada, 2000, p. 103-104). Given that Hispanic accents in English are highly stigmatized inside the classroom and beyond (Parodi, 2017) and that a speaker’s accent can signify both their confidence and competency in ways that may classify them as “slow learners” (Martin & Sullivan, 2000, p. 55), many Puerto Rican educators and learners of English place high value on the acquisition of a native-like accent<sup>1</sup>. This context has a potentially damaging impact on the self-perceptions and speaking confidence of young bilinguals, who often face stigmatization of their accent in English as substandard or “incorrect” when measured against a native U.S. standard.

Many educated Puerto Ricans today identify English as either a fluent second language or one of their two first languages, particularly if they are members of a family that has been part of the diaspora or have experienced return migration to the mainland U.S. (Barreto, 2000, p. 9-10). They identify with and orient towards inner-circle speakers according to Braj Kachru’s influential concentric three-circle model of World Englishes (Kachru, 1985). However, this self-identification is at odds with their perceived status in the outer circle as second-language speakers for whom English is an official language but is not the island’s vernacular. Puerto Rico’s current status as an unincorporated territory of the United States which retains vernacular Spanish problematizes its local variety of English in terms of theoretical models for new varieties of English which normalize post-colonial varieties that become nativized and establish endonormative paradigms through codification (Schneider, 2003). Puerto Rico is not a sovereign nation with its own recognized second-language variety of English that has moved through progressive stages of consolidation leading to a new world variety, nor is it a U.S. state with an English vernacular that might be accepted as a regional dialect among first-

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<sup>1</sup> We acknowledge that there is a wide range of native varieties in the U.S. (including those used in plurilingual communities) and do not propose that one homogeneous accent represents all native-speaker usage. However, for the purposes of this paper, the terms “native” (or native-like) accent and “American accent” refer to the standard pronunciations of General American English that are modelled in second language educational contexts.

language speakers. The island remains Spanish-dominant, and as such, English in Puerto Rico is in constant contact with Spanish at all levels of its expression, including its phonetic realization. In such a context, this study asks if students' self-perceived accent in English impacts their speaking confidence and communicative competence either positively or negatively.

This study presents empirical and qualitative data showing how young people, between the ages of 16 and 20, identify their own accent and illustrate the impact it has on their confidence. It tests the hypothesis that, in the unique context of Puerto Rico where negative attitudes towards Hispanic accents in English have been normalized, young Puerto Ricans orient towards native U.S. standards when speaking English. The research design is modeled on a comparative study conducted among upper-secondary school participants in Sweden taking a requisite English course that renders them eligible for further studies (Norman, 2017). As such the research questions of the current study replicate those of Norman's paper: 1) What English accent do young people aim to acquire and why? 2) Is having a native-like English accent important? and 3) Do participants feel that their self-perceived accent impacts confidence or communicative competence in English-speaking situations? (2017, p. 2). Findings are anticipated to provide comparative data that may help researchers understand the nuances of context among second language speakers of English and the shifting sociolinguistic factors that impact young people's self-perceptions of accent in environments with high levels of language contact.

## **Methodology**

The research design involved the administration of an online survey in Puerto Rico among bilingual participants between the ages of 16 and 20. The research instrument was adapted from a survey administered among Swedish upper secondary school participants—typically aged between 16-19 (Statista, 2022)—that was provided as Appendix 2 of a study on student's self-perceived English accent and its impact on communicative competence and speaking confidence (Norman, 2017, p. 33-36). This study was conducted to measure perceptions among students taking “English 6”—the most common requirement in Sweden to study a bachelor's or master's or degree program that incorporates English instruction. With permission from the author, the survey instrument was replicated and adapted to a Puerto Rican context for use among bilinguals. For example, one question that was originally posed to Swedish participants: “How often do you speak English with someone that is not a native speaker of Swedish?” (Norman, 2017, p. 14) was adapted for Puerto Ricans by asking the same question about participants' frequency speaking with someone that is not a native speaker of Spanish. The Puerto Rican survey composed three sections. The first section provided information for informed consent, as specified by NIH protocols, the second section asked for demographic information and had nine questions related to: gender, age, birthplace,

place(s) of childhood, first language, languages spoken in communities that the participant is a member of, self-evaluation of English, and one open question about how participants learned English. The last section, constituting the main content of the survey, had seventeen questions grouped in three general categories: the frequency of English usage, how participants felt about their own accent and confidence using English, and how they might respond to the perceptions of others about their accent in English. The last open question asked participants if they would like to share any personal recollection or comment about their English accent or speaking confidence. Participants had the option to choose not to answer any of the questions, excepting those related to informed consent.

The survey was available from August 2019 to February 2022 (2 years, 6 months) and participants were self-selected using a convenience sample. Research assistants encouraged participation among students at the University of Puerto Rico at Cayey and shared an open call for volunteers and the link to the survey through social media (WhatsApp, Twitter, Instagram) and via a QR code in flyers posted in and around the University and surrounding community. Participants could access and complete the online English-language survey without requiring any contact with the Principal Investigator or research assistants. We assume that, as participants self-selected, there may have been some snowball sampling as people in the community shared the link with others who were willing to participate in the study. During the time that the survey was active, a total of 157 participants between the ages of 16-20 provided their responses. The quantitative and qualitative data they provided were concurrently analyzed. Qualitative data were analyzed by compiling written responses and then using exploratory and inferential analysis methods to identify statistically significant trends. Quantitative data were analyzed using Microsoft Excel for the data-entry process to analyze variables descriptively using the average, maximum, minimum, standard deviation, and the range of the variable created to evaluate the perception of the participants in relation to their competence and confidence in English. For responses with only two variables, percentages were observed to determine results. Normalized statistics were applied to determine statistical significance.

## Results

Contrary to anticipated findings that Puerto Ricans orient towards native U.S. standards when speaking English, results suggest that negative attitudes towards Hispanic accents in English are weakening among young bilinguals. Data from the survey suggest three main statistically significant trends: 1) Puerto Rican bilinguals have positive self-perceptions of their English abilities; 2) speakers value effective communication more than perceived accuracy in terms of native U.S. standard pronunciation; and 3) participants demonstrate apathy towards exonymic evaluations of their speech.

### *Positive self-perceptions of English*

Results indicate that participants expressed positive self-perceptions about their English competency and accent. Four out of every five participants rated their own ability in English as either “quite good” (68 participants, 43%) or “very good” (58 participants, 37%). Although participants who identified as female and those who had urban backgrounds were more highly represented among participants who positively evaluated their own ability in English, see Table 1, this weighting was not statistically significant considering the demographic profile of all 157 participants, among whom females and people with urban backgrounds were more highly represented. When asked if they felt awkward or embarrassed about their accent when speaking English, most participants replied, “not really” (34 participants, 22%) or “not at all” (68 participants, 43%) for a total of 102 participants (65%) who expressed positive self-perceptions of the accent that they used in English. However, for those 53 participants who said that they felt awkward or embarrassed either “a lot” “often” or “a little,” three out of every four said that they either would or might avoid speaking English because of their accent. Yet, when asked if they would care if someone recognized that they were not a native speaker of English, the vast majority of participants (135 participants, 86%) responded “No, I wouldn't care at all” or “No, I am Puerto Rican and it is normal to sound different.”

**Table 1** Self-evaluation of competency in English expressed by number of participants and percentage. (N=157) (PN = Prefer not to answer)

<i>English Self-Evaluation</i>	Category: Gender Identification				Category: Background Environment		
	Female	Male	PN		Urban	Rural	PN
<i>Not so good</i>	2 (100%)	0	0		0	2 (100%)	0
<i>Average</i>	15 (52%)	14 (48%)	0		15 (52%)	13 (45%)	1
<i>Quite good</i>	<b>51 (75%)</b>	16 (24%)	1		<b>39 (57%)</b>	28 (41%)	1
<i>Very good</i>	<b>39 (67%)</b>	17 (29%)	2		<b>39 (67%)</b>	16 (28%)	3

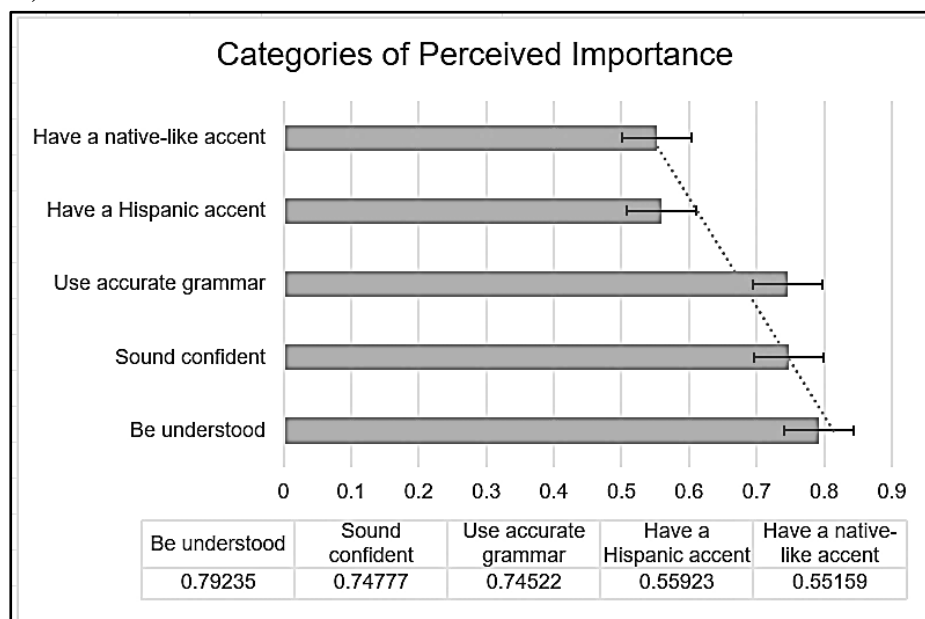
In response to the open question about whether it is important to sound like a native speaker of English, participants overwhelmingly responded that it was not important (123 participants, 78%) and gave comments that recognized communicative competency or regional variation as more important factors, for example, participants who stated, “As long as people understand you, it doesn’t matter,” “Every country has its own accent” and “Accent is part of our identity.” Many comments suggested that the importance of a native accent has been imposed on learners, such as “I believe it is expected, not necessarily important” and “I don’t think it is important, but socially there is a lot of pressure.” One participant noted, “We feel obligated ... because of all the discrimination us Latinos go through whenever we speak in mainland USA.” Another participant specifically associated professionalism with a native accent stating, “*muchxs intentan esconder su acento para parecer más profesionales*” (many people try to hide

their accent to appear more professional) (all translations are by the authors unless specified otherwise). In line with this comment, many participants who said that it was not important to sound like a native speaker, nonetheless associated value with a native accent, such as, “I think it’s not important, but I definitely want/wanted to sound like a native speaker of English,” “Basically no, but as an advanced English student I think I should” and “I don’t think it is that important but it would be great to aim for that level.” In sum, although responses demonstrated positive self-perceptions of English, participants also addressed some of the complexities related to academic achievement and professional expectations which continue to promote orientation toward native, and specifically U.S. accents.

### *Effective communication as a priority*

Results show that participants valued communicative competency as a priority when speaking English. Furthermore, being understood by others was perceived as more important than sounding confident, perceived accuracy in terms of native U.S. standard pronunciation, and the use of a native or Hispanic accent. When asked to measure the importance of those five factors using a Likert scale, normalized results show that participants considered that to be understood by others was paramount, and that both confidence and accuracy were also valued highly, each indicating a normalized score of  $\geq 0.74$  compared to the significantly lower evaluations for the importance of accent, either native or Hispanic, which both resulted in a normalized score of  $< 0.56$  (Figure 1).

**Figure 1** Evaluation of the importance of five factors for bilingual participants when speaking English, expressed as normalized data. (0=min importance, 1=max importance)



When asked whether expressing yourself easily but not with a native-like accent in English was more important than sounding like a native speaker even if sometimes you have

trouble expressing what you want to say, participants overwhelmingly selected the first option related to communicative competency. A total of 132 participants (84%) selected “expressing yourself easily” compared to 16 participants (10%) who indicated that “sounding like a native speaker” was more important; 9 participants (6%) preferred not to answer this question. Moreover, results indicate that the relative importance of communicative competency for the young bilingual participants seemed to have a correlation with demographic data related to how they learned English. Participants who selected “expressing yourself easily but not with a native-like accent” as the most important factor predominantly listed the use of English for consumption or comprehension of English-language media and for communication with others as principal descriptors of how they learned English. That is to say that those who learned English in authentic contexts and for social and entertainment purposes fairly consistently expressed that the most important factor was ease of expression. Among this group, when formal instruction was listed for language learning, it was typically placed last, potentially indicating its lesser importance as a motivational factor in the language acquisition process, for example, “I learned English using television, music, and my friends when I was young. *I also had great English teachers*” (emphasis added).

Contrastively, participants who selected “Sounding like a native speaker even if sometimes you have trouble expressing what you want to say” as the most important factor typically referenced formal instruction as the only or the first (i.e., most relevant) influence on their language acquisition, see Table 2.

**Table 2** Examples of participant responses to the prompt about how they learned English grouped by trend and indicating correlation with the question about most important factor.

Trend	Responses to the prompt: Describe how you learned English	Aligns with
Using English in social contexts	Through the internet (social media, youtube, etc) and also through television, watching Disney Channel” and “music, television and video games	Expressing yourself easily but not with a native-like accent in English
	It wasn't exactly taught to me. It was more of exposure since a young age. Reading, hearing and talking it helped me developed it up until now.	
	I learn English by practicing and watching television.	
Using English (and school)	I primarily learnt English by watching cartoons and playing video games as a child. However, more technical/grammatical learning was done in school.	
	I learned English using television, music, and my friends when I was young. I also had great English teachers	
	Through TV shows and YouTube mostly, as well as a bit from English classes	
School learning (and using English)	Full english school since elementary	Sounding like a native speaker even if sometimes you have trouble expressing what you want to say
	in school, my school was a bilingual school, so since kindergarten until twelve grade all my clases were in Ingles	
	School, TV, and music	
	I learned a bit from my grandmother(father’s side). I was in a bilingual school for two years. I had great English teachers in middle school and high school. And I’ve always read books in English and watched movies and series in English as well.	



### *Apathy towards expectations of U.S. standards*

When asked if they consciously thought about how they sounded or what accent they used in English, most participants indicated that this was not a significant concern to them. Most responses (101 participants, 64%) indicated that they thought about this “a little” (42 participants, 27%), “not really” (37 participants, 23%) or “not at all” (22 participants, 14%). Comparatively fewer participants indicated that they were conscious of their accent or how they sounded to others either “often” or “a lot” (each selected by 28 participants, 18%). More specifically than asking if they were conscious of how they sounded, we asked participants if they aimed to speak English with an accent, and if so, what accent. Most responses (102 participants, 65%) indicated no conscious aim to speak with an accent. However, of the 51 participants (34%) who indicated a specific preference, twice as many responses indicated the conscious choice of an American accent (32 participants, 20%) compared to a Puerto Rican accent (16 participants, 10%), see Table 3.

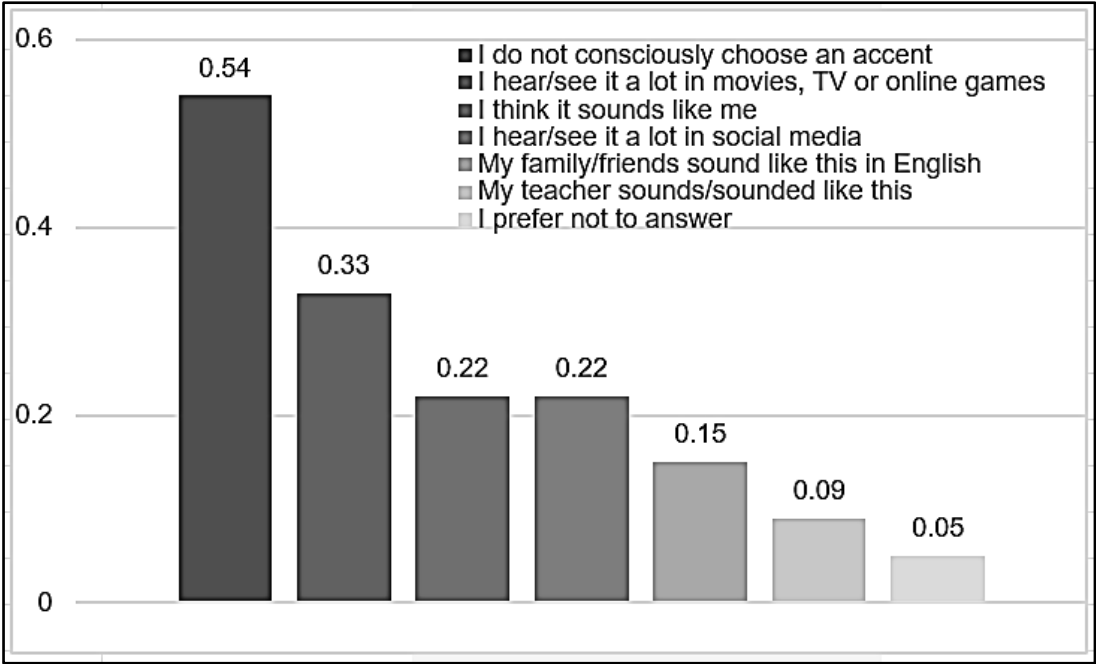
**Table 3** Participant responses to the prompt “When you speak English, do you aim to speak with an accent?” expressed by number of participants and percentage. (N=157)

Participant Response	No. of responses	% of total N=157	Grouped %	Conscious Choice
No, I do not aim to sound a certain way	79	50%	65%	No
No, I mix different accents	23	15%		
Yes, American	32	20%	34%	Yes
Yes, Puerto Rican	16	10%		
Yes, British	2	1%		
Yes, Hispanic	1	1%		
I prefer not to answer	4	3%		

In a follow-up question asking those participants who consciously selected an accent about how they made that choice, the most cited reason (indicated by a third of participants) was, “I hear/see it a lot in movies, TV or online games.” The second two most cited reasons were “I hear/see it a lot in social media” and “I think it sounds like me.” The two least selected reasons were “My family/friends sound like this in English” and “My teacher sounds/sounded like this,” see Figure 2.

Participants were fairly equally divided between those who indicated that they believed they were not judged because of their accent (76 participants, 48%) and those who thought that they were definitely or maybe judged, (81 participants, 52%), see Figure 3. Yet, trends in explanatory comments show that, even among those who felt that they were judged by others, positive self-perceptions were maintained by disregarding negative feedback (e.g., “People will always judge” and “mostly just jokingly”) to reassure themselves (e.g., “My accent is beautiful” and “I have good English”) and to focus on

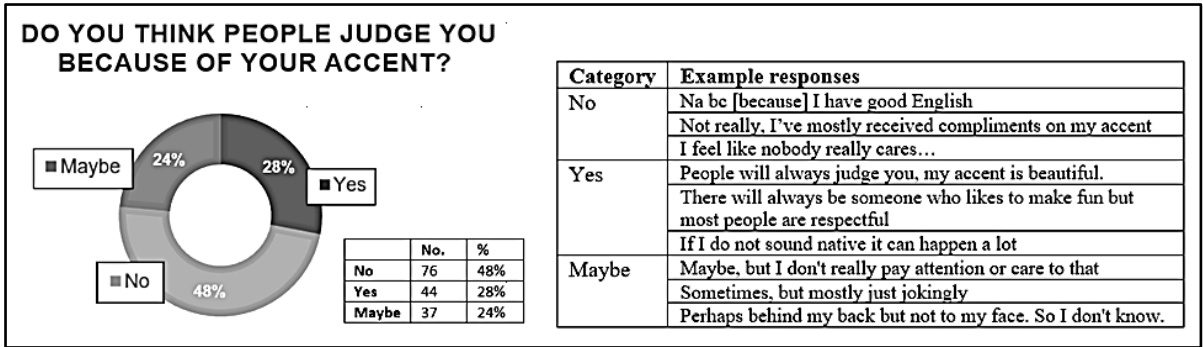
**Figure 2** Reasons for conscious accent selection when speaking English, expressed as normalized data on a scale of 0-1 (0=not selected, 1=all selected this option).



positive reinforcement (e.g., “I’ve mostly received compliments” and “Most people are respectful”), see Table 4. When asked if they had ever been in a situation where they felt that someone spoke to them as if they were less intelligent because of their accent, most responses (99 participants, 63%) said that they had not experienced this type of discrimination. Among the 58 participants (37%) who had been treated as less intelligent because of their accent, notable trends in the comments indicate that teachers and people from the U.S. were most likely to be judgmental, but, again, participants maintained positive attitudes by disregarding negative judgements and affirming their own communicative competency e.g., “That type of things hapen all the time. I can't be upset about it” and “I really didn’t care because I know my capabilities.”

**Figure 3** (left) Participant perceptions of whether they are judged because of their accent.

**Table 4** (right) Examples of participant responses aligned with categories of perception about whether participants are judged because of their accent.



## Discussion

The data we collected from 157 young bilingual participants does not support our hypothesis that young Puerto Ricans orient towards native U.S. standards when speaking English. Furthermore, in the unique context of the island, where negative evaluations of Hispanic accents in English are common and have a historical precedent in the education system, participants of the study do not generally appear to have internalized the negativity that others may associate with Hispanic accents in English. One strong trend in the data suggests that the rejection of stigmatization results from the fact that many young bilinguals have developed English proficiency in informal contexts and for authentic communicative purposes which has resulted in high levels of self-confidence based on the effectiveness of their own communicative competency. This context has resulted in young bilinguals who demonstrate apathy toward standardized pronunciation of a General American English associated with native speech. Consequently, they frequently dismiss negative evaluation based on exonormative standards and exhibit high levels of self-confidence when speaking English. Interestingly, these results correspond with the findings of Norman's (2017) survey among upper-secondary school participants in Sweden who "think that having a native-like accent is overvalued and that communication is far more important than their perceived English accent ... [and] that it does not matter how they sound as long as what they say is conveyed" (p. 23).

Our results demonstrating positive self-perceptions of English, specifically that four out of every five participants (68 participants, 81%) rate their own English as either "quite good" or "very good," is an inverse of the data collected by the U. S. Census Bureau that reports "Out of approximately 3,295,000 natives living in Puerto Rico, 14.3% report speaking English 'very well' and 80.5% report speaking English 'not very well'" (United States Census Bureau, 2015 cited in Eisenstein-Ebsworth et al., 2018, p. 69). We accept that our study disproportionately represents young, educated speakers, mostly due to its use of an English-language survey instrument and participant recruitment activities in the university environment in which fluent bilingualism is more common than in the rest of the island. As such, we do not propose that these results are representative of all Puerto Ricans regardless of English competency, but we do assert that they are potentially replicable among a similar demographic of young, educated bilinguals, both in Puerto Rico and beyond, given the similarities with the findings of Norman's (2017) original study among Swedish participants. In our Puerto Rican study, 135 participants (86%) indicate that they do not associate any negative stigma with being identified as a second language speaker and that sounding "different" associates positively with their Puerto Rican identity. They also indicate that, although native pronunciation has advantages in academic and professional contexts, using a General American English accent was not important if a speaker is intelligible. This finding aligns with research on language acquisition which demonstrates that high self-esteem correlates positively not only with second and foreign language learning (Asakereh &

Yousofi, 2018), but also feelings of ownership over the newly acquired language (Aielo, 2017, p. 58). Habrat (2018, p. 134) additionally claims that “[t]he belief in one’s capacity (self-efficacy) make an important contribution to the prediction of performance, which results in success being not so much a matter of capacity itself, but more a matter of self-belief.” In sum, positive self-perceptions of their English among participants may explain why negative attitudes towards Hispanic accents in English are weakening and orientation towards native U.S. standards no longer predominate among young, educated bilinguals.

Results demonstrating that effective communication is a priority among participants aligns with the way that many of them describe how they learned English, which is potentially a causative factor of this finding. Specifically, those students who describe their own learning of English predominantly as a personal skill used for the consumption of English-language media and/or a social skill used to communicate with others also prioritize ease of communication (regardless of accent) as more fundamental than sounding like a native speaker. This finding is perhaps intuitive without the need for empirical data. However, it stresses the importance of authentic communication contexts for the success of language learners rather than abstracted, isolated exercises measured against exonormative standards that formal academic environments often enforce and reinforce through standardized testing. The promotion of authentic communication contexts remains a universal concern in ESL pedagogy (e.g., Yedla & Narayana, 2022; Liu et al. 2021) particularly in ways that integrate technology (e.g., Shadiev et al., 2021; Nguyen et al., 2022). And in Puerto Rico, where U.S. standards (in the language classroom and beyond) have been imposed since the early days of U.S. administration of the island in 1902, and where English acquisition often projects political ideologies (Domínguez-Rosado, 2015, p. 23), the importance of authentic communication contexts in learners’ communities seem to have increased in value over time. For example, in one study among Puerto Rican college students, Horowitz found that “a relationship between online multiplayer video game play and increased confidence and lowered anxiety about using English among second-language learners” (2019, p. 379). Even in the diaspora, where U.S. standards might be considered more acceptable, Borrero’s study among Latino bilinguals in a public high school in California showed the use of English in real and local contexts is central to their identity and their self-esteem:

students perceived their bilingualism to be important in their home, community, school, and cultural lives. ... different contexts required students to interact and communicate with different people (from family members to complete strangers), and language was the construct that bound these interactions together. (2015, p. 18)

In short, the results of our study confirm trends in pedagogy research that underline the importance of authentic communicative contexts for learner confidence in language acquisition. They also suggest that learners who use and consume English online among peers are more likely to acquire confidence in their own communicative competency.

Results demonstrating that participants are apathetic toward U.S. standards are elegantly summarized in one participant's comment, "If you are able to communicate and get your point across, that is the only thing that should matter." Indeed, more than two thirds of participants do not consciously think about how they sound or what accent they use in English. Furthermore, among those who do consciously choose an American accent (20% of all participants) the most common reasons given are exposure through movies, TV, online games or social media content rather than via formal ESL education. Moreover, the user-generated content they are consuming on platforms like TikTok, YouTube, Instagram and Twitch are more likely to feature authentic dialects and informal language use rather than the standardized norms that are promoted in the classroom. Given that young people are digital natives, and their consumption of online media is ubiquitous (Titus, 2018, p. 240) it is fair to conclude that they do not orient toward an abstracted idea of General American English or even native-speaker pronunciation, but instead toward the non-standard and ESL accents they consume online, including those of bilingual speakers in their own online communities. One implication of this finding in Puerto Rico corresponds to the teaching of General American English pronunciation in the classroom according to the native-speaker model. If learners neither need it for communicative competency nor consider it important, then why are teachers so invested in promoting native-like pronunciation? Although the Puerto Rico Department of Education stresses that the mission of its K-12 English program is "to communicate effectively" (2014, p. xi) the wording of its Core Standards nonetheless stresses the acquisition of "*correct* grammar, intonation and *pronunciation*" (p. xi, emphasis added). Interestingly, this document does not specify what is "correct" in terms of pronunciation, but it is reasonable to assume that the implication is a native target, given that the island's Department of Education was established in 1952 under U.S. administration and continues to be maintained with federal funding and overseen by the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act (PROMESA).

We agree with Bischoff (2017) that formal evaluation of English competency functions as a barrier to public higher education in Puerto Rico, and that part of this exclusionary practice includes the assessment of learner pronunciation according to unrealistic native-speaker targets. This is especially problematic for the many Puerto Ricans for whom English remains distant second language or a foreign language that represents U.S. colonial domination (Del Valle, 2003, p. 17-22). The results of this study suggest that one strategy to promote confident bilingualism among young people might be to distance educational approaches from an idealization of "correct" General American English pronunciation and instead recognize young people's orientation towards authentic usage and ESL norms. This strategy recognizes that non-native speakers of English are the ones who make up most of the world's English-speaking population and affect the direction of language change contrary to traditional perspectives that identify

native speakers of the inner circle as the ones who provide the norms and own the language (Al-Mutairi, 2020, p. 85-87). Thus, Nickels recommends that “Puerto Rican English” be explicitly recognized (2005, p. 235) so that it may serve as an endonormative standard in the island. Based on their responses, it seems that our participants agree, because “Every country has its own accent” and “It is not important to sound like a native speaker. What’s important is being able to communicate and be understood.”

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# REJECTING LANGUAGE STANDARDIZATION: AN ACT OF POWER AND RESISTANCE

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## Abstract

In this article, I aim to explore the connections between non-standardized language use and the empowerment of those who are part of traditionally marginalized communities in the United States and the Caribbean. I summarize aspects of the history of colonization and highlight the relationships between language, culture, and identity, as well as how rejecting standardized language and grammar can be viewed as an act of power and resistance. Specifically, I discuss these themes within the contexts of African-American English, Southern American English, and Puerto Rican English-speaking communities. I provide examples demonstrating non-standardized language use, while explaining the implications of utilizing this type of language in relation to issues of the agency of the speakers and speech communities under discussion.

**Key terms:** Syntax, language resistance, language and power, grammar, standardization

## Introduction

Modern-day oppression and marginalization are largely rooted in European colonization, which has ultimately determined the shape of most of the world's major systems and institutions. Language standardization was not merely implemented as a way to facilitate communication, but instead it is a process with colonial roots, and tools such as grammars and dictionaries have reinforced it (Joseph, 2004 as cited in Makoni & Pennycook, 2005, p. 138). For the purposes of this article, the term 'standardization' is used to refer to the institutionalization of language through the creation of normative rules in order to categorize language use according to the binary of 'correct' vs. 'incorrect'.



The standardization of language and the imposition of European languages have historically been used as methods of domination over colonized and marginalized communities and continue to be used today for the same purposes. Standardization has objectified language by basing education and literacy on both the models and histories of dominating groups (Mignolo, 2000, p. 255). Furthermore, language standardization has determined how languages are understood, how language policies are built, and how identities are shaped based on language labels (Makoni & Pennycook, 2005, p. 138).

Despite the prevalence of language standardization, non-standardized language is used by all speakers. However, it is crucial to recognize that particularly violent forms of stigmatization and marginalization of non-standardized language is reserved for certain groups, while often being excused for others. The basis for this phenomenon has little to do with mutual intelligibility or clear communication, but instead has to do with colonial notions about what constitutes ‘correct’ language and who should be stigmatized for not using it. Unfortunately, this has a real impact on how people are perceived in terms of how educated, employable, or respectable they are within larger societies.

Regardless of the aforementioned stigmatization, many marginalized communities continue to regularly use non-standardized language as part of their pluri-lingual repertoires. Members of these groups are often able to use non-standardized language to communicate with others in their speech and discourse communities without issues, which demonstrates that language standardization is not really necessary for successful communication. Furthermore, many of the ways in which these groups use non-standardized speech are just as complex, creative, and expressive as is standardized language, and these non-standard varieties emerge from a body of valid cultural and social experience that is unique and relevant to the groups who use them.

By rejecting the use of standardized language, marginalized speech communities are often acting in their own self-interests. Colonization and Western ideals have attempted to erase the pluri-lingual and personalized nature of these varieties by stigmatizing them. Speech and discourse communities that communicate in ways relevant to their unique social and cultural realities, regardless of the extent to which their language repertoires conform to the rules imposed by standardization, are often deploying their language as an act of resistance, self-advocacy, and power.

### **Origins and assumptions**

It is crucial that the standardization of language as well as the imposition of European colonial languages are examined critically rather than taken for granted as neutral or natural processes. One way to do this is by recognizing that language standardization has always been an artificial and ideologically saturated process that can be traced historically and analyzed critically to reveal the biases and political agendas of its proponents and supporters. For example, in the case of English, one can pinpoint the first English grammar guide written by William Bullokar in 1586 with the explicit intention

of demonstrating that English was as ‘rule-bound’ as Latin (Linn, 2008, p.74) as the first in a series of grammars, dictionaries and policies enforcing a set of artificial language rules, all of which can be situated in the ideological, social, historical, and cultural contexts of English colonial expansion. Furthermore, the intentions and effects of these texts and policies of standardization can be evaluated both in historical and present-day contexts.

Languages do have patterns and norms, but the forced standardization of language does not accurately reflect real communication practices. The dominant discourse concerning language standardization is that it was implemented with the intention of creating the conditions by which greater numbers of people could successfully communicate with one another, and while lamenting the fact that there are unsavory sociopolitical side effects from standardization, it is justified as ultimately beneficial because it allows humans to communicate more effectively. This discourse is riddled with false assumptions and colonial logics.

Firstly, it should be considered that significant cultural and linguistic erasure has occurred in order to pave the way for standardized versions of language. This can be clearly seen in the case of Puerto Rico, where the standardization of both Spanish and English has doubly marginalized millions of people. In the first 400 years of colonization, the Spaniards attempted to extinguish the local indigenous languages in favor of a standardized form of Spanish, and then during the century that followed, the United States attempted to replace Puerto Rican varieties of Spanish with standardized varieties of English. Linguistic colonialism thus does not simply involve the imposition of metropolitan languages, but instead is taken a step further by enforcing standardized versions of these languages. For example, at school and in other formal situations, it is not enough that a Puerto Rican can communicate in Spanish or English (or both), but they need to speak each of these languages in a manner that is deemed ‘proper’. At this point, not only have the original languages that existed in Puerto Rico been largely erased, but there are also significant efforts to erase certain varieties of English and Spanish because these varieties of language do not fall into the arbitrary and artificial category of ‘correct’ that standardization has created.

Secondly, it should be noted that the false pretext which is used to justify standardization, namely, the enabling of communication among greater numbers of people, may not be what every linguistic community aspires to achieve. Historically, language imposition and standardization have been implemented to facilitate both external and internal colonization, and this has not usually benefitted those being forced to conform. In its broadest sense, colonization goes way beyond Western Europeans dominating non-Western European communities and spaces, and can be extended to the domination of women by men and the domination of the poor by the rich within the metropolitan countries themselves. Thus colonization can be used to refer to any instance where people and their labor are devalued, plundered and dumped on (Faraclas & Delgado, 2021,

p.3). To achieve its goals, colonization sets up the false, mutually exclusive and conjunctively exhaustive binaries of class ([+rich/propertied] vs. [-rich/propertied]), gender ([+cis-hetero-male] vs. [-cis-hetero-male]), and race ([+white] vs. [-white]) and standardized language is one tool for doing this (Faraclas & Delgado, 2021, p.3). The way that people use language often reflects the categories that colonization has forcefully labeled them into, thus having the potential to profoundly impact their identities. Because of this, communities and individuals that experience more stigmatization than others may want to limit communication with their oppressors, or at least preserve some style of language use that differentiates them from their oppressors.

A third point that should be mentioned is that for all but the last 500 years of the 300,000 years that homo sapiens have lived on this planet, people have been communicating successfully without standardization. For instance, there was significant cohabitation and pluri-lingualism in the Caribbean both before and during European invasion, which included the use of ‘trade languages’ and other contact varieties. During the colonial era, language varieties emerged which incorporated European, African, and indigenous elements (Faraclas & Bellido de Luna, 2012, p.12-13). These diverse groups communicated by adopting pluri-linguistic approaches and using creative systems of expression in order to establish methods of understanding each other, as opposed to expecting entire populations to adhere to monolingual language norms (Faraclas & Bellido de Luna, 2012, p.33). Furthermore, it should be pointed out that European languages have been imposed as the official forms of communication in the Caribbean, despite Europeans being a minority in the region (Faraclas & Bellido de Luna, 2012, p.14-15). These European languages were imposed and standardized as a method of European domination and control. The effects of this are still seen today, with English being considered a major lingua franca in numerous fields, despite other languages having more native speakers. It is also seen within English-speaking societies, with standardized (i.e., [+white], [+rich], [+metropolitan]) versions of the language taking precedence in professional, academic, and judicial settings, despite the fact that significant portions of the population do not necessarily speak the standardized variety of English or identify with the labels associated with it.

Finally, it should be understood that no one truly or perfectly speaks any standardized language, further supporting the fact that it is an artificial construct. However, certain groups of people are more likely to be stigmatized for their use of non-standardized varieties. Those who do not communicate in a way that is consistent with the [+white], [+rich], and [+metropolitan] norms are systemically at a linguistic disadvantage in major domains of society. However, people who do identify as [+white], [+rich], [+metropolitan], and [+cis-hetero-male] consistently use non-standardized varieties of language without facing the same consequences as other groups. Faraclas and Bellido de Luna eloquently summarize the impact that formal language standardization has had on both individuals and societies at large:

The only linguistic varieties which are ‘fully mastered’ by absolutely nobody are standard varieties, which are purposefully and devilishly encumbered with so many prescriptive norms by the symbolic elites that, though we may spend our entire lives trying to live up to those norms, we somehow never quite manage to do so. In the process, however, we have allowed the colonizing classes to colonize our minds, restructure our thinking, hijack our voices, and write the scripts of our lives. (Faraclas & Delgado, 2021, p.5)

When discussing the need for implementing standardized language policy, it should be noted that some communities may want to maintain their identity through the language varieties that are linked to their cultural and social backgrounds, limit communication with their oppressors, and/or continue to use language without adhering to standardized norms. The rejection of standardized language norms and expectations can thus be a tool for establishing power and agency over the languages that individuals and communities use regularly to express themselves.

### **Examples of the rejection of standardization**

#### *African-American English (AAE)*

Varieties of African-American English (also called Black English (BE) and African-American Vernacular English (AAVE)) are robust examples of language varieties that reject the norms of Standard English (SE), but are still used frequently and are tied closely to cultural and social identity. These language varieties cannot be separated from the sociohistorical contexts that they emerged from (Makoni et al., 2003, p. 9), nor can they be separated from the social construct of race, due to the fact that skin color is “perceived and endowed with social meanings” (Harrison, 1991c, as cited in Makoni et. al, 2003, p.10). In terms of grammar, AAE upends the Chomskian assumption that grammar is somehow politically ‘neutral’ (Newmeyer, 1986, as cited in Makoni et. al, 2003, p. 11) because many of the grammatical patterns in AAE are assigned meaning based on the political and social contexts of usage (Makoni et. al, 2003, p. 11).

One important point to note about AAE and other non-standardized varieties is that they are not devoid of ‘rules’ in the sense of regular grammatical, phonological, lexical and semantic patterns. What they ‘lack’ instead are inflexible and artificial standardized rules, thus allowing room for a certain level of fluidity. Unlike standardized varieties, they do not masquerade as some sort of ‘universal’ or politically/socio-culturally ‘neutral’ varieties of language. Instead, are explicitly imbued with socially, historically, and culturally specific meaning.

A few grammatical features that some varieties of AAE share include habitual *be*, copula ‘absence’, stressed *been*, irrealis *gon*, and the use of *they* to show possession (Alim, 2003, p.46). Copula ‘absence’ refers to patterns in AAE where forms of the verb ‘to be’ do not occur where they would be expected in SE. For example, in AAE one might say “He the one who said that” (see Alim, 2003, p. 47). In the first place, the widespread

use of terminology such as ‘copula absence’, ‘copula deletion’ etc. by linguists who have studied AE, reveals a Eurocentric and SE-centric point of view, since it is assumed that there was a copula there in the first place that later was deleted. In other words, the SE form is taken as the norm, while the AAE form is taken as a ‘deviation’ from that norm. Is it an accident that most West African languages do not use copulas in similar environments? If West African languages were taken as the norm or comparative standard rather than SE, there would be no question of ‘deletion’ or even ‘absence’. In any case, “He the one who said that” is a sentence that would be readily understood, not just by members of AAE speaking communities, but also by most speakers of English worldwide.

Linguists generally ignore the agency of Africans, and later African-Americans, in the development of their own language varieties in favor of an English-centric viewpoint that considers AAE as a ‘deviation’ from English rather than a mode of creative expression that potentially emerged from several linguistic sources. Not only has AAE been misrepresented by some linguists who routinely ignore a range of possible sources in favor of monocausal Eurocentric explanations, but the use of AAE has also been largely stigmatized in favor of SE in professional, educational, and other formal spaces. The positioning of African descended people in colonial societies, as well as their own cultural and social practices, would likely impact how they navigated the use of language in specific contexts, which could potentially carry over into current linguistic usage.

52 Despite the stigmatization and linguistic profiling that often occur as a result, the use of AAE continues to prevail in many African-American sociocultural spaces, as well as in popular culture and social media. Language is a “badge of separate cultural identity” (Winford, 2003, p. 27), which to some degree explains the continued usage of AAE. While the continued internal colonization of African Americans in the US itself attempts to impose standardization and homogeneity, the use of AAE rejects this impetus in several ways. While the use of varieties of AAE establishes African-American communities as culturally distinct from other groups, it also pays homage to the origins of these communities’ pluri-linguistic and pluri-identificational backgrounds. Not only is there evidence that AAE contains traces of African influence, but there is also significant evidence of code switching between different varieties of AAE, as well code switching with SE (Winford, 2003, p. 28). African Americans have unique cultural, historical, and social positionings in which they may regularly navigate between multiple varieties of language depending on context.

It is often assumed by linguists that all speech communities share the same assumptions about usage and prestige, as well as appropriate language use depending on the formality of situations (Winford, 2003, p. 30). This viewpoint is yet another attempt at the imposition of linguistic and sociocultural uniformity, by assuming that all speech communities view language in the same way, with the use of standard forms being associated with superiority and formality, and the non-standard forms with inferiority and

informality (Winford, 2003, p. 30). However, this assumption does not mechanically apply to many African-American speech communities. Several studies (Hoover, 1978; Speicher, 1992; & Ogbu, 1999, as cited in Winford, 2003, p. 30) have demonstrated that African Americans value their linguistic varieties as a “badge of identity and a symbol of resistance to their assimilation to the dominant ‘white’ culture” (Lippi-Green, 1997, as cited in Winford, 2003, p. 30), despite being aware of the potential advantages of using SE. Furthermore, the use of AAE rejects the assumption that language varieties are principally evaluated in all speech communities based on status, with many AAE speech communities tending to place linguistic value on community over status (Winford, 2003, p. 30). In this way, African-American communities claim their cultural and identificational autonomy and power, as well as resisting the standards that the standardized dominant culture has attempted to impose upon them.

### *Southern US English (SAE)*

Varieties of English spoken in the southern United States can also serve as examples of non-standardized languages that function as forms of resistance. It should be noted that there are numerous language varieties spoken in this region, including those that are related to specific ethnic and cultural groups. Like AAE, each variety of southern English has its own specific cultural, social, and historical context, although there are shared features commonly found among numerous groups of speakers. For the purposes of this article, I will be focusing on Southern American English, which is a variety that is primarily spoken by Southerners who are raced as ‘white’ in rural areas (Thomas, 2007, p. 3).

Just as is the case with other non-standardized varieties, the social acceptability of certain syntactic structures in SAE do not necessarily vary geographically, but rather individually (Close, 2007, p. 3). For example, some non-standardized usages are accepted by particular individuals, while other individuals would consider the same usages as either incorrect or even unintelligible. The social context of SAE is therefore a crucial component of communication because individual relationships among speakers can impact which forms are accepted and/or understood. An example of a feature of SAE that depends on cultural and social context in terms of communicative acceptability is the use of double modals (Close, 2007, p. 3). While all southern language varieties do allow the combination of two modal auxiliaries in sequence, each variation differs in terms of which combinations of modals are accepted (Whitley, 1975, as cited in Close, 2007, p. 3). A few common examples of double modals are as follows:

- might could
- might would
- used to could
- may need to
- might better
- might ought to

The acceptability of double modals in Southern American English is not contingent on grammatical categories, but rather what has been deemed as allowable by specific speakers of particular varieties. For instance, the combination of ‘can should’ is never permissible by speakers of varieties of SAE, despite the socially contingent acceptance of other combinations of double modals that function the same way grammatically, such as ‘can might’ (Whitley, 1975, as cited in Close, 2007, p. 3). However, it should be noted that the same double modal constructions are not accepted by all SAE speakers. In fact, a study carried out among speakers based in Arkansas concluded that the only double modal construction that was accepted among every participant was ‘might could’, further demonstrating that the use of this grammatical structure is contingent on the feelings and opinions of individuals rather than hard rules that can be easily noted, categorized and predicted (Close, 2007, p. 3). In this way, speakers of SAE are blatantly rejecting the norms of language standardization in favor of methods of communication that apply to their individual social and cultural contexts.

Another notable grammatical feature of SAE is the use of reflexive pronouns in what would be non-reflexive transitive clauses in SE (Teomiro García, 2013, p. 33). For instance:

- I want *me* a new car.
- You had *you* a good time last night.
- We bought *us* some groceries.
- She wanted *her* something to drink.

This particular use of reflexive pronouns in SAE can convey “that the speaker assumes that the action expressed has or would have a positive (or negative) effect on the subject, typically satisfying the subject’s perceived intention or goals” (Teomiro García, 2013, p. 37). For example, when a speaker describes the actions of themselves or someone else, they use these reflexive pronouns to emphasize that the subject performing the action is successful in achieving the result that they have set out to achieve. Consider the example: ‘You had you a good time last night’. If a speaker says this to someone else, the use of the word ‘you’ as a reflexive pronoun emphasizes that the person being spoken to did, in fact, have a good time the night before. Depending on the speaker’s intonation, this could be communicated as either a positive or negative comment about the person being spoken to. Thus these reflexive sentence structures can be used as a means to either insult or commend, which demonstrates how fluid their use can be within a particular cultural and social context.

The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis suggests that the structure of the language that a person regularly uses influences how that person thinks and behaves (Kramsch, 1998, p. 11). In the case of SAE, many widely-held economic, political, and social beliefs that its speakers adhere to revolve around ideas of individualism and self-reliance. While these ideas can certainly become problematic in certain contexts, it does make sense that working-class people living in relatively rural areas would historically value concepts

such as property ownership, independence from the perceived upper classes, and their subjective understandings of life experiences, as opposed to information that perceived [+rich], [+metropolitan] forces attempt to establish as objective truths. With these values in mind, the idea that certain aspects of the structure and meaning of language are contingent upon individual interpretation is not too surprising. Rather than adhere to the homogenous methods of communication that the perceived [+metropolitan], [+rich] forces have attempted to impose on them, many SAE speakers actually reject this aspect of their internal colonization within the US when they use non-standardized grammatical structures that are open to personal interpretation regarding correctness.

### *Code-switching in Puerto Rico*

Puerto Rican language is distinct because it often does not only consist of the usage of a single language at all, but rather it involves code-switching between Puerto Rican varieties of both English and Spanish. Additionally, Puerto Rican language varieties incorporate features from other linguistic sources, such as Indigenous Caribbean and West-African language varieties (Faraclas & Delgado, 2021, p. 6), so it is important to note that the varieties of English and Spanish that many Puerto Ricans use are not standardized versions of these languages, even when they are not necessarily code-switching between the two.

Some examples of code-switching among Puerto Rican speakers may look like:

1. I think that it's fine, *pero gracias!*
2. *La pregunta fue, dicha* by you (Sankoff & Poplack, 1981, p. 13).
3. 'Cause I believe they're poor, they gotta know how to eat everything; not just little desserts and *esos potes*, which I don't like them (Sankoff & Poplack, 1981, p. 11).
4. *Y en Puerto Rico* he would say *que cortaba caña*, even though *tema su negocio*, you know (Sankoff & Poplack, 1981, p. 24).

The above examples demonstrate complex grammatical usages that pull from both English and Spanish varieties. In some cases, the speaker primarily uses one language while only substituting a few lexical items in the other (e.g., examples 1-3), however there are other times in which the speaker will fluctuate between the languages multiple times within one or two sentences (e.g., example 4) (Sankoff & Poplack, 1981, p. 11-12). In cases where the speaker is substituting a few lexical items, the grammar is not dramatically affected because the speaker is not substantially changing the sentence structure, but rather replacing words from one language with words from another. However, even in these instances the speaker is demonstrating their awareness of both languages' grammatical boundaries by effectively placing prepositions, conjunctions, and other function words in their appropriate slots.

In example #4, the speaker is also demonstrating their syntactic awareness of both English and Spanish. While the speaker is staying true to the grammars of each language,



they code-switch at moments in which a structural change is appropriate. For example, after pauses or after transitional elements. Although the speaker is using prescribed grammar in each instance of code-switching, formal language standardization still categorizes this type of communication as ‘incorrect’ because it does not adhere to what has been conceptualized as a single, monolithic linguistic variety. Furthermore, it should be noted that some of the examples not only code-switch between English and Spanish, but non-standard and standard varieties of each of these languages. For instance, in example #3 the speaker uses ‘cause’ rather than ‘because’. In this way, Puerto Rican speakers who utilize code-switching are actually utilizing multiple varieties of both English and Spanish, instead of just the standardized versions of these two languages.

Speakers of Puerto Rican language varieties reject colonial notions of standardization by incorporating their pluri-linguistic and pluri-identificational backgrounds into their linguistic practices. Historically, European colonization has attempted to replace pluri-lingual repertoires with strict adherence to idealized monolingual norms (Faraclas & Delgado, 2021, p. 4). Furthermore, colonization has attempted to attribute the emergence of languages to monocausal and monolithic circumstances, rather than acknowledge the influence of multiple groups and a range of linguistic repertoires in the formation and restructuring of particular language varieties (Faraclas & Delgado, 2021, p. 4). With this in mind, Puerto Rican English serves as a clear example of how the pluri-identificational backgrounds of real speech and discourse communities influence the rejection of language standardization in favor of forms of language that better serve their needs.

Language standardization often categorizes non-standardized language practices as somehow deficient. However, the ways in which multiple grammars are mastered and used by Puerto Ricans who are code-switching between English and Spanish varieties actually point to in-depth knowledge of a number of varieties of both languages, including their similarities and differences, which in turn allows speakers to flow between languages without hesitation (Sankoff & Poplack, 1981, p. 10-11). Moreover, there is no loss in communication when Puerto Rican speakers communicate via code-switching, further demonstrating their competencies in more than one language (Sankoff & Poplack, 1981, p. 11). By communicating via code-switching, Puerto Ricans are not only acknowledging and preserving the pluri-lingual aspects of their histories and cultures, but they are also exhibiting their proficiencies in navigating the pluri-identificational worlds in which they reside.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this article is not to argue about whether or not standardized language should be used or taught, but rather to acknowledge the origins and limitations of stand-

ardization, as well as to analyze and question assumptions about what constitutes ‘correct’ or ‘proper’ language. Language usage does not occur in a vacuum, and standardized varieties often attempt to erase the historical, social, cultural, and political contexts of other varieties. It is of utmost importance that we analyze the reasoning behind promoting standardized varieties. Often, it is assumed standardized varieties need to be learned in order to succeed in professional or academic settings, but this is once again looping back to the colonial mindset. While it is the norm to use standardized varieties in most formal contexts, and that can be helpful for speakers to be aware of, it is crucial to also consider the importance of other contexts. Belonging to a community, validating one’s socio-cultural background, and acknowledging the history behind one’s identity are all extremely valuable context-dependent factors that get erased when standardized language is viewed as the only viable linguistic code, rather than being viewed as one viable code among many.

Additionally, we must not forget that the complete mastery of standardized language is an artificial ideal, rather than something that is actually attainable. No one truly speaks a completely standardized language, yet certain groups are much more often stigmatized for not doing so than others. The purist aim for language perfection not only hinders certain groups from full participation in various formal settings, but it also trivializes aspects of language that are not used for the sole purpose of clear, simple communication within formal contexts. Language usage involves more than just getting messages across, and creative, culturally embedded means of expression are a crucial part of what constitutes the real, embodied use of any language.

The use of standardized language varieties is now deeply embedded in the expected social practice of most modern nation states. This has not only shaped how we communicate, but also how we think, since, as a vehicle for thought, language often (but not always) influences our cognitive processes (Leavitt, 2019, p. 18). This implies that standardized versions of language are potentially shaping the ways in which we view the world and ourselves. Instead of seeing ourselves in control of language, the unattainable goal of mastery of a standardized form of language seems to have taken control of us. In our constant attempts to speak the way we are expected to speak, we may end up not only speaking, but also thinking and acting not in our own interests, but instead in the interests of those who are imposing standardization on us. With this in mind, people and communities who reject standardization by using non-standardized varieties that actually reflect their own identities, can be seen as resisting the attempted imposition of both language and thought as a means of control. Although they may be stigmatized in certain contexts, these individuals and groups are actually acknowledging and asserting their power over their language and their lives by resisting language standardization.

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# METAPHORS AND LINGUISTIC ATTITUDES TOWARD CARIBBEAN CREOLES

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## Abstract

In this article, the prevalent negative attitudes toward creole languages in the Caribbean region are explained, not only in terms of beliefs and ideologies, but also in terms of the metaphors that underpin attitudes, beliefs and ideologies. Once these metaphors are acknowledged and explained, numerous possibilities emerge for transforming negative attitudes toward creole languages.

**Key terms:** language attitudes and ideologies, metaphor, creole languages, Jamaica, Louise Bennett

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) observe:

[H]uman reason is a form of animal reason, a reason inextricably tied to our bodies and the peculiarities of our brains ... [O]ur bodies, brains, and interactions with our environment provide the mostly unconscious basis for our everyday metaphysics, that is, our sense of what is real. (pp. 229-231)

Western science has had some positive outcomes, such as the development of vaccines to limit pandemics. But in an epistemic sense, Western science has done significant damage by claiming to have a monopoly on a monolithic truth that only the ‘experts’ (i.e., those in the academic and symbolic elites who have been trained in ‘the’ (one and only) scientific method, have access to. Average people have thus been deprived of their ‘animal reason’, that is, their epistemic powers, no longer trusting their own abilities to critically examine the realities of their daily lives in order to determine what is true and what is not. Instead, they have been trained to depend on the ‘experts’ of the symbolic elites to tell them what is true. The symbolic elites do not only include academics and

professional scientists, but also religious figures and media personalities, whose versions of ‘the one and only truth’ have become increasingly detached from any accountability to any set of real lived experiences. This has led to the current state of affairs, where, despite the fact that effective vaccines have been developed by Western science to combat disease, there are an alarming number of people who are refusing to take these vaccines, because they have been conditioned by that same Western science not to trust the actual events unfolding before their eyes, and instead to believe the lies that the equally elite experts in reactionary religious and media organizations are telling them.

The notion of objectivity, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out, has resulted in egregious abuses of power by those who use the cloak of objectivity to hide the subjective agendas that saturate all discourse, even the most ‘detached’ Western academic scientific discourse. We should not forget that during World War II, the fascists in Germany justified their genocidal policies with ‘objective’ scientific studies that ‘proved’ the innate inferiority of their victims. And with the current rise of fascism in the US, Brazil, Europe, Turkey, India and China, we may soon witness the equivalent of concentration camps and gas chambers, al, carefully justified by ‘objective’ scientific ‘facts’.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) state that they “do not believe that there is such a thing as objective (absolute and unconditional) truth, though it has been a long-standing theme in Western culture that there is” (p. 134). Corum (2016, p. 88) comments that the notion of objectivity arose from very subjective and Eurocentric hegemonic ideas related to power abuse in 17th century European imperialistic metropolitan society. Notions about an absolute truth affect society at all levels and in all domains, including the use of language in places where extreme levels of abuse of power have been the norm for centuries, like the Caribbean. It is therefore the case that such ideas about truth have an effect on the linguistic choices of Caribbean peoples and their attitudes toward those choices.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) contend that many values that are embedded in our society and which condition how we think, speak and act, are based on metaphor. Lakoff (1992) defines metaphor as “the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another” (p. 202). Physical and social environment is important in explaining both metaphors and attitudes. For example, a Jamaican woman who works as a farmer, speaks Jamaican English lexifier Creole and sells her products in a local market may have little need to use Standard English, and her attitudes towards Jamaican Creole might be positive if she can make a living by using the language, with her belief system linking the concept of ‘Creole’ to the concept of ‘success’. But maybe her son, who wants to be a professor, will have a different attitude toward Jamaican Creole, and will aspire to learn Standard English in search of a ‘better future’ that, because he was not born to an elite family, may not be attainable even if he masters Standard English. In his mind, the concept ‘Creole’ may be linked to the concept ‘failure’. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) comment:

The meaning a metaphor will have for me will be partly culturally determined and partly tied to my past experiences. The cultural differences can be enormous because each of the concepts in the metaphor under discussion ... can vary widely from culture to culture. (p. 130)

In any case, in Jamaican society in general, the dominant hegemonic discourses have established and propagated the ‘truth’ that Standard English is the key to social mobility and ‘success’. In this connection, it is useful to discuss some dominant metaphors identified Lakoff and Johnson (1980) that influence our way of thinking and collective behavior about languages, such as: UP IS BETTER, HIGH STATUS IS UP, and THE PROGRESS IS GOOD, PROGRESS IS UP (p. 128) as exemplified in speech by such passages as: “He’s a rising star in the business world;” and “She’s climbing the social ladder”. In our Caribbean societies, where these and other metaphors, such as EDUCATION IS SUCCESS, MONEY IS SUCCESS, STANDARD ENGLISH IS EDUCATION, STANDARD ENGLISH IS WEALTH, STANDARD ENGLISH IS PROGRESS, CREOLE LANGUAGE IS IGNORANCE, and CREOLE LANGUAGE IS POVERTY are part of our worldview, it is normal that negative linguistic attitudes are automatically adopted by most people in relation to Creole languages.

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) assert: “The concepts that govern our thoughts are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details” (p. 124, see also Bednarek, 2009). In general, at least in part because of the dominant metaphors mentioned above, Caribbean Creoles are subject to negative linguistic attitudes, and because of that, speakers are less likely to use them in formal, official, and professional contexts. Two domains have a particularly forceful impact on negative linguistic attitudes towards the Caribbean Creoles: that of formal education and that of the formal economy.

In some places this is changing. In Jamaica, for example, Jamaican Creole is being used in more formal domains (Farquharson, 2015). This demonstrates how both metaphors and attitudes can change when ‘bottom-up’ (Crystal, 2014) pressures begin to question and challenge dominant ‘top down’ ideologies. Changes in linguistic policy and practice, such as those taking place in relation to Papiamentu in Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, can propel Creoles languages into a better position. Such bottom-up pressures can be exerted by the use of Caribbean Creole languages in popular music, literature and religious practice. A case in point is Jamaica, where reggae, Rastafarianism, ska, mento, and other extremely popular cultural phenomena have showcased Jamaican Creole on the international stage (Hancock, 2017).

Specific artists can also promote changes in people’s beliefs, as they introduce new metaphors that can initiate transformations in attitudes and perceptions about the use of language. Jamaican poet, educator, folklorist, and actress Louise Bennett is a paradigmatic example, in her untiring advocacy for the use of Jamaican Creole. Frank (2010) comments that:



She [Louise Bennett] pioneered the use of JC [Jamaican Creole] in literature and demonstrated the richness of Jamaican culture that draws from African, European, and Jamaican sources. She argued that not only JC derived from English, but that Standard English is also a dialect that derived from other languages. (p. 8)

Definitely, her lasting influence over Jamaican popular culture has contributed to a better general perception of Jamaican Creole. This influence has been especially strong in relation to questions of identity, one of the main variables that promotes a positive linguistic attitude in communities with a strong cultural conscience. Despite her powerful legacy, it has taken years for Jamaican Creole to begin to be accepted in wider domains outside the realm of popular culture. Today, for example, the language is more widely used than ever in education and in the media, among other more formal contexts (Hancock, 2017). Farquharson (2015) also argues that Jamaican Creole has become an important part of Jamaican cultural capital because of the value placed on the language inside and outside Jamaica.

Culture is not static since people change. It is true that some beliefs are hard to displace from the general worldview of a given society but, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) note: “changes in our conceptual system do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions” (p. 132). So, to change attitudes and perceptions about language, we as linguists have an obligation to promote new “metaphorical concepts and the loss of old ones” (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980, p. 131). Some academics may question the need to restructure some of the metaphorical concepts that predominate in our society. But when we witness social dynamics where the use of a stigmatized linguistic variety is deployed as a pretext for discrimination and injustice, linguists must begin to question and challenge the metaphors and attitudes that underpin the ‘truth’ that is being used to justify such power abuse. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argue, “In most cases, what is at issue is not the truth or falsity of a metaphor but the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions that are sanctioned by it” (p. 133). And, as Corum (2016) contends, linguists should “bring such findings about the human mind and its capacity to reason to light so that people can form their own non-hegemonic ideas, first, about how their brains work, and, secondly, about what motivates their thoughts and actions” (p. 101).

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# **COSMOPOLITANISMS AND LITERATURES IN THE CARIBBEAN AND BEYOND**



# THE GLOBAL SOUTH'S TRASH: DECAPITALIZATION IN 1970s ANGLOPHONE CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

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## Abstract

In this article, I argue that the category of trash is an essential component of a Global South's cultural production. More specifically, I argue that studies on Global South's literature systematically ignore lesser narrative forms when providing their perspective on literary traditions. The Global South's Trash examines how literary traditions are shaped not only by canonical works but also by an understudied stream of pulp fiction works whose narratives are set in the Caribbean. In order to prove this point, I trace the boom in representations of not quite white characters in Anglophone trash fiction published in the 1970s such as Christopher Nicole's *Sunset* (1978).

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**Key terms:** Caribbean pulp fiction, Christopher Nicole, white trash, literary boom, whiteness

## Introduction

This essay argues that the category of trash is an essential component of the global south's cultural production. Critical studies of literature produced in the global south systematically ignore lesser narrative forms when providing their perspective on literary traditions. I refer to popular or pulp novels as 'trash fiction' because they have been discarded from studies of Anglophone Caribbean literature. 'Trash fiction' is labeled in that way not only for their perceived lesser literary value, or their licentious (trashy) content, but also because they contain white trash characters in their narratives. Regarded with 'great contempt,' these white trash fictional works and their trashed white characters are considered unworthy of attention in the larger spectrum of nation building politics. Mid-to-late twentieth century decolonized nations looked to gain literary prestige to substantiate their claims to having a legitimate postcolonial culture. These novels

published in the 1970s sought to contest newly formed nationalist literary canons. Accordingly, these decolonized nations excluded pulp fiction from their new literary canons – that is to say, from their list of works that they surmised would generate cultural capital. If their pulp quality is what makes them unfit to represent a national literary tradition, nevertheless it is that same quality that permits them to explore key themes at the heart of a postcolonial world.

The Global South's Trash examines how Caribbean literary traditions are shaped not only by canonical works but also by an understudied stream of works of pulp fiction whose narratives are set in the global south. Christopher Nicole, the writer examined here, finds inspiration in multifocal South-South themes in the Caribbean Sea and in the archipelagic history of the Lesser Antilles. In his works we encounter themes such as human trafficking, shipwrecks, the appearance of monstrous white trash entities, and the violent actions of perverse plantation overseers. His narratives are set in South America, Jamaica, the Lesser Antilles, and in the ocean sounds, straights, channels, and whirlpools that connect them. The popular fiction analyzed here provides examples of a recalibration in social relations where post-plantation societies grapple with the emergence and legacies of 'decapitalization.' In this article, the term decapitalization is conceptualized as a cultural off-centering caused by a loss of wealth, prestige, and status. There is a correlation between the loss of economic wealth and the diminishing value of whiteness in circum-Atlantic processes of decapitalization. Narratives of lesser whites suggest that when institutions supporting white dominance plummet, so too do the white subjects' cultural worth. The circum-Atlantic plantocracy created its own world of manners, propriety, and cultural values that collapsed with the abolition of slavery and the emancipation of the enslaved. The suddenly decapitalized former planter became exiled from the world that formerly had sustained him.

In recent years the study of white trash in the Caribbean has occurred at the edges of larger studies tracking the history of white indentured labor in the European colonization of the Americas. For instance, historical studies such as *White cargo* (2007), by Don Jordan and Michael Walsh, explain that along with the Irish and the Welsh, a significant number of undesirable whites, "the dregs of England," were also sent to the "isles of Devils" (the West Indies) as indentured servants (pp. 33, 59).

Key to my take on 'white trash' is my discovery of works of non-fiction that have been overlooked. My work is informed by underexamined scholarly works of non-fiction on white trash in the Caribbean. In an article entitled *White trash in the Antilles* (1934), Afro-Caribbean sociologist H. Gordon Andrews elaborates an understanding of Caribbean culture in which categories of impoverished whiteness (former white indentured servants, planters, and convicts) are consolidated into a single category of white trash. The denomination 'poor white' fades from the Caribbean landscape and instead 'white trash' becomes the preferred term to classify all non-'full' whites. Andrews alerts us to

this conceptual space in Caribbean culture where historically impoverished types and decapitalized planters acquire the designation white trash.

His explanation of white trash resonates with the themes developed in trash fiction where poor whites amount to “nothing more than ‘White Trash’” in the Caribbean (Andrews, 1996, p. 492). From the interstices of power/knowledge, Andrews has articulated a unique perspective of white trash that is inconsistent with the US understanding of white trash. Whereas in the US white trash is the result of lack of breeding, Andrews argues that there is an additional specific use of white trash in the global south that refers to those who suffered decapitalization. In the Caribbean one is not only born white trash, but in addition one can *become* white trash. Becoming white trash is a unique form of decapitalization. It emerges from the interstices of Caribbean fiction *and* non-fiction. Andrews’s insight becomes useful for examining a representative text of decapitalized white characters in Anglophone trash fiction published in the late 1970s—Christopher Nicole’s *Sunset* (1978).

Before delving into the novel, a few facts about Nicole are pertinent, given the scant critical attention paid to his work. Born in 1930 in Georgetown, British Guiana, of Scottish parents, Nicole began writing Caribbean fiction in the 1950s and his pulp narratives have been published steadily ever since. He studied at Queen’s College in Guyana and at Harrison College in Barbados. In 1957, he moved to the Channel Islands, United Kingdom, where he currently lives. Nicole’s works of trash fiction initiated a trend of trashy plantation sagas whose innovations include white trash and decapitalized white Caribbean characters. Over the years, his sagas have covered almost all the regions of the postcolonial world, including India. His political perspective is fundamentally archipelagic and multicultural, emphasizing the legacy of imperialism in postcolonial societies (Soto-Crespo 2020b, p. 87). Nicole’s work expands the white trash plantation saga’s geographical scope by decontinentalizing its settings and by emphasizing archipelagic themes.

### **White trash at *Sunset***

“It took an effort to turn the key in the lock, and then another effort to pull the huge mahogany door, bound with strips of rusting iron, open. The two women peered at the gloom beyond, sniffed the mustiness.” Thus, Christopher Nicole begins his novel *Sunset*, describing the reopening of the Great House by descendants of the planter class decades after the collapse of the plantation complex in the West Indies (Nicole, 1978, p. 40). Set in 1888, the old mercantilist production model of sugar cane, sweat, and lash has been replaced by ‘free’ labor (aka wage slavery) and a ‘free’ market (aka colonial enclave capitalist) economy. Nicole’s scene captures a crucial moment, following the plummeting of sugar cane prices in the aftermath of British emancipation of the enslaved, when a new generation of old planter money feels the need to re-acquaint itself



with foregone planter glory. The Great House—often referred to as a monumental “rubbish” or a “mausoleum”—continues to symbolize “the fountainhead of everything Hilton” (Nicole, 1978, pp. 17, 40). As the plantation complex had become an extinct mode of production, the Great House had been “left to rot,” with “shutters in place” and a front door “closed and barred” (p. 12). For the descendants of the old Hilton line, it conveyed a feeling of “terrible shame, having that Great House, just sitting there, mouldering” (p. 149). They wagered that the Great House’s restitution to its former glory would reverse the stigma of decapitalization associated with the Hilton family: “Without it, without its splendour, the family is as nothing” (p. 40).

Ever since the collapse of sugar cane profits, the newfound worthlessness of the Hilton name evokes a transformation whereby one form of production has been superseded by a new one. These cataclysmic economic and political changes created two types of subjects in post-enslavement Caribbean society; the newly freed enslaved and the decapitalized white class of former planters, who soon became stigmatized as white trash. This was not only the result of the sustained and ultimately successful resistance of the enslaved to chattel slavery, but also the result of a peculiar process of becoming white trash in the Anglophone Caribbean, which I explain in greater detail in *The white trash menace and hemispheric fiction* (Soto Crespo, 2020a).

Predicting a white trash fate in the ‘forsaken’ islands, a few members of the plantocracy decided to resettle in London, but many lacked the economic means to move back to England. The rising specter of a decapitalized future prompted ‘full’ whites to leave the islands. Nicole’s narrator explains:

the plantocracy, after fleecing the islands for every penny they could over two hundred years, at the thought that they might not be able to continue living like millionaires, went fleeing back to England with what they could salvage. (1978, p. 131)

Although the novel takes place long after the opening of the British domestic market to cheaper European beet sugar (which led to the collapse of the sugar cane empire in the West Indies), the aftershocks of the plantation complex’s demise continued to be felt in the Hilton family. The Hiltons represented the last lineage of a world that had disappeared decades ago. They were creatures who didn’t know they were extinct.

Decapitalization has led to the Hilton name’s diminishing value as cultural capital. The narrator explains, “the Hilton name. It might have had everyone bowing and scraping in 1788 but not in 1888” (Nicole, 1978, p. 116). The family name’s diminishing clout in the West Indies signals the encroaching post-/neo-colonial world, with its own travails and ecologies. As a result, the Hilton clan has to contend with a surname that has lost its luster. The family lawyer explains the downwardly mobile fate awaiting the Hilton descendants who seek to restore the Great House; “You will never be millionaires, like, shall we say, your great-great-great grandmother, Robert Hilton’s stepmother, for

example” (p. 138). To Meg, the family’s heiress, the lawyer lays out her new economic reality; “The great days when a Hilton could sit back and spend whatever he liked whenever he liked are gone, perhaps for ever” (p. 141).

Even though the novel’s primary focus is the Great House, an architectural landmark testifying to the once absolutist dominance of the plantocracy in the West Indies, its key contribution is its representation of a growing cleavage in Caribbean whiteness. *Sunset* captures a transformation in West Indian whiteness whereby a long process of decapitalization has devalued, or trashed, planter whiteness.

In order to illustrate ‘full’ whiteness and trashed or decapitalized whiteness, Nicole develops two main characters: the protagonist, Margaret Hilton (Meg) and the antagonist Oriole Paterson. These are the women opening the Great House’s mahogany front door at the beginning of the novel. Oriole, Meg’s British cousin, is a young widow who arrives in Jamaica to help Anthony Hilton raise his teenage daughter Meg as a proper lady. Having lost his wife during childbirth, Anthony has raised Meg with the help of black servants, but, as Meg approaches her sixteenth birthday, Anthony welcomes Oriole’s assistance. A significant character, Anthony is the last patriarch of a centuries-old Hilton empire in the British Caribbean. For Oriole, helping to raise Anthony’s daughter is an urgent duty, given that Meg is “the very last Hilton”—the surname will end when she marries (Nicole, 1978, p. 36).

Whereas Oriole’s full British whiteness is described in terms of “marvelous pink and white flesh,” with “feet of a similar delicacy and whiteness,” (Nicole, 1978, p. p. 35) Meg’s whiteness is compromised by her lack of culture, owing to her friendship with lesser whites. When Oriole meets Meg for the first time, the latter is covered with sheep dung after rolling around the fields with the sons of the family’s lawyer and the son of Hilltop’s overseer. Oriole’s judgment of Meg is brutal: “You look positively indecent as you are .... Your complexion is a disgrace, Margaret. How your father could have permitted you to spend so much time in the sun I shall never know” (pp. 34-35). Oriole is appalled that Meg walks barefoot, that she has “no clothes to speak of,” and, above all, that she shows “no breeding” (p. 36).

Lack of breeding is precisely what the sociologist Matt Wray points to in *Not quite white* (2006) as the cultural boundary between full white and white trash. Although Wray does not mention Andrews, his theory follows Andrews’ understanding of whiteness by arguing that the stigmatized white trash has gained traction through historical anxieties over whiteness mixing with non-white or ‘lesser’ whites. For Andrews, the expansion in question is the British migration to the New World: for Wray it is the US territorial expansion into the Western regions of North America. If for Andrews, Barbados and the sugar islands represented a risk that white settlers might deteriorate into wild, uncultured, or uncivilized citizens, for Wray the menace was the American frontier. Separation from the Eastern urban centers of US settlement meant a distancing from exposure to high culture and, simultaneously, an incremental socialization with

non-whites and common whites. Both Wray (2006) and Andrews (1996) describe this anxiety in terms of the threat of becoming “not quite white” via decapitalization which meant the trashing of full whiteness by cultural mixing with whites of lesser status.

Full whiteness secures its value with a constant influx of cultural capital, but it can diminish in value by mixing with those whites socially and economically below the elite classes. In a decapitalized post-plantation society, full whiteness has degraded in status and shares common spaces with whites of inferior class status. Unlike the US, where there is a (dwindling) majority white population with an array of racialized class types (i.e., white folks, poor whites, good country whites), in the post-emancipation Caribbean the minority white population becomes stratified into two groups: full whites and white trash. Oriole’s recently arrived British whiteness and Meg’s decapitalized Caribbean whiteness represent key markers of the plummeting status of whiteness in the global south. It is in this context that Oriole has to remind Meg about the importance of her white skin, “Your skin is white. You got for watch it” (Nicole, 1978, p. 15). Oriole emphasizes, “You have got to get through your head ... that the Hiltons have always been at the very top of the West Indian aristocracy” (p. 91).

For Oriole, white skin is tied to name and status; and from her perspective, wealth, though gone, may return as long as full whiteness is kept from being trashed. She explains this rationalization of class and destiny to Meg in the following exchange:

‘Whoever marries you is not merely taking a wife. He is taking the whole responsibility, the power and the wealth, of Hilltop.’

‘The wealth?’

‘It will come again. I have no doubt at all on that score. You and I will make it come again.’ (Nicole, 1978, p. 90)

Oriole serves as an enforcer of the divide between two types of whiteness: full white, and lesser white. Scandalized, Oriole perceives that Meg is dangerously close to a worrisome lessening of her whiteness. She makes this cultural distinction perfectly clear to Meg, saying, “You are a Hilton. They [lesser whites] are nothing” (Nicole, 1978, p. 43). She forbids Meg to “keep any friends amongst the white children” on the plantation (p. 43). And again, she states, “The Mistress of Hilltop can have no friends, Miss Hilton, save amongst others of equal rank” (p. 47). “They are your inferiors,” she said to Meg, “You must never forget that” (p. 43).

Yet, the Hilton decapitalized fate is tied to Nicole’s account of the demise of the British West Indies and the collapse of the sugar subsidies that had kept sugar cane prices at high market levels. On this subject the narrator tells us: “These islands were the most valuable part of the British Empire, not a hundred years ago. Now they are the poorest” (Nicole, 1978, p. 44). In *Sunset*, whiteness and imperialism are permanently entangled. The decapitalization of the West Indies by the British Crown has given shape to Meg and has made her a “half wild creole” (p. 48). Here Nicole echoes the first pages of *Wide Sargasso sea*, where Antoinette Mason is described as a “white cockroach” (Rhys,

1966, p. 48). In Rhys, we find another Caribbean example of a Deleuzian becoming in the burrows, “the white creole” becomes a “white cockroach.” By contrast, Oriole’s full whiteness is referred to as a “whitey whitey woman” (Nicole, 1978, p. 70).

Concerned that Meg is on the verge of an irreversible trashy future, Oriole seeks the revival of the old Hilton name. For Oriole, the Great House represents a “Hilton family fortress” and she insists that it be restored to its former glory (Nicole, 1978, p. 53). In this context, the Great House as a symbol of wealth would protect full whiteness. As Thomas Hobbes put it decades before in *The leviathan*, wealth and property are linked in a nascent economic reality where “Wealth is power” (cited in Smith, 1999, p. 134). In the Caribbean, wealth and a planter’s house assume the role of fortresses not only for protecting whiteness from ‘contamination’ by ‘lesser’ genes and lifeways, but also for sending a clear message of superiority, so that “people know when they are in the presence of a superior” (Nicole, 1978, p. 52). Fortresses and walls are typical symbols of superiority.

However, trash refers to more than a class distinction. The boom of postwar trash fiction in the Anglophone Caribbean is lucrative, because of its innovative white trash characters and the provocative sexual content that dominates this genre. To be white trash refers also to a moral character trait—in this context, it means to be licentiously trashy. The trashiness of the subgenre, Caribbean trash fiction, provides Nicole the space to develop the notion of white trash behavior further. Decapitalized whiteness takes a trashy turn with Meg’s increasing fascination with erect male penises.

“Oh,” exclaims Meg, “a magnificent rod. Hard as a rock, and yet all velvety ... I held it until it was wet” (Nicole, 1978, p. 98). But just having had the experience of holding a fully erect penis was not enough: “She had never known the rod, there was the trouble. She had only held it, and dreamed of it” (p. 116). In moments of contemplation, when she suffered the “absence of the rod,” Meg would exclaim, “I couldn’t possible marry a man until I’ve seen the size of his rod” (p. 110). After saying this she “licked her lips” (p. 111). Meg becomes a zealous connoisseur, “Here was a magnificent manhood, glowing with pumping blood, and desiring only her” (p. 124). She developed a keen sense of men and their appendage, “He was a man. He would have a rod” (p. 160). Often Meg would want to “hold it, and feel it throb” and other times she stared bedazzled “at his rod, swollen and hard” (p. 165). Meg likes to caress the rod’s “curling love forest”, and often she desires to kiss “the flaming member” as she describes in the following excerpt: “she touched his rod, stroked it, caressed it, felt it rise beneath her fingers ... and lowered her head to kiss it” (pp. 163, 213). Kissing it had an immediate effect; “she exploded in a tumultuous orgasm within seconds” (p. 214). Ready to be “impaled,” she avers, “you had a potent weapon there” (pp. 214, 216).

When she trades sex for a mortgage loan, in an attempt to save the last remnants of her plantation, she states with a straight face, “Oh, it is awfully dirty money. You may smell

the semen on it” (p. 195). Her debauchery leads her husband and cousin to lock her in the Great House’s attic, and she becomes known in Jamaican society as the “Mad-woman of Hilltop” (p. 263). Similar to *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha Mason, the white creole is confined to an attic, but her imprisonment does not end with the torching of the Great House. Instead, the Great House crumbles when a prophecy comes true and a natural disaster rocks the last bastion of full whiteness on the island. The collapse of the Great House is a common motif in post-plantation trash fiction; (for more on this subject, see Soto-Crespo, 2020b, pp. 89-92).

Physical decay and spiritual decadence are twin forces driving the end of the plantation complex. Thus, *Sunset* ends with a catastrophic earthquake that destroys the Great House. Emblematic of a disappearing last vestige of plantation whiteness, the House is trashed and “reduced to meaningless rubble” (Nicole, 1978, p. 351).

Meg walked towards the Great House. It seemed the main force of the tremor had run right underneath the building, for the massive stone cellars upon which it had been erected, which had been at once a foundation and a refuge ... had been split, as if with a gigantic axe ... the outer walls still stood, but the roof was gone, crashing down on top of the bedrooms, on top of her bed ... crashing in turn on top of the collapsing staircases, crashing in turn into the hall and sucking down the inner walls of the dining room and the drawing room .... Hilltop Great House had simply collapsed into the resulting chasm. (pp. 350-351)

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It is Oriole who voices the meaning behind Hilltop’s collapse:

Oh, God have mercy on me. They are all dead. All gone, she thought. All gone. Everything Hilton gone. The Hiltons are dead. Oh, my God, Meg ... All the Hiltons are dead. The Great House is dead...The Plantation is dead. (p. 350-351).

The death of the plantation signals the death of a world system. As Marc Matrana points out in *Lost plantation*, plantations “were not singular isolated entities in history but instead were tangled in a dense web of other plantations and plantation inhabitants like them” (2005, p. xi). In *Sunset*, the collapse of the plantation signifies the birth of a trashed world. For the white creole, the social, cultural, and economic pressures of keeping up with full whiteness amounted to another aspect of the legacy of cultural imperialism.

At this juncture in the novel, Meg provides a white trashed end to the narrative by claiming: “I was never a Hilton. I only tried to act the part” (Nicole, 1978, p. 352). Admitting that she has acted full white rather than being so, Meg embodies the emergence of a mid-twentieth century decapitalized distinction at the heart of Caribbean whiteness. Having pretended to be fully white, Meg reveals the decapitalized reality of a trashed whiteness coming to terms with an impoverished future. From the rubble of Great Houses, a burgeoning network of trash subjectivities begins to emerge onto the pages of trash fiction.

## Conclusion

Decapitalized fiction portrays what happens to whiteness in the West Indies with the demise of the plantation complex. There we encounter unsheltered forms of whiteness, which expose the racialized class divisions that have made whiteness far from monolithic. Trash fiction emphasizes a fragmented whiteness that often remains out of sight. It makes clear that class *and* race are both constitutive of a hegemonic order. To this intersectional mix, we must add patriarchy, given the fact that, while Meg's sexual fixations eventually cause her to be banished as a madwoman to the attic, her male plantation owning counterparts, both during and after the heyday of the plantation in the Caribbean, would have been allowed to fully indulge in their sexual fantasies with women raced as 'full' white, 'lesser white' or even 'non-white' with complete impunity. In this article, I have identified a literary boom, a paradoxically silent boom, one missing from accounts of the Caribbean and studies of the global south (Kantor, 2019; López, 2007)—a postwar outburst of white trash fictional works. Distracted by literary developments elsewhere, Anglophone literary studies have failed to notice this moment of sudden growth taking place in the Caribbean, where economic decapitalization has created the conditions for a new literature to emerge. During the postwar period, and continuing in the 1970s and 1980s, we encounter a surge of trash novels set at the end and aftermath of the plantation complex, so many that it produced a boom of trash romances, a network of white trash literature that affirms a nascent decapitalized world of letters. Works of pulp fiction or trash fiction are useful in rescuing worlds like these, *lost* from the literary canons of the global south and lurking in the interstices of Anglophone literature.

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# WALCOTT AND PISSARRO: A TALE OF TWO DOGS IN *TIEPOLO'S HOUND*

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## Abstract

*Tiepolo's hound* explores the kinship between the poet Derek Walcott and the painter Camille Pissarro. Posing as a search for “a spectral hound”, Walcott composes an inexact biography of Pissarro who left his native St. Thomas to be a painter in France. This correlates with Walcott's fear that he has ‘lost’ his roots in the Caribbean by moving away from St. Lucia in the same way that Pissarro pulled up his at the expense of his Caribbean identity. The search for the dog brings both poet and painter together as Walcott retrieves for both men the irrefragable bond of *place* and *self* that both men share.

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**Key terms:** Walcott, Pissarro, kinship, poetry, painting.

Writing the *künstlerroman* *Another life* (1973) left the poet Derek Walcott “a renewed, exhausted man” (p. 147) once he had accepted the choice he made in favor of poetry over painting. Declaring in “The schooner flight” that nobody “go fuck with my poetry” (Walcott, 2014, p. 246), he set the scene for the two long poems that follow. Admitting that he was a less-talented painter than his mentor, Dunstan St. Omer, the decisions he took prepared him for the demands expected of a Caribbean poet who had entered “the house of literature as a houseboy” (Walcott, 1973, p. 77). Both *Another life* (1973) and “The schooner flight” (1979) are *rites de passage* that begin a sustained exploration of *place* and *self* in his poetry.

In *Omeros* (1990), the defiance that the sailor Shabine shows during a knife-fight on the deck of the *Flight* deepens as Walcott makes Africa the catalyst which triggers a comparison in “The divided child” between his mother's “house that sang softly of bal-



ance,/ of the rightness of placed things” (Walcott, 2014, p. 133) and Africa. The reclamation of African continent leads to a recuperation of those Caribbean islands that can only exist, Walcott suggests, if one has loved in them. As a consequence, “Phantom Africa” in *Omeros* (Walcott, 1990, p. 72) is stripped of its ghostliness and given shape as the continent figures in the mind of the fisherman Achille whose imagined return to Africa validates a ‘new’ history which will eventually restructure his life with Helen, the waitress who symbolizes St. Lucia. The fisherman Philoctete with his ‘incurable’ sore cursing his yams - “You all see what’s it’s like without roots in this world” (p. 21) - and the obeah woman Ma Kilman pausing during communion because of “an old African doubt” (p. 58) allow history to give way to new memories which Walcott hopes will erase “The leprosy of Empire” (Walcott, 2014, p. 29).

Just as the German poet Novalis invoked the Romantic motif of returning home with new insight as the object of all journeys in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* (1802), so *Tiepolo’s hound* (Walcott, 2000) is a continuation of *Omeros* in that both poems involve imaginary journeys of leaving and return. In *Omeros*, Achille breaks the chain that hobbles his connection between Africa and the Caribbean. In a vision brought on by sun-stroke, he is guided by a sea-swift across the Atlantic to a “branch of the Congo” (Walcott, 1990, p. 135) where he realizes that if Africa’s past is not retrieved, then the Caribbean present (and future) will signify nothing: “The inheritors of the middle passage” will simply have stewed,/ five to a room, still clamped below their hatch,/ breeding like felonies” (Walcott, 1996, p. 86). The “settlement” (Walcott, 1990, p. 134) that Achille discovers in the past is the “unsettlement” (p. 140) that will persist unless the twin places of his birth are reconciled in their respective contexts. When he returns from his imagined voyage to St. Lucia, Achille *sees* his island home for the first time. *Tiepolo’s hound* continues Walcott’s desire to reconcile *self* with *place* and centers on the sometimes fraught kinship he feels between himself and the French impressionist painter Camille Pissarro who was born on the island of St. Thomas.

The search for an elusive canine dogging Walcott in *Tiepolo’s hound* sets in motion a semi-fictional enquiry into the life of Pissarro who, central to the drama, emerges in the poem as a means to Walcott’s own understanding of himself and the Caribbean. Whether it is a black mongrel nosing garbage on Dronningens Gade in Charlotte Amalie or “the arched grace of a whippet” (Walcott, 2000, p. 37) by an unnamed painter, the dog in *Tiepolo’s hound* is reminiscent of the bird in John Keats’ “Ode to a Nightingale” (1819). Attempting to flee the exigencies of the world, the poet follows the nightingale - in his imagination - into a tree only to be overcome by the impenetrable darkness of its foliage. As Keats makes sense of this experience in the great odes of 1819, he comes to understand that the burden of the world eases once it is seen as amazing and beautiful. Walcott’s hound, like Keats’ nightingale, is also a means towards enlightenment.

Walcott’s quest centers on which artist painted the hound: Giovanni Tiepolo or Paolo Veronese. Both painters depict dogs in their respective works, and it was while looking

through the pages of art books or visiting galleries that Walcott began his search for “a hound in astonishing light” (Walcott, 2000, p. 8) once seen in a painting by one of the Italian masters. While the leitmotif is important, the identity of the painter is never revealed as Walcott abruptly abandons the search for the elusive canine whether whip-pet, wolfhound, or mutt: “Research/ could prove the hound Tiepolo’s or Veronese’s/ but I refused” (p. 117). Nevertheless, a mongrel, “black as its shadow” (p. 4) haunts the pages of Walcott’s poem and appears variously as a “sepulchral hound” (p. 5) or a “starved pot hound” (p. 111) until eventually he rages “The dog, the dog, where was that fucking hound” (p. 125). While the dogs of St. Thomas and St. Lucia are invariably **black** “skeletal, scabrous mongrels foraging garbage” (p. 14), “panting for entrails” (p. 23) or “nosing puddles by a yam fence” (p. 145), the European pure-breeds of the palazzi of Venice and Verona are **white** and sit on their mistress’s lap or under the master’s table. The color symbolism is, of course deliberate on Walcott’s part.

*Tiepolo’s hound* is a tale of two dogs: Walcott and Pissarro. Walcott was born in Castries, St. Lucia; Pissarro in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas. Walcott lived most of his adult life elsewhere; Pissarro moved to France to become a painter. Walcott was brought up a Methodist in a Catholic country; Pissarro was a Jew. Of their kinship, Walcott writes that he and Pissarro were “both island boys” (2000, p. 149) who “doubled in each other’s eyes” (p. 159). Walcott’s “pen replaced a brush” (p. 19); Pissarro, a Jew, was always a painter, a “homeless dog” (p. 46), and a “Sephardic sage” (p. 160) in a France soon to be shaken by the Franco-Prussian war (1870-1871) and the Dreyfus affair (1894-1906).

Both men, however, did not share the same success: Walcott won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1992 and was mostly feted by literary London and New York; Pissarro, “His name . . . hidden in the word Paris” (2000, p. 36) remained for most of his life one of “the [French] Academy’s outcasts” (p. 45) accused of being an unorthodox and unconventional painter (p. 45). While recognition came slowly, Pissarro developed “a different language for a different light” (p. 56) and was forced briefly into exile in London with his friend Paul Cézanne as

The Salon laughed  
as it locked them out:  
Sketches. Impressions.  
They were heretical in their delight  
there was no deity, outdoors, no altar  
in the rose window of the iris, light  
was their faith a shaft in the atelier. (Walcott, 2000, p. 45)

Walcott in his “inexact and blurred biography” (2000, p. 101) writes discerningly that Pissarro was “false to France” (p. 102) because like all great artists he was guilty of

“changing the truth” (p. 102), of painting in defiance of “Time petrified in every classic canvas” (p. 43) by classical painters like Claude or David. Despite their Caribbean kinship, Walcott betrays a certain ambivalence towards his ‘fraternal’ subject as if they had been simply thrown together accidentally by the places of their birth, as if the ‘dirty backward island-ness’ of their origins inhibited one more than the other. Walcott also questions the motives of an artist simply making art rather than probing the truths of art as they relate to self, others, and place. Pissarro found his *place* and himself in France: for him, there was no need to return to the Caribbean. After all, he had painted five or six masterful landscapes of St. Thomas in the 1850’s and that in itself was sufficient. He simply moved on to other subjects. Unquestionably, the “islander in fresh France” (p. 53) who painted the *ordinary* extraordinarily came to see – “saw with another eye” (p. 80) – the Old World (France) in a new way. Walcott, on the other hand, diffidently took his time to re-discover the brutally ‘discovered’ New World by swearing to get the “true tints someday” (p. 94).

Walcott’s view of Pissarro harkens back to his own admitted struggles as a would-be painter in *Another life*. Pissarro’s perceived abandonment of the Caribbean seems to haunt Walcott as he compares his own artistic scuffles for “a different light” (Walcott, 2000, p. 56) to those of his ‘alter-ego’ on the banks of the River Oise. Pissarro’s inspired landscapes are deliberately “framed by an open window” (p. 64), where, unlike Walcott’s Caribbean with its flea-bitten strays, no painting of the farm-land around Pontoise includes “a rain-whipped wretch huddling under an oak” (p. 65). What kind of poet, Walcott implies, would he have been had he not ‘returned’ home and seen St. Lucia with new eyes? That Pissarro did not return to St. Thomas, Walcott suggests, had as much to do with his new ‘home-coming’ in Europe as it did with the stubborn resilience of his painterly imagination in the face of academic cruelty, both artistic and racial. Despite the formative canvasses Pissarro painted in and around Charlotte Amalie - for example, “Storm, St. Thomas” (1855), “Women talking by the sea” (1856), and “Inlet and yacht” (1856) - , Walcott undermines Pissarro’s artistic output in a way that he himself rarely experienced by branding the painter’s wife a hindrance, calling her “unshakeably morose” (2000, p. 60), and harping on about a life that swirled “with dejection, like a kitchen sink” (p. 60). Echoing Gauguin’s barb that Pissarro was a “second rater” (p. 142), Walcott insists:

.... His own  
brushwork turned frantic, angrier, weeds grew

in these furrows, their unstable horizon –  
What was he but a backward, colonised Jew?

The blow of their rejection was a dull

ache that sat like an anvil on his heart,

all that had made in joy, thought beautiful,  
in their directness was indifferent art,

the pavement pictures of an islander  
struggling with every stroke to realise

a life not his, work whose earnest candour  
retained a primal charm to expert eyes.

There is a kind of ecstasy in failure,  
just as, at the heart of desire, is a core

of sweetness, the worm that whispered its lure  
in white orchards. Crows with their critical caw.

the studio with its stillness of failure,  
was like a parlour where there has been a death. (Walcott, 2000, pp. 60-61)

While Pissarro's paintings have been criticised for their 'conventional' unconventionality when compared, say, to the early Modernists of the twentieth century, he was with Cézanne, Bazille, Gauguin, Monet, Renoir, and Sisley in the vanguard of one of the great movements in the history of European art. Walcott, of course, knows this and his muted admiration of Pissarro, reiterating the dark epiphanies that haunt *Another life*, turns deeply inwardly as the poet who chose academia in the United States over an island life, returns to the post-colonial Caribbean. Reflecting on the death of one of Pissarro's daughters, Walcott writes of the sensory effects of a "fading Eden" with its "violet flowers, primordial blues and green", the "smell of absence on varnished furniture" (Walcott, 2000, p. 82). Pausing his narrative, Walcott, like the Jesuit poet G.M. Hopkins in "The Windhover" (1877) signaling a revival of faith after being stirred by a tiny bird, records seeing a "clerical egret" (2000, p. 88) that 'transports' him from a "wind-grooved lagoon" (2000, p. 87) in St. Lucia to the banks of a river in Val-d'Oise north west of Paris where he reimagines the 'middle passage' as one "the submerged memory" must "negotiate/ between the worlds it finds on both sides,/ the Caribbean, the Atlantic with its reeking freight,/ the archipelago's bridge". (2000, p. 88) On one side of the span, Walcott muses on "the healing of Time measured in ruins, the empires of Europe" (2000, p. 88); on the other, "what exile altered and banishment made dim" there remains:

The still pond and the egrets beating home  
through the swamp trees, the mangroves anchors,  
and no more bitterness at the Atlantic foam  
hurtling the breakwater; the salt that cures (Walcott, 2000, pp. 88-89)

As Walcott imagines Pissarro on the banks of his beloved Oise – the painter’s adopted river – he contemplates the “corrugations” of Roseau’s lagoon in St. Lucia “rustling like rushes in the mud”. The egret, personified and done “muttering old degradations”, soars into grace” and:

in the reeds, halberds of begonia flame/  
in their botanical accent, one pointed flange/  
folded into the other, at its creole name/  
flaring even brighter.

Walcott concludes sadly: “This once felt strange” (Walcott, 2000, pp. 90-91)

Once Walcott’s quest for the dog is abandoned, and he has come to a kind of closure regarding Pissarro, the poet’s own demons and dilemmas persist from the previous books in *Tiepolo’s hound*. Of course, the search for the dog - white or black - is as much about race as it is about self. The placing of the black mongrel on a street in Charlotte Amalie serves to remind Walcott of his roots and that, despite the ‘device’, the dog has been a bit of a red herring. In the same way, his identifying with and drawing away from his fraternal relationship with Pissarro, is ultimately all about the poet rather than the painter. Walcott’s poetry has often been about himself and the ambiguity of situation, whether Castries or Boston. Nevertheless, the exploration of another’s life to further an understanding of his own is a useful journey, one in which Walcott is usually welcomed home.

Towards the end of *Tiepolo’s hound*, Walcott admits:

Teaching in St. Thomas, I had never sought it out,  
the Synagogue of Blessing and Peace and Loving Deeds;

in the tourist streets, I never gave it a thought  
in the lost shops of that were Dronningens Gade’s. (Walcott, 2000, p. 140)

Charlotte Amalie’s “vivid banality” and its “sunlit stone alleys” suddenly seem necessary to his poetry, and he feels his “figure now emerging” - again - as a Caribbean poet. In a walk-about with an imagined Pissarro, he quips accusingly: “I and my kind move and not move; your drawing/ is edged with a kindness my own lines contain,/ but yours may just be love at your own calling.” (p. 141) The issue here seems one of posture. Despite the painfully slow recognition Pissarro received in France, he was content to set up his easel on the Oise or a street corner in Paris; Walcott, given the repetitions in his

poetry, seems often out of place in Eden and appears to blame his fellow islander for the fact that “St. Thomas stays unpainted, every savannah/ trails its flame tree that fades” (p. 143). Walcott adds, however, that this is “not fair” (p. 143 while inferring that Pissarro must have heard “the noise/ of loss-lamenting slaves” (p. 158) that trembled “in the poplars of Pontoise,/ the trembling, elegiac tongues he painted” (p. 158). It is as if in every brushstroke, Pissarro’s history, his imagined *self* remembers “veins backwards/ to the black soil of my birthplace” (p. 142). All enmity set aside, Walcott suddenly exclaims:

.... I kept seeing  
things through his eyes: a gate, a rusted door,

since all our radiant bush, a road, a hill  
with torches of pouis, a shade-stayed stream

made joy recede to memory, our provincial  
palms, bowing, withdraw before his dream,

as History’s distance shrank a crescent fringe  
of rustling yellow fronds on a white shore,

a house, a harbour with its mountain range  
to a dot named by its cartographer –

the name no longer a dot. (Walcott, 2000, p. 154)

Walcott notes that in Trinidad, the “embalmed *paysages*” of the French painter Michel-Jean Cazabon were “all we had” (Walcott, 2000, p. 154). If Cazabon was the first, then Pissarro is the “second” who found “the prism that was Paris, rooted in France, his dark-soiled ancestors/ no matter, cherish the conviction their work carries” (pp. 154-155).

There is a quiet conspiracy of souls imagined in *Tiepolo’s hound*, one in which a painter from St. Thomas extends his canvas to a poet from St. Lucia. Paris, Walcott writes, emerges from his canvasses and fills his poetry “with their own light, their walks, their weather/ that will outlast me as they outlast him” (Walcott, 2000, p. 56). The poem is a meditation on artistic brotherhood and echoes a conjunction of cultural roots. At the poem’s end, Derek Walcott and his ‘brother’ islander Camille Pissarro are allowed a spiritual kinship - a century apart - in which a special knowledge is celebrated. Like the Wedding-Guest at the conclusion of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Rime of the ancient mariner* (1798), both men in the imagined stroll through Charlotte Amalie are made “sadder” and “wiser” (Coleridge, 1973, p. 209) as a result of a shared Caribbeanness

that underpins their collective arts. “We is your Roots, Walcott affirms in *Tiepolo’s hound*, “Without us you weak” (2000, p, 25).

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# PERFORMATIVIDAD DE GÉNERO Y LO ‘CUIR’ EN PÓSTUMO ENVIRGINIADO DE ALEJANDRO TAPIA Y RIVERA

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## Resumen

Con el desarrollo de nuevas ideologías tenemos nuevas maneras de abordar e investigar los textos literarios. La crítica feminista, la teoría ‘cuir’ y los Estudios Críticos del Discurso (ECD) han permitido que se realicen nuevos acercamientos a obras que no se han considerado literatura feminista o ‘cuir’, literaturas en creciente desarrollo en nuestros días. Desde estas epistemologías modernas analizo la obra *Póstumo Envirginiado* de Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, publicada en el 1882. Esta novela de finales de siglo XIX, presenta múltiples cuestionamientos de la sociedad de su época, que pueden ser trazados hasta la sociedad actual. Tapia y Rivera construye un personaje que transgrede las normativas de género de siglo XIX. Póstumo Envirginiado o Virginia postúmica es una mujer, asignada así biológicamente, que ha sido invadida por el alma de un hombre. Desde el inicio el personaje representa una posición ‘excepcionalísima’, es un travesti que cuestiona los binomios cuerpo/alma y sexo/género y la moralidad de la sociedad en la que se maneja. A partir de las aventuras del personaje principal de la novela y partiendo de las teorías feministas de la performatividad del género esbozadas por Judith Butler, establecemos cómo se presenta la construcción de género, separándola de su concepción ‘natural’ y cómo cuestiona también la dualidad cuerpo/alma. Para este análisis utilizamos también la Teoría Queer propuesta por David Córdoba, ya que, la novela de Tapia y Rivera reta las normativas sociales de su época, posicionando un personaje extraño, con un conocimiento extraño al discurso hegemónico de la época y que al encontrarse en ‘situación excepcionalísima’ transgrede toda la normativa de la sociedad decimonónica en Puerto Rico.

**Términos clave:** Alejandro Tapia y Rivera, performatividad de género, travestismo, Siglo XIX, teoría cuir



## Introducción

Tras el desarrollo de las filosofías feministas las categorías de sexo y género se encuentran separadas, hoy en día entendemos al género no como algo natural dado antes del nacimiento, sino como un constructo social asignado por el entramado patriarcal social sobre la materialidad del cuerpo a través de la institución del binario hombre/mujer. Es a través de las teorías feministas de siglo XX y XXI que hemos podido cuestionar el entramado patriarcal y luchar por la obtención de derechos para la emancipación de las mujeres y las comunidades LGBTTTQIA+.

Sin embargo, estas teorías feministas eran inexistentes en las postrimerías de siglo XIX. En este periodo comenzaban a gestarse las luchas en favor del sufragio femenino que posteriormente desembocarían en el surgimiento de la primera ola del feminismo. De modo que, encontrar a finales de siglo XIX textos que cuestionen los binarios sexo/género; hombre/mujer y alma/cuerpo es sin lugar a dudas revelador. Tal es el caso de la novela *Póstumo Envirginiado o historia de un hombre que se coló en el cuerpo de una mujer*, publicada en 1882 por el escritor puertorriqueño Alejandro Tapia y Rivera.

Alejandro Tapia y Rivera nace el 12 de noviembre de 1826 en San Juan y se convierte en un escritor prolífero que experimenta con casi todos los géneros literarios. Fue autodidacta y llega a ser reconocido “como la primera figura de nuestra literatura del siglo XIX” (García Díaz, 1971, p.151). Reconocido principalmente por su obra de teatro *La Cuarterona* publicada en 1867, fue además de precursor de nuestras Letras Puertorriqueñas en casi todos los géneros literarios y un crítico de la posición de la mujer en la sociedad decimonónica.

En el 1870, fundó la revista *La Azucena* dedicada al ‘bello sexo’ donde se “divulgaba un mensaje de reivindicación de los derechos de la mujer” (Barceló Miller, 2006, p.46). Es en esta revista que Tapia y Rivera publicó su célebre ensayo “El aprecio a la mujer es barómetro de civilización” donde exponía cómo la mujer había quedado relegada al ámbito de ama de casa, de los lujos, de la galantería y como el sistema social estaba coartando su capacidad de desarrollo intelectual para el ‘beneficio’ de la sociedad. Estos planteamientos los observamos también dentro de la ficción de su obra, el narrador lo especifica: “Hablamos de la mujer como la han hecho las preocupaciones, las leyes y las costumbres de los hombres” (Tapia y Rivera, 2007, p. 252). Para el autor era imposible el progreso de su país, ni de cualquier nación, sin que las mujeres alcanzaran un nivel de igualdad y de desarrollo intelectual:

“La mujer ha pasado por la esfera de las esclavas y de las libertas, ha ocupado el trono de las diosas; ese no es su fin, ese no es su camino; la mujer se eleva más, camina mejor hacia su estado natural haciéndose ciudadana; he aquí uno de los problemas que tiene que resolver el siglo XIX”<sup>1</sup> (Tapia y Rivera, 2013, p. 48).

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<sup>1</sup> Original publicado en la Revista *La Azucena* el 30 de noviembre de 1870. Todas las citas de la Revista utilizadas en el presente artículo corresponden a la edición facsímil del Instituto de Literatura Puertorriqueña, 2013. Ver lista de referencias.

Además, fundó junto a Manuel Elzaburu el Ateneo Puertorriqueño en 1876. Es decir, su defensa de los derechos de la mujer y su igualdad abarcó las distintas esferas públicas de la sociedad de su época.

Esta obra es escrita a finales del siglo XIX, cuando nuestras letras puertorriqueñas se encontraban en plena gestación. *Póstumo envirginiado* nace en medio de una atmósfera de censura y de un sistema colonial aplastante brindándonos un personaje travestido, transgresor, y extraño ante las creaciones literarias de su época. Quiero aclarar que el término travesti se entiende como una persona, generalmente hombre, que se viste y se caracteriza como alguien del sexo contrario. Tapia y Rivera, utilizando los recursos de la sátira, el humor, el espiritismo y la fantasía, planteó temas de importancia social en medio de una época de censura y represión colonial.

Esta segunda parte de las aventuras del personaje Póstumo, publicada en 1882 narra la historia del “espíritu más anárquico y desordenador” (Tapia y Rivera, 2007, p. 205), en su segunda transmigración sin atravesar las aguas del Leteo. Es decir, sin olvidar su vida y su género anterior. El espíritu de Póstumo decide descender a la ciudad de Madrid con su ángel custodio y al encontrarse en la calle a una joven hermosa decide colarse en este cuerpo de mujer. Luego de colarse y habitar este cuerpo femenino (siendo su alma masculina), Póstumo decide aceptar los deberes conferidos a su cuerpo y actuar como mujer. Al aceptar estos ‘deberes’ impuestos por su condición de mujer Virginia postúmica se casa, para posteriormente huir de su marido por maltrato y antipatía a este, viaja a París y se hace cantante. Conoce un duque inglés con el cual se hacen pasar por esposos y con el viaja a Estados Unidos, conoce los postulados de las sufragistas norteamericanas y decide hacer un apostolado en favor de la emancipación femenina. Cuando regresa a Madrid, convencida de promover su apostolado ve que sus ideas no son bien acogidas entre las de su propio sexo por la falta de educación en la época. Y termina muriendo por un disparo en medio de una revuelta política, para la que se habría vestido de hombre para pasar como un soldado y luchar por su causa.

La presente investigación surge tras una serie de cuestionamientos que me permite plantear la obra al analizarla con la lupa de las corrientes feministas modernas. A pesar de que estas teorías no se encontraban formuladas en el momento histórico en el que Tapia y Rivera escribe su novela, gracias al marco de los Estudios Críticos del Discurso (ECD) propuesto por Teun van Dijk (1999) podemos establecer las rupturas con el discurso hegemónico social que la obra nos ofrece. A través del ECD observamos los problemas sociales de acuerdo con la época en la que se publica la novela y en ella podemos establecer las relaciones de poder que desde el texto se plantean y cómo estas constituyen un discurso que subvierte el entramado social y cultural de su momento histórico.

Primero, analizo cómo la ambigüedad genérica del personaje es presentada por el narrador de la novela a través de su incapacidad de brindarle un solo nombre propio al personaje. ¿Por qué el narrador de la obra oscila constantemente en su significación e inteligibilidad, creando un personaje que rehúye de la inmovilidad? ¿Tiene que ver esta

ambigüedad con el personaje con la manera en la que asume su género? ¿La ruptura de la dicotomía alma/cuerpo que presenta el personaje Póstumo/Virginia construye un cuestionamiento de las leyes sociales, religiosas y del sistema patriarcal en siglo XIX? Y finalmente, ¿Cómo este personaje ‘inquieto y descontentadizo’ forma una ruptura con los estereotipos de los personajes en su época y forma un espacio ‘cuir’ y de otredad dentro de la obra y en el marco de la escritura de su época?

Para sustentar mis cuestionamientos en esta investigación, utilizo como marco teórico dos corrientes filosóficas modernas. Primero, utilizo la teoría feminista presentada por Judith Butler en sus libros *El género en disputa. El feminismo y la subversión de la identidad* de (2007, originalmente publicado en 1990) y *Lenguaje, poder e identidad* (2004, originalmente publicado en 1997). De modo que, es posible analizar esta novela a la luz de las teorías modernas para así establecer las relaciones entre el lenguaje, el discurso y la sociedad de la época que nos brinda *Póstumo Envirginiado*. A su vez, analizo el espacio discursivo extraño y cuir que creó la obra en el marco de la literatura puertorriqueña decimonónica con el ensayo teórico de David Córdoba titulado; “Teoría Queer: reflexiones sobre sexo, sexualidad e identidad. Hacia una politización de la sexualidad”. El genio de Alejandro Tapia y Rivera crea una obra que puede ser leída e interpretada dos siglos después, demostrando así su vigencia y lo adelantado de sus ideas. Debemos establecer también que la novela no subvierte de modo total los roles de género de su época, sino que plantea importantes cuestionamientos a la formación del binario sexo/genero.

### **Ambigüedad genérica del personaje**

Según explicado anteriormente en el breve resumen de la novela *Póstumo Envirginiado*, el antihéroe de esta historia es un personaje travestido, en sentido figurado, ya que posee un alma masculina dentro un cuerpo femenino. De forma que, Tapia y Rivera crea en la ‘situación excepcionalísima’ del personaje una ruptura irreparable con las dicotomías sexo-interior/género-exterior y el binomio alma/cuerpo. Sin embargo, esta no es la única ruptura que se puede extraer de la narración ya que la vacilación de nombres que produce el narrador con su personaje crea también una ruptura con la forma en la que se constituyen los sujetos a través del lenguaje.

Partiendo de las nociones propuestas por Judith Butler (2004) en las que “ser llamado por un nombre es también una de las condiciones por las que el sujeto se constituye en el lenguaje” (p. 17), y que “Entramos en el espacio social y en el tiempo al ser nombrados” (p. 55), la identidad del personaje es así mismo ambigua. La vacilación producida por el narrador y el personaje entre los pronombres en tercera persona singular él/ella, ocasionan que tengamos ante nosotros un personaje híbrido, fluido y ambiguo. Al igual que el personaje no posee una identidad en términos de nombre propio fija, ya que, el narrador oscila también con los nombres del personaje, de acuerdo con los movimientos geográficos que realiza y a las situaciones en las que este se encuentra. Ejemplos de los

nombres con los que el narrador nombra al personaje son: Virginia postúmica, Envirginiado, Póstumo Envirginiado, nombres propios como: Póstumo, Virginia, Virginia, Duquesa de la Verbena (una vez se casa con el Duque), luego cuando viaja a París huyendo es Virginia del Monte-Bello, entre otros.

Para Butler (2005) “el nombre ofrece también otra posibilidad: al ser llamado por un nombre se le ofrece a uno también, paradójicamente, una cierta posibilidad de existencia social, se le inicia a uno en la vida temporal del lenguaje...” (p. 17). De modo que, en el desarrollo de la novela vemos que la oscilación del nombre del personaje está íntimamente relacionada a la existencia social de este y a cómo asume su género una vez ha transmigrado. Al inicio de la transmigración el narrador utiliza ambos pronombres para referirse al personaje, nombrándolo en una misma frase como “él o ella” y luego “la heroína o héroe de esta historia” (p. 230). Ahora bien, una vez que Póstumo se “convence de que era mujer” y actúa como tal, el narrador la nombra como “nuestra heroína” (p. 229). Mas adelante, una vez se ha casado con el Duque, el narrador afirma; “la que ya seguiremos denominando Virginia” (p. 248). Estableciendo así que una vez que el alma-interior ha asumido la identidad de género femenina asignada por la materialidad de su cuerpo, el personaje pasa a ser Virginia.

En palabras de Butler (2005), “el lenguaje preserva el cuerpo pero no de una manera literal trayéndolo a la vida o alimentándolo, más bien una cierta existencia social del cuerpo se hace posible gracias a su interpelación en términos de lenguaje” (p. 21). Así, una vez el personaje ha asumido su género femenino y lo actúa el narrador valida esta existencia social dentro del texto al nombrarlo y aceptarlo a su vez como mujer, haciendo reconocible a Virginia. Porque, “el acto de reconocimiento se convierte en un acto de constitución: la llamada trae al sujeto a la existencia” (Butler, 2005, p. 50). En el caso del narrador y el personaje esta llegada a la existencia de Virginia no se da tras la llamada usual sino a través de la autoridad creadora del narrador, al validarla en su narración nos permite a los lectores a su vez validar su inteligibilidad social y discursiva.

Esta oscilación y movilidad genérica también está presente en cómo se define el personaje a sí mismo. En el caso del personaje envirginiado la vacilación de su género queda inscrita en los modos en los que emplea su lenguaje, es decir en las formas gramaticales de las palabras que usa y en cómo se nombra en el texto. Por ejemplo, en el capítulo X de la novela, mientras el personaje reflexiona sobre su condición desigual de mujer en el marco social, observamos como utiliza las palabras asumiéndose parte del colectivo mujeres. La siguiente cita ilustra este punto:

En general se nos quiere ignorantes, y si algunos hombres mas ilustrados hablan de que debe instruírse nos un poco, es solo para que la vanidad del marido no se lastime ni tenga por compañera insustancial idiota. ¿Qué importa que aprendamos algo, si luego atrofiarnos con el silencio para no parecer inmodestas, lo poco

que sin estímulos ni fin social de ninguna especie hayamos aprendido? (Tapia y Rivera, 2007, p. 259)

Más adelante en el texto se observa que ante la relación amistosa/erótica que entabla con el personaje Matilde, condesa del Cierzo, el personaje vuelve a vacilar con su identidad de género. Ante la necesidad, de confesarle su verdad, Póstumo envirginiado le dice a Matilde; “no soy lo que parezco...” (p.263), para finalizar afirmándose ante ella como “un ser especial, un hombre con cuerpo de mujer” (p. 263). De modo que, ante la atracción que el personaje desarrolla por Matilde se define en una situación excepcionalísima y establece su dualidad, un tanto por conveniencia. Cabe señalar también, que la novela activa un dispositivo de la sexualidad femenina de igual modo novedoso en la literatura de su época. El cuerpo de Virginia siente atracción y deseos físicos por un personaje masculino, mientras que el alma de este(a) siente ‘simpatía’ por Matilde. La relación un tanto erótica que ambas desarrollan en la novela no se analizará en este ensayo por conceptos de espacio, pero bien puede desarrollarse en un estudio posterior. A partir de aquí el personaje continuará definiéndose en su dualidad y en su no ser hombre; “Cuando yo era hombre y me llamaba Póstumo...” (p. 289), De esta forma, el personaje establece así su feminidad al cancelar y nombrar su masculinidad pasada.

Esta oscilación genérica persiste hasta el final de la obra que, tras la muerte del cuerpo, al llegar el alma a los Limbos eternos el narrador establece; “Llegó Virginia, ósea el espíritu de Póstumo...” (Tapia y Rivera, 2007, p. 419). Esta última vacilación de significación e inteligibilidad del personaje es aún más significativa que las anteriores, ya que en esta la dualidad no se fundamenta en la problemática de alma/cuerpo, sino que demuestra que el alma de Póstumo ha asumido también el género femenino. Es decir, Póstumo se Virginizó (utilizando los juegos lingüísticos del autor), este pudo convertirse de forma performática en su yo femenino, asumió el género en su totalidad. Así, el castigo que recibe el personaje por parte de la Autoridad simboliza el rol que poseía la mujer en la sociedad de siglo XIX, no puede ser escuchado. Lo ponen en prisión y le asignan un custodio al que le prohíben “que oyese hablar al preso, de cuya labia y travesura tanto y con justo motivo se recelaba” (p. 419).

### **Performatividad de género**

El género lo entendemos como la inscripción en el cuerpo de distintos discursos de poder creados para fortalecer el binomio masculino/femenino dentro de la lógica de la matriz heterosexual, y al cuerpo como el instrumento o medio con el cual se relaciona solo externamente un conjunto de significados culturales (Butler, 2007). A la luz de estas teorías modernas en las que el género no es concebido como natural y dado desde antes del nacimiento, sino como un constructo social dado por la autoridad sobre la materialidad del cuerpo, puede ser interpretado el performance de género producido por el personaje Póstumo/Virginia (alma vs. cuerpo) quien al poseer un alma masculina representa al travesti. Para Butler (2007):

El género no debe considerarse una identidad estable o un sitio donde se funde la capacidad de acción y de donde surjan distintos actos, sino mas bien como una identidad débilmente formada en el tiempo instaurada en un espacio exterior mediante una *reiteración estilizada de actos* (p. 273).

Es decir, el género es problematizado por Butler al establecerlo como no perteneciente a la sustancia íntegra de un sujeto sino como una sucesión de actos repetidos que crean lo que pretenden anticipar, creando así el concepto esencial de su teoría la *performatividad del género*. Este ritual de repetición a través de las normas sobre el cuerpo consigue encauzar al sujeto dentro de la oposición binaria masculino/femenino. La escritora discute cómo las identidades subversivas, que trastocan y alteran el orden establecido, forman la inestabilidad y la ininteligibilidad del binomio sexo/género como algo natural e inmutable. Estos sujetos producidos por la misma repetición del imaginario de lo que debe ser mujer/hombre crean la ruptura de la naturalidad del género en sí mismo. De esta manera el sexo aparece asumido por el género y convertido en algo parecido a una ficción o fantasía, instalado como un discurso prelingüístico al cual no se puede acceder directamente (Butler, 2007). Este planteamiento desnaturalizante de la violencia con que rige las normas de género logra crear sujetos corpóreos que debaten y se apropian de la identidad de género para subvertir el orden. La teórica problematiza el imaginario de que la interioridad (alma) es la que brindaba el género sino a la inversa, ella cree en que *es* la materialidad del cuerpo lo que brinda el sexo humano y categoriza el género social. Según Butler (2007);

La figura del alma interna –entendida como “en el interior” del cuerpo, aunque su modo primario de significación sea a través de su misma ausencia, [...] El efecto de un espacio interno articulador se genera mediante la significación de un cuerpo como un encierro vital y sagrado (p. 264).

De modo que, el personaje de Póstumo envirginiado constituye una ruptura con el imaginario de esta interioridad. Al representar una interioridad distinta a la corporeidad que habita subvierte el entendido social y religioso de que la interioridad es la esencia que significa al cuerpo. El personaje es un travesti figurado porque encarna la misma ruptura entre interioridad/exterioridad que establece la figura del travesti o ‘drag queen’. La figura del travesti o ‘drag queen’, entendido como una persona de sexo masculino que, por inclinación natural o como parte de un espectáculo, se viste con ropas del sexo contrario. Estas formas marginales del género vistas con detenimiento cuestionan su formación íntegra, más allá de ser el espectro de la ininteligibilidad. La filósofa plantea que esta figura encarna el significado de la construcción performativa del género. Por un lado, tenemos un sujeto/exterior que es en apariencia y en vestimenta femenina, mientras que por el otro su interioridad, en este caso corporeidad y genitalia son masculinas. Esta supuesta interioridad o ademán que brinda el sexo al cuerpo es derrocada por el travesti que exterioriza un comportamiento ajeno a su biología corpórea. Butler (2007) lo establece así:

El hecho de que el cuerpo con género sea performativo muestra que no tiene una posición ontológica distinta de los diversos actos que conforman su realidad. Esto también indica que si dicha realidad se inventa como una esencia interior, esa misma interioridad es un efecto y una función de un discurso decididamente público y social... (p. 266)

Es decir, si un ‘hombre’ puede exteriorizar y asumir un devenir femenino ya el género de este sujeto no depende de su sexo. En el caso del personaje envirginiado, el alma al ser masculina presenta el cuestionamiento entre la esencia interior del sujeto y la materialidad del cuerpo, junto a los dictámenes sociales que sobre él se establecen y que validan su integridad e inteligibilidad como sujeto en el entramado social. Utilizando estas teorías feministas observamos cómo el personaje Póstumo/Virginia o “Virginia postúmica” problematiza y transgrede el entendido sobre la construcción del género en el siglo XIX. Tapia y Rivera, sin advertirlo posiblemente, construye así un *cuerpo* transgresor en el desarrollo de la narración de la novela que se adelanta por más de medio siglo a los cuestionamientos de Simone de Beauvoir, en su celebre texto, *The Second Sex*.

Citaré a continuación varias instancias de la novela *Postumo Envirginiado* de Tapia y Rivera (2007) que presentan esta ruptura. Por ejemplo, en el Capítulo IV: “En que se ve que el cuerpo lega compromisos”:

Póstumo comprendió [...], que no le convenía jugar a los quid pro quos y que, pues se había entrometido en Virginia, lo más razonable y conveniente era aceptar su papel de doncella casadera y pasar por todos los antecedentes y compromisos del cuerpo en que se había metido (p. 222).

Por otro lado, en el capítulo V, titulado: “...Tuvo Póstumo que convencerse de que era mujer y proceder como tal”:

Nuestro envirginiado vislumbró todo esto; y como sabemos que cuando fue Póstumo era de condición extremosa y soñadora incurable, hubo de abandonarse a las sugerencias de la nueva situación por el creada y entregarse por instinto de novedades y tiranía de circunstancias a ser Virginia en forma y fondo, es decir: toda una mujer. (p. 232).

Más adelante, ya para el final de la obra continúa afirmándose: “Como hombre hecho mujer, *enmujerado*, y por añadidura andaluza, la más mujer de todas...” (énfasis del texto, p. 362).

### **Espacio cuir en la literatura decimonónica**

Como ya hemos mencionado, Tapia y Rivera es el precursor de la literatura de nuestra nación y de toda su creación literaria establecemos que esta obra crea un espacio discursivo extraño y de difícil clasificación en la literatura puertorriqueña. Es aquí donde creo conveniente incluir la teoría ‘queer’ para fortalecer mi argumento de que esta obra de Tapia y Rivera rompe todos los esquemas de lo que se había escrito y lo que se

escribiría en nuestro suelo en los años subsiguientes. Lo ‘queer’ es todo lo extraño, raro excéntrico, de carácter cuestionable, dudoso sospechoso, sin suerte, atolondrado, echado a perder o roto (Córdoba García, 2005 p. 21). Esta obra por casi cien años fue echada a un lado tildada por muchos críticos como de poco ingenio, sin valor literario y sin agudeza intelectual. Esta obra no pasa a ser parte del canon puertorriqueño ni a ser estudiada hasta entrada la década del 1980, tras el Centenario de la muerte del autor, en la que se visita nuevamente la obra. La misma fue descrita por críticos de siglo XX como Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo (1948) y Francisco Manrique Cabrera (1971), quien la define como “de menos valía como realización literaria” (p. 119). Por su parte Menéndez Pelayo (1948) establece sobre Tapia y Rivera en su *Historia de la poesía Hispanoamérica* que:

De genio ya hemos dicho que carecía Tapia, pero tenía cierto grado de talento poético, amor desenfrenado al arte, manía de grandezas estéticas, y estaba contagiado, como otros muchos de su generación, por aquellos pomposos aforismos de filosofía literaria y aquellas fórmulas huecas... (pp. 339-340)

Una de las primeras críticas literarias puertorriqueñas que reconoce el valor y la novedad de los planteamientos sociales de Tapia y Rivera es Marta Aponte Alsina (1982), en su ensayo “Póstumo interrogado: relectura de Tapia”. Para Aponte Alsina (1982), la cita anterior de Menéndez Pelayo, “Evidencia, [...] la exasperación del crítico ante una obra que si de una parte estimaba singularmente disparatada, no dejaba de fascinarle por su originalidad. Una obra que no acertaba a descodificar, en suma” (p. 56). Es decir, que Tapia y Rivera al crear este personaje ambiguo, travestido, desordenador e inconforme subvierte los códigos de escritura inteligibles para el escritor español Menéndez Pelayo. El uso de las corrientes filosófico-religiosas espiritistas y su utilización de las formas de escritura de la literatura fantástica crean un espacio dentro de la narrativa decimonónica puertorriqueña que no pudo ser clasificado fácilmente, un espacio extraño y ‘cuir’ lo que ocasionó que la obra fuese dejada al olvido por casi un siglo. En su momento histórico al ser una novela de tesis, no fue comprendida o no quiso ser entendida por sus pares, ya que sus ideas se adelantaban por casi 20 años al surgimiento del movimiento sufragista en Puerto Rico. En palabras de Aponte Alsina (1982), “Es inexcusable que no se haya dado a conocer ampliamente, como patrimonio del pensamiento social latinoamericano, el ideario feminista intercalado en el *Envirginiado*” (p. 50). *Póstumo Envirginiado* fue dejado en un cajón precisamente por ser este espécimen raro dentro de nuestras letras.

David Córdoba García (2005), en su artículo; “Teoría Queer: reflexiones sobre sexo, sexualidad e identidad. Hacia una politización de la sexualidad” reflexiona sobre el espacio de lo ‘queer’ dentro del ámbito de los devenires de género y la sexualidad y establece que el discurso ‘queer’ es altamente político:



Construir un discurso queer implica por lo tanto situarse en un espacio extraño que nos constituye como sujetos extraños de un conocimiento extraño, inapropiado, malsonante. Hacer y hablar de teoría queer es, en este contexto, asumir un cierto acto político de intervención enunciativa por la cual, en un cierto sentido, se suspende la autoridad de la disciplina académica y se la increpa desde uno de sus márgenes, con el objetivo de movilizar y desplazar ese margen (Córdoba García, 2005, p. 23).

De la forma en la que se narran las ideas progresistas de Tapia y Rivera en la novela, construyen un discurso de cambio social y político que fue malsonante e inapropiado en la política de finales de siglo XIX. Estamos conscientes de que en el momento histórico que Tapia y Rivera escribía, estas corrientes no estaban en discusión. Sin embargo, este personaje travestido, ambiguo, desordenador e inconforme; al situarse en este espacio de extrañamiento podemos identificar en él aspectos de dicha teoría actual. Debo aclarar que no pretendo establecer que la novela es ‘cuir’ en sí misma, ya que reconocemos que no se acerca a la forma que toma esta narrativa moderna. Sino al discurso que crea la obra de Tapia y Rivera en el canon de la literatura puertorriqueña de este siglo sus postulados tienen resabios de este tipo de literatura. Para las mentes más suspicaces de nuestro tiempo leer esta obra de Tapia y Rivera es un banquete intelectual por lo radical de sus planteamientos. El lugar en el que coloca a su personaje y cómo éste desestabiliza las normas hegemónicas sociales nos muestran la brillantez y lo adelantado a su tiempo que estaba la pluma de nuestro autor. Debemos recordar las condiciones precarias en las que se encontraba este mientras terminaba su obra, Tapia y Rivera estaba rodeado por la censura, por la represión, por la falta de lugares donde se propiciara la educación, por condiciones económicas de precariedad y por una grave enfermedad que le arrebató la vida a sus tempranos 52 años.

## Conclusión

A través de este análisis podemos concluir que nuestro ‘padre de las letras puertorriqueñas’ fue un arduo defensor de las mujeres en el siglo XIX. Su defensa fue desde la crítica directa a las condiciones sociales que mantenían a la mujer subyugada al hombre en el espacio de la crítica periodística, hasta colocar planteamientos del naciente feminismo norteamericano en su personaje más ingenioso Póstumo. Como bien afirma Roberto Ramos-Perea (2015), en su extenso tratado de la obra Tapiana; “la memoria de Tapia impulsó otros tantos cuestionamientos sobre el ser puertorriqueño frente al olvido, frente a la represión y a la burla. Y en todos ellos la respuesta invariable era la inteligencia.” (p. 836).

Para finalizar, Póstumo, como personaje, es nombrado y se nombra a sí mismo de distintas formas a través de la narración y esta oscilación denota la manera en la que asume su género. En este espacio narrativo Tapia y Rivera, sin pretenderlo, plantea el género

como una construcción performativa, un conjunto de normas impuestas por las diferentes autoridades sociales de la época y no como un producto natural dado por el binomio sexo/alma del cuerpo.

También se estableció cómo en medio de una sociedad patriarcal estoica en la que la mujer no poseía derechos inalienables, el autor plantea a través de la narración de su novela las concepciones sociales sobre el binomio femenino/masculino en el imaginario de su época y analiza en voz de un hombre (alma-interior), la falta de derechos para el género femenino. De forma que, el personaje travestido Virginia-postúmica o Póstumo envirginiado representa así un espacio de cambio, ambigüedad y cuestionamiento de las leyes sociales y el sistema patriarcal de finales de siglo XIX. Este sujeto subversivo creado por el autor presenta una ruptura con los estereotipos de personajes literarios en su época y se coloca en el espacio de lo “cuir” como una otredad para todo el orden social y literario de su momento histórico. Este personaje es el ideal de progreso que como cosmopolita Alejandro Tapia y Rivera propuso para la sociedad en la que se desarrolló. Es su utopía ante la falta de equidad de parte de las autoridades coloniales en la Isla y sobre el cuerpo de los sujetos coloniales.

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# CARIBBEAN LEGENDS AND MONSTERS: THE TRANSMOGRIFICATION OF INDIGENOUS AND AFRICAN WOMEN IN CARIBBEAN FOLKLORE

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## Abstract

In the Caribbean, there exists an extensive inventory of monstrous beings. Not all these monsters originated in the Caribbean, though some were born in the multi-cultural contact that occurred between Africans, Europeans, Asians, and the Indigenous populations of the Americas during and after colonization. Some monsters were once not monsters at all, but would be eventually transmogrified into terrible beings. In this article, I trace this process of transmogrification in the Caribbean, especially as it applies to figures who are gendered as female, such as Mami Wata, La Llorona, Soucouyant, María Lionza, and La Diabliesse.

**Key terms:** Mami Wata, Mamadjo, La Llorona, Soucouyant, María Lionza, La Diabliesse

## “The monster’s body is a cultural body”

Jeffrey Jeremy Cohen (1996) proposed seven theses behind the imaginary construct of all monsters, his first thesis being, “The monster’s body is a cultural body.” With that, he explained that the conceptualization of a monster is “the embodiment of a certain cultural moment” (p. 4). Every culture has its monsters, manifesting the fears of the people who practice it into a physical body. To combat them, specific rituals, which are also established in a cultural moment, must be performed. Understanding the monster is vital to understanding a culture, for as Cohen puts it, “the *monstrum* is etymologically ‘that which reveals,’ ‘that which warns’” (Cohen, 1996, p. 4). Monsters can reveal many social anxieties internalized deeply in the cultural psyche—fear of the other, of death, of change.

What Cohen fails to mention is the plasticity of cultural fear, which ties into the ‘plastic’ nature of monsters. They can be born from anything, transmogrified from myths and legends, even unmade from the monstrous into something sublime. Another of Cohen’s theses is “The monster that dwells at the gates of difference”—people of different sex, gender, ethnicity, religious belief, i.e., marginalized peoples, rejected by the dominant majority as unacceptable, undesirable, and frightening. “History itself becomes a monster,” says Cohen, “defeating, self-deconstructive, always in danger of exposing the sutures that bind its disparate elements into a single, unnatural body” (1996, p. 9).

In the Caribbean, there exists an extensive inventory of monstrous beings. Not all these monsters originated in the Caribbean, though some were born in the multi-cultural contact that occurred between Africans, Europeans, Asians, and the Indigenous populations of the Americas during and after colonization. Some monsters were once not monsters at all, but would be eventually transmogrified into terrible beings. Oral legends would be progressively removed from their historicity. Our research is concerned with how figures who are gendered as female have been transmogrified in the Caribbean, and in this article, we explore several extraordinary tales wherein women and feminine figures are transformed to inspire fear, woe, and awe, as a result of the ‘plastic’ effect that occurs when different cultures are brought into contact. Among these female figures are the Mami Wata, Watramama, Mamadjo, La Llorona, María Lionza, la Diabla, and the Soucouyant.

Before stepping into these folkloric traditions, however, it is important to first examine the origins of the monstrous-feminine in the Caribbean. As cultural bodies, sexism and misogyny play a big part in the development of both the horrific and sublime natures of these figures. Furthermore, we must not overlook the histories of African and Indigenous women before colonialization, and how their stories and myths were transmogrified with the advent of patriarchal, Christian, and capitalist colonialization.

### **The status of women in Western, African and Indigenous Caribbean societies**

“Women are contentious, prideful, demanding, complaining, and foolish; they are uncontrollable, unstable, and unsatiable.” (Bloch, 1987, p. 3) According to Bloch, this is the sentiment many Medieval European male writers held about women in general, whether poor, rich, beautiful, ugly, married or unmarried. Rosemary Radford Ruether (2014), who delved into the history of misogyny in Christian tradition, found that the philosophical arguments against women’s rational abilities go as far back as Ancient Greece: “the Greek philosophical tradition, particularly Aristotle, which shaped early Christian views on this, believed that women lacked autonomous reason and were therefore inherently inferior and dependent on the male” (p. 84). Women as a sex were not believed to be as capable as men: they had no reason, and so could not participate in academic discourse to defend their points of view. Ruether goes on to expound on how the Christian tradition deepened and expanded upon this notion of women’s inherent

inferiority. Analyzing the words of Paul in his Letter to the Corinthians as well as those of Timothy, what emerges is a hierarchy where God is first, Man is second, and Woman is third (p. 84). Modern commentaries on these biblical passages often bring up the first sin against God, committed by the first woman, Eve, as something to hold against the entire female sex: “women are said to have been both created second after the male and also to have been guilty of originating humanity’s fall into sin” (Ruether, 2014, p. 85). Christian tradition focuses on women’s spiritual ability to be redeemed in soul, while also laying emphasis on their physical capacity to bear children as both a fault and the sole purpose of their creation. Ruether writes:

the woman in her sexual body is not the image of God, but rather images the body as carnal and prone to sin. As female, even in the original creation of paradise, woman was created to be subject to the male in her sexual roles as wife and childbearer. (2014, p. 85)

Ruether additionally tells us that this split view of the woman as a socially inferior, spiritually suspended, and physically subjugated creature is the basis of the dominant Western Christian tradition. It became women’s role, to, as Ruether contends, “quietly and submissively [accept] her husband’s rule over her, as well as that of other males in authority, even their harsh words and blows. ... This remains women’s place in the Christian era” (p. 87).

Othered and oppressed, women have been depicted as creatures without reason and tainted by sin in Christian discourse. Therefore, to gain spiritual redemption, they must be made submissive, submit themselves to man as their ruler. This anti-feminine dogma accompanied the colonizing Europeans into the Caribbean, where they encountered the pluri-ethnic and pluri-cultural societies that they would forcibly subjugate, enslave and plunder, with the full blessing of the highest authorities in both the Catholic and Protestant churches.

Before European colonialization, women in West Africa held their own status and power that did not depend on men. Niara Sudarkasa (1986) writes, “They were queen-mothers; queen-sisters; princesses, chiefs and holders of other offices in towns and villages; occasional warriors; and, in one well known case, that of the Lovedu, the supreme monarch” (p. 91). Unlike the European women subjugated in Christian society, a woman in Africa could be seen occupying positions higher than those held by most other men. The concept of the innate inferiority of women did not exist in their non-Christian cultures; neither did the Aristotelian idea of rationality being the exclusive province of the male sex.

According to Sudarkasa’s research on women’s status in some indigenous West African societies, men and women play different social roles beyond childbearing. They organize themselves into kin groups where “African women have rights and responsibilities toward their kinsmen and kinswomen that are independent of males” (1986, p. 95). Everyone in the community has obligations to one another, whether they are between men,

between women, or between both sexes. The terms ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ bear meanings in African societies that do not correspond to those normally attached to these same terms in Western societies. These meanings are tied to kinship responsibilities, as Sudarkasa notes, using an example from Yoruba society, “a husband refers to his spouse as ‘wife’; a woman refers to her cowife as ‘wife’ or ‘mate,’ and ... female as well as male members of the lineage refer to the in-marrying spouses as their ‘wives.’” (1986, p. 96) Within both matrilineages and patrilineages, seniority, and not sex, is the main criterion for respect and deference.

African women have traditionally not been confined to the ‘private domain,’ as has been the case until very recently for most European women. Many Western researchers, however, tend to project European norms on West African societies. “In West Africa, the ‘public domain’ was not conceptualized as ‘the world of men,’” (Sudarkasa, 1986, p. 99). Such distinctions as ‘public’ vs. ‘private’ domains are the result of the Platonic binaries that saturate the Western episteme, which insists on drawing artificial boundaries between social groups and their spheres of agency. This is not the case in West Africa, where social agency occurs within more complex and interconnected systems that defy reduction into oppositional binaries such as public and private.

Taking all this into consideration, it can be said that women in many pre-colonial West African societies were not confined to exclusive and rigid roles based on their sex or gender, but instead could play a range of complementary roles with men and other women. For example, as ‘wives’ women were not forced into a role of submission and deference to their husbands; instead, they could choose among a diverse set of interpretations of conjugal responsibilities, sometimes even as wives to other women in “women-marriages”. Finally simplistic polarized dualities such as ‘public’ and ‘private’ or even ‘male’ and ‘female’ fail to account for the vast array of sexed and gendered performances in African societies.

Defining the role of women in ‘Taíno’ society is tricky, much like the indigenous designation ‘Taíno’ itself. Katheen Deagan (2004), in an article studying gender and class in indigenous societies following Spanish conquest, writes that while the term ‘Taíno’ has been the traditional colonial designation of the inhabitants of the Greater Antilles and Bahamas at the time of European arrival, “most researchers recognize that this usage inappropriately reduces the considerable diversity of social, political, and economic formations among these people” (p. 600). Given that complex pluri-cultural and pluri-ethnic interrelations existed among indigenous Caribbean populations before colonialization, we must be on our guard not to let artificially imposed colonial ethnic distinctions and divisions, such as those between the ‘Taíno’ and other local indigenous groups like the ‘Caribs’, become obstacles in our investigation of cultural bodies and cultural monsters (Amodio, 1991, p. 573). For this reason, in this paper we will refer to the plurality of indigenous groups that first encountered colonizers as ‘the Indigenous peo-

ples of the Caribbean,’ though Deagan’s paper still classifies those of the Greater Antilles under the category ‘Taíno.’

What, then, was the role of women in these indigenous Caribbean societies? As Deagan writes, “although the paramount rulers among the Taíno were most often men, women could also be caciques (*cacicas*)” (2004, p. 600). From the accounts of the *cacicas* that met and negotiated with the first European colonizers a few are named properly, like Yuiza of Puerto Rico, and Anacaona of La Hispaniola. They were considered the leaders of their communities and recognized as mediators between the colonizers and the Indigenous peoples as well.

They, like African women, could take up positions of power and responsibility over other men and women. Not only could Indigenous women serve as *cacicas*; they were recorded as participating in all aspects of indigenous political life. Sex and gender roles were non-exclusive among the indigenous people of the Caribbean—from food production to crafting, to fighting and politics; “there are few documented social or economic functions that can be attributed exclusively to the domain of either men or women” (Deagan, 2004, p. 601).

Comprehending the roles women have played in Western, African and Indigenous societies is crucial to understanding how women have been envisioned in Western, African, and Indigenous minds. It therefore becomes useful to consider how the female figures of indigenous and African legends, how female Indigenous and African historical figures such as Yuiza, Anacaona and Lovedu, as well as how Indigenous and African divinities came to be feminized, sexualized, and demonized after the invasion of the Caribbean by the Christian colonizers and enslavers. Given the Platonic-Aristotelian and Christian misogyny that underpin Western European culture and thinking, it should come as no surprise that wherever women may have wielded any legitimate, normal, and natural power over men in Indigenous and African societies, these powers, and especially the women who exercised these powers were transmogrified into illegitimate, abnormal, and unnatural abominations under the Western colonial gaze. This is how the female figures examined in the present work underwent a systematic process of being rendered wicked and monstrous in the colonial imaginary.

But the monstrous-feminine is not only the product of patriarchal discursive violence; other factors are also at play, such as the fear, trauma and alienation that have accompanied the hegemonic domination of the minds of the peoples of the colonial Caribbean. For example, the monstrous-feminine has become a convenient scapegoat which can be used to explain personal and collective misfortune and disaster in the region. Because “The monster’s body is a cultural body,” (Cohen, 1996, p. 4) the monstrous-feminine has become an ever-changing and adaptive response to people’s needs and anxieties. Cultural stories change and monsters change with them.



### **Mami Wata, Watramama and Mamadjo**

As a result of the transatlantic trade in the enslaved, millions of enslaved Africans were forcibly brought to the Americas. They were displaced from their kin, but not totally from their cultures, their languages, or their religions. They carried these with them to the American colonies, into a world that would irreversibly alter them. “To survive, they had to adapt quickly to the new labor and living conditions, a new physical environment, different surrounding cultures, and each other” (Van Stipriaan, 2008, p. 525). In the area of religion and spiritual practices, their enforced conversion to Christianity was particularly devastating, but the enslaved found resourceful ways to Africanize their practice of Christianity. “African-derived religions and systems of belief have been vilified ..., often in response to a real or perceived threat to European cultural and political dominance” (Anatol, 2015, p. xi). The spiritual beings they believed in would not be immune from the impacts of colonialism and enslavement, as is demonstrated by the case of Mami Wata.

In the *Encyclopedia of African Religion*, edited by Asante and Mazama (2009), Mami Wata stands for “a pantheon of water deities found primarily in the Vodun tradition practiced in Benin and Togo” (p. 404). The name is thought to derive from English *mommy* and *water*, although the words can be traced back to ancient Egypt, to *ma* or *mama* meaning “truth” or “wisdom,” and *wati* for “water”; in some sub-Saharan languages, *wat* or *waat* means “woman” (p. 404). In its pantheon, Mami Wata could be represented by both male and female bodies, though regardless of their gender, they “are nonhuman and have never been human” (Asante & Mazama, 2009, p. 404). Each Mami Wata bears a specific symbol, a color, a ceremony, a tattoo, an order, and a *danmi* or bead. Which hand wears the beads indicates whether it is a male spirit or a female spirit, whose colors are red and white, a duality which represents both violence and healing.

After the transatlantic voyages, many Africans were forced to work in swamp lands and coastal areas. Water became both a source of food and escape, and a source of trauma (Asante & Mazama, 2009, p. 405). This transformed the relationship devotees had with Mami Wata into cause for both celebration and fear. Numerous manifestations of water deities in the Caribbean took on different aspects and names: there was *Watramama* in Suriname and Guyana; *Mamadjo* in Grenada; *Yemanya/Yemaya* in Brazil and Cuba; *La Sirène*, *Erzulie*, and *Simbi* in Haiti; and *Lamanté* in Martinique (Asante & Mazama, 2009, p. 404). These deities’ path through the Caribbean followed where their devotees went, and their stories generally converged into that of a feminine deity or goddess, given that in the colonial Americas, the oppositional binary ‘male’ vs. ‘female’ demanded that all religious figures be strictly gendered as one or the other. In contrast to the situation in West Africa, in the Western episteme, there is no possibility for anything in between the two poles, both poles at the same time, or completely outside of the

binary scheme of gendering (Rodríguez Montemóño, 2019). In the following section, we focus primarily on the figures of Watramama and Mamadjo.

“In Suriname, the first mention of Mami Wata by name occurs in the 1740s, where the observer noted that if proper rituals were not performed by a woman, [‘Watramama’] would harm her husband or child” (Asante & Mazama 2009, p. 405). Mami Wata in Suriname adopted a creolized identity, as accounted for in detail by Van Stipriaan (2008), as the indigenous people of the Americas came into early and frequent contact with Africans, and both worshiped water gods and spirits (p. 530). The indigenous people told stories of ‘water people’ who would knock over boats and drag people under water. Those who met Watramama described her as “one part fish, with the upper part that of a very handsome young woman, with beautiful, long, deep-black hair” (Asante & Mazama, 2009, p. 533). Thus, the Watramama came to be, in the rivers of Suriname, “a fearful being, who was to be kept satisfied by all means” (Asante & Mazama, 2009, p. 531).

Europeans themselves could have contributed to the imaginary of a fearsome fish-woman as well, with their stories of mermaids and sirens, as the attribute of the fish tail is not originally in the indigenous tale of water people nor in the original Mami Wata (Van Stipriaan, 2008, p. 539). Though iterations of Mami Wata in West Africa may also depict a half-fish woman wrapped around the waist by a snake, Asante and Mazama’s encyclopedia claims this was the depiction of her as a specific deity, “[appearing] as a beautiful creature, half woman, half fish, with long hair and a light brown complexion, and she lives in an exquisite underwater world” (2009, p. 404).

What we find interesting about Watramama and Mamadjo is how similar their descriptions are to this specific Mami Wata deity. Jane Beck (1975) collected and recounted some of the supernatural beliefs held by people in Barbados, through the testimonies of an elderly man. Among these superstitions is the ‘mermaid.’ Blond haired, with a comb in hand to comb her hair. Beck details as follows:

This creature is known as *Mamadjo*, thought to be a corruption of *Mama d’Eau*, “Mother of Water,” but which may also be a corruption of the Yoruba term, *Yemoja*, “Mother of Fishes,” an important water deity. Black Grenadians propitiate her four times a year with rum, unsalted rice, sheep, and fowl. The ceremony is performed in a traditional manner with drumming and dancing. In return, the mermaid blesses the crops with rain—all very reminiscent of the *Yemoja*-water-mother concept of African tradition. (p. 237)

This ‘creature,’ as Beck calls her, must be worshipped annually else her rage rain down on her followers, much like Watramama evoking fear in the hearts of people in Suriname. Patrick Polk (1993) observes Shango rituals and practice in Grenada, and one of the accounts he shares is of a pilgrimage to Grand Etang, a water source sacred to Mamadjo, where Grenadian followers would sacrifice goats and fowls in exchange for

rain, sorely needed for their crops of corn. Endless prayers would be addressed to *Mamadjo* during sacrifice, wherein African dance would last until daylight and the devotees would return, ceremony completed, to their homes (p. 75).

Through multi-cultural contact with Europeans and Indigenous peoples, and after the trauma endured by devotees of a waterborne passage into a life of enslavement, Mami Wata was transformed into a half-fish woman, no longer just an African deity, but shaped by a Caribbean landscape, to take residence in the waters that have both sustained and scarred her worshippers. The awe she provokes mirrors the terrors of her domain. Monsters often lie in perilous territories as inhabitants of worlds where humans cannot dwell. However, as time goes on, stories shift again. The plasticity of monsters is that they are “the embodiment of a cultural moment” (Cohen, 1996, p. 4), and culture in the Caribbean would become a constantly shifting beast of its own.

The Barbadian gentleman in Beck’s documentation that had seen a mermaid, also recounts that he’d attempted to frighten her and take her comb, as he believed he would have been able to sell it back to her for money. The mermaid fled before she could drop her comb. This folkloric belief, drastically different to what we’ve previously mentioned of the wrathful mermaid, is yet another evolving interpretation of Mami Wata. The water goddess who awards blessings only after the performance of rituals transforms into a harmless and beautiful mermaid, a woman with riches to be plundered by patriarchy. Former plantation owner Willem Frederik van Lier affords us with another story of a wealthy mermaid. As an amateur ethnographer of Afro-Surinamese culture, he published works about the Surinamese creature, saying that, “generally ... the water spirit was heard laughing cheerfully and no one ever mentioned that a human being was harmed by her” (Van Stipriaan, 2008, p. 534). To the contrary, it is believed that she protected people from drowning by taking them into her underwater palace adorned with gold and diamonds. This is not the same terrible being who elsewhere needed to be kept satisfied with sacrifice and ceremony. This is a creature who can be adored for her beauty and sacked of her treasure.

In other manifestations of Afro-Surinamese folklore, Watramama would still punish behavior that did not please her, especially in cases where she featured in Anansi stories (Van Stipriaan, 2008, p. 535). It is not known when Watramama earned the reputation that she could have her wealth stolen or gifted, only that it is the most common story nowadays, very unlike her early 18th and 19th century sources. “Today, the story goes that when Watramama loses her golden comb and comes to the finder at night to claim it, the finder may ask of her anything he wants; his desires will be gratified punctually” (Van Stipriaan, 2008, pp. 535-36), much as was the case with the *Mamadjo* story, where a Barbadian gentleman sought to claim *Mamadjo*’s comb in exchange for riches. In the case of Watramama in Suriname, however, the granting of riches to any particular man comes at a price: he must become her ever-faithful husband.

According to Alex Van Stipriaan, who documented the history of Watramama in Suriname, the transformation from fearsome, frightening water deity to a beautiful and frivolous mermaid may be in part due to the abolition of chattel enslavement in 1863. Formerly enslaved persons could now leave rural districts and become involved in the economy as people who could earn their own money. To quote Van Stipriaan, “a little luck in this respect was quite welcome, particularly if luck could be helped a bit by making offerings” (2008, p. 536). For Afro-Surinamese, urbanization also separated them from the omnipresent threat of water. The role of the ‘urbanized’ Watramama changed with her people, as she continues to change in different contexts, as protector, provider, or punisher.

Alongside European, African and indigenous influences, we must consider the impact of Asian immigration to the Caribbean as well (Van Stipriaan, 2008, p. 536) on these powerful water spirits, which might have played a role in altering her monstrous manifestations into something less frightening and more docile. It can be expected that the figure of Mami Wata will continue to change in the Caribbean as her worshippers also continue to change.

### **La Llorona**

The story of La Llorona is one that encompasses not only the Caribbean, but also significant portions of Latin America as well. The transmogrification of indigenous female ceremonial and folkloric figures into La Llorona is a process echoed in the transmogrification of indigenous female historical figures, such as Yuiza, Anacaona and other *cacicas*. Andrea Yambot Lugo (2017) writes for *El Adoquín Times* that during the colonial era, Yuiza, an Indigenous *cacica*, was among the first *caciques* of Puerto Rico who met with the arriving conquistadors (para. 1). A widow, she ruled after her husband’s passing. Her baptismal name was said to have been Luisa, the antecedent to the denomination of the Puerto Rican town of Loíza. She served as mediator and translator between the Europeans and the Indigenous people of the region. It is also said that she married a Spanish mulatto named Pedro Nexia, though no record of this union exists. Her marriage and her involvement with the conquistadors would not be accepted by her indigenous comrades (para. 2). Because of her cohabitation with non-indigenous people, an uprising took place; fellow *caciques* Cacimar and Yaureibo invaded her territory, along with presumed ‘Caribs.’ In the aftermath, she and her mulatto husband were killed. Cacimar fell in the battle as well. Some of the indigenous people involved would be captured and sold as slaves by the conquistadors. According to Yambot Lugo, chroniclers at the time compared her to La Malinche from Mexico (2017, para. 2).

Yuiza’s story is not one of a monstrous spectre but instead incorporates a sinister trope that has demonized many other indigenous women: the ‘betrayal of the race’. Anacaona, an indigenous leader of the neighboring island La Hispaniola, experienced a similar fate to that of Yuiza. According to Gillespie (2021), citing the chronicles of Bar-

tolomé de Las Casas, we know that in 1498, Anacaona negotiated four years of relative peace and freedom from slaughter for her people under Spanish colonialism, but this would not be enough to save them (p. 163). In 1503, she was captured and executed at the hands of the Spanish governor Nicholas de Ovando (p. 163). The conquistadors called her “licentious and untrustworthy and liken[ed] her to the Assyrian warrior queen, Semiramis” (Gillespie (2021, p. 164), another powerful female historical figure who faced similar condemnation by the men who write the history books. If the character of the indigenous woman was not slandered, then she would either be slaughtered by the conquistadors like Anacaona, or executed by her own people like Yuiza. In their stories, these two *cacicas* would be remembered as betrayers of both the Indigenous peoples as well as of the Europeans.

Similar female characters called ‘malinches’, after Malintzin, the Indigenous woman who worked as an interpreter for the Spanish during the conquest of Mexico, were women trained to serve as cultural and linguistic mediators for the colonizers, and who would at times be married to European men. “Anacaona and Malintzin, like thousands of other Amerindian women over the centuries of conquest and colonization, were involved in similar negotiations, sometimes with and sometimes without their consent” (Gillespie, 2021, pp. 152-53). Once they outlived their use or stepped out of line, their lives would be swiftly forfeited. In the case of Malintzin, hers is a story that would merge with La Llorona’s.

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In an article titled “The Wailing Woman,” Amy Fuller (2017) tells us of La Llorona. “She is often presented as a banshee-type: an apparition of a woman dressed in white, often found by lakes or rivers, sometimes at crossroads, who cries into the night for her lost children, whom she has killed” (para. 2). A post-colonial myth of La Llorona, recorded by Zoila Clark (2014) gives us more detail:

[She is the specter of] ... a mestiza woman [who]... was beautiful and proud, but she was poor. She married a man from a higher social class, one who owned land and animals, and together they had two children. However, he would leave her alone for months at a time, and eventually married a woman from his own wealthy class. In anger, she threw her two children into the river and then died of pain and anguish. The story goes that until this day villagers hear her crying by the rivers asking: “Where are my children?” (pp. 64-65)

Marta E. Sánchez (2005), introducing the intercultural connections among Puerto Rican, African American, and Chicano narratives, says that ‘La Malinche’ is the name of a historical Indigenous woman wedded to the Spanish conquistador Cortés: “her real name was Malintzin Tenépal; she was known as Marina to the Spanish” (p. 5). Sánchez goes on to explain that as an informant, a linguist, a translator and mediator between the Spanish and the Indigenous peoples of Mexico, Malintzin became a key figure in early colonial history in the Americas. From her came the term *malinche*, implying “be-

trayal of self, of group interests—selling out” (Sánchez, 2005, p. 5), for being complicit in the plunder and destruction of her own people. When one invokes the image of La Llorona, inside her is the echo of La Malinche and all the *malinches* of the Caribbean: female, indigenous, abandoned, a woman who does not belong with anyone. She is the monstrous-feminine who wails on the cultural fault-lines of colonialism, who causes her own demise, whether by the crime of her interracial marriage, or by the sin of infanticide.

La Llorona’s association with infanticide is so pervasive, in fact, that her origins are uncertain, even conflated, with the indigenous legend of the Mexican goddess Cihuacoatl. In Fuller’s article about La Llorona, Cihuacoatl is singled out as a pre-Hispanic Aztec goddess, said to be an omen foretelling the Conquest of Mexico (2017, para. 4). It could be that the Mexican Cihuacoatl is the source of La Llorona’s tale, in the same way the African Mami Wata is the source of Caribbean water creatures like Watramama and Mamadjo. Ana María Carbonell (1999) provides us with more information about the goddess who is the patron of midwives, and who “embodies a holistic figure that embraces both death and creation” (p. 53). Some of Cihuacoatl’s recurring themes also merged with those of La Llorona, like her white dress and her wailing, foreboding cries. To expand upon Carbonell’s claim:

In examining, ethnographic accounts dating back to the colonial period, La Llorona and her antecedent, Cihuacoatl, repeatedly emerge as dangerous and destructive figures. These tales of maternal betrayal describe La Llorona as a treacherous, selfish woman who murders her own children, usually through drowning. The motivations provided include: insanity, parental neglect or abuse, and/ or revenge for being abandoned by a lover. In addition, La Llorona often seeks to murder other children or women out of envy for her loss and to seduce or kill men out of spite. (1999, p. 54)

Such mythical intertwining between Cihuacoatl and La Llorona is fascinating enough, but even more interesting is how La Llorona’s myth carries on from here, from tragedy to terror, and from fear to inspiration. One of the versions Fuller quotes is of a 20th century play, Carmen Toscano’s *La Llorona*, which “presents a harsh critique of the Conquest and colonial period, with special attention paid to the treatment of the indigenous people by the Spanish conquistadors” (2017, para. 17). Though she is undoubtedly still a terrifying folk creature, her purpose in plays like Carmen Toscano’s continues to be that of a *monstrum*: to ‘reveal’ the source of cultural fear. This time, she is transformed into a tool with which to reveal the monstrosities of colonialism.

### **Soucouyant**

The *soucouyant* is a vampiric folkloric figure of Dominica, Trinidad and Guadeloupe. Depending where we find ourselves in the Caribbean, this shapeshifting creature could be popularly conceived as *Old Hige* (Jamaica and Guyana); *Asema* (Suriname); *volant*

or *loogaroo* (Haiti); or the *gens-gagée* (St. Lucian) (Anatol, 2015, p. x). A demoness of the night, she is believed to be “an amalgamation of French vampire myths and African mythological entities known as *jumbies* ... malevolent night spirits or demons that terrorize the living” (Robinson, 2016, p. 66). In the preface for Giselle Liza Anatol’s (2015) book, *The Things That Fly in the Night*, she describes the rich storytelling traditions of her Caribbean upbringing:

According to the stories shared by my Trinidadian aunts, mother, and grandmothers, the soucouyant seemed to be an ordinary old woman by day. Each night, however, she shed her skin, transformed herself into a ball of fire, flew about the community, and sucked the blood of her unsuspecting neighbors. Afterward, she would return home and slip back into her skin, and the repeated practice made her human form unusually wrinkled. (ix)

The soucouyant embodies a specific traumatic aspect of vampiric superstition in the Caribbean: the loss of culture and ancestry. The kidnapping of millions of Africans from their homelands to bring them to the Americas was felt in Africa as well. Timothy Robinson (2016) writes about the border-transgressing appeal of vampiric lore, especially in the telling of African tales, both in American literature and in Africa as a consequence of colonialization and the transatlantic slave trade. He explains it as follows:

...within regions along the west coast of Africa and locations where the transatlantic slave trade originated and held fast for centuries, vampirism often emerged as the prevalent explanation as to why millions of men, women, and children who were taken during the Middle Passage never returned. (p. 64)

The enslaved Africans who were transported during colonialization to the Caribbean not only lost their homes, but many of their connections to it. They were made to “forget their people,” (Robinson, 2016, p. 65).

Vampires as drainers of life essence transcend the boundaries of Europe. Robinson goes on to say that while the term *vampire* is relatively new to Africa, some of its roots may predate the time when the Portuguese first reached the African shores. “European colonists brought their vampire tales with them and Africans adopted and transformed the tales to explain aspects of European slavery and other traumas such as European biological experimentation on Africans” (2016, pp. 66-67). The monstrous idea behind the soucouyant is the genocide of a people, assigned to the form of a merciless, life-draining woman-creature.

### **María Lionza**

Many myths surround the origin of the female-gendered spiritual being called María Lionza. Daisy Barreto Ramos (2020) collects them into a genealogy of the María Lionza cult, in which she presents not only her possible origins, but her development into the contemporary age. In the region of Cerro María Lionza in the state of Yaracuy in Ven-

ezeuela, Barreto Ramos says that there once was a legend of an indigenous lady called María de la Onza, daughter of a *cacique* of the region, “*quien como encanto vive en el fondo de las aguas, bajo la forma de una gran serpiente, de donde sale por las noches a cabalgar montada sobre un danto*” [who, with magical enchantments, lives at the bottom of the waters in the form of a great serpent, and who comes out at night riding on a tapir] (all translations in this work are by the author, unless specified otherwise) (2020, p. 48). Another tale focusses on a different woman, a Spanish lady named María Alonso, who owned great stretches of land in the state of Yaracuy, and with whom pacts were made in exchange for riches (p. 48). The existence of either figure—María de la Onza or María Alonso—cannot be confirmed. If those women indeed existed, they might have lived in the very early stages of colonial rule.

As Daisy Barreto Ramos (2020) observes, the people of the Yaracuy tell stories of those who made pacts with María Lionza, men who earned riches in exchange for their souls and who would endure in folkloric memory as spirits enchanted by her (p. 54). To those who would initiate pacts with her, the deity was known as *Mayuronza*, “*que representa una fuerza telúrica ancestral*” [who represents a terrestrial, ancestral force] (p. 62). Mayuronza was not to be trifled with. A sinister side is counterposed with the more benevolent face of María Lionza: “*bondadosa, protectora de la naturaleza, de los animales y las cosechas*” [kind-hearted, protector of nature, animals, and crops] (p. 48).

As are the historical facts pertaining to the women who are claimed to be her historical source, the origins of the name María Lionza are uncertain. Some, Barreto Ramos notes, assume that the name of María Lionza has been superimposed onto that of an indigenous goddess: “*Yara, Igpupiará, Caapóra, Yurupari, Chía, Yubecaiguaya y Bachué*” (Barreto Ramos, 2020, p. 42). Others assume either the legend of the Spanish María Alonso or that the indigenous woman to have been true. But, without documentation, we have no way of establishing with certainty why the name of this deity is as such, or what came before. What we can do, is look at the importance of her association with both indigenous and African folklore in Cerro María Lionza.

Like the figure of the Mami Wata, she is a terrifying and powerful woman who dwells in an underwater palace. The Christian church may not have repressed her cult directly, but they have declared it to be a ‘pagan practice,’ one they claim has appropriated and deformed the image of Catholic saints, and the souls of those who worship her, granting her their souls in exchange for favors (Barreto Ramos, 2020, p. 105). What is truly incredible is that, like the face of the modern West African Mami Wata, María Lionza owes hers to a real woman: Beatriz Veit-Tané.

Tobias Wendl (2001) asserts that the most recognizable image of the Mami Wata comes from a 19th century chromolithograph of a Samoan snake charmer named Maladamaute. However, “the original link to [her] was lost; the image was stripped of its original meaning and put into a completely new frame of reference: that of the emerging modern transafrican Mami Wata complex” (Wendl, 2001, p. 271). In the 1950s, Beatriz



Correa – known by the name Beatriz Veit-Tané – posed as a model for artists like Centeno Vallenilla y Colina, who would paint María Lionza in her image. The image of a real, living woman thus becomes the face of a terrifying myth.

Patriarchal Christian and Western thinking places man above woman since creation, as only man is created in God's image. But the question then arises as to "how could she have a redeemable soul if she is not made in the image of God?" (Ruether, 2014, p. 85). On the other hand, Indigenous and African traditions have no problem depicting deity and positive spiritual force via female imagery. As a medium of the cult of María Lionza, Beatriz would say, "*El verdadero mito soy yo. Yo veía a María Lionza en mí misma y me sentía como un aparato receptor*" [The real myth is me. I saw María Lionza in myself and I felt like a receiving apparatus] (Barreto Ramos, 2020, p. 187).

### La Diabliesse

La Diabliesse, or Jablesse, is a she-devil in Caribbean folklore. As Beck (1975) describes her along with other superstitious creatures like the mermaid, "a *jablesse* is thought to be a woman temptress who leads people astray ... clad in a long dress which hides her [cloven] feet" (p. 239). This story, as quoted by an article in The Rum Ration (2020) on La Diabliesse, "endure[s] in African, French, Trinidad and Jamaican culture" (para. 1). The article goes on to say:

While stories vary across cultures, there are key themes that continually appear in the legend. Most agree that La Diabliesse (female devil) was born mortal but she made a pact with the devil and became a demon. When disguised in human form, she entraps men with her beauty and leads them astray into dark places, where they meet an untimely end. (The Rum Ration, 2020, para. 2)

The Rum Ration article proceeds to identify Martinique as the place of the origins of her legends, "as the mixing of French and West-African culture gave rise to similar stories of a mysterious and beautiful woman who haunted the forgotten byways of the island" (2020, para. 7). She has since spread through the Caribbean and made herself known through the villages of Trinidad (Ali, n.d., para. 1). Angelo Bissessarsingh (2013), writer for the *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian*, says that this is possibly due to many of the island's French settlers coming from Martinique (para. 3). In the late 19th century, Lofcadio Hearn's memoirs introduced the world to La Diabliesse, and as Bissessarsingh elaborates, as well as the image associated with her: "a tall woman of Afro extraction, simply but elegantly clad and all the men know and fear her" (Bissessarsingh, 2013, para. 5).

At the heart of the legends surrounding La Diabliesse is a complex hierarchy of monstrous attributes that each enhance the other, understood by what we have discussed above as the 'cultural body of the monster.' She is part-human and part-animal. As a faceless woman of African descent, she is portrayed as demonic and unchristian. She therefore embodies the monstrous othering of race, sex, and religion, that continues to

haunt the Caribbean. We discussed above how African women could navigate both ‘public’ and ‘private’ domains and hold power independently from men, as precolonial African society was not bound by patriarchal Christian traditions or hypermisogynistic European ideologies. In the form of La Diabliesse, however, African femininity has been transmogrified and demonized by the gaze that emerged from the Western European, Christian colonial enterprise.

The very name – *diabliesse*, she-devil – confirms her undeniable association with the oppositional binary of ‘god/good’ vs. ‘devil/evil’ that saturates the Christian imagination. Beck likens the story of La Diabliesse to that of the jack o’lantern of the British Isles, “an apparition usually appearing as a ball of light and known for leading night travelers astray” (1975, p. 239). Perhaps the idea of the wandering lurer comes from European folklore, but we suggest that we need only look at other female-gendered Caribbean folkloric beings like María Lionza to identify a common thread having to do with the selling of souls.

### **The monstrous-feminine and feminist empowerment**

The social roles that women played in pre-colonial African and Indigenous societies were quite different from those that were accessible to women in Christian Europe in the period leading up to colonialism. Constrained by patriarchal hierarchies and by misogynistic discourse, women were relegated to subservient positions. In the colonial Caribbean, Western European Christian tradition would not only come to dominate African and Indigenous female bodies, but it would also come to dominate the way in which women’s stories would be told, through both history and folklore. In this process, both women and female folkloric figures became monsters. However, a monster is a cultural body, signifying a cultural moment in time. Their transmogrification speaks to the fears of the culture they emerged from, because the word *monstrum*, from which the term ‘monster’ is derived, means “that which reveals” (Cohen, 1996, p. 4).

Stephen T. Asma once wrote a short paper about monsters and the moral imagination. In it, he writes as follows about the cathartic journey of coming face-to-face with monsters:

Monsters can stand as symbols of human vulnerability and crisis, and as such they play imaginative foils for thinking about our own responses to menace. ... Monster stories and films only draw us in when we identify with the persons who are being chased, and we tacitly ask ourselves: ... ‘What will I do when I am vulnerable?’ (2020, p. 290)

What we can extrapolate from Asma’s reasoning is that the conception of women as monsters is a response to the threat posed by women in the patriarchal landscape of the Caribbean. The Afro-Surinamese see themselves in Watramama’s victims – victims of the deep waters – and they deal with this by respecting her power and appeasing her with rituals. Mamadjo’s comb should be coveted, so that she may grant away her riches.

To escape from La Diabliesse's deadly beauty, a man must "[take] their clothes off and turn them inside out before putting them on again" (Ali, n.d., para. 2). If one is not careful, the bloodthirsty soucouyant will take one's life and flee into the night again. At the core of many of their legends, these feminine monsters have been depicted as agents of wickedness, sin, death, and betrayal; but they have also been understood to be powerful, sensual, and independent. Like the women of pre-colonial, pre-Christian Indigenous and African societies, they enjoy status and responsibility. Returning to Asma's argument, what happens, then, when instead of seeing ourselves in the victims of the monster, we see ourselves in the monstrous, as outcast, reproached, and othered? We already have our answer in the plasticity of some of the stories we have discussed. These same legends have empowered women across the pluri-ethnic and pluri-cultural panorama of the Caribbean to see themselves not in the monstrous, but in the *monstrum*: the revelation. La Llorona is considered a symbol of Mexican identity (Fuller, 2017, para. 18), while La Diabliesse is seen as a champion of the oppressed (The Rum Ration, 2020, para. 5). As Beatriz Veit-Tané said, proud and awed of her rank as the artistic face of the myth of María Lionza, "*El verdadero mito soy yo. [The real myth is me.]*" (Barreto Ramos, 2020, p. 187).

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**COSMOPOLITANISMS, ETHNICITIES  
AND INDIGENEITIES IN  
THE CARIBBEAN AND BEYOND**



# BECOMING ‘STRUCTURALLY WHITE’ IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY JAMAICA

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## Abstract

When the Assembly of Jamaica passed a law in 1761 making it difficult for people of colour to inherit property from white planter fathers, some historians assumed that they were successful in preventing this practice. However, using archival research in the Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica, I have found evidence to show that many people of colour avoided this restriction by paying to have themselves and their children declared “structurally white”.

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**Key terms:** Jamaica, Assembly, people of colour

## The erosion of the rights of free people of colour in eighteenth century Jamaica

In eighteenth century Jamaica, a white elite controlled the British colony through a brutal form of enslavement of an African descended majority on their lucrative sugar estates. This dynamic also produced a mixed-race minority, which strove to find its place within this fractious relationship between ‘black’ and ‘white’. At the beginning of the century, free people of colour had similar rights to those of people raced as ‘white’ with regards to voting, property ownership, and in the courts. However, that situation changed as the century wore on. In 1708, the Assembly of Jamaica brought forward a Bill to regulate elections, and decreed that “no Jew, mulatto, negro, or Indian, shall have any vote at any election of members to serve in any assembly of this island.” (Journals, Vol. I, 12 February 1708, p. 439). The Assembly passed such legislation to ensure that only white men of property had the right to vote in Jamaican elections.

Shortly afterwards, the Assembly took away the rights of people of colour to defend themselves in Jamaican courts. Francis Williams was a free black Jamaican, educated at Cambridge, who made an impact as a poet, and eventually earned a living as the head



of his own school in Jamaica. However, Williams encountered discrimination on his return to the Caribbean. In 1724, a white planter named William Brodrick insulted Williams, calling him a “black dog”, whereupon Williams reacted by calling Brodrick a “white dog” several times. Brodrick punched Williams, as a result of which his “mouth was bloody”, but Williams retaliated, after which Brodrick's “shirt and neckcloth had been tore [sic] by the said Williams”. Williams insisted that since he was a free black man, he could not be tried for assault, as would have been the case with black slaves who hit a white man, because he was defending himself (Journals, Vol. II, 19 November 1724, pp. 509–512).

The Assembly, which was comprised of elected white planters, was alarmed at the success with which Williams argued his case, and how he secured the dismissal of Brodrick's attempts to prosecute him. Complaining that “Williams's behaviour is of great encouragement to the negroes of the island in general”, the Assembly then decided to “bring in a bill to reduce the said Francis Williams to the state of other free negroes in this island”. This legislation made it illegal for any black person in Jamaica, a slave or free, to strike a white person, even in self-defence (Journals, Vol. II, 19 November 1724, pp. 509–512).

People of colour also inherited property from their white fathers, and were beginning to form a significant propertied group. Consequently, the Assembly took actions to stop this development. In 1761, the Assembly tried to restrict anyone less than four generations removed from a black ancestor from acquiring the “rights and privileges of whites”. Titled “An Act to prevent the inconveniences arising from exorbitant grants and devices, made by white persons to negroes”, this law sought to curtail mixed-race children inheriting significant amounts of property from white landowners (Journals, Vol. VIII, 5 November 1790, p. 586). Historians such as Vincent Brown saw this law as a repudiation of the ambitions of Governor Edward Trelawny to create an empire embodying subjects of different colours, even if they had differing ranks and status (Brown, 2020, p. 216).

A planter in western Jamaica, Norwood Witter, who had mixed-race family members, objected to this new law, but in vain (Brown, 2020, p. 216. Rose Fuller Papers, 1759-64, SF 20/65). As a result, some historians believe that the Assembly of Jamaica successfully imposed limits on bequests of property to the mixed-race children of slaveholders born out of wedlock (Burnard & Garrigus, 2016, pp. 147-154; Newman, 2018, pp. 108-143; Livesey, 2012, pp. 107-123). However, in this article it will be argued that many free people of colour found a way to circumvent this legislation by legally becoming ‘structurally white’. These people of colour petitioned the Assembly of Jamaica in order to elevate themselves to the same status as white people. Many of these petitions were successful, and they were able to successfully transition to becoming a part of white planter society by paying for these Acts of the Assembly.

### **Becoming ‘structurally white’ before 1761**

The practice of becoming ‘structurally white’ was common before the passing of the 1761 law. The first mentions of such petitions can be found in the Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica in 1738. Susannah Augier, “a free mulatto woman”, petitioned the Assembly on behalf of herself and her son, with a view to enjoying “the rights and privileges of English subjects”. It is possible that her son was the child of a white man, and his parents were seeking to give him equal status to his father. A week later, Ann Dufresnay, another “free mulatto woman”, who was now the wife of a white subject named Samuel Dufresnay, petitioned the Assembly to enjoy “the same rights and privileges with Englishmen, born of white ancestors” (Journals, Vol. III, 17 June 1738, p. 440, 23 June 1738, p. 443).

Many women of colour were successful in their applications for “the same rights and privileges with English subjects, born of white parents” on behalf of themselves and their children. In 1742, “a mulatto woman” named Anne Fletcher, living in the parish of St Catherine, applied on behalf of herself and her two children, James Fletcher and Fletcher Jones. In 1744, Elizabeth Ford, a “free mulatto woman” who earned a living as a “tavern-keeper” in Kingston, made a similar application on behalf of herself and her son and daughter, Benjamin Tanner and Frances Ebzory, “begotten of white fathers”. Another St Catherine woman of colour, Mary Johnstone, also known as Mary Rose, petitioned on behalf of herself and her two sons, Thomas Wynter and William Fuller, also the children of white men. The Assembly ruled that “the bill do pass” in all of these cases (Journals, Vol. III, 5 May 1742, p. 597, 17 May 1744, p. 654, 19 April 1745, p. 682). These women of colour applied for a change in their racial status so their children could enjoy better lives.

It was not just free women of colour who applied to become ‘structurally white’. William Cunningham was the illegitimate son of a white man of the same name in the parish of Westmoreland, and a “free negro woman”. In 1738, Cunningham, “a free mulatto”, petitioned the Assembly to be granted “the same rights and privileges with English subjects, born of white parents.” In 1747, William McDonald did the same (Journals, Vol. III, 13 July 1738, p. 450, Vol. IV, 28 May 1747, p. 104). The children of white men and women of colour sought to remove any obstacles in the way of them inheriting their fathers’ property by getting themselves legally declared ‘white’.

Consequently, many people of colour possessed large estates. In 1760, Anne Petronella Woodart, “spinster, a free mulatto”, and the illegitimate daughter of William Foster and a “negro woman slave”, made a similar application, in order to inherit his lucrative estates of Watermount, and two sizeable pens, in the parish of St John. She successfully inherited her father’s estate, valued at over £56,000 (Journals, Vol. V, 14 November 1760, p. 210, 16 November 1762, p. 377). In 1761, John Elletson, “a free mulatto”, possessed “a very good estate, consisting of a sugar plantation”, which meant that his sister Dorothy was “entitled to a considerable fortune”, valued at nearly £7,000. John

was able to send Dorothy to England, “for the benefit of her education”. Both John and Dorothy were the children of a white planter also named John Elletson of the parish of St Thomas-in-the-East and June Harris, described as a “free mulatto woman”. The Assembly approved their petition to be accorded the “same rights and privileges with English subjects” (Journals, Vol. V, 24 October 1761, p. 274, 6 November 1761, pp. 281-2, 16 November 1762, p. 377).

Arguably the most famous man to have utilised this legislation was Captain Jonathan Barnet, who successfully apprehended the notorious pirate ‘Calico’ Jack Rackham, and his two female lieutenants, Anne Bonney and Mary Read. Barnet was rewarded with a substantial estate in the parish of St James, and a significant financial reward (Journals, Vol. III, 31, October 1720, p. 346, 1 November 1720, p. 346). Barnet went on to become one of the two elected representatives from St James in the Assembly, before dying in 1745 (Journals, Vol. III, 3 April 1745, p. 678). However, Barnet had no legitimate white offspring to inherit his estates, which embodied a large portion of the parish of St James, and the fledgling port of Montego Bay (Journals, Vol. IV, 11 October 1751, p. 285). So, in 1739, Barnet submitted a bill to the Assembly to have his mistress, Jane Stone, “a free mulatto woman”, and her four children, Thomas Hugh Barnet Stone, Elizabeth, another Jane Stone, and Ann Stone, entitled to “the same rights and privileges with English subjects, born to white parents”. The Assembly ordered three elected members of the Assembly, named Barrett, Harris and Hyde, to “carry the bill to the council”, and ask them to approve it (Journals, Vol. III, 24 March 1739, pp. 465-466).

The Bill was successful, and Jane Stone and her children were declared ‘structurally white’. Thus, the quadroon Thomas Hugh Barnet Stone, who now became Hugh Barnet, was able to inherit his father’s estate as a white man, according to official documents. At his death in 1779, Hugh Barnet passed on to his son, also named Hugh, four plantations in Trelawny, and two plantations at Catherine Hall and Catherine Mount in Montego Bay (Besson, 2002, p. 66). After this legislation, both Hugh Barnets successfully moved up into white planter society, and became leading planters in the parish of St James.

### **Becoming ‘structurally white’ after 1761**

AFTER 1761 The passage of the 1761 Act was supposed to restrict the ability of people of colour to inherit property from their white fathers. However, the practice of people of colour applying to become legally ‘white’, in order to inherit property, continued in the Assembly of Jamaica over the next half century. Significant fees were charged by the Assembly of Jamaica to people of colour applying for a change in racial status, and once the fees were paid, many people of colour were successful in becoming ‘structurally white’, though some of their applications were subjected to restrictions.

After 1761, a number of Acts were passed in the Assembly, granting mixed-race free people the “same rights and privileges with English subjects, born of white parents”.

These included Sarah Morris, “a free quadroon woman”, who in 1763 petitioned the Assembly. However, her new rights were “under certain restrictions”, which remained unnamed (Journals, Vol. V, 30 December 1763, p. 459). In 1774, an Act was passed in favour of a free mixed-race family by the name of Sadler, including Frances Sadler, George Cunningham, Samuel Laing, Margaret Bright Sadler, and Ann Sadler (Journals, Vol. VI, 19 November 1774, p. 528). In 1776, Jane Sympson, “a free quadroon woman”, presented her petition to the Assembly (Journals, Vol. VI, 21 December 1776, p. 704). In 1782, Dugald Clarke the younger, “a free mulatto man”, the son of a white millwright of the same name in St Thomas-in-the-East, applied for an upgrade in his rights (Journals, Vol. VII, 21 December 1782, p. 543). In 1784, brothers Thomas and Joshua Roper also applied to have equal rights with white people (Journals, Vol. VIII, 7 December 1784, p. 45). In 1794, “a free mulatto woman” named Sarah Spraggs, and her three children, “free quadroons”, applied for a change in status (Journals, Vol. IX, 19 December 1794, p. 356). All of these applications were successful.

Even those planters and merchants who had exceptional circumstances were successful in applying to become ‘white’. This included planters who wanted to make their mixed-race children ‘white’ in order to inherit property, Jewish merchants who had children with black women, and mixed-race men who had white wives. In 1790, a white property owner in Westmoreland named George Bedward sought to make his “natural grandson, a free quadroon infant of tender years”, the heir to his estate, but he was prevented from doing so by the 1761 Act. He petitioned the Assembly for the right to “settle and dispose of his estate, both real and personal...in favour of George James Bedward, a free quadroon, his natural grandson.” The Assembly approved the passing of such an Act (Journals, Vol. VIII, 5 November 1790, pp. 586-592).

Jewish merchants were often subjected to discriminatory practices themselves, but in 1791 Daniel Rodrigues Cardoso was successful in getting his eight children by a “free black woman” named Ann Darby, entitled “to the same rights and privileges with English subjects, born of white parents.” (Journals, Vol. IX, 4, 17 November 1791, pp. 6, 21) Mulatto women continued to be successful in securing a change in the racial status of their children. In 1802, Mary Hay of St Mary successfully applied for her five “quadroon” children, all bearing the surname Davidson, to become structurally white (Votes, 1 December 1802, p. 104).

This law even affected children born to white women. In 1796, a St Elizabeth “free quadroon man” named John James junior, “possessed of very considerable property in this island”, had married a white woman named Anna Bonella James, with whom he had four children, but because of the 1761 law, his children were prevented from inheriting his property. He successfully petitioned the Assembly for a change in his racial status, so that his children would be able to inherit (Journals, Vol. IX, 12 November 1796, 10 December 1796, pp. 546-547, 620-621).

### **The paradigm shift after 1800**

With the advent of the nineteenth century, the planters of Jamaica took a more conciliatory attitude toward free people of colour who possessed property. This change in approach was largely the result of two major events: the independence of the black republic of Haiti being declared in 1804, and the British parliament passing an Act abolishing the slave trade in 1807. The Jamaican planters realised that they needed to have the wealthy free people of colour on their side, and they passed laws to lift restrictions on inheritance. In 1813, the Assembly passed a law removing restrictions on people of colour inheriting property, and also allowing them to appear in court alongside white citizens, and to navigate their own vessels (Campbell, 1976, pp. 83-84). Once this Act was passed, there was no further need for people of colour inheriting property to apply for a change in their racial status. Before 1813, the Assembly often made money from charging people of colour for this change in status. In 1826, Assembly member Richard Barrett remarked that the Assembly wanted to “encourage and reward loyal and correct conduct, and the example of industry, among the people of free condition.” Barrett pointed out that “the fees payable on private bills by free persons of colour” were prohibitive, and that “there are many free persons of colour, of good education and behaviour, who cannot afford the large fees now payable on private bills.” He proposed abolishing fees for Bills submitted by people of colour, and his motion was carried (Votes, 18 October 1826, pp. 43-44).

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That same year, large numbers of free persons of colour petitioned the Assembly to change their status to white, now there was no longer a prohibitive financial charge. John Parchment, William Baker and John Miller of Manchester, John Cuff of St Elizabeth, Colin Francis Crawford, Andrew Smith Crawford, Hugh Smith of Trelawny, St James residents John Williams, John Vernon, Martin Waite, Thomas Smith, and John Wiggan, John South of Manchester, James Campbell Stewart of Kingston, James Mitchell Gibb of Vere, and St Ann residents Henry Greaves, Alexander Tulloch and John Fox Edwards, were all free people of colour who applied to the Assembly for “the same rights and privileges as British subjects, born of white parents”. All of these applicants successfully had Acts of the Assembly passed to have themselves, and their children, declared legally ‘white’ (Votes, 8 November p. 116, 15 November p. 129, 9-11 December 1826, pp. 240-241). There were still significant benefits to be gained by becoming ‘structurally white’.

Finally, in 1830, the Assembly passed an Act which removed all other restrictions on free people of colour, allowing “free blacks and browns ... to ... enjoy all the rights, privileges, immunities and advantages whatsoever to which they would have been entitled if born of and descended from white ancestors.” (Campbell, 1976, pp. 139-140. CO 137/178, Belmore to Goderich, 21 February, 12 March 1831)

## Conclusion

Some historians have contended that in 1761 the Assembly of Jamaica was successful in passing legislation which effectively prevented people of colour from inheriting property. However, evidence found within the Journals of the Assembly of Jamaica shows that many people of colour circumvented this ruling by applying for a change in their racial status from ‘mulatto’ to ‘white’. By petitioning the Assembly, and paying the requisite fees, these people of colour were thus able to become ‘structurally white’. In the half century that followed 1761, a large number of people of colour changed their racial status to ‘white’, and in the process became a part of the ruling elite. These actions rendered a body of discriminatory colonial legislation that included the 1761 Act largely redundant and unsuccessful. When this and similar laws were repealed through Acts of the Assembly in the early 1800s, people of colour no longer needed to seek a change in racial status in order to inherit property. Thus the 1761 Act had failed in its attempts to stop planters from passing on their property to their mixed-race children.

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# TIKTOK AS A LIMINAL SPACE FOR REFLEXIVITY AND COUNTERHEGEMONIC RACIAL DISCOURSE

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## Abstract

Alim et al. (2020) argue:

for the importance of a reflexive approach that entails looking at racialized language as an ideological construct and situating processes of racialization across multiple scales of space and time and within structures of power. [These] processes of racialization ... take place in both scholarly and everyday contexts ... . (p. 25)

This process of reflexivity in reference to how language users ‘race language’ or ‘language race’ may also be analyzed in the virtual world. In today’s social media craze, one of the most popular apps is TikTok. Through this app’s For You Page, aka FYP—a curated feed of videos adapted to each user based on an undisclosed algorithm—TikTok displays to its users content created by other users of the same app. This includes diverse content in the form of entertainment, critique, and even short educational videos. Content such as this makes this app a liminal or queer space, where contestatory counter-racializing subtexts can take on an additional layered function as counterhegemonic discourse. In sum, this platform can be analyzed within the context of processes and performances which subvert dominant discourses on race, which have given rise to a digital microcosm of resistance to the ‘hyper-racial’ society that we inhabit.

**Key terms:** TikTok, reflexivity, language, race, counterhegemonic discourse

## Introduction

In *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Race*, Alim et al. (2020) argue:

for the importance of a reflexive approach that entails looking at racialized language as an ideological construct and situating processes of racialization across



multiple scales of space and time and within structures of power. [These] processes of racialization ... take place in both scholarly and everyday contexts .... (p. 25)

This process of reflexivity in reference to how language users 'race language' or 'language race' may also be analyzed in the virtual world, including social media platforms. Therefore, an app like TikTok can be seen as a liminal space for this reflexive and contestatory process to emerge in relation to language and the construction, performance, and deconstruction of 'race' as a hegemonic concept.

TikTok is an app and social networking service where people can share short video-content that they have created. The types of videos vary; some creators upload recordings of dances, commentary or point-of-view recordings, or skits, which may be of a political, educational, or other nature. As with other social media apps, TikTok has its own set of community guidelines. These have been criticized as some of these established rules are open to interpretation or are often used arbitrarily. A video may be 'taken down' with the justification that it allegedly contained nudity, for example, when in fact the video in question does not include any nude bodies or anything which could be interpreted as nudity. In addition, when these instances of content suppression occur, users can appeal to get their videos visible again, but these appeals often are rejected without explanation. Therefore, although TikTok does not overtly discriminate against specific communities, the implementation of these guidelines often give rise to accusations of covert discrimination, given how they are apparently enforced more strictly on certain communities than on others.

For someone to be an avid TikTok user, it is not necessary for them to create videos. Instead, they can opt to view and interact with them by liking, commenting, saving, or sharing. This can be done from the For You Page (FYP), which is a curated feed of videos presented to each user based on an undisclosed algorithm. This means that each user may have an entirely different content feed depending in some way on how, when, and for how long they engage with certain content. The more a user interacts with the app, the more it 'learns' and adapts its content to the topics it 'thinks' the user will prefer. This will also affect the so-called communities a user will 'land' on, such as Gay TikTok, ArtTok, or BookTok. Herein lies an additional concern of certain creators when it comes to content suppression, namely that of being shadow banned. In this case, the user does not explicitly know their content is not being presented to users, but they can speculate that their videos are excluded from the FYP of most of the platform's users based on diminishing or nonexistent views and/or likes. This could also discourage users looking to monetize their content.

The lack of visibility of people racialized as non-white or [-white] on FYPs can be seen as yet another way to silence communities from free expression, even if they follow all the explicit rules. Despite these additional barriers, some users have been able to use the platform to perform or speak critically on issues of race, as well as by users who are

racialized as Black, Native American, and other racially othered populations. As in the examples presented on the next pages, in this form of praxis, these creators have been, and so far have continued to be able to educate their viewers regarding issues of language and the construction of race through entertaining videos. In many cases, humor has been used to challenge dominant discourses of race, with the intent to educate, entertain, and create community.

## Findings

The following are transcriptions of a short, curated feed of videos (a sample of an FYP) in which users ‘race language’ and ‘language race:’

### 1. Day in the Life of a PWC (Person Without Color) Part 2 🧴❤️❤️😊

By @peoplewithoutcolor (Madan & Sirosh, 2021)

**Speaker A:** So, this is part two of a day in the life of a person without color, which, you know we both are. So, for lunch we’ll usually have, like, a piece of dried chicken breast, like, usually wrapped in lettuce. We’ve noticed that our POC friends have, like, more, like, colorful foods or, like, have, like, good smells and things, but...

**Speaker B:** Yeah, there’s just a lot of colors and a lot of smells, and you know we love all cultures and everything, but... we just don’t know why they have to put it in your face like that?

**Speaker A:** Yeah. [...]

**Speaker B:** And on that same sort of subject, you know, in a lot of the Zoom calls that we’re in we always make sure to be really professional. Like, we’ll put on our blazers and straighten our hair... and, you know, just like adhere to these, like, standards. But the POC in the meetings they just come as they are and it’s, like, I know that these meetings are about systemic oppression against them, but why do they have to be so, like, aggressive about [it]?

**Speaker A:** Yeah, like, we’re all united, like, we should all be trying to, like, fit into the [standards of] professionalism.

Jahnvi Madan and Tara Sirosh use the acronym PWC and their username, People without color, to refer to people raced as [+white] in a manner typically reserved for people raced as [-white], i.e., minorities or people of color. In this video, they vent their frustrations about criticisms they often receive for simply existing as people of color in the U.S. They pretend to not be racialized themselves and make comments about food and standards of professionalism. For example, Madan mentions putting on a blazer and straightening their hair and, by doing so, adhering to [+white] standards of ‘professionalism.’ Madan also comments, “and you know, we love all cultures and everything, but we just don’t know why they have to put it in your face like that?” (Madan & Sirosh, 2021). All of this illustrates how “racialized populations bear an unequal burden in accommodating to a monolingual [and in this case also monocultural] order” (Flores &

Rosa 2015, Reynolds & Orellana 2009, Urciuoli 1996 as cited in Lo & Chun 2020, p. 35). This “People Without Color” moniker is a recurring joke. In other videos, Madan and Sirosh refer to their characters’ white features such as their corpse-like skin and strawberry blonde and ginger hair and extend the acronym to BRPWC (Brunettes/Blondes/Redheads People Without Color).

## **2. Reply to @khiemnms She should really be more grateful.**

By @clarabellecwb (Brown, 2021, Nov 30)

**Manager:** Margin! It's been so long since you've come scuttling into my office. That hair, goodness. It's just so distracting. Have you ever considered perming your hair? Yeah, just ... I wonder what it would look like ... you know? If it was different. So, what's the problem? We don't have any days off for Christmas? Does anyone in the office celebrate Christmas? Oh, you do. Adorable. Umm, we have half days for all of Hanukkah and then this year we were able to provide all of Kwanzaa off, so I would celebrate Christmas then. We can't accommodate any additional time off.

This video is by Clare Brown (@clarabellecwb). She creates skits that show (flipped) microaggressions against people racialized as white, who she refers to as “European Americans.” For example, she will show discomfort with the word “white”, mispronounce names commonly associated with white people, reference straight or “flat” hair as unprofessional, or describe stereotypical actions or foods associated with people racialized as white, as exotic.

In this video, as in many other of her diverse skits, @Clarabellecwb, whose perspective is that of a person racialized as Black, presents these (flipped) microaggressions where [-white] status becomes the norm and [+white] is now the ‘other.’ She therefore switches the power dynamic by establishing blackness as the neutral position within society, and in so doing, challenging and critiquing established racialized social norms. She begins the video portraying someone in a management role by calling out “Margin,” (whose name is probably Margaret) the imagined employee. This is a joke she often uses in her videos to reference how [+white] speakers will often mispronounce names they consider to be ‘exotic.’ She also feigns being surprised by Margin celebrating Christmas, using this as an example of how expectations, even of holidays, can be racialized. Something else that may be noticed is her reference to “Margin” as having “distracting hair” and asking, “Have you ever considered perming your hair?” This comment is also a flipped microaggression which relates to how Spears (2020, p. 52), indicates that “*race* refers to categories in a racial system, ... based ... on visible corporeal features, real or imagined. Highly salient features of race categories are skin-color, facial features, and hair texture.”

### **3. If white people were the cultural other in real estate sales / This neighborhood is ready to be gentrified.**

By @clarabellecwb (Brown, 2021, Jun 4)

**Real Estate Agent:** This is your house? Alright, yeah. This is fine. It's outside the city, but it's not the outer city. Let's go inside. Is this your family? Cute. Listen, if you want to sell this house, you need to remove all these photos and replace them with an All-American family. OK? This will need to come down. [points to a Live Laugh Love sign]. Everything gang related needs to come down.

In this video, Clare Brown plays the character of a real estate agent who tells the family she is working with to sell the house to “[r]emove all of these photos and replace them with an ‘All-American family’.” Here she uses the ‘All-American’ description from a flipped perspective, referencing a Black family as the All-American or real American family, rather than the usually assumed [+white] family. This is a flipped example of the metonymy illustrated by Lieberman (1985), as cited in Morgan (2020, p. 264) that explains how America serves as a metonym for white Americans, but not so for Black Americans. Brown also says, pointing to the “Live, Laugh, Love” sign, that “anything gang related needs to come down,” (2021, Jun 4) referring to this as a marked symbol of race and culture. Many of the videos by @clarabellecwb illustrate the point made by Morgan (2020) that “we must recognize that there may be embedded harmful meanings regarding race, gender, sexuality, during what is thought to be general American communication.” (p. 264) So, while a speaker may not appear to be saying anything insulting in isolation, in context their words may be charged with racializing and demeaning implications.

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### **4. This actually happened to me except she just called me her own nickname anyway.**

By @jazmynjw (Jazmyn, 2020, Jul 7)

**Speaker A:** Hey, there! Jaz, Jazmyn?

**Speaker B:** Yes, come in!

**Speaker A:** OK, awesome. Your last name, I'm sorry, I couldn't pronounce it. Where is it from?

**Speaker B:** Oh, yeah, it's Nigerian, yeah.

**Speaker A:** So beautiful, Oh my God. Maybe I'll just call you by a shorter name.

**Speaker B:** Huh?

**Speaker A:** Do you have a nickname maybe I can call you?

**Speaker B:** No. People usually just pronounce it! Haha.

**Speaker A:** Are you kidding? I could never pronounce it, ever! I could never.

**Speaker B:** Right. Let me finish this email. You sit down. Keep practicing.

**Speaker A:** I – da... I – da – gue... what?

**Speaker B:** Spell it out.

**Speaker A:** I tried!... I promise.

**Speaker B:** I have faith in you. I think you can do it. You can do it, yeah, If you can pronounce all those beers, you can pronounce that. Haha. OK?

**Speaker A:** Well, that's not really the same, haha. I – da... just let me call you J.I.! Mrs J.I.

**Speaker B:** No, keep going though, keep trying; I have faith.

**Speaker A:** Are you seriously gonna make this a big deal? Like, I can't just call you J.?

**Speaker B:** No. [smiles to viewer]

**Speaker A:** Are you kidding me?

This video by @jazmynjw illustrates how Speaker A's failure to seriously attempt to pronounce Speaker B's name is not merely an everyday occurrence, but is also a racially charged microaggression which forces Speaker B into navigating a social situation in which she finds herself obliged to establish a boundary while still projecting calmness and avoiding the 'angry Black woman' trope. This is what Morgan refers to as *coolness*, a counterlanguage signifier which along with:

a positive social face, is valued because it makes the person appear inscrutable and in complete control of her emotions and body. Because [her] stance and social face are unreadable, [she] appear[s] immune to racist [and sexist] taunts and threats and verbal insults. (2000, p. 274).

## 5 This has happened to my husband at least 8 times. (He flies first everywhere) 😭

By @jazmynjw (Jazmyn, 2020, Nov 28)

[+white] **Passenger:** Hi!

[-white] **Passenger:** Hey.

[+white] **Passenger:** Sorry, I don't know if you really heard but this is, like, the line for first class right now. That's who's boarding right now, so...

[-white] **Passenger:** [Looks towards the viewer and rolls eyes] I'm in first class. Thank you.

[+white] **Passenger:** Oh, OK! Do you mind if I see your ticket really quick? I just wanna take a quick look at your ticket.

[-white] **Passenger:** [rolls eyes] No.

[+white] **Passenger:** Well, I'm sorry. I just don't know if I believe...

[-white] **Passenger:** You're gonna believe these hands!

[+white] **Passenger:** Excuse me?

[-white] **Passenger:** You're gonna believe these hands though when they come at you. You're gonna believe them then.

[+white] **Passenger:** What do you mean? I don't know what you mean by that.

**[-white] Passenger:** Will you believe these hands?

**[+white] Passenger:** Your hands? Are you threatening me?

**[-white] Passenger:** You don't wanna know what I mean either. Turn around!

**[+white] Passenger:** Are you threatening me? Excuse me. [cries in White Woman tears] This is not even that serious!

**Announcer:** Boarding first class.

In a second video by @jazmynjw we see an example of the:

African American women's 'I don't play' counterlanguage ideology, philosophy and critique of racism and sexism [that] directly expose[s] and disrupt[s] society's dependence on the marginalization of African Americans in general and Black women in particular in the construction of white privilege. (Morgan, 2020, p. 263)

The passenger who is raced as Black ([-white]), is claiming her place and space by preventing the passenger who is raced as White ([+white]), from deploying a poorly disguised verbal attack designed to deter her from getting on the plane unharrassed as a first-class passenger without the humiliation of being forced to show her ticket. With this same act, she is challenging the:

unwritten—but enforced—policy meant that in order to participate in the average Black/white interaction, a Black person minimally had to abide by language and communicative rules which function ... to mark a presumed belief in the superiority of a white audience/hearer. (Morgan, 2020, p. 272)

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## Conclusion

Content such as that presented above converts the TikTok app's For You Page (FYP) into a liminal or queer space, where contestatory counter-racializing subtexts can take on an additional layered function as counterhegemonic discourse. This includes progressive performances that confront established power structures and systems of discursive domination. As such, this platform can be analyzed within the context of processes and performances which subvert dominant discourses on race, which have given rise to a digital microcosm of resistance to the 'hyper-racial' society that we inhabit. FYPs can be spaces of questioning, upending and contesting artificial reified binaries such as 'black vs white' through subversive acts of trans-performance. The trans-performances presented in this article illustrate Wirtz' (2020) definition of performance as "highly reflexive, recognizable, and repeatable 'chunks' of social action, [that] can produce complex configurations of participation and time-space indexicality" (p. 207).

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# THE MIGRATION OF NATIVE AMERICANS FROM THE SOUTHEASTERN UNITED STATES INTO THE NORTHERN CARIBBEAN

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## Abstract

The post-Invasion upheavals and ultimate migrations of Native Americans occurred in many areas of North America due to war and eventual economic subservience to dominant colonial society, whose policies and attitudes excluded indigenous peoples from the privileges and opportunities enjoyed by the colonists. This paper will focus on the migration of Native Americans from the Southeastern United States into the Northern Caribbean that resulted from these processes and exclusions. Questions that will be explored include: Why was it necessary for these tribes to leave their traditional lands? What prompted their departures? With whom did they depart? Where did they resettle? Are there still remnants of these peoples today?

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**Key terms:** La Florida; Guanabacoa; Black Seminoles; Calusa; Andros Island

## Introduction

Amerindian migration has a long history. In addition to traditional migratory patterns, various indigenous groups and individuals migrated due to contact with European invaders and colonists. Post-contact colonial governments in the Southeast created treaty lands to which many indigenous peoples were ‘encouraged’ to relocate. Other migrations, especially as contact increased, resulted from Native Americans being attracted, for various reasons, to colonial settlements. Military and trading posts offered opportunities to sample new goods and seek safety; missions had similar attractions and, usually, more drastic results. Though their importance in the European development of the Southeast is frequently overlooked, Native American knowledge and labor were vital to the incoming settlers. Native Americans were often recruited and forced into labor



by missionaries, soldiers, or colonists. Withdrawal from European contact was possible only for those living in areas where settlers either had little need for their labor and/or desire for their land.

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The official invasion/‘discovery’ and naming of La Florida signaled the onset of almost three hundred years of Spanish exploration and colonization in the Southeastern United States, which formally ended with the handing over of Florida to the United States in 1821. The first documented Spanish expedition to reach Florida was that of Juan Ponce de Leon in 1513. Based on the appearance of at least one Spanish-speaking indigenous person during De Leon's first trip, his expedition was preceded by the arrival in South Florida of at least some indigenous fugitives from Cuba, many of whom ultimately settled in a single town within the Calusa territory. Descendants of this initial indigenous Cuban migration to Florida were reported to still live within the territory as late as the 1560s (Worth, 2004, p. 1). Ironically, while Florida initially served as a haven for indigenous Cuban refugees from the Spanish conquest of that island in 1511, in a curious reversal of fortune, it would ultimately be Cuba that served as the last haven for indigenous Floridan refugees two centuries later.

Worth notes the following, taken from the Cédula to the Jeronimites regarding the lawsuit by Juan Ponce de León against Diego Velázquez, July 22, 1517:

Though Ponce de Leon did not return to Florida until 1521, there is clear evidence of early Spanish slaving there long before that date. Cuban vessels dispatched by Governor Diego Velazquez were later accused of bringing back some 300 indigenous Floridians as enslaved people before 1517, confirming that Southeastern Native Americans began to be transported to Cuba within four years of ‘first contact’ (Worth, 2004, p. 2).

Cuban vessels also maintained trade with indigenous Floridians between the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, involving immigrant Seminoles after the 1760s.

Like other Native American peoples, the pre-Hispanic tribes of Florida endured dramatic and apocalyptic circumstances throughout the colonial era. However, according to John E. Worth, an anthropologist specializing in the era of European colonial domination in the Southeastern United States, historical evidence suggests that the genetic traces of Southeastern tribes can still be identified in Cuba, about 90 miles to the south

of Florida. From 1704 to 1760, several hundred refugees from slave-raiding across South Florida fled on Cuban vessels and settled near Havana, followed in 1763 by 89 surviving mission Indians from St. Augustine (Worth, 2004). The terminus for the last group of people who identified as being descended exclusively from pre-Invasion Calusa was Guanabacoa, a village near Havana, where they were taken by Spaniards along with survivors of other original Floridian tribes such as the Tequesta, and Timucua when England took control of Florida in 1763. Because these immigrants faced overcrowding in Guanabacoa, some were subsequently transferred to other parts of the island, including Cienfuegos.

As early as 1688, La Florida attracted numerous African descended people who had escaped British enslavement in the Carolinas and Georgia. From 1623, official Spanish policy was that all enslaved people who reached Spanish soil and asked for refuge could become free Spanish citizens. These refugees would normally be assisted in establishing their own workshops if they were skilled in a trade or given land if they were farmers. In exchange, they would be required to convert to Catholicism, swear allegiance to the Spanish monarchy and serve for some years in the Spanish militia. These formerly enslaved people were settled at Gracia Real de Santa Teresa de Mose, better known as Fort Mose in St. Augustine, Florida, the first settlement of free African descended people in North America.

Formerly enslaved people of both African and Indigenous descent also found refuge among the Lower Creek and Seminole tribes, who settled in Florida at the invitation of the Spanish government. After the American Revolution, enslaved African descended people from the Carolinas, Georgia, and the Low Country escaped to northern Florida and were received by the Seminoles. The Seminoles were made up of members from many different tribes, known collectively as the Lower Creek. Black Seminoles had their roots in a diverse number of African regions and cultures, including a small offshoot of the Gullah Geechee who had escaped from the rice, cotton, and indigo plantations.

The relations between Black Seminole and Native American Seminole groups were multi-faceted, shaped by economics, procreation, desire and combat. Some Black Seminoles were fully brought into the tribe by marriage or adoption. Seminole marriage rules dictated that a child's ethnicity was based on the mother's: if the mother was Seminole, her children were Seminole. Other groups of Black Seminoles formed independent communities and became allies who contributed to the community in return for freedom and protection from re-enslavement. Like other southeastern tribes, the Seminole sometimes subjugated the Black Seminole. Some reports that I have read over the years suggest that for the ex-enslaved, bondage to the Seminole was far less harsh than that experienced under the Europeans.

All Black Seminole villages had to provide a contribution, be it crops or cattle, in return for their freedom and protection from re-enslavement. The Black Seminoles usually

lived amongst themselves in detached towns or villages rather than in the main Seminole communities. Many of the Black Seminole were successful farmers and cattle herders. Others served as interpreters and military leaders during the Seminole wars and rose to prominence in Seminole society. No group would resist annexation to the United States more than the Black Seminoles. To lose a battle would mean they would simultaneously lose their independence, homes and freedom. Over seven years, the U.S. army sent 40,000 troops to fight about 2,000 Seminoles, approximately 500 of them Black Seminoles. After three Seminole wars and a truce, no peace treaty was ever signed between the Seminoles and the US government.

For this reason, the Seminoles are considered 'Unconquered People.' In 1857, many Seminoles were forcibly resettled to Oklahoma via The Trail of Tears. The Seminoles who remained fled into the Everglades and now make up the 3,000-plus Seminole Nation of Florida. For the Black Seminole, it all began in Florida, but their saga eventually took them to Oklahoma, Texas, Mexico, and the Bahamas. Between 1821 and 1837, a faction of the Black Seminoles left Florida and built a community at Red Bays, located on the north end of Andros Island in the Bahamas, where they remained essentially isolated for nearly 150 years.

Black Seminole scholar Rosalyn Howard feels that the migrants perceived the Bahamas as a natural refuge because of alliances forged with the British in Florida and the long-standing trade relations established with them and in the Bahamas (Howard, 2006). In 2013, the community greatly anticipated a visit to the Bahamas by James Billie, the former chairman of the Seminole Tribe of Florida, in hopes of receiving official recognition from the Nation. Unfortunately, Billie's visit resulted in an article in the Seminole Tribune that noted, "Generations of intermarriage have thinned the Andros Island Seminoles' 'bloodline' below that necessary for membership in the Seminole Tribe of Florida" thus ending their hopes for recognition (Gallagher, 2013).

Out of colonial chaos and forced migration arose a new reality. The Black Seminoles, who had played a significant role in American history, but never properly received their deserved recognition, fled Florida and resettled in isolated areas of the United States and the Bahamas. As for the original Floridian tribes who were resettled and began new lives in the Northern Caribbean, they have become part of the mestizo quilt that makes up Cuban society.

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# HUELLAS DEL TAÍNO CLÁSICO EN EL ESPAÑOL PUERTORRIQUEÑO CONTEMPORÁNEO

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## Resumen

En este artículo: 1) se investiga la influencia del taíno clásico en el español puertorriqueño contemporáneo; 2) se realiza una revisión de literatura sobre la influencia del taíno en el léxico, la fonología, la semántica, la morfología y la sintaxis del español puertorriqueño; 3) se plantea que las investigaciones previas sobre los indigenismos subestimaron la presencia de los tainismos en el léxico del español puertorriqueño; y 4) se hipotetiza que la fonología del taíno clásico contribuyó al debilitamiento de la /d/ intervocálica y la nasalidad, mientras que hay muy poca o ninguna influencia taína en la semántica, morfología y sintaxis de esta variedad.

**Términos clave:** Lengua taína, español, Puerto Rico, contacto lingüístico, lingüística hispánica

## Introducción

Surgen muchos mitos al hablar del pasado. Dos que deseo desmentir son relacionados con los habitantes nativos de Borikén, isla que hoy llamamos Puerto Rico. El primer mito es que la raza taína se extinguió o que, en el mejor de los casos, hay muy pocas personas que pueden reclamar alguna herencia nativa de Puerto Rico. Según un estudio del Dr. Juan Martínez Cruzado (2002), el ADN de 61% de los puertorriqueños contiene un gene que se remonta a una antepasada indígena por su matrilineaje. Del otro 39%, es muy probable que una porción significativa tenga algún antepasado indígena varón. Si bien ya no existe ninguna comunidad indígena en Puerto Rico, la raza taína tiene una presencia genética notable en la gente de Puerto Rico de hoy.

El segundo mito es que no se sabe nada o casi nada sobre la lengua taína—solo perduran unos remanentes léxicos legados a la lengua española. Es verdad que no había un sistema de escritura taíno y que para finales del siglo XVI, los cronistas en Puerto Rico reportaron

que la lengua de los taínos ya no se hablaba (Álvarez Nazario, 1977). No obstante, la lengua taína ha sido documentada desde el primer contacto entre los taínos y los españoles (Grandberry & Vescelius, 2004). No hay bastante información para reconstruir esta lengua completamente, pero sí se conocen a nivel básico sus propiedades fonológicas, morfosintácticas, semánticas y léxicas.

Desmentir el primer mito nos rinde una hipótesis y desmentir el segundo provee el medio de evaluarla, al menos hasta cierto grado. La hipótesis es que la lengua taína ha dejado una huella en el español puertorriqueño que sigue más de un medio milenio después del primer contacto entre nuestros antepasados taínos y españoles. El medio es comparar los rasgos del taíno clásico con los del español puertorriqueño frente a las fuentes a las que tradicionalmente se les han atribuido estas características, notablemente el español de Andalucía (Vaquero de Ramírez, 1992) y el de Canarias (Álvarez Nazario, 1972).

A pesar de la declaración de Eugenio Coşeriu (1990) que “[e]l influjo indígena y el de otras lenguas conciernen casi solo a aspectos superficiales del [español de América],” (p. 62) no está de más escudriñar el sustrato indígena para hallar posibles influencias en el español de Puerto Rico. Si un fragmento de los taínos sobrevivió en nuestros genes, nuestra gastronomía, nuestra música y nuestra cultura, es razonable imaginar que sobrevivió también en nuestra lengua.

## Metodología

El enfoque de este ensayo no es la lengua taína misma, sino su influencia en el español puertorriqueño contemporáneo. Por lo tanto, solo se mencionarán los rasgos del taíno que coinciden con los del español de Puerto Rico. Tampoco se evaluarán las influencias históricas que el taíno clásico ha tenido en el español puertorriqueño a no ser que sean relevantes para el español hablado hoy en la isla. Las fuentes principales para las referencias al idioma taíno son *Languages of the Pre-Columbian Antilles* (Grandberry & Vescelius, 2004) y *Diccionario taíno ilustrado* (Miner Solá, 2002).

El análisis de la influencia taína en el español puertorriqueño se dividirá en cuatro áreas lingüísticas: 1) el léxico; 2) la fonética/fonología; y 3) la semántica, la morfología y la sintaxis. Los estudiosos reconocidos solo han considerado que la primera ha influido en el español puertorriqueño, así que para el análisis del léxico, primero se resumirán los hallazgos de unas notables investigaciones pertenecientes a esta área. Para las demás, se examinarán unas hipótesis de interés sobre las posibles influencias de la lengua taína.

## Análisis léxico

El estudio de la influencia léxica del taíno en el español comenzó con los primeros colonizadores y cronistas mismos. Entre ellos, destaco a Cristóbal Colón, Bartolomé de las Casas, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Ramón Pané (Grandberry & Vescelius, 2004). A partir de ahí, los tainismos iban incorporándose en el habla y, notablemente, la literatura de los puertorriqueños (Vaquero de Ramírez, 1983). Sin embargo, no había interés

académico sobre la lengua taína misma ni en las sociedades precolombinas de las Antillas hasta finales del siglo XIX (Grandberry & Vescelius, 2004). La obra mejor conocida de esta época que se trataba del taíno era “Lenguaje de los indios borinqueños” del Dr. Agustín Stahl (Fonfrías, 1969).

A mediados del siglo XX, se empiezan a analizar los tainismos en el español de Puerto Rico. En 1948, Tomás Navarro Tomás concluye que los indigenismos en el español puertorriqueño son escasos. Luego, en 1977, Manuel Álvarez Nazario afirma que hay una “mayor frecuencia y utilidad [de] los diversos vocabularios de tainismos.” (p. 11) No obstante, en su propio estudio de los indigenismos en el español de Puerto Rico, María Vaquero de Ramírez (1983, p. 623) critica a Álvarez Nazario por tener en cuenta “primordialmente fuentes escritas y lexicográficas”.

Este estudio de Vaquero de Ramírez (1983), llamado “El léxico indígena en el español hablado en Puerto Rico”, es valioso porque es el único estudio empírico de los indigenismos utilizados en el español puertorriqueño. Vaquero de Ramírez (1983) siguió los pasos de Juan Lope Blanch, Humberto López Morales y Orlando Alba, quienes analizaron los indigenismos en el español de México, Cuba y Santiago, República Dominicana, respectivamente. En el estudio de Vaquero de Ramírez (1983), 183 indigenismos fueron seleccionados y una encuesta fue enviada a 100 puertorriqueños en la isla. En la encuesta, para cada indigenismo, cada participante marcó si lo conocía o no, y luego si lo usaba o no (Vaquero de Ramírez, 1983). Los resultados arrojaron que solo 53.01% de estos indigenismos eran usados por la mayoría de los encuestados (Vaquero de Ramírez, 1983, p. 631), lo cual implica una presencia menor frente al resto del léxico del español puertorriqueño. Los cinco universos léxicos más sobresalientes en que Vaquero de Ramírez (1983, pp. 636-638 agrupó los indigenismos son<sup>1</sup> 1) “Árboles y frutas”: *guayaba, maíz, yautía, anón, achiote, ají, bejuco, cacao, caimito, caoba, capá, cohítre, guajana, mangle, papaya, quenepa y yagrumo*; 2) “Animales”: *carey, carrucho, guaraguao, güimo, higuana, juey y mime*; 3) “Objetos domésticos y de labranza”: *guayo, hamaca, batea, dita, jataca, petaca, petate y coa*; 4) “Comida y bebida”: *mabí, marrayo y hayaca*; y 5) “Religión y folklore”: *güiro, maraca, areito y cemí*.

Si bien este estudio tiene valor por dar una cuenta empírica del léxico indígena del español de Puerto Rico, hay múltiples facetas problemáticas de la metodología del estudio que ponen en duda la conclusión de Vaquero de Ramírez (1983, p. 633) que “el indigenismo...no [se encuentra] en la lengua viva de los hablantes.” La primera es que su selección de los 183 indigenismos no estaba motivada por criterios claros y objetivos. Esto implica que pudo haber omitido palabras que hubiesen sido calificadas como indigenismos utilizados actualmente en el español puertorriqueño. Unos de los tainismos que no incluyó Vaquero de Ramírez (1983) parecen ser bastante comunes, como *batata, caimán, ceiba, chin* (ej. “un chin de algo”), *guanábana, iguana, maní, recaó, tabaco, taíno*, y

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<sup>1</sup> En este estudio, Vaquero de Ramírez (1983) incluyó todos los indigenismos usados en Puerto Rico, no solamente los de origen taíno.



*tiburón*. Curiosamente, tres de los tainismos que faltaron en la investigación de Vaquero de Ramírez (1983) no solo son candidatos probables para incluir, sino que pueden considerarse emblemáticas de la puertorriqueñidad: *coquí*<sup>2</sup>, *jíbaro* y, quizá el indigenismo más importante para los puertorriqueños, *boricua*<sup>3</sup>.

Ese último punto sirve como transición a la segunda debilidad del estudio léxico de Vaquero de Ramírez (1983), porque solo incluir esos catorce tainismos no haría un impacto significativo en los resultados finales. Dos extremos de esta noción se insinúan en la publicación misma de Vaquero de Ramírez (1983). Por un lado, Vaquero de Ramírez (1983) observa que varios encuestados describieron una porción significativa de los indigenismos como “objetos antiguos ‘que se usaban’, o ‘que había en la época de los indios’” (p. 631). Por otro lado, en su crítica de Rubén del Rosario, expresa que cuando “se hacen observaciones generales basadas en la intuición y experiencia del estudioso...el número de indigenismos vuelve a elevarse considerablemente,” (Vaquero de Ramírez, 1983, p. 623). Sus puntos son válidos: unas de las palabras del estudio son “indigenismos arqueológicos” (Vaquero de Ramírez, 1983, p. 624), y en realidad, es probable que se enuncien infrecuentemente en el habla cotidiana; no obstante, unas personas poseen una intuición inquietante que escuchan una mayor presencia de indigenismos que hay según los resultados de este estudio. Esta noción que no se incorpora en la investigación es la *frecuencia de uso* de los indigenismos, fundamentalmente distinta a la frecuencia de los encuestados que indicaron que usaban un indigenismo en particular o no. Puede que unos de los tainismos, como *coquí*, *jíbaro* y *boricua*, se empleen con tanta frecuencia que aumentan la proporción de tainismos en el léxico disponible del español puertorriqueño. Hay otro factor para considerar al estudiar el léxico de una variedad lingüística. Primero, se debe recordar el propósito de estos estudios: sacar a la luz verdades sobre el lenguaje relativas a un cierto grupo de personas *de identidad común*. *Puertorriqueño* no es tanto una delimitación geográfica como es una identitaria. Es decir, se pretenden vincular peculiaridades de una cierta forma de hablar con la identidad social de sus hablantes. Una manera típica de indagarlo es por medir la frecuencia de ciertas palabras. Propongo otra medida, la cual sería medir la percepción social de las palabras más características del habla. Es posible que unas palabras, aunque no se utilicen con la frecuencia más alta, se consideren más caracterizadoras y representativas dentro de un cierto grupo identitario; sería una especie de estudio “metaléxico”. No es irrazonable imaginar que un puertorriqueño que lleva años fuera de la isla escucha indigenismos como *boricua*, *ceiba*, *coquí*, *guayaba*, *güiro* y *jíbaro* y provocan en él una añoranza por su tierra natal, más que palabras sobre el comercio o los vehículos que se resultan usar en Puerto Rico.

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<sup>2</sup> La palabra *coquí* generalmente se categoriza como onomatopeya y no como indigenismo. Sin embargo, los extranjerismos y las onomatopeyas no son mutuamente exclusivos. Otro ejemplo es *chat*, anglicismo onomatopéyico.

<sup>3</sup> La omisión de los gentilicios era intencional por parte de Vaquero de Ramírez (1983). Se discute más adelante.

Finalmente, hay que incluir los nombres propios de origen taíno en los estudios léxicos sobre la influencia taína en el español de Puerto Rico. Vaquero de Ramírez (1991, p. 25) explica por qué los omite: “Deslind[é] y elimin[é] cuidadosamente antropónimos, topónimos y gentilicios, unidades que, como es bien sabido, no forman parte del léxico que podemos llamar funcional y común.” Parece que Vaquero de Ramírez (1991) no se refiere a las categorías funcionales (que se contrastan con las léxicas), pues Chomsky (1995) las define como palabras que solo tienen función gramatical y carecen de sentido, como preposiciones y determinantes. Creo, más bien, que Vaquero de Ramírez (1991) se fija en el hecho de que generalmente, no se definen los nombres propios en los diccionarios—de hecho, esta es una excelente demostración de la diferencia entre el *lexicón* y los diccionarios: el primero incluye todas las palabras con valor léxico, incluyendo nombres propios y excluyendo palabras de categorías funcionales como preposiciones y determinantes, mientras que a los diccionarios solo les suelen concernir las palabras con sentido definible. Los lexicógrafos contemporáneos defienden la inclusión de los nombres propios en los estudios léxicos, sobre todo los topónimos, tras descubrir que pueden alcanzar el 15% del contenido léxico del discurso (Löfström, 2011).

Vaquero de Ramírez (1983) aportó una mejor estimación sobre la influencia léxica de los indigenismos en el español de Puerto Rico que cualquier otro investigador de la época. Sin embargo, en cuarenta años, el campo de la lexicología y sus metodologías se han modernizado. Parece dudoso que haya alguna manera de diseñar un estudio léxico cuyos resultados sugieran que hay una tremenda o hasta moderada presencia de influjo taíno en el léxico del español puertorriqueño; Vaquero de Ramírez (1983) desmintió esa hipótesis. No obstante, creo que es posible probar que los indigenismos sí ocupan un rol en la lengua viva de los boricuas.

### **Análisis fonológico**

Si hay alguna influencia fonética o fonológica de la lengua taína en el español puertorriqueño, es poca. La mejor evidencia que sugiere que el sistema fonológico del taíno no influyó en el español puertorriqueño es que se observa la misma evolución de varios fonemas hispánicos que sucedió uniformemente en toda América Latina, aún en la pronunciación de palabras de origen taíno: eso es, la /ts/, escrita con <c> antes de <e, i> y <ç> antes de <a, o, u>, se fricativizó (“cemí”: /tse.ˈmí/ → /se.ˈmí/); la /h/, escrita con <h>, se elidió (“bohío”: /bo.ˈhi.o/ → /bo.ˈi.o/); y la /ʃ/, escrita con <x>, se aspiró (“ájí” [anteriormente “axí”]: /a.ˈʃi/ → /a.ˈhi/) (Álvarez Nazario, 1977, pp. 87-89). Es decir, ni los tainismos pudieron conservar su pronunciación original; se hispanizó. Sin embargo, hay dos coincidencias entre la fonética y fonología del taíno clásico y del español puertorriqueño que han de examinarse.

Uno de los fenómenos más caracterizadores del habla puertorriqueña es la elisión de la /d/ intervocálica, sobre todo en el morfema /-VdV/, el sufijo de participio pasado (Álva-

rez Nazario, 1972). Es bien sabido que los puertorriqueños heredaron muchas de sus características tanto de Canarias (Álvarez Nazario, 1972) como de Andalucía (Vaquero de Ramírez, 1992), y dicha elisión parece estar presente en ambas regiones de España (Molina, 2001). Con respecto a este fenómeno, un dato curioso es que los andaluces dominaban no solo en la emigración a Puerto Rico ni al Caribe, sino a toda América Latina (Boyd-Bowman, 1976). Sin embargo, esta peculiaridad parece estar limitada a solo unas regiones de Hispanoamérica (Moreno Fernández, 2004). Lógicamente, debe de haber algún factor determinante (o varios) que permitió que la elisión de la /d/ intervocálica permaneciera en unas regiones de Hispanoamérica y no en otras.

Planteo que la coincidencia de la terminación [-ao] del superestrato, resultado de la elisión de la /d/ intervocálica de los canarios y andaluces, y la misma terminación abundantemente encontrada en el léxico del sustrato taíno (ej. *guaragua*, *guaitiao*, *recao*, *Humacao*, etc.) garantizó que este fenómeno no se perdiera en el desarrollo del habla puertorriqueña. Primero, hay que notar que, a diferencia de las otras terminaciones resultantes de la elisión de la /d/ intervocálica de los participios, las cuales son [-ío], [-ía] y [-á], la [-ao] ocurre muy infrecuentemente en el español; en realidad, solo existe como alosufijo de /-ado/. Así que la introducción de numerosos tainismos que terminaban en /-ao/ en el español puertorriqueño pudo haber fortalecido el alosufijo [-ao], el cual, a su vez, promovió la elisión de la /d/ intervocálica en general.

Ahora bien, si es verdad que el sustrato indígena de Puerto Rico aseguró el mantenimiento de la elisión de la /d/ intervocálica como rasgo del español canario-andaluz, se debe poder observar una correlación entre las demás regiones con el mismo sustrato y la elisión de la /d/ intervocálica. En estas regiones, mayor parte de República Dominicana y el este de Cuba (Grandberry & Vescelius, 2004), se observa el fenómeno igual que en Puerto Rico (Alba, 1999; López Morales, 1971). Además, lo inverso debe resultar cierto: que en las otras regiones donde se observa, debe haber un sustrato indígena con una presencia marcada de la terminación /-ao/. En la mayoría del resto del Caribe Hispano, eso es, las Antillas Mayores y la costa norteña de Sudamérica, regiones donde ocurre la elisión de la /d/ intervocálica (Rivera Castillo, 2015), predominan lenguas de la familia arahuaca, familia lingüística a que pertenece el taíno clásico (Aikhenvald, 1999). Interesantemente, esta correlación parece mantenerse consistente fuera del Caribe Hispano: hay un cúmulo significativo de lenguas arahuacas en Bolivia y la mitad sur de Perú (Aikhenvald, 1999), y en estas regiones también está presente el proceso fonológico en cuestión (Lipski, 1996).

En resumen, la correlación entre las regiones donde hay sustrato arahuaco y elisión de la /d/ intervocálica es sorprendentemente estrecha. Las únicas excepciones son que este fenómeno ocurre frecuentemente en las hablas tanto de Chile (Rabanales, 2000) como de Panamá (Lipski, 1996). Sin embargo, parece que la hipótesis que el sustrato indígena tuvo un papel en la permanencia de este rasgo canario-andaluz es viable. Se requieren

estudios que examinen las lenguas indígenas originarias de las regiones de Hispanoamérica donde se elide con frecuencia la /d/ intervocálica.

Hay dos piezas de evidencia que indican firmemente que la lengua taína se hablaba con un alto grado de nasalidad. La primera es la existencia de vocales nasales en esta lengua, deducidas del patronamiento fonológico interno (Grandberry & Vescelius, 2004). Es decir, en la transliteración del taíno de los cronistas, si el grafema <n> está en posición de coda de la sílaba, no denota una /n/, sino una nasalización de la vocal precedente (Grandberry & Vescelius, 2004). Por ejemplo, *burén* no era pronunciado como /bu.ʹren/ sino como /bu.ʹrẽ/.

La otra evidencia que el taíno clásico era una lengua bastante nasal es una aparente discrepancia entre unos grafemas en las transliteraciones de los cronistas. En varias instancias, se confundían ciertos fonemas [-nasales] por [+nasales]. Por ejemplo, el barrio Bucarabones de Maricao era escrito a veces como *Mucarabones* (bilabial oclusiva vs. bilabial nasal) (Álvarez Nazario, 1977, p. 17), la palabra *caníbal* se deriva del lexema *canib-*, paralelo a *carib-* “caribeño” (alveolar vibrante simple vs. alveolar nasal) (Miner Solá, 2002, p. 17) y *eyerí*, gentilicio de una de las etnias de las Antillas Menores, llegó a ser reemplazado por *ignerí*, pronunciado como “iñerí” (palatal fricativa vs. palatal nasal) (Miner Solá, 2002, p. 25). Según los fonemas reconstruidos de Grandberry y Vescelius (2004), no podía ser que fuesen alófonos en variación libre. Entonces, parece que la única explicación lógica es que las discrepancias de las transliteraciones sucedieron erróneamente por parte de los cronistas debido al alto nivel de nasalidad del taíno clásico.

La nasalidad es rasgo fonético del español de Puerto Rico. Álvarez Nazario (1961) se lo atribuye a la influencia africana y sus argumentos son contundentes. Cabe mencionar que no sería una contradicción que ambas raíces del pueblo puertorriqueño aportaran al mismo rasgo del español de Puerto Rico; a menudo, observamos una peculiaridad de una lengua y presumimos que forzosamente debe de tener una sola fuente de origen. Creo que el lenguaje es un asunto complicado, y aun más cuando se desarrolla desde la intersección de lenguas y culturas de tres continentes distintos—todas en la misma isla, al mismo tiempo. Al contrario, sería mucho más peculiar si el español puertorriqueño no resultara nasalizado a pesar de este rasgo común a la mayoría de las lenguas habladas en la isla.

### **Análisis de la semántica, morfología y sintaxis**

Evidentemente, el taíno no tuvo mucha influencia en la semántica, morfología ni sintaxis del español de Puerto Rico. Parece que el orden descendiente de las áreas lingüísticas más afectadas por la lengua taína es igual al de la influencia árabe (Quilis Morales, 2003): mayormente influencia léxica, luego poca influencia fonológica y casi nada en las demás áreas (con unas notas dignas de mencionar).

Hay un solo caso para considerar. Según el *Diccionario de americanismos*, en Puerto Rico, la palabra *alacrán* puede referirse no solo a los escorpiones sino también a los

ciempiés en algunas partes de la isla (Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, 2010). Se puede especular que esta ampliación semántica pudo haber sido debido a la influencia taína. Entre las categorías de las arañas, los escorpiones y los ciempiés, solo dos palabras del taíno sobrevivieron: *guabá* y *cacata* (García Bidó, 2010). Parece que *cacata* se refería a una especie específica de arañas y que *guabá* tenía una extensión semántica más amplia, usada para todo tipo de alacrán (García Bidó, 2010). Hay que notar que falta una palabra taína para *ciempiés*. Dado esto, lo más lógico es que *guabá* se usaba para referirse no solo a los escorpiones sino a los ciempiés también (y posiblemente a las arañas en general). Hallo dudoso el pensamiento que los taínos tenían un nombre distinto para los ciempiés que nunca fue grabado; de seguro los españoles arribados a Borikén hubiesen preguntado sobre esta criatura extrañísima. Tampoco considero sólida la idea de que los llegados de España simplemente decidieron usar la palabra *alacrán* para referirse a los ciempiés; en todo el mundo hispanohablante, esta admisión solo se observa en Puerto Rico.

Es una posibilidad que fuese que los españoles dividieron la traducción de la palabra taína *wabá*, palabra general que se refería a las arañas, los escorpiones y los ciempiés, en tres palabras: *araña* para las arañas, *guabá* para la criatura que hoy se llama así y *alacrán* para todo lo demás, es decir, los escorpiones y los ciempiés.

Así como la fonología de los tainismos, se observa una hispanización masiva de su morfología, al contrario de la noción que la morfología del taíno clásico influyera en el español de Puerto Rico. Los sustantivos taínos que se admitieron al español de Puerto Rico se clasificaron en género masculino y femenino según su terminación con pocas excepciones (Álvarez Nazario, 1977); el plural de estas palabras se forma por añadirle -s, morfema de pluralidad hispánico (*guaraguaos*, *batatas*, etc.) (Álvarez Nazario, 1977); unas palabras como *guayo* se verbalizaron según la morfología hispánica (*guayar*) (Álvarez Nazario, 1977); en caso de la flora, los árboles adoptaron la forma masculina y el fruto en femenino (*guayaba* y *guayabo*, *guanábana* y *guanábano*, etc.) (Álvarez Nazario, 1977); y hay una plétora de otros ejemplos como *guayabal*, *mayagüecillo*, *tabacón*, *manicero*, *caciquismo*, *jibaridad*, *coameño* y *huracanado* (Álvarez Nazario, 1977).

En torno a la sintaxis, lamentablemente, solo sobrevivieron seis oraciones completas del taíno clásico (Grandberry & Vescelius, 2004). Por lo tanto, nuestro conocimiento de la sintaxis taína es sumamente escasa; sin embargo, de las peculiaridades que se pueden observar, ninguna coincide con las del español puertorriqueño.

## Discusión

Este ensayo comenzó con una hipótesis y finaliza con varias. Por lo discutido arriba, creo que la hipótesis que la lengua taína dejó una huella en el español hablado en Puerto Rico hoy, en términos generales, es cierta. Interesantemente, los estudiosos en años relativamente recientes han reabierto el debate del andalucismo, sobre todo en Puerto Rico, y

planteado que hubo más procesos de criollización en la formación del español puertorriqueño que se pensaba (Ortiz López, 1999). En cuanto a la influencia taína, solo es una cuestión de indagar la exactitud de qué áreas afectó y cómo y cuánto. Para realizarlo, se requieren estudios que aborden lo siguiente:

1. Los tainismos en el léxico disponible del discurso puertorriqueño
2. Los tainismos en el “metaléxico” de los puertorriqueños
3. El sustrato indígena de la familia lingüística arahuaca y la distribución geográfica de la elisión de la /d/ intervocálica
4. La nasalidad en los dialectos hispanos y la nasalidad en los sustratos indígenas y/o africanas donde se hablan
5. La igualación semántica de palabras del español frente a palabras indígenas

Desafortunadamente, la única manera verdadera de probar las hipótesis sobre la influencia taína sería viajar atrás en el tiempo. No obstante, con nuevas metodologías, se puede evaluar su viabilidad en un grado que no hemos podido hacer antes.

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**COSMOPOLITANISMS,  
LANGUAGE AND GENDER IN  
THE CARIBBEAN AND BEYOND**





# PRISON TALK: POWER, COMMUNICATION, CULTURE AND COMMUNITY AMONG INCARCERATED TRINIDADIAN MEN

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## Abstract

Male prisons are rich environments for the creation, adoption, development and perpetuation of particular linguistic repertoires. This study aims to identify and describe instances of ‘re-semanticizing’ or the re-assignment of new meanings to old linguistic terms and structures within the specific speech constructions of male adult prisoners in Trinidad. Underpinned by qualitative enquiry, the study generated a bank of words and expressions used contextually in prisoners’ quest to attain, maintain and retain power and dominance over those perceived as less powerful, be they other prisoners or prison authorities inside the prison community. A comparative analysis has been undertaken to ascertain the difference in meanings, if any, to similar constructions within varieties of Standard Trinidadian English used by mainstream society.

**Key terms:** linguistic repertoires, prison, power, masculinity, language, communication

## Introduction

Recent media reports across Trinidad and Tobago have led to the creation of increasingly uneasy and distrusting public attitudes regarding the covert but seemingly real communication systems used by criminals in maximum security incarceration and alleged members of the underworld in free society today. The vexing issue of crimes against the citizenry that seem to have resulted from orders emerging from behind prison walls remains topical. The linguistic repertoires in question, however, differ significantly from those of varieties of Caribbean/Trinidadian Standard English or

those of its many permutations along a continuum with Trinidadian Creole or Tobagonian Creole English-lexified varieties. The linguistic repertoires utilized within prison walls are pregnant with their own semantic structures, purposely honed to evade the comprehension of those in legal authority and to retain and maintain power relationships among male prisoners. It is this 'prison talk' that forms the basis for the present article, complete with the tensions, contentions and collisions that arise in terms of structures and meanings. The ripple effect of this phenomenon is the balance of power that results from the quest among men of multiple masculinities in a society that is slowly (d)evolving from one marked by subordinate criminal masculinities to one that is defined by parallel hegemonic criminal masculinities in pockets of mainstream society.

### **Context, purpose and rationale for the study**

As diverse as criminal offences are today, so too are the range of masculine identities that belong to the perpetrators of such crimes. Crimes and offences are committed by boys and men of diverse backgrounds and a multiplicity of masculinities to the effect that when charged and convicted, these males enter a localized physical space that see them grapple for positioning along a power continuum. In such a potentially violent locale, the dynamic social construct that is masculinity is quickly policed to ensure a status quo is maintained depicting an established power hierarchy that may or may not include the legal prison authorities. More often than not, there is a deconstruction of legalized power hierarchies and a very specific set of cultural repertoires that mark a defined way of life emerges, with a corresponding set of linguistic repertoires that evolves for use among the incarcerated with a tripartite purpose.

Firstly, since the culture is intertwined with a quest for power and the maintenance of power relationships, the language used among prisoners is one that directs power and demarcates the less powerful and powerless (Reddock, 2004). Secondly, the linguistic competencies of the prison community are continuously honed to send and receive messages that, if intercepted by the legal authority, will offer little insight into their content, due to the specialized meanings for the terms and expressions utilized. Thirdly, the complete prison vernacular among the incarcerated is transmitted to the outside world via networking and the release of those who have served their sentences and have re-integrated themselves, to one degree or another, into mainstream society. These linguistic repertoires are thereby quickly replicated, propagated and elaborated upon in free society among members of the underworld, toward similar ends.

The study upon which this article is based aims to identify and describe instances of 're-semanticizing' or re-assignment of new meaning to older linguistic terms and structures by male adult prisoners. This is done with the ultimate goal of compiling a repertoire of words and expressions commonly used among prisoners, which possess different meanings to the corresponding structures in repertoires of Trinidad Standard

English and/or Trinidad English-lexifier Creole used by mainstream society. In order to accomplish the goals of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How does language 'evolve' at the prison/community level in a quest to create and sustain power relationships?
2. What are the actual linguistic terms and expressions pertinent to creating, sustaining and policing power relationships within the prison community?
3. What are the implications of re-semanticizing of these lexical terms at the prison/community level in terms of creating and maintaining power links and relationships?
4. What is the effect of such re-semanticizing on established power relationships, both inside and outside of the community of incarcerated males?

### **Review of related literature**

The situational landscape that the incarcerated finds himself in exacerbates the social reality of particular linguistic constructions being culturally transmitted and endorsed among prisoners as a pertinent dimension of creating and retaining power. Such language use not only becomes the shared experience of prisoners granted entry into a pervasive sub-culture but also presents itself a potent tool of male gender socialization and adherence to an institutionalized power hierarchy. Puerto Rican anthropologist Rafael Ramirez (2004) argues that masculine ideologies are discursive gender constructions, which are dominant in societies structured on asymmetrical gender and power relations. In the prison system, such masculine ideologies are both a dimension of and the end result of a fluid process of power dynamics that incoming prisoners face upon entry, one marked by the use and perpetuation of the language utilized in the prison system. Bourdieu (1977) argues that in contexts of unequal social relations, language becomes an instrument of power (p. 648).

Certainly, few would argue that the established prison system for males is devoid of inequity in social relations. The very idea of incarceration is one that propels a human need for social interaction and a vaulting ambition for supremacy within such social interaction. Dagenais (2003) essentially extends Bourdieu's argument by suggesting that, under systems of domination, a person's material and social conditions determine whether or not they find themselves in a position to speak and to effortlessly command attention (p. 272). Undoubtedly, the prison's material and social conditions are those typified by systems of domination. There are distinctive factors associated with how inmates respond to life in prison. These include their value systems, expectations, life goals and certainly the culture clash associated with life *before* prison and life *in* prison. Exposure to prison-specific linguistic and cultural repertoires is relevant to the cognitive dissonance experienced by the newly incarcerated. Wooldredge (1999) posits that successful adjustment is associated with the inmates' psychological well-being

and their capacity to adapt swiftly and easily. Appadurai (1988) links this notion of successful adjustment to the inmate's ability to easily understand, replicate and perpetuate the language used in prisons. He claims:

Thus, all the language of niches, of foraging, of material skill, of slowly evolved technologies, is actually also a language of incarceration. In this instance confinement is not simply a function of the mysterious, even metaphysical attachment of natives to physical places, but a function of their adaptations to their environments. (p. 37)

According to Morris (2008), who researched Jamaican male prisons and their impact on prisoners, the prevailing culture of the prison system is the fundamental element that determines whether or not a prisoner will adapt successfully. Specifically, Clemmer's (1958) theoretical model of deprivation may be cited as suitable in explaining inmate responses and adaptation to prison life. This model is predicated on the notion that inmates' behaviours, attitudes and values are derived from the prison environment and its dominant culture. Underpinning the prison's culture is the use and perpetuation of very specific language codes among prisoners. Such codes are in a constant amorphous state as the quest is to ensure usage and comprehension among the inmates while eluding prison officers' awareness and understanding of what is transpiring. In this regard, the creation and maintenance of power resides with the imprisoned as opposed to the prison guards. The process of learning the prison linguistic code is one that facilitates incoming inmates in their efforts to adapt to prison life, a process that Lave and Wenger (1991) theorize as situated learning. Norton (2001) extends this perspective:

Through a process of legitimate peripheral participation, newcomers interact with old-timers in a given community setting, become increasingly experienced in the practices that characterize that community, and gradually move towards fuller participation in that community. (p. 160)

It is this organizational structure of discursive practices within male prison walls that gives rise to the phenomenon whereby particular words and expressions take on new meanings among the inmates. Fairclough (2005) alludes to this when he cites Mumby and Stohl's claim that "Communication, then, is the substance of organizing in the sense that through discursive practices organization members engage in the construction of a complex and diverse system of meanings" (p. 917). Thus, the emergence and maintenance of specific linguistic repertoires among prisoners is firmly hinged to the realization that inmates create their own discourse and such discourse is the principal means whereby their social reality is created and social identities are constructed. Indeed, such realities and identities are inextricably intertwined with power relationships within the prison system as the powerful wield control over the less powerful, a pattern that typifies patriarchy and other systems of domination in virtually all situational contexts.

In her studies of the Tennessee prison system, Karhu (1988) discerned that instrumental to creating, sustaining and policing power relations among inmates was a set of linguistic terms and expressions utilized within the prison community. Those who participated fully in the use of this linguistic code generated a sense of full belonging to the prison community, thereby confirming Appadurai's notion of ownership of the incarceration experience marked by specific language use. Interestingly, Karhu discovered that linguistic terms and expressions utilized within the prison community were different from labels ascribed to the prison community by mainstream society, with prisoners, for example, being known as *residents* inside the prison but considered *convicts* by the public. Likewise, whereas the latter considered the head of a prison to be a warden or governor, the inmates saw him as *The Man*. (Karhu, 1988, p. 127)

Karhu also found that sexual terms and expressions used in prison life were intricately linked to a hierarchy of masculinity, with the normative, hegemonic masculine figure of 'a traditional man' who performs the act of penetration at the top, and the effeminate subordinate figure who is the 'penetratee' or *bitch, sissy, punk, chicken, boy, gal-boy* and *little girl*, at the bottom. Each of these terms occupied a specific point along a linguistic continuum based on the degree of powerlessness exhibited by inmates and the extent of power that the active partner in the sex act wielded over them. Thus, lexical items such as these played a role in the creation and sustenance of power links and relationships among the incarcerated within the realm of sexual behaviours and identities. But specifically coded linguistic terms outside of the area of sexual behaviours and identities are also used to create and establish power relationships among incarcerated males. Karhu's research led her to surmise that certain terms and expressions are created for the expressed purpose of creating a community of practice among inmates who comprehend each other while striving to exclude undesirable inmates and prison officials. According to Karhu:

An inmate who is *mellow*, one who is *getting along*, survives well in prison because of his ability to judge on whom he can *run a game* and to what extent his game can be run. To *run a game* is to lead someone, either staff or fellow inmate, to an incorrect apprehension of motives or behavior or to delude someone else into inappropriate actions and/or assumptions. (1988, p. 128)

Such an inmate undoubtedly exerts a degree of power over others – inmate or correctional officer – by virtue of his ability to get others to act in a certain manner, thereby controlling another person's actions and behaviour.

Karhu's findings reveal that there is a strong tendency to utilize the language of the prison in mainstream society in an effort to replicate power links and relationships forged in prison in free society. This finding is not surprising, given the fact that: 1) during their incarceration, inmates often remain in contact with their social networks, for example sharing elements of the linguistic repertoires specific to the prison with those who visit them; 2) underworld figures outside the prisons often need to have clear

communication with inmates, but simultaneously need to evade comprehension by the authorities; and 3) inmates are continually released into mainstream society with the knowledge of a working linguistic code that can continue to meet their needs on the outside. Waldram (2009) warns that since “most inmates eventually return to our communities, what goes on inside the walls should be of intense interest to us all” (p. 5). As Karhu avers:

*Getting along* involves close determination of both people and situations. An inmate who is overly adept at *getting along* may become *institutionalized*; that is, he has come to accept the prison world as the norm of society. An *institutionalized* man may have considerable difficulty in re-acclimating himself to *the streets*, a term indicating any place outside prison. (1988, p. 128)

It stands to reason, therefore, that if the communicative competencies of a former inmate include prison-specific linguistic repertoires used as a means of creating and maintaining power links and relationships inside the prison, then it is likely that he will attempt at some point to utilize such repertoires as a means of effecting related power relationships outside the prison walls.

### **Design of the study**

The study upon which this article is based was premised primarily on constructivist and interpretivist assumptions, specifically that knowledge is established through the attachment of individual personalized meaning to a phenomenon and that it is only through a social construction of reality that knowledge can emerge (Walsham, 1993). As such, the participants' views and positions on their relationships and interactions within and outside prison proved essential to how the findings were eventually categorized and interpreted. based on interpreted multiplicities of participant meanings.

As postulated by Creswell (1998), qualitative inquiry provides an avenue for examining and constructing meaning based on shared experiences among individuals. This required extensive mediation of inductively revealed primary data from a population of males who were or had been incarcerated at the time of the study. A case for the use of qualitative data is presented by Marshall and Rossman (1995) in which they see human behaviour as being significantly influenced by contextual variables such as setting and situation. As such, an understanding of human behaviour in this study cannot be gained without understanding the interpretative frameworks within which it is constructed and a holistic sense of local prisons and their operations. The study therefore required the gathering of what Russell (2000) describes as cultural data. This type of data necessitates experts (the prisoners and ex-prisoners themselves) who were able to offer informed explanations about the topic in addition to being competent users of the linguistic repertoires under examination.

Two sampling strategies were employed owing to the nature of the research and the type of experts required. The study employed a combination of judgment and snow-ball sampling. According to Russell, in judgment sampling:

you decide the purpose you want informants (or communities) to serve, and you go out to find some ... there is no overall sampling design that tells you how many of each type of informant you need for a study. (2000, p. 176)

Owing to the sensitive nature of incarceration, judgment sampling did not provide a substantial number of respondents for the study. Individuals did not express an initial willingness to disclose that they were or had previously been incarcerated, which complicated participant identification. The initial participants for the study were therefore identified based on their participation in a larger study with which one of the researchers had been directly involved. Snowballing was employed thereafter to increase the number of participants (Patton, 2001). In snowballing “you locate one or more key individuals and ask them to name others who would be likely candidates for your research” (Russell, 2000, p. 179).

A total of twenty adult male participants were identified for participation in the study. All participants were of Afro-Trinidadian descent and had resided within the same community for over twenty years. They shared a history of incarceration and having been formally educated within their community of residence. The participants ranged from ages twenty-one to fifty. Of the twenty participants, ten were incarcerated for having committed crimes within the country, four were incarcerated abroad and deported after having served their sentence and six were detained in prison overnight on more than one occasion but never criminally charged. At the time of the information-gathering stage of the study, two of the participants were employed as skilled labourers on community projects, seven were employed as unskilled labourers and eleven claimed to be self-employed.

Twenty individual interviews were conducted over a three-month period. The participants were approached requesting an opportunity for an interview and made aware of the purpose of the interview. The process was initially greeted with skepticism and unwillingness to participate, but agreement to participate was reached after having been made aware of the types of questions they would be required to answer. Sixteen interviews were conducted within the community and four conducted during civilian visits to a local prison. Two of the interviews were audio-recorded while the other eighteen participants refused. The interview document designed for the study comprised ten pre-determined but open-ended questions, although the actual interview process generated responses that led to additional questions. All responses were documented, transcribed and compiled in a data bank.



### Presentation of findings

Findings from the study are divided to reflect identified instances of ‘re-semanticizing’ and perceptions about re-semanticized items. Table 1 includes a list of words and phrases used by the community of incarcerated males to avoid interpretation by law enforcement personnel. The meanings of these items within the context of incarceration are also provided. Table 2 places perceptions concerning the factors that most impact re-semanticization into three specific categories derived from patterns emerging from the data base itself. Table 3 lists the main reported reasons for re-semanticizing inside prison, while Table 4 lists the main reported reasons for continuing to use re-semanticized items outside prison.

Table 1 presents a list of re-semanticized items and their newly assigned meanings by members of the community of incarcerated individuals.

**Table 1** List of re-semanticized terms and their meanings

ITEM	NEWLY ASSIGNED MEANING
drive	to move an item without detection
tunkey	a prison officer or the owner of the home within which one resides outside of prison
spee	alcohol
print	wrapping paper
shim	cross dresser
shoot	send
frequent flyer	person regularly detained but not charged
up	cigarette
down	marijuana
pine	marijuana
aunty	a female partner outside of an established relationship

Table 2 lists factors influencing meaning shifts. Information provided by participants was found to belong to one of three general categories identified on the basis of participant responses. Discourse samples are provided to exemplify each category.

**Table 2** Factors impacting resemanticizing

FACTOR	DISCOURSE SAMPLE
Popular Culture	“family it real simple ... tv”
Religion	“we converted to Islam in here so we learn Arabic and talk it to each other sometimes cause the tunkeys don’t know it nah and sometimes we does just change up Arabic words”

Music	“ah hindu bredrin teach we ah few things nah so we does throw it in the mix to off them”
	“the yardies [Jamaicans] (all translations by the authors) understand what we go through and they sing about it so we talk the talk”
	“yuh ever listen to rap empress? It ha real codes and slangs in it, them fellers real grimy so we does take the talk and fix it to suit”

Table 3 presents the three main reasons that were identified by participants for re-semanticizing while in prison: 1) denying access of prison authorities to meanings conveyed, 2) concealing illegal acts and 3) generally resisting surveillance. Samples of discourse representing participants’ reported motives for re-semanticizing are provided in each instance.

**Table 3** Participants’ stated reasons for re-semanticizing in prison

REASON	EXPLANATION PROVIDED
Exclusion	“is not everything we say they need to understand”
Hiding illegal acts	“we not allowed to have plenty things so we can’t let them know we have it nah” “is jail family, not Holiday Inn yuh cyah make them know you have cigarette and cell phone and shit”
Resisting surveillance	“everything you say them assholes does be listening so if you had-da send ah message you have to do it so they can’t know nah”

Table 4 represents reasons for use of semanticized items outside of communities of incarceration. The responses show that individuals maintain the use of these items in the free world because of habit, to conceal illegal practices and to exclude others without shared ideologies.

**Table 4** Reasons for the continued use of re-semanticized terms outside prison

REASON	EXPLANATION PROVIDED
Habit	“once yuh get use to talking a certain way it hard to just switch back just so” “most ah the fellas here went in so we get accustom to talking to each other so”
Hiding illegal practices	“empress is not sweetie we selling here” “simple, in my line ah business yuh hadda keep it on ah down low cause Babylon always eyeing we”

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Exclusion	<p>“is not all the time yuh want people in yuh business so yuh hadda mix it up”</p> <p>“if I talking to my soldiers and it have other people around who not on we scene, yuh hadda lock dem out the talk normal nah”</p>
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### Analysis and conclusion

The findings presented in Tables 1-4 strongly suggest that the dynamics of ‘re-semanticizing’ among male prisoners in Trinidad is very similar to the dynamics described by Hancock (2021) for the establishment and propagation of cryptolects among groups such as the Romani in Europe and LGBTTQIA+ communities in hyper-patriarchal Western societies. The design and use of cryptolects frequently involve the re-assignment of meanings to previously existing forms and structures for the purposes of creating an in-group system of communication which is opaque to outsiders, who in many cases are operatives of state-sponsored law enforcement and surveillance agencies.

In the process of the emergence of cryptolects, forms are influenced and even borrowed from other sources that are identified as bastions of resistance to these same authorities, such as, in the case of Trinidadian male prisoners and ex-prisoners, the linguistic repertoires of Yardies, Rastas and other popular culture ‘renegades,’ and Muslims and other religious and cultural ‘renegades.’ The phenomenon of renegadism, by which members of dominant and/or majority demographic groups (in this case Afro-Trinidadians) reject the hegemonic linguistic, cultural and identificational repertoires which they are expected by dominant society to internalize and propagate (such as ‘Standard’ language, Christianity, etc.) in favor of subaltern linguistic, cultural and identificational repertoires (such as cryptolects, Rasatfarianism and Islam) which they are expected by dominant society to reject and vilify, has a long and revolutionary history in the Caribbean and the rest of the Afro Atlantic (Delgado, 2021; Faraclas & Delgado, 2021; Faraclas, 2012).

In terms of power dynamics, cryptolects establish not only ‘power links’ or in-group solidarity among those who are initiated into their use, such as communities of prison inmates, but also have the potential to challenge, upend and reverse asymmetries of power that have subjugated their users, such as the subjugation of those same inmates to the guards and other prison authorities. These in-group solidarity and contestatory aspects of the linguistic repertoires of incarcerated males have had a major impact on the male populations of the Anglophone Caribbean, as well as on many of the other male populations of the rest of the African diaspora in the Anglophone Afro-Atlantic. African descended males from Brooklyn to Brixton to Bahia are much more likely than other sectors of the populations of their countries to be imprisoned, often on the basis of racially motivated laws, law enforcement practices, and judicial procedures

which are designed to condemn them to a miserable life and premature death as underclass outcasts. Those young African descended men who manage to escape the deeply corrupt and unjust police, court and prison systems are nonetheless attracted to the counter-identities espoused through the adoption of the cultural and linguistic repertoires of male prisoners and ex-prisoners. Because of the fact that they are rejected by increasingly openly racist societies, led by increasingly openly fascist politicians, such as Trump, Johnson and Bolsonaro, prison cryptolects have become a linguistic model for young African descended men outside the prison system. In effect, an adoption of prison talk becomes one of the vehicles through which power links and relationships are fostered and negotiated by a growing number of African descended diasporic men in the outside world. For this reason, our study has resonances and implications that extend from the shores of Trinidad to the shores of the entire African diasporic world.

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# THE CONSTRUCTION OF GENDER IDENTITIES IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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## Abstract

This article explores how language serves as a tool for the construction of gender identities which exist beyond the rigid mutually exclusive, conjunctively exhaustive binary gender system. Studies of gender and language more commonly associated with the dynamics of language within the binary, i.e., male/masculine vs. female/feminine, fail to encapsulate vast complexities of gender as a spectrum. The research investigates language as a marker of gender identities and how English speakers use and promote specific self-referring tools in order to construct, establish, and determine their gender identities in the world. By focusing on the overall pattern of the self-referring tools used as gender markers in the English language by the queer and LGBTTQIA+ communities, this research seeks to understand the social meaning behind the usage of these self-referring tools by trans and gender non-conforming individuals as they experience life outside of this rigid binary. In terms of gender identities, this research will, thus, focus on non-binary and transgender identities and their construction in the English language.

**Key terms:** gender binary, queer identities, LGBTTQIA+ identities, identity construction, gendering in English

## Introduction

An individual's speech encompasses and reflects their attitudes, values, and beliefs, as well as how they experience, shape, and deconstruct these attitudes. Language may be understood as a tool of communication intended to include all people; however, oftentimes, language may serve as a tool of oppression by speakers wishing to exclude others due to race, class, gender, sex, religion, or ethnicity. For example, in the English language, there are a distinct array of linguistic practices that often exclude women from power and portray them as powerless individuals. The early study of gender in

language, thus, was a response to sexist attitudes that continue to perpetuate misogynistic ideologies and social inequality. The early study of gender and language came as the result of trying to establish the fact that men and women exhibit differences in how they speak and experience language.

This research instead offers an investigation of the relationship between language, gender, and gender identities on the part of individuals whose gender is outside of the traditional male-female binary. It focuses on self-referencing items such as the usage of gender identity-specific pronouns, the usage of the plural *they/them* pronouns in reference to a single individual, the modification of honorifics to align with gender non-conforming individuals, and the appropriation and reclamation of slurs in order to reclaim respect for their gender identities.

The focus of this research, thus, reflects a cultural shift that blurs the lines of a fixed gender binary, or what we know as strictly male or female, feminine or masculine and the ways in which the English language has been modified to address this shift. Traditional English honorifics, pronouns, and other titles have presented an array of challenges for individuals who experience their gender and gender identities outside of the binary. These individuals have begun to make changes in how they use English in order to fit and reclaim their new identities, allowing them to take control of how they want to be perceived in society. This has become key in understanding how marginalized communities and members of the LGBTTQIA+ communities are able to experience and re-claim their identities and direct how they want to be referred to in their cultures and societies.

The study will first address the dismantling of the concept of sex as equated to gender and gender identities. Second, this study will examine gender in terms of a spectrum rather than a fixed normative conception of cis-heteronormativity. To do this, the paper will discuss and analyze gender, sex, sexuality, and gender identities as non-fixed categories and provide a broad definition of each. The principal line of research will analyze studies focused on the English third person singular and plural pronouns, honorifics and words considered slurs in an effort to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What self-reference tools are used by gender non-conforming and gender non-normative individuals (focusing on non-binary and trans identities)?
- 2) What do gender identity-specific pronouns mean to individuals?
- 3) What are the linguistic challenges presented in assessing gender as a spectrum rather than a binary?
- 4) How does linguistic misgendering affect gender non-conforming and gender non-normative individuals?

Lastly, this paper suggests how queer linguistics, community allies and language reform can support gender-neutral language and gender non-normative individuals as they construct, experience, and express their gender identities.

## **The language of sex, gender and gender identities**

Personal speech enables humans to establish the way they choose to be perceived in their respective communities and cultures. Language plays a fundamental role in how many cultures and societies promote and establish certain values and norms that are deemed as the normative standard. Many of these sociocultural norms and ideologies are embedded within their specific language and it is through language that individuals express their conformity to, or rejection of, such pre-established sociocultural norms.

In the case of gender, language plays a crucial role in how individuals perceive and express themselves. Through language, individuals assess their identities and may reject their own non-conformity within the context of particular cultures and societies. Individuals whose gender identities, expressions, or attitudes do not align with those that have been socially and culturally imposed as the normative standard, will often face backlash and even discrimination.

Recently, young adults and children are redefining and creating spaces in which they can question their gender and their identities by deviating from what has already been established for them socially and culturally. Queer linguistics sets out to bridge the generational divide by providing a space in which to explore, understand and respect the complexities of gender identities. Queer linguistics and feminist linguistics study the complexities and nuances that represent challenges for gender non-conforming and trans peoples and attempt to deconstruct the harmful sociocultural norms that can result in the targeting, discrimination, violence, and even death of the individuals belonging to these marginalized groups. The following paragraphs will provide broad definitions for each key term.

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### **Defining sex and defining gender**

According to the organization known as the Gender Spectrum, sex is assigned at birth and refers to one's biological status as being either male or female and is associated primarily with physical attributes such as chromosomes, hormone prevalence, and external and internal anatomy (Gender Spectrum, 2019). For years, sex and gender have been used interchangeably, and although we can acknowledge they share a connection, they are not equivalent. Wong (2017, p. 37) argues that sex is biological and permanent whereas gender is socially constructed. In this sense, "sex is often considered to be something innate, a fixed and stable binary variable, whereas gender is 'learned' or 'acquired,' and can thus vary across time and cultures." The notion that one is strictly biologically male or female is problematic as it disregards the lives and identities of transgender individuals "with the implication that a transgender person can never be or become fully, authentically, 'the other gender,' or of non-binary individuals with the implications that they must be one or the other" (Hekanaho, 2020a, p. 54).



Hekanaho (2020a, p. 54-55) makes a significant distinction between gender and sex in their study:

While the distinction between sex and gender has served a theoretical purpose, helping us better understand how notions of masculinity and femininity are “culturally bound” (Zimman, 2014: 14), it has also often been simplified into an unrepresentative relationship with little to no interaction between the two (see discussion by Crawford & Fox, 2007: 483). Often, if acknowledging any relationship, then sex as the more stable (i.e. valid) variable has been thought to affect gender (e.g. Unger, 1979: 1086). However, this perspective creates an unnatural separation of the body and living in a body as a social being, leading to disregarding a person’s own experience of their gender as invalid if it does not match sex (e.g. Ansara & Hegarty, 2014: 259; Butler, 2004: 76; Zimman, 2014: 14–20). Furthermore, if gender was indeed something that we simply acquired or learned, then how would mismatches between sex and gender ever occur, given that sex is used to determine gender at birth, guiding parents to raise their offspring as boys or girls? Indeed, especially considering transgender experiences, there has been a growing need to reassess our understanding of sex/gender (e.g. Zimman, 2014).

According to the Gender Spectrum (2019) website, a person’s gender is the interrelationship between three dimensions: body, identity, and social gender. Hekanaho (2020a, p. 55) explains that gender:

has further become understood as dynamic, interactional and intersectional, with the potential to change throughout one’s lifetime ... Indeed, ‘the self’ is always experienced at the intersects of multiple different identity categories, which are not independent of each other, but instead mutually constitutive ... Moreover, even though gender is often perceived as an individual property, it is culturally encoded and shared, reflecting or connecting to power relations ... As such, gender can only be understood as it relates to a specific culture in time and place.

In contrast to sex, gender is a social construct that expresses an individual’s characteristics, behaviors, attributes, likes, and the social and cultural roles placed upon them. Faucette explains:

According to gender as a binary, gender is ultimately defined by male or female, and dictates what is appropriate for men and women. Binary gender is not only deeply rooted in language, the way we see one another, and the way we relate as discussed above, but it is also the most common way people are classified by governments and other institutions. (2014, p. 81)

Although masculinity and femininity are attributed to a person’s sex and body (physical characteristics), the way humans express their femininity and masculinity is far too complex to rely heavily on the established and mutually exclusive and conjunctively

exhaustive binary. For example, some individuals feel like a feminine male or a masculine female. Gender goes beyond physicality, it encompasses an individual's behaviors, thoughts, and ideologies. Gender carries values and roles that are pre-determined by an individual's culture and society. These societal expectations determine how men and women are expected to behave, dress, act and speak as they are aligned with their gender.

Social gender refers to the ways in which individuals express and portray their gender and gender identities in their society and can involve "clothing, hair, and mannerisms" (Gender Spectrum, 2019). It additionally reflects how an individual's society or communities choose to perceive and interact with them. Like the nuances of femininity and masculinity, social gender heavily relies on the pre-established expectations of a given individual's culture and society. Because social gender is socially pre-determined and established, societies and cultures will often reinforce their specific beliefs and practices in order to force people to strictly adhere to established gender norms and roles. Common examples of gendered items for children are clothing and toys; however, as we reach adulthood, we are able to experience how tasks, beliefs, and certain cultural practices are gendered. In many cultures, cooking, and cleaning have been gendered as a feminine trait and a woman's job. In such cultures men are taught to sell their labor outside the home, whereas women are taught to stay home and provide free labor, such as cooking and cleaning for their families.

Children who express and experience themselves outside of the rigid sociocultural norms of gender are often humiliated and pressured into fitting into what has been pre-determined for them. Boys who tend to play with dolls or wear their mother's clothes and makeup are socially demonized and often violently reprimanded. Children who deviate from what is classified as normative tend to experience bullying by their peers and damaging repercussions at home. The pressure children feel to conform to what is expected from them both culturally and socially ultimately negatively influences the way they perceive themselves. Children whose likes and interests do not align with the established binaries often experience deep rooted psychological issues that negatively define the way they perceive themselves, their self-worth, their identities, and even their culture.

The common belief that only two genders exist establishes the gender binary. However, as gender studies continue to progress, we have come to understand that gender is not limited to the two pre-established options, male and female, and should be viewed as a range of possibilities that defy and mutually exclusive or conjunctively exhaustive binary understandings. Studying and viewing sex as a binary fails to account for intersex people, which according to the gender spectrum, refers to a type of biological sexual development in which children are born with chromosomes, hormones, genitalia and/or other sex characteristics that are not exclusively male or female as defined by the medical establishment in our society. A majority of intersex children are assigned

a legal binary sex identity (M or F) after birth, meaning a sex is chosen for them after birth, usually depending on their genitals. For years, people have used the binary to further their transphobic and homophobic rhetoric that heavily relies on misinformation and ignorance. The harmful rhetoric that there are only two genders, and gender and gender identity are equal to sex targets trans and gender-non-conforming children in schools.

### **Defining non-binary and transgender identities**

According to the Gender Spectrum (2019) website, gender identities are our internal experience and naming of our genders. Non-binary or “genderqueer,” is an umbrella term for gender identities that are neither male nor female—and those which in other ways do not align with the gender binary. According to Hekanaho (2020a, p. 227), the term nonbinary broadly refers to all identities that fall beyond the binary. Non-binary and genderqueer identities fall under transgender identities, although not all non-binary individuals consider themselves transgender. Non-binary individuals may refer to themselves in distinct ways: (a) identifying with a separate or third gender, (b) identifying with more than one gender, (c) having no gender (agender), or (d) having fluctuating identities (genderfluid).

A non-binary individual’s experience with their gender identities varies from person to person; meaning gender expression is unique to the individual experiencing it. Non-binary individuals commonly reject the pre-determined and pre-established gender binary of male vs. female—masculine vs. feminine. Some non-binary individuals may face gender dysphoria (GD). Gender dysphoria in a broad sense, can be used to describe an individual’s discontentment or dissatisfaction with their assigned gender. Often, it is a psychological conflict between the individual, how they perceive themselves and how society has labeled as well as perceived them. Individuals who experience gender dysphoria most commonly struggle with their gender identities in terms of how society has molded the established gender roles and gender expectations. According to Gender Spectrum (2019), gender dysphoria, which can occur in relation to any of the multiplex dimensions of gender, can encompass a broad range of feelings, from mild discomfort to unbearable distress; the intensity and pervasiveness, frequency, and triggers of gender dysphoria vary widely from person to person. According to Gender Spectrum (2019), “gender dysphoria” is a clinical term found in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM or DSM-5) and the labeling of gender dysphoria has been controversial; however, understanding gender dysphoria as a clinical term and definition is helpful to understanding how individuals going through gender dysphoria experience conflicts with their gender identities.

In terms of language, Hekanaho (2020a, p. 23) posits that there are three factors that we must always remember when discussing non-binary identities:

(a) binary individuals typically do not use pronouns other than he and she when other pronouns are used, the association is of a nonbinary identity; (b) some nonbinary individuals may use he and she, and their identities are no less nonbinary for using binary pronouns; (c) there is ambiguity between some specific uses of singular they, but a need to distinguish between such uses.

The word ‘transgender’ is an umbrella term used to reference individuals whose gender identities do not align with their assigned sex. It can additionally be used to describe someone whose gender identities are ‘opposite’ from the sex they were assigned at birth. However, not everyone whose gender identities do not align with their assigned sex identifies as transgender. Transgender commonly refers to individuals who have undergone their transition to fit into their desired gender identities. ‘Transitioning’ is a term used to refer to the steps transgender, non-binary, or gender-nonconforming individuals take in order to find congruence with their desired gender identities. Because many individuals undergo a distinct array of struggles with their gender identities, they will commonly seek to alter their appearance in order to best align themselves with their desired gender. Many transgender individuals seek to make changes in their language, behavior and physical appearance in order to fit into their desired gender identities.

Transgender identities vary depending on the nature of each individual’s transitions, including, but not limited to: (a) MtF (male to female) -a person who was assigned male sex at birth and has transitioned to a female gender identity and (b) FtM (female to male)—a person who was assigned female sex at birth and has transitioned to a male identity. Commonly, the terms used by transgender individuals are “transgender woman” or “transgender man”; however, some younger transgender individuals may refer to themselves as “transgirl” – a child who was assigned male sex at birth and has girl gender identities or “transboy” – a child who was assigned female sex at birth and has boy identities. “Transsexual” remains a controversial term, as it is still considered highly offensive and problematic by many people. According to Gender Spectrum (2019), it is a term used in different ways in English-speaking countries that originated in the medical and psychological communities and unlike the term transgender, transsexual is not an umbrella term. Many if not a majority of transgender individuals do not identify as transsexual and prefer the term transgender.

According to the Gender Spectrum (2019) website, transitioning refers to the steps transgender, non-binary and agender (without gender) individuals take in order to find congruence with their gender. Similar to the experiences of non-binary individuals, the experience of trans persons relies heavily on the acceptance of their loved ones. A transgender person will undergo their transition in society; however, it is how their communities perceives them that authenticates their desire for congruence. According to Gender Spectrum (2019), the four primary congruence measures experienced by transgender individuals during their transition are: social congruence, hormonal con-

gruence, surgical congruence, and legal congruence. Not all transgender individuals undergo the same congruence processes, but the most common congruence measure is social congruence. Social congruence is defined as the modification of social and cultural markers such as clothing, hair, names, and pronouns. It is through social congruence that transgender individuals are able to experience, express, and establish their newfound gender identities within their society. The second most common congruence measure is hormonal congruence. Hormonal congruence relies on “medical approaches such as hormone blockers or hormone therapy to promote physical, mental, and/or emotional alignment” (Gender Spectrum, 2019). The third most common congruence measure is surgical congruence in which medical measures are taken to remove, add, or modify gender identity-related physical traits. Lastly, legal congruence occurs when a transgender individual changes their identification documents in order to match their gender identities; these include birth certificates, drivers’ licenses, and passports.

Non-binary individuals often establish their identities by ‘coming out.’ “Although coming out is not unique to the nonbinary (NB) demographic, the interactive process is a little different for NBs than for binary transgender people or gay and lesbian people” (Darwin, 2017, p. 328). Coming out as a non-binary person mainly lies in disclosing to peers and family members that you do not identify in conventional ways in terms of sex and/or gender. It consists of being honest about your gender identities with the people closest to you and those who surround you on a daily basis; however, much of this process is about educating those around you. Unlike coming out as a gay man or lesbian woman, non-binary individuals normally face considerable ignorance on the part of those to whom they are coming out. In many cases, people refuse to acknowledge the existence of anything but two mutually exclusive and conjunctively exhaustive possibilities (male vs. female), thereby invalidating a non-binary individual’s gender identities and sense of self. According to Darwin, (2017, p. 328) this is because the assumption of a naturalized gender binary is so entrenched within society. Re-establishing gender identities as non-binary heavily relies on others’ acknowledgement of possibilities that do not conform to the gender binary. The generally low levels of understanding and acceptance of such possibilities among the general public often causes this “coming out” process to feel like a burden. When non-binary individuals see the public invalidating their identities, they may experience intense psychological damage to their sense of self, as the way they perceive themselves is negatively affected by depriving them of a sense of authenticity and/or legitimacy.

### **Deconstructing the gender binary in English**

Modern English is, on the whole, a so-called ‘natural’ gender language, meaning the gender of a noun, pronoun, or noun phrase, is attributed based on the sexed/gendered characteristics of its referent. Within this system, there are many cases that obligate

speakers of English to designate gender in speech. The most common examples of such instances are references to people through the personal pronouns of *she/her* and *he/him/his*. In addition to personal pronouns, the English language specifies gender in other cases, including honorifics such as *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, and *Ms.*, and titles such as *mailman*, *congressman*, *chairman*, *mankind*, etc. Feminist scholars have identified a language shift away from such traditionally gendered forms as a new form of ‘gender literacy’ which enhances and individual’s capacity to participate in discussions about gender and gender-related issues. As we continue to delve deeper into the nuances of gender, we understand that language and gender discourse must additionally account for individuals whose existence and identity remains outside of the conventional binary. Understanding language and gender through a binary lens excludes those whose gender and gender identities exist outside of what has been established as the norm. In this section, I will focus on the inclusion of gender-neutral language in the English language, the inclusion of inclusive language in reference to non-binary, transgender, and gender non-normative individuals, the challenges of the heteronormative honorifics for gender non-conforming peoples, the construction of neopronouns in the English language, and the reclamation of verbal slurs such as the appropriation of the term “queer” in LGBTTTQIA+ communities. Although there is a wide array of identities linked to LGBTTTQIA+ communities, this paper’s focus centers around non-binary, transgender, and gender non-conforming identities and the role language plays in the construction of these gender identities.

Although Old English had grammatical gender, Adami (2009, p. 86), points out that unlike other Indo-European languages that have retained grammatical gender, Modern English has no inflectional category for gender and no gender agreement is needed within and above the noun phrase. Adami (2009, p. 86) refers to gender in relation to English pronouns by stating that when:

the choice of the pronoun follows the sex of the referent, a problem arises when a pronoun is to be used with antecedents referring individually to a mixed-sex human group, role, or category, or to a human entity whose sex is unknown (e.g., the student, the child, someone).

The fact that the default usage in these cases has stipulated the use of male referents has resulted in a grammar of English which can be characterized as sexist.

Whilst the language we speak, in this case English, might not be inherently sexist, we cannot ignore the fact that it holds an inherent bias that favors that which is gendered as masculine. As Hekanaho (2020a, p. 60) has clarified:

sexism in language is not an inherent feature: expressions of gender in any given language are not in themselves sexist (e.g. Stahlberg et al., 2016: 167), and language need not be sexist .... the mere lack of pronominal or grammatical gender marking does not mean the language, or the society in which it is spo-

ken, is nonsexist .... Nevertheless, to some extent, language still reflects the shared beliefs and attitudes of a community, including those related to gender.

According to the *Handbook of English Linguistics* (Aarts & McMahon, 2006), the generic masculine pronoun is not the only instance where English linguistic convention has historically treated men as prototypical of the human species. The same principle is operative in relation to a subset of English nouns which denote people by office or occupation. Historically, male and masculine has always been set as the default grammatical standard. Even with genderless terms such as *firefighters*, many individuals will often visualize and assume the gender identity of the referent to be male, a response conditioned by the fact that historically most firefighters have been men. Common gendered terms rely on the suffix /-man/, for example, *salesman*, *chairman*, *fireman*, and *policeman*. Although many of these terms have a female counterpart (*saleswoman*, *chairwoman*, *policewoman*), the gender-specific male term is, nonetheless, the default. Those of these terms that do not have a female variant often reflect the fact that traditionally, women have not held these positions (e.g., Pope).

Morphological terms that are gender-specific but do not contain the morpheme /-man/ tend to have a female variant such as *waiter/waitress*, *actor/actress*, and *steward/stewardess*; however, despite the existence of this female variant, the male term is often used to refer to all individuals in a mixed-sex group, regardless of their identities. For terms such as *actor* and *waiter*, only the masculine form can be used generically. It is noteworthy that while *actor* is now popularly used to refer to (female gendered) actresses, the word *actresses* cannot be used to refer to (male gendered) actors. Hekanaho (2020a, p. 60) defines sexist language beyond the male female binary, stating:

Sexist language is defined as language use that excludes, diminishes, or discriminates against a group of people based on gender. This definition is adapted from Parks and Robertson (1998a: 455; 2005: 402), but importantly, rephrased to avoid cissexism and move away from a binary gender world view.

The following paragraphs will examine ways in which language can be made more gender neutral.

### **Gender neutral language in English**

Much of the discourse surrounding gender studies within a linguistic framework focuses on the need to dismantle the oppressive systems of sexist language through the adoption of gender neutral forms. The fight for gender neutral language emerged from the second wave of the feminist movement from the 1970s onward, that sought to unmask the inherent sexism in language as well as ensure a non-sexist approach to language. Gender neutral language or gender inclusive language, is language that is inclusive of all gender identities and is not gender specific.

### *Singular they*

In English, gender neutral language includes the usage of gender neutral pronouns such as the singular *they*, nouns that are gender non-specific in reference to roles or professions, or gender neutral honorifics and common titles. In addition, gender neutral language seeks to, for example, use terms such as *humankind*, as a replacement for *mankind*, in order to combat sex bias in language.

With regard to pronouns and gendering in English, Hekanaho (2020b, p. 499-500) maintains that:

When a language has gendered pronouns, is a general person a he or a she? ... For a long time, the supposedly correct answer to this question was he. The use of he was widely prescribed in grammar books, dictionaries and even in law .... In essence, the question concerns which gender is considered to be the ideal representative for humankind. Behind this problem is a broader phenomenon in language and society, where masculinity has often been set as the norm.

Hekanaho (2020a, p. 4-7) furthermore explains:

Third person singular pronouns provide a fascinating object for linguistic inquiry for a number of reasons. One of the most intriguing reasons to study 3PSPs is that despite having previously been theorized to lack any independent meaning ('pronouns are just placeholders for nouns'), these supposedly semantically empty function words continue to be in the center of discussions about gender and gender-fair language .... the adoption of gender-fair language depends on broader developments in gender equality. Because of the links between pronouns and identity, nonbinary pronouns will only be fully and broadly adopted once societies let go of the gender binary ideology and accept the existence of nonbinary identities.

The importance of the pronoun discourse centers on the ways in which gender identity-specific pronouns relate to any particular individual's identities. "What connects these pronouns is their relation to gender equality and gender-fair language. Pronouns mark both identity and group membership, thus playing an important part in regulating who is acknowledged and visible in language" (Hekanaho, 2020a, p. 5-6). Bodine (1975, p. 16) elaborates:

There is a tradition among some grammarians to lament the fact that English has no sex-indefinite pronoun for third person singular and to state categorically that the only course open is to use 'he' in sex-indefinite contexts. Other grammarians omit the lamentations but state just as categorically that 'he' is the English sex-indefinite pronoun. This matter has taken a new turn recently with the insistence of many feminists that 'he' should not be used when the referent includes women, and that speakers of English should find some substitute.

For gender non-normative individuals, the use of "pronouns offer[s] an important linguistic identity building tool both at the individual and group level ... the importance



of pronouns to identity has become particularly visible through transgender and non-binary experiences” (Hekanaho, 2020a, p. 6-7). For gender non-normative individuals, having their identities recognized and validated by society is significant as it helps reaffirm the sense of self that they have established as a result of their experiences with questioning, recognizing and taking control over their gender identities. Using an individual’s preferred pronouns “signals that their identity is recognized by others; misgendering, in contrast, sends the opposite signal” (Hekanaho, 2020a, p. 7). For many, questioning and discovering their gender identities involves the linguistic practice of choosing pronouns that best align with their gender identities. In cases regarding non-binary and transgender individuals, language, specifically pronouns, become a tool for identity-building.

According to Adami (2009 p. 283):

for a number of years grammarians, linguists and teachers have debated which English pronoun should be used to refer individually to gender-indefinite or sex mixed human categories and roles, in cases like ‘anyone can put aside his, their or her own interests to review a situation dispassionately’ .... Along with singular they, several gender-fair alternatives to generic masculine were suggested, such as the phrase ‘he or she’ and a wide range of neologisms ... Yet the use of the former is hindered by its supposed ‘clumsiness,’ as argued by many grammar textbooks.

In the English language, the singular *they/them* has several distinct functions. *They* is generally used in referencing an unspecific person, for example, “they went home.” In addition, the singular *they/them* pronouns may refer to specific people. For example, “Kaylee left their book at home.” Below, are examples from Hekanaho’s (2020a, p. 29-31) typology of distinct functions of the gender-fair use of *they/them*:

#### **Generic *they*:**

- a) A child loves their mother [+generic, ~singular, -gendered, .+epicene]
- b) “You’re looking for someone who writes what they believe in” (Corpus of contemporary American English, 2012) [+generic, +singular, -gendered, +epicene]

#### **Generic *they* in gendered contexts**

- a) “Like any girlfriend with someone they care about” (Paterson, 2014, p. 39) [+generic, ~singular, +/-gendered, -epicene]
- b) for any woman, waiting to hear whether or not they have breast cancer is an extremely stressful and worrying time (Boseley, 2008 cited in Paterson, 2014) [+generic, ~singular, +/-gendered, -epicene]

#### **Unknown/uncertain gender *they***

- a) Someone phoned you this afternoon, but they wouldn’t give their name (McConnell-Ginet, 2011 [1979], p. 198) [+specific, -definite, +singular, +epicene]

b) I saw someone running away from me, but I didn't see their face (Bjorkman, 2017, p. 1) [+specific, -definite, +singular, +epicene]

### ***They with known binary-identifying people***

a) "My friend left their sweater here" (Bjorkman, 2017, p. 5) [+specific, +definite, +singular, +epicene]

b) "I'll let my sister1 . . . introduce themselves" (Bjorkman, 2017, p. 2) [+specific, +definite, +singular, +/-gendered, -epicene] [context: addressee sees referent]

### ***Nonbinary they***

a) A friend of mine told me that their dog had died [+specific, -definite, +/-singular, -gendered, +nonbinary] [context: friend is nonbinary]

b) "My friend left their sweater here" (Bjorkman, 2017: 5) [+specific, +definite, +singular, +nonbinary] [context: friend is nonbinary]

c) Sam drinks their coffee black [+specific, +definite, +singular, +nonbinary]

d) "It's grown out of the process of really seeing how Rocko has grown as an individual and an adult, seeing how Rocko is their own person, and not a child" [+specific, +definite, +singular, +nonbinary] (in a *New York Times* article, Scelfo, 2015).

As these examples of the use of nonbinary *they* illustrate, neutral pronouns can provide a "way of actively recognizing a non-binary person's gender, and their use in public spaces ... increases awareness that non-binary people exist" (Faucette, 2014, p. 79). The singular *they/them* "comes with predetermined variants *them*, *theirs*, and *themselves* that all English speakers already automatically know, although the singular *themselves* may take a while to seem natural in opposition to the plural *themselves*" (Faucette, 2014, p. 79). Many allies and activists encourage the usage of the singular *they/them* pronouns as a "generic neutral pronoun when the subject's gender is unknown" (Faucette, 2014, p. 79). In addition, members of LGBTTQIA+ communities have promoted the usage of the singular *they/them* to refer to individuals who have yet to establish or specify their preferred pronoun or gender identities. Such usage would force individuals to stop making assumptions about other individuals' gender and gender identities based solely on their physical appearance.

Being referred to as *they* instead of *he* or *she* based solely on physical appearance allows non-binary individuals to make a choice about how they want to be perceived by others, resulting in a sense of authenticity and validation. Having the choice of being able to specify preferred pronouns promotes a sense of control and power in one's own body.

Choosing which pronouns you want to be referred to by, and specifically choosing pronouns that you have chosen for yourself, tends to be frowned upon in society. Choosing specific pronouns such as *they/them* for yourself, is often deemed as "wrong" or "not normal" as it goes against the conventional and normalized mutually

exclusive, conjunctively exhaustive binary for gender and gender identities. Validating one's identities and preferred pronoun categories within many LGBTTTQIA+ communities is standard; however, when in contact with heteronormative communities, many LGBTTTQIA+ individuals face significant conflicts regarding discrimination and invalidation by their own peers. Between members of LGBTTTQIA+ communities, there is little to no complaint about the introduction of gender-neutral and gender identity-specific language and how members choose to establish their identities. However, gender non-normative individuals' lives and experiences within their LGBTTTQIA+ communities and within cis-heteronormative communities will vary significantly. Because homosexuality still carries great stigma in our cis-heteronormative society, the values and practices of LGBTTTQIA+ communities are still often subject to questioning, criticism, invalidation and discrimination.

During Hekanaho's study, "participants nearly unanimously accepted singular they in generic use, many of the same participants rejected they in nonbinary use. Whereas generic they was often described as inclusive, ideal, natural and common, nonbinary they was rejected as weird and confusing." (2020b p. 506). Hekanaho's research establishes the main concern with gender-neutral and inclusive language: people's perception and reactions towards its usage in public or normative settings. "The difference between the reactions was most clear with arguments relating to the number of they, which was one of the most common overt reasons provided for the rejection of nonbinary they, but not with generic they" (Hekanaho, 2020b, p. 506). In Hekanaho's study the singular *they/them* pronoun was the preferred option for 67% of participants, whereas 33% related more to neopronouns, new pronouns invented to avoid expressing gender such as *ze* and *xe*, which will be discussed below. Hekanaho (2020b, p. 505) explains this by stating that "overall, it seems it is easier to accept a familiar pronoun being used in a new context, than to accept completely new pronouns." The main importance in pushing for language reform is having gender-neutral language normalized. As gender-neutral language begins to be normalized within cis-heteronormative society, the conflicts faced by gender non-conforming and non-normative individuals will significantly decrease. Specifically, how cis-heteronormative individuals in society perceive the existence of non-binary and gender non-normative individuals will influence how they choose to use gender-neutral language.

### *Neopronouns*

Neopronouns are not as new as their name suggests. Neopronouns are a category of singular gender-neutral pronouns that portray an individual's sense of gender identity beyond the established *he*, *she*, and even *they*. Modern neopronouns are used as an alternative to the singular *they/them* in reference to non-binary and gender non-normative identities and may be used by anyone regardless of their gender identities.

Although the use of neopronouns is not widespread, the most common neopronouns are *xe/xem*, *ze/hir*, and *ey/em*. In some cases, individuals may create a neo-pronoun variant with existing nouns such as objects or animals. Examples of some of the most common type of noun-to-self pronouns are: *cat/catself* (cat), *dog/dogsself* (dog), *vamp/vampself* (vampire), *faer/faerself* (fairy), and so forth, in which English speakers usually relate themselves to an object, animal, or other type of being. Although neopronouns are a less common self-referencing tool than the singular *they/them*, as reflected in Hekanaho's (2020a) research discussed above, the discussion of neopronouns has increased significantly as younger gender non-normative individuals continue to explore and establish their gender identities.

### *Preferred gender pronouns (PGP)*

PGP, 'preferred gender pronouns' or 'personal gender pronouns,' refers to an individual's specific set of pronouns (third-person pronouns) in the English language. PGP are an individual's chosen pronouns that align with their gender identities. PGP were created in order to be more inclusive towards gender non-normative individuals as well as to avoid making assumptions based on an individual's physical appearance, although the term 'preferred pronoun' may be interpreted as not obligatory. In many instances, PGP refers to the specific pronouns an individual wishes to be addressed by, for example, *he/him*, *she/her*, *they/them*, and in other cases, the usage of neopronouns such as *ze/zir*. PGP emerged as a way of promoting inclusion of transgender and gender non-normative individuals. It is a way of normalizing the practice of sharing and establishing specific gender identity-related pronouns in academic and medical settings. PGP extends to asking for the individual's preferred name in addition to their preferred pronouns. Hekanaho's (2020a, p. 240) outlines some practical complications sometimes encountered in using PGP, but generally concludes that using a person's preferred pronouns signals support and acceptance of nonbinary identities.

### *Honorifics*

Honorifics are a form of addressing an individual with high esteem, out of courtesy, or respect. Commonly, honorifics can be titles prefixed to an individual's name (i.e., Mr., Mrs., Ms.) but can additionally be used without the individual's name (i.e., Mr. President, Captain, Colonel etc.). English-language honorifics have been used for members of nobility, royalty, the armed forces, etc., for example, lord, lady, Your Majesty, admiral. Additionally, honorifics may be used in situations where it is inappropriate to use an individual's first or last name. Unlike other languages such as Japanese, many English honorifics are not commonly used. The most common honorifics are Mr., Mrs., and Miss/Ms. This section will focus on the most common English honorifics in order to establish how they represent a challenge for gender non-conforming individuals.

Common title honorifics such as Mr., Mrs., Miss, or Ms. are determined by the person's gender. Mr. is the honorific used for men, regardless of their marital status. Its feminine counterparts include Mrs., which is usually used for married women. In addition, unmarried women or women who keep their maiden name can be referred to as Miss. The third alternative is Ms. which can refer to married or unmarried women whether they keep their maiden name or not. According to the *Handbook of English Linguistics* (Aarts & McMahon, 2006), Ms. was not intended to be gender-neutral, but it was meant to be neutral regarding a woman's marital status, and as such to provide a direct parallel with the male title Mr. In the *Handbook of English Linguistics*, Aarts and McMahon (2006, p. 12) state:

Some speakers have restructured their system of titles in the way feminists hoped, by using Ms. instead of Miss and Mrs. Others seem to have restructured along different lines, by constructing a three-term system: Miss for young unmarried women, Mrs for married women and Ms for 'anomalous' women—older but still unmarried, divorced, militantly feminist or lesbian (Schwarz 2003). These examples illustrate the difficulties that can arise with attempts to change a language from the top down: as Anne Pauwels (1998) reminds us, the shift towards greater gender-egalitarianism in English usage has been less a matter of 'natural' evolution than a case of language planning.

As for formal titles, the most common honorifics in the English language are sir and madam (ma'am). Both sir and ma'am are terms that demonstrate a sense of respect or flattery. Sir and madam are commonly used by workers in reference to the individuals they are serving. For example, "May I take your coat, sir?" Like Mr., madam can also be used to address an individual by their title without their name (e.g., "Madam President"). Because they are determined by the person's gender, such honorifics pose challenges to gender non-normative individuals.

A gender-neutral title is a title or honorific that does not indicate the gender of the person being addressed. For example, an alternative to the gendered English honorifics is the gender-neutral term Mx (pronounced mix - /miks/). According to Wong (2017), Mx. exists as a hybrid of the traditional honorifics' first consonant M and the most common mathematic variable x. Mx. reflects neither a person's marital status nor their gender, though it could potentially be a marker for nonbinary gender identities. Mx. is used by non-binary and gender non-normative individuals who do not wish to indicate a gender (binary or otherwise), whose gender is not specified, whose assigned sex is not included in the gender binary (intersex), or whose gender identities do not align with the gender binary. Although this honorific is gaining popularity now, according to the Merriam Webster dictionary, which added the term in 2016, the earliest print evidence of the title dates back to 1977 in an issue of an American magazine called *Single Parent*. For non-binary individuals, gendered honorifics and common titles are often invalidating with regard to their identity and can cause severe gender dysphoria.

In addition to non-binary individuals, some transgender individuals often use honorifics in order to avoid the gendered expectations attached of Mr., Mrs., Miss or Ms. If a transgender woman chooses any of the female honorifics., she must then have to deal with the social expectations that come with a gendered title. If an individual chooses Miss, Mrs. or Ms., they may feel they must automatically present themselves as female and must look and act according to what is socially gendered as female behavior. Because transgender identities and the process of transition are dynamic, not every individual will conform to socially gendered expectations; therefore, the honorific Mx. serves as a tool which can help them to avoid having to endure stereotypes and gendered expectations. According to Wong (2017), having a way to refer to oneself that is true to one's identities and does not attach unnecessary extra meanings and assumptions such as binarily gendered identities allows one more freedom in interactions with others. Another positive side-effect of having these terms for nonbinary individuals is decreasing the salience of gender overall, allowing cisgender people to potentially also experience less gender stereotyping. Faucette (2014, p. 74) asserts that:

Non-binary activism is not about taking away others' gender identity; rather it's about questioning the unique pedestal on which gender stands as a system of classification and an identity marker, and especially the heavy use of a classification system that is based on assumptions rather than consent.

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### *Appropriating language and reclaiming slurs*

In this section, I will explore the process in which queer individuals and members of LGBTTQIA+ communities reclaim words previously designated as slurs aimed at them, such as the word *queer*. Acts of reclamation and appropriation are common amongst numerous marginalized groups around the world. For many marginalized groups, appropriating or reclaiming a slur is a form of resistance and revolution. The appropriation of slurs is often a response to oppression and discrimination which seeks to challenge the systems of discursive domination that perpetuate this oppression and discrimination. By reclaiming slurs, members of these marginalized communities are able to reclaim power over public narratives.

Much of the discourse regarding slurs, relies on the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. Slurs are an aspect of language that is embedded within power dynamics. For oppressors, slurs become a linguistic weapon by which they can impose domination over a specific group. Members of oppressed groups, however, can disarm this weapon by using the slur term to self-refer. In other words, when marginalized groups begin to use a new definition of a slur normally used against them to label themselves, they are able to upend the appropriate the formerly oppressive speech act itself. When marginalized groups appropriate slurs, the speech act evolves from being a derogatory term to an act of self-labelling or self-expression. Although the word(s)

used in the slur remain the same, by reclaiming the speech act, a new meaning is acquired. The speech act's derogatory nature ceases to oppress, rather it acquires meaning and ownership as it now belongs to the marginalized community rather than to the oppressor. The reclamation and appropriation of slurs in the English language re-establishes a new power dynamic.

According to the Oxford Dictionary of Slang, the word *queer* was first introduced by John Douglass, the 9th Marquess of Queensberry, who discovered his son was having a romantic relationship with Oscar Wilde. This resulted in the word *queer* becoming a derogatory term as it carried with it the negative connotations attached to homosexuality by dominant cis-heteronormative society. Throughout the years, it remained a slur as it was used by speakers of English to refer to anyone who was openly gay or to males who were perceived as feminine. In the twentieth century activists began the process of reclamation and appropriation, which has had an impact on how other speakers' use of English as well.

### **Misgendering and deadnaming**

Misgendering occurs by intentionally or non-intentionally using the incorrect gender pronoun to refer to an individual. Highlighting the fact that transgender spectrum people experience widespread stigma, McLemore (2015, p. 2). asserts:

Identity misclassification, or the experience of not having one's social identity correctly recognized by others, is psychologically disruptive. These experiences undermine belonging and coherence needs ... disrupt the social identity process ... and reflect a failure to have one's social identity accurately verified by others.

When misgendering occurs, it violates an individual's desire for verification, understanding and validation. Being validated by others allows an individual to confirm their identities. "Confirming one's self-views helps to make the world predictable and controllable, satisfying a psychological need for coherence, providing knowledge about the self, and allowing social interactions to proceed in an authentic and smooth manner" (McLemore, 2015, p. 3). When an individual's identities are not confirmed or validated by others, this may often result in a sense of inauthenticity that affects how the individual will go on to perceive themselves and others. In many cases, misgendering leads to gender dysphoria.

When an individual is being constantly misgendered, they may experience anxiety, depression, and intense discomfort and dissatisfaction with themselves, which can lead them to stop engaging in interpersonal relationships with their peers or in general. As McLemore (2015) points out, misgendering is one of the more subtle forms of enacted stigma that transgender spectrum individuals experience, as it has the potential to shape how they feel and how they evaluate themselves and their social identities. Much discussion in this area has centered around language, insofar as linguistic mis-

gendering through the incorrect use of *he* or *she* is “one of the most pervasive, irritating, and easily altered micro-aggressions that occur in a non-binary person’s daily life” (Faucette, 2014, p. 79).

Misgendering also occurs through being denied access to one’s preferred pronoun or one’s preferred gendered space such as bathrooms. For example, if a transgender woman is denied access to a ‘female’ bathroom, her identities as a woman are being invalidated. The participant responses in Hekanaho’s (2020b, p. 506) study support the interpretation that “incorrect pronoun use, or misgendering more broadly, signals disrespect and invalidation of nonbinary identities.”

- Many times, transgender individuals refuse to seek medical attention because of past traumatic experiences with misgendering within the medical community. According to Ansara and Hegarty (2013), gender independent people have described being refused necessary medical care, avoiding essential medical care, or omitting vital medical information that would reveal their gender independent history or experience due to prior traumatic experiences of misgendering by professionals. Ansara and Hegarty (2013, p. 56) outline research identifying specific instances in which the language used by medical professionals misgendered patients:
  - These traumatic experiences include misgendering through pronouns and titles; the use of misgendering anatomical language to describe people’s body parts (e.g., assuming that it is acceptable to refer to a self-designated man’s genitals as ‘vagina’ and ‘clitoris’ when he may understand them as his ‘frontal opening’ and ‘cock’, respectively, or that it is acceptable to refer to a self-designated woman’s genitals as ‘penis’ and ‘testicles’ when she may prefer more woman-centric language).
- In cases such as these, misgendering leads to poor quality medical attention and safety and as such, misgendering can be seen as a form of psychological violence that has significant consequences. Freeman asserts:
  - According to the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (Veale et al. 2015), the largest survey of its kind with responses from over 28,000 participants, transgender individuals are systematically discriminated against in health care settings ... For those who were able to access health care services, they reported negative interactions like harassment; others were refused services altogether on account of their being trans. (2018, p. 158)

Transgender, non-binary, and gender non-conforming individuals may often choose a new name; one that aligns with their unique gender identities. Undergoing a name change may prove to be an affirming step in their transitioning process that allows them to have a ‘fresh start.’ Choosing a new name as a transgender individual may help one’s peers and those around them to view them through a new lens, in accordance with their preferred gender identities. However, in many cases, people struggle to acknowledge and adhere to a transgender individual’s new identities and name and



often refuse to acknowledge them entirely. Referring to someone by their birth name and disregarding their affirmed name is called 'deadnaming.' Deadnaming is another way in which individuals invalidate gender non-normative people's identities and authenticities. Deadnaming may occur intentionally or may be accidental. Intentional deadnaming can serve as an attempt to diminish, deny and invalidate a person's gender identities. Deadnaming can be partially avoided by undergoing bureaucratic processes to legally change one's name. Deadnaming is a form of harassment that further reflects how language is used to discriminate against transgender individuals.

### **Language reform and what it means to be an ally of LGBTTTQIA+ communities**

The English language has systematically encoded an inherent and often top-down, elite-led bias towards men and masculinity. The language that we use is a reflection of our cultures, ideologies and perceptions. In regard to gender and sex, speakers of English unconsciously or consciously often exclude individuals based on their gender or gender identities. In this article, we explored the relationship between language and gender by analyzing the ways in which gender non-normative individuals construct their gender identities through the English language through the use of self-referencing tools such as: pronouns, non-binary honorifics, the reclamation of slurs, and an overall use of gender-neutral language. In the process, we have shown how language serves as the most significant and primordial tool in the construction of gender identities for non-binary and trans individuals.

In order for us to promote non-sexist language reform, we need to have a deeper grasp of gender as a spectrum, rather than as a mutually exclusive, conjunctively exhaustive binary. Like queer theory, queer linguistics is concerned with how heterosexual normativity is produced, perpetuated, and resisted. Queer linguistics also seeks to localize these productions within specific communities of practice. Language reform does not simply rely on changing forms; instead, it requires sociocultural and ideological changes. Linguistic choices and practices are embedded within sociocultural and political frameworks which usually perpetuate systems of domination. An individual's choice of words is saturated with political and social meaning, and it is through one's linguistic practices that one is able to express social meaning. Hekanaho (2020a, p.66) advocates for non-sexist language reform by stating: "The suggestion with nonsexist language reforms was that moving towards nonsexist language use would facilitate moving towards a nonsexist society."

An LGBTTTQIA+ ally can be defined as a person who has a genuine concern for the lives and well-being of members of LGBTTTQIA+ communities. Anyone, regardless of their sexual orientation and/or gender identities can be an ally and support LGBTTTQIA+ communities. However, being a good ally requires deepening your understanding of LGBTTTQIA+ and queer-related issues. In this section, I will provide steps which individuals can take to become significant language allies to LGBTTTQIA+

communities. Allies tend to have a genuine concern for the lives and equality of individuals. They are people who support and accept members of LGBTTTQIA+ communities and advocate for equal rights and the dismantling of oppressive systems of domination. A good ally understands that they hold privilege that members of LGBTTTQIA+ communities do not get to experience because of their sexualities and/or gender identities. In order to become an ally, a person must stay informed. Being informed starts by acknowledging concepts and terms that are important to the members of LGBTTTQIA+ communities, such as understanding the difference between sex and gender. The internet offers a vast variety of LGBTTTQIA+ advocacy sites that provide broad definitions of terms and concepts for those unaware.

An ally should recognize their privilege and bias; cis-heteronormative individuals do not face inequality because of their sexual orientation or gender identities. Allies may carry an unconscious bias; but it is their responsibility to deconstruct and dismantle these as they can continue to perpetuate the oppressive systems LGBTTTQIA+ individuals face on a daily basis. Allies refrain from making potentially dangerous assumptions. Allies should use gender inclusive and gender-neutral language in their everyday speech because this can help to normalize gender neutral language in cis-heteronormative environments. The most important components of being an ally are: (a) supporting equality, including through financial support: allies can support policies that help members of the LGBTTTQIA+ communities as well as those that ensure them a better quality of life and protect them from discrimination; (b) lifting up queer voices: a good ally understands that lifting up queer voices includes black queer voices, sex workers' voices, and impoverished queer voices; (c) appreciating social issues: allies should be aware and understanding of the social issues queer individuals face on a daily basis such as sex work; (d) supporting queer artists and performers: allies can attend performances and celebrate queer artists, musicians, and talents; and lastly, (e) advocating for the existence and livelihood of queer individuals on a daily basis: allies should be regularly supportive, for example, not just during occasions like Pride Week. Allies, including 'language allies' are important to LGBTTTQIA+ communities; it is through allyship that voices for advocacy can be heard as allies may hold positions of power that may help LGBTTTQIA+ people in their struggles for equality.

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# PROCEDENCIA DE LOS MARCADORES DE GÉNERO BINARIO DEL LENGUAJE DE SEÑAS PUERTORRIQUEÑO (LSPR): FORMA Y UBICACIÓN DEL MASCULINO Y FEMENINO

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## Resumen

El Lenguaje de Señas Puertorriqueño posee áreas del rostro delimitadas para expresar los conceptos que contengan un género binario, ya sea masculino o femenino. Estas señas emparejadas, solo se diferencian por la ubicación en la que se realizan, la cual determina si son de género masculino o femenino. El presente trabajo explica el origen de los marcadores de género presentes en el Lenguaje de Señas Puertorriqueño. Además, muestra la composición como estrategia para otorgarle género a una seña base. También recoge las señas utilizadas a través del tiempo para representar el género masculino y femenino, y sus referentes.

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**Términos clave:** sordos, género, lenguaje de señas, Puerto Rico, señas metódicas

## Introducción

La lengua natural de los sordos, por su condición, es el lenguaje de señas. Cuando un niño sordo no tiene acceso a un sistema de comunicación oral o de señas, intentará comunicarse mediante gestos, que luego podrían convertirse en señas. Es así como surgen la mayoría de los lenguajes de señas en el mundo, creados por personas sordas que carecen del acceso auditivo a una lengua formal. Claramente para que estos sistemas de comunicación se vuelvan tales, y que subsistan, se necesitan una comunidad de habla, por ende, una comunidad de sordos. Han sido pocos los lingüistas que se han dedicado al estudio de los lenguajes de señas como lenguas verdaderas, a diferencia de las lenguas orales (Baker-Shenk & Cokely, 1991). Una de las lenguas orales más estudiadas y con gran variación es el español. En esta lengua existe lo que se conoce como género o género gramatical, una cualidad intrínseca de los sustantivos, la cual obliga a que estos

se clasifiquen como masculinos o femeninos. Se conoce que el nombre de las clasificaciones (masculino y femenino) y las palabras que agrupan no son accidentales. Dicho de otra manera, existe una relación entre los objetos o características asociadas típicamente con el hombre (sexo biológico) y su clasificación como palabras de género gramatical masculino. Lo mismo sucede cuando se trata de sustantivos catalogados como femeninos y su relación estereotípica con la mujer. En otras categorías gramaticales existe una tercera clasificación conocida como género neutro que se aplica a conceptos o ideas, pero no a referentes humanos (Hualde et al, 2010, p. 137-142). Vale aclarar que, esta forma neutra no se refiere a lo que se conoce como lenguaje inclusivo.

Previamente, sobre el Lenguaje de Señas Americano (ASL, por sus siglas en inglés), uno de los lenguajes de señas más estudiados en el mundo, se ha planteado que con el tiempo cambió la forma femenina (palma abierta) de hacer las señas, por ejemplo, la seña de *amor*, por la forma masculina (palma cerrada o puño), indicativa de fuerza. Por otro lado, se le atribuye a un prejuicio machista el designar la frente como área masculina debido a que una serie de señas, que se ejecutan en esta área como, por ejemplo, inteligencia, sabiduría, pensar, aprender, y concentrarse, están tradicionalmente relacionados al hombre. Lo mismo se argumenta para el área de la barbilla, denominada como femenina, en la que se ejecutan señas como triste, vanidad, paciente, soledad, y fea, ideas tradicionalmente relacionadas a la mujer. Esto, según se menciona, es un reflejo de la creencia de la racionalidad del hombre (frente → cabeza → cerebro → mente), y la expresividad de la mujer (barbilla → pecho → corazón → emociones). En consecuencia, se ha señalado que el ASL, aparte de manifestar el racismo y la xenofobia de su comunidad de señantes, también revela su pensamiento machista (Jolly & O'Kelly, 1980). En vista de que las áreas denominadas masculinas y femeninas del lenguaje de señas de Puerto Rico son las mismas del ASL, y algunas de las señas son similares, es conveniente conocer cómo se determinan dichas áreas, a saber qué relación exististe, si alguna, entre el área de la frente y lo masculino, y el área de la barbilla y lo femenino.

### **Señas metódicas, composición y género**

El Abad Charles-Michel de l'Épée, conocido como 'el padre de los sordos', ideó un sistema de comunicación para la educación de los sordos al que llamó "Signes Methodiques" o Señas Metódicas. Este sistema consistió en modificar las señas utilizadas por los sordos e inventar una serie de señas equivalentes a los elementos gramaticales que poseía el francés. Los artículos, las conjunciones y el género gramatical son algunas de las categorías que se integraron en la lengua de los sordos. Una de las estrategias que utilizó Michel de l'Épée para representar la morfología y gramática del francés oral y escrito fue la composición. Para crear una nueva representación de un concepto, se unían dos o más señas, secuencialmente. Por ejemplo, la palabra francesa *chat* [gato], se construía uniendo la seña de *bigotes* (de felino) con *pequeño*. Si hacíamos esto mismo, pero con la seña de *grande*, en sustitución de *pequeño*, significaba *tigre* [tigre]

(Pélissier, 1856) (a menos que se especifique lo contrario, todas las traducciones en este artículo son mías). De tal manera, cualquier concepto con significado, se podía tomar como la raíz, y combinarlo para generar o derivar un nuevo significante según se necesitaba. Ahora bien, cuando se empleaba la composición para representar estos los conceptos nuevos que se le enseñaban a los alumnos sordos, se evitaba crear nuevas formas, puesto que, se utilizaban solo las señas existentes pero combinadas.

En términos de los artículos y del género de las palabras francesas, de l'Épée en su escrito para la instrucción de los sordos manifiesta:

Hacemos que el Sordo y Mudo observe las articulaciones de nuestros dedos, de nuestras manos, de las muñecas, de los codos, etc. y las llamamos artículos o articulaciones. Luego escribimos sobre la mesa, que el, la, las, de, del, de, unen las palabras, como nuestros artículos unen nuestros huesos; [...] a partir de entonces, el movimiento del dedo índice derecho, que se extiende y se pliega varias veces en forma de gancho, se convierte en el signo razonado que damos a cualquier artículo. Expresamos género llevando la mano al sombrero, para el artículo masculino *le*, y a la oreja, donde termina el peinado de una persona del sexo, para el artículo femenino *la*. (de l'Épée, 1784, según citado en Shawn & Delaporte, 2006, p. 20)

Este fragmento da a entender dos cosas; primero, que las señas para los artículos tenían forma gancho (índice encorvado), forma que se extenderá para otros conceptos relacionados; y segundo, que el género de los artículos, y por ende, el del resto de las señas, es binario y se estableció por referentes distintos. El género masculino se ubicó en la parte superior de la cabeza, en referencia a un sombrero, accesorio de los hombres. Mientras que, el género femenino se estableció al nivel de las mejillas, por el peinado de las mujeres de la época.

Shawn y Delaporte (2006, p. 21) recalcan que en un comienzo la ubicación de las señas de *hombre* y *mujer* no era marca de género, sino que fue generada de manera orgánica por los sordos:

Si la configuración del gancho fue introducida por el Abbé de l'Épée por las razones que acabamos de ver, las ubicaciones ciertamente toman prestadas a los signos espontáneos HOMBRE y MUJER que él podía observar en los sordos que acudían a sus lecciones. En cuanto al signo HOMBRE, tenemos el testimonio del Abbé Ferrand (alrededor de 1785), contemporáneo del Abbé de l'Épée: “llevar la mano al sombrero”. Del signo MUJER sólo tenemos constancia posterior al Abbé de l'Épée: el dedo índice o el pulgar se deslizan por la mejilla para estilar “el borde del gorro” (Puybonnieux 1846) o “la cinta del gorro” (Lamberto 1865). Este signo se ha mantenido sin cambios hasta el día de hoy (fig. 7).

A pesar de que no se describe la forma de la mano para la seña de HOMBRE, solo se menciona la ubicación, para la seña de MUJER ya se tiene constancia de dos configu-

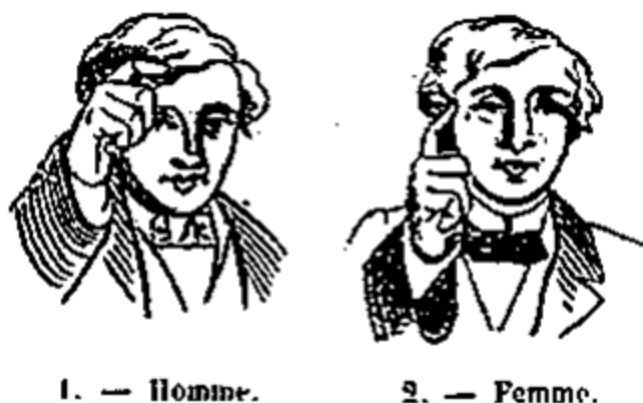
raciones usadas, la ubicación y el movimiento. Sin embargo, los referentes y la ubicación provistos por las fuentes son distintos a los dichos por de l'Épée. Otra seña documentada, para el concepto de mujer, es, “seña de las dos manos una encima de la otra, y seña del anillo en el dedo anular” (Ferrand, 1897, p. 126). En cambio, en su primer tomo, el Abad Roch-Ambroise Cucurron Sicard, sucesor de Michel de l'Épée, redactó la siguiente explicación para las señas de hombre y mujer:

Hombre. 1. Lleve el dedo índice a la frente, como para mostrar el asiento de la mente pensante, y luego al corazón, como el asiento de la voluntad que se inclina hacia los objetos. 2. Recorrer todo el hábito del cuerpo, con ambas manos, de la cabeza a los pies, para mostrar un cuerpo extendido, animado, respirando y andando.

Mujer. 1. Todas las señas del anterior. 2. Seña de garganta. 3. Formar una figura, dejando caer ambos brazos a lo largo de las caderas, debilidad física; es el signo del sexo. (Sicard, 1808, p. 52-53)

Sicard (1808) menciona al pensamiento y la voluntad como referentes para elaborar la primera parte del concepto de hombre. El primer contacto del índice, forma manual que se hace en la cabeza, coincidiendo con la ubicación del género masculino. La figura de la mujer, en comparación a la del hombre, no se construye de manera independiente, sino que está basada en este último a la que se le añade dos referencias corporales, la garganta y las caderas. La descripción que se brinda, para la instrucción de los sordos, sobre el hombre es una de autocontrol y dominio, ya que es un cuerpo “pensante y con voluntad” (Sicard, 1808, p. 52). Por el contrario, a la mujer se le define con base en el hombre, agregando elementos corporales y mencionando la “debilidad física” (p. 53). Una explicación distinta a la que expresó su antecesor Michel de l'Épée, la cual han repetido diversos investigadores a través del tiempo.

Años más tarde el escritor, poeta y profesor sordo francés Pierre Pélissier (1856, sin paginación) ilustró las señas de *hombre* y *mujer* utilizadas en ese tiempo (Fig. 1). Para la primera, escribió “Signo de tirar del sombrero” y para la segunda “Haga descender el índice, por el lado externo, a lo largo de la sien, hasta la mandíbula inferior”.



**Figura 1** Señas de *hombre* (*homme*) y *mujer* (*femme*) (Pélissier, 1856, sección Individualités et professions)

Si bien estas dos señas fueron reestructuradas, sus formas se originaron de los artículos *le* y *la* creados por de l'Épée. Además, luego de las adaptaciones, solo se emplean para componer señas que contengan los conceptos de hombre y mujer en su semántica. Debido a procesos lingüísticos, los artículos y marcadores de *masculino* y *femenino*, pasaron a ser también las señas de *hombre* y *mujer*, respectivamente. Péliissier (1856, sección Individualités et professions), luego de estas definiciones, anota que, “En las siguientes 8 figuras, para designar el sexo, hay que tener cuidado de que cada una de ellas vaya precedida por uno de estos dos signos”. De aquí que se interprete que los sordos que fueron instruidos bajo el sistema de Señas Metódicas, adoptaron el marcador de género binario y lo incorporaron a su sistema de comunicación, mejor dicho, a su lengua. Es preciso comentar que estos mismos sordos son los que luego compondrán la comunidad parisina y francesa de sordos. Y aunque el sistema se utilizó en Francia y fue llevado a los Estados Unidos, no se empleó por mucho tiempo.

### **La base metódica del ASL**

En 1817, en Connecticut, Estados Unidos, abrió la primera escuela de sordos de instrucción manual, en otras palabras, que utilizaba un lenguaje de señas para la educación. La escuela, hoy conocida como la *American School for the Deaf* (ASD), fue una especie de caldo de cultivo para la comunicación de los sordos de la época. En un principio, se creía que los sordos que llegaban a la ASD eran instruidos mediante Lenguaje de Señas Frances (LSF). No obstante, en un recuento de los eventos más importantes que han encaminado el desarrollo del Lenguaje de Señas y la Comunidad Sorda en el mundo, Wilcox y Occhino (2016), aclaran que, el maestro sordo francés, Laurent Clerc y, el pastor oyente estadounidense, Thomas Gallaudet, conocidos por establecer las bases de la educación en señas de los Sordos en los Estados Unidos, no trajeron al continente americano el *Old French Sign Language* (OFSL), o Antiguo Lenguaje de Señas Frances, sino que fue el sistema de Señas Metódicas. La combinación del sistema de Señas Metódicas junto con las señas llevadas por los sordos desde sus hogares y comunidades dieron forma a lo que hoy se conoce como ASL. William Stokoe (2005) en su monografía de investigación sobre el ASL con relación a las Señas Metódicas, menciona que, los artículos *le* y *la*, del francés, se representaron encorvando el dedo índice, para indicar el singular, y ubicándolo en la frente como recordatorio de la costumbre masculina de inclinar o tocar el borde del sombrero; y en la mejilla como forma femenina, ya que el corte del peinado de las mujeres de la época usualmente llegaba hasta esta área, respectivamente, sosteniendo lo escrito por de l'Épée entorno a los referentes utilizados para originar los artículos. Además, describió cómo el uso de la composición y de los marcadores género es variado entre los señantes del ASL. Mientras unos sordos utilizan la forma compuesta, es decir, el género seguido de la seña base, otros utilizan una variante que resulta de la contracción de dicha forma. Incluso menciona que no hay evidencia

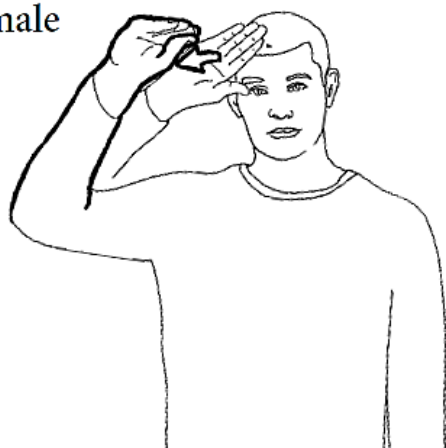


de la existencia de otra estructura de prefijo y base, excepto el grupo de señas que contienen los conceptos de hombre y mujer en su semántica, comúnmente llamado ‘la familia’. Este confirma la transferencia de los marcadores de género binario, proveniente de Francia, a la lengua de los sordos en Estados Unidos. Cabe resaltar que en el Diccionario de ASL de Gallaudet (DASL) (Valli, 2005) se ilustra un tercer marcador, el género neutral. Este se ejemplifica solamente con la seña de prime, forma alterna a primo y prima, la cual se ejecuta entre el área masculina y el femenina, eso es, a nivel del pómulo.

Las señas interpretadas en Francia como *masculino* y *hombre*, y *femenino* y *mujer*, provenientes de los artículos inventados por Michel de l’Épée, en Estados Unidos, evolucionaron para convertirse en la seña de *sexo* o *género*. No obstante, los conceptos de *masculino* (Fig. 2) y *femenino* (Fig. 3) continuaron siendo representados en el ASL por las formas previamente descritas en Francia para hombre y mujer, esto es, quitarse el sombrero y deslizar el pulgar por la mejilla, respectivamente.

Cabe mencionar que ambas señas ahora poseen varias acepciones relacionadas semánticamente con el género que representan, por ejemplo, en Puerto Rico se utilizan como equivalentes de muchacho y muchacha. Mientras que las señas de hombre y mujer, que son las mismas en el Lenguaje de Señas Puertorriqueño (LSPR), tomaron una forma similar a *Monsieur* [señor] y *Madame* [señora], las cuales son composiciones de masculino o femenino y la seña de ‘bien vestido’ haciendo referencia a un *jabot* [volante], pieza distintiva de la vestimenta francesa, como ilustró Pélissier. Lo que demuestra que ambos pares de señas, las inventadas por de l’Épée y las creadas por los sordos, eran utilizadas simultáneamente y que fueron llevadas a los Estados Unidos y consecuentemente a Puerto Rico.

man  
guy  
male



**Figura 2** Seña de *masculino* (male)  
(DASL: Valli, 2005, p. 274)

girl  
female



**Figura 3** Seña de *femenino* (female)  
(DASL: Valli, 2005, p. 194)

Shawn y Delaporte (2006) prueban la travesía y evolución que ha recorrido la seña del ASL con el significado de *sexo* o *género* (Fig. 4), refiriéndose en ambos casos a la identidad de una persona. Las autoras enfatizan que muchas de las señas utilizadas en el ASL vienen del LSF y la importancia de rastrear el significado de estas señas hasta sus orígenes, puesto que en muchas ocasiones se adjudican raíces o etimologías incorrectas, como es el caso de la seña de *sexo* o *género*. Diversos autores han postulado que dicha seña posee la forma de X (Fig. 5) a causa de que la palabra en inglés termina en dicha letra. Las investigadoras desmienten esta etimología y explican que el origen de la seña es una combinación de *hombre* y *mujer* (Fig. 1) para expresar la alternativa de ‘masculino o femenino’. Nuevamente, por procesos lingüísticos, se redujo la amplitud del movimiento, aunque conserva la dirección de articulación de una de las formas (masculina), y parte de la ubicación de articulación de la otra (femenina).

sex  
gender



**Figura 4** Seña de *sexo* o *género*  
(DASL: Valli, 2005, p. 407)

X

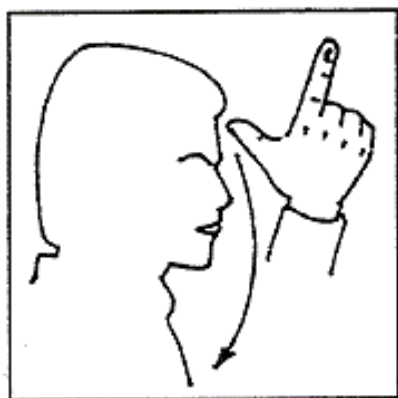


**Figura 5** Letra X en ASL  
(DASL: Valli, 2005, p. 10)

### Remanentes metódicos en el LSPR

Puerto Rico, desde el 1898, pertenece a, pero no es parte de, los Estados Unidos. Como toda nación o país tiene una identidad, cultura, idiosincrasia, y lengua propia que, a veces, es desvalorizada. En el archipiélago borincano, como en otras partes del mundo, existen minorías lingüísticas, como es el caso de las comunidades sordas. Aunque en los años recientes se ha reconocido la existencia de un lenguaje de señas de Puerto Rico, o LSPR, la realidad es que muchas personas siguen pensando que en Puerto Rico solo se utiliza el ASL. Por el estatus colonial de la isla, diversos estudiosos han planteado que el LSPR pertenece a la familia del ASL o es una variación de este. A la fecha de hoy, no se ha realizado una investigación exhaustiva o un corpus lingüístico que compruebe esa teoría o que describa lo que conforma el LSPR y cómo ha surgido.

En 1902, en el Viejo San Juan (Puerto Rico) se estableció el colegio, casa y convento Colegio San Miguel. Labor que estuvo a cargo de las Misioneras Auxiliadoras del Sagrado Corazón (*Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart*, MHSH). Las Misioneras vinieron a la isla con el propósito de educar a los niños sordos y oyentes en la fe católica a través de la instrucción del catecismo. Algunas de las religiosas se habían preparado en Educación del Sordo en Gallaudet College, institución fundada por Edward Minner Gallaudet, hijo de Thomas Gallaudet. Dicha preparación tiene como fundamento que la enseñanza de los sordos debe ser mediante el método manual, es decir, utilizando el lenguaje de señas. Las Misioneras viajaron por toda la isla en búsqueda de niños sordos que necesitaran ser educados y por tal razón, con el tiempo, la matrícula del colegio fue aumentando (Laguna-Díaz, 2017). Una vez los jóvenes sordos culminaban su periodo educativo en el colegio, regresaban a sus hogares. Varios de estos niños sordos, tenían hermanos y otros familiares que también eran sordos a los cuales les transmitían lo que habían aprendido. Los egresados del colegio durante el transcurso del tiempo y la vida adulta se reencontraban. Algunos inclusive formaron familias, lo que permitió que una comunidad sorda emergiera. Un dato cronológico fundamental es que las Misioneras llegaron a Puerto Rico 58 años antes de que se describiera el ASL en 1960, durante ese periodo probablemente surgieron cambios en la lengua de los sordos estadounidenses. Por lo expuesto anteriormente, en la recolección general del vocabulario utilizado por los sordos de Puerto Rico, se registran varias de las señas discutidas previamente, entre ellas, una de las variantes de *hombre*, la seña de *sexo*, y la forma compuesta de *hija* (Matos, 1990). Es probable que la seña de *hombre* (Fig. 6) provenga de las formas de *el*, *masculino* y *hombre* utilizadas por los sordos franceses (Fig. 1), ya que la forma del índice es parecida. La diferencia reside en que la seña hombre no se ejecuta en forma de gancho, sino en forma de L, en otras palabras, extendiendo el índice y el pulgar. Lo demás, la primera ubicación, la orientación de la palma y los dedos empleados, es lo mismo. La descripción provista para esta variante es similar a la escrita por Sicard, primero llevar la mano a la frente y luego al pecho, que a su vez concuerda con las ubicaciones ilustradas por Pélissier pero con otros referentes.



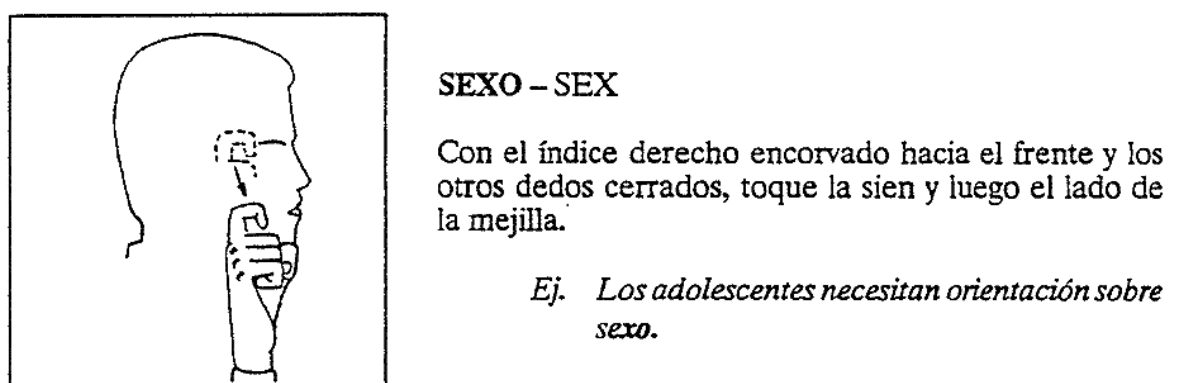
#### HOMBRE – MAN

- ☐ Mano en “L” toca la frente y luego el centro del pecho en un solo movimiento.

*Ej. El hombre entró en su casa.*

**Figura 6** Variante de *hombre* (Matos, 1990, p. 9)

Por otra parte, en el caso de la seña de *sexo* (Fig. 7), como se puede observar, mantiene la misma forma del ASL (Fig. 2), sin embargo, no contiene el significado de género. Una de las posibles razones es que al momento de las Misioneras llegar a Puerto Rico, la seña no contenía el género en su semántica, sino el concepto de sexo solamente. Otra de las razones es que pudo haberse perdido el significado porque la comunidad no conoce el concepto de género, como una construcción social. Cualquiera que sea el motivo, hasta ahora, no se ha registrado u observado una seña para género.



**Figura 7** Seña de *sexo* (Matos, 1990, p. 329)

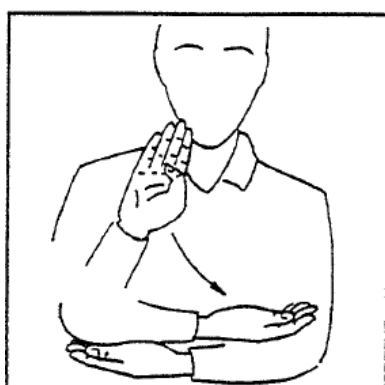
Desde Francia, a través de Estados Unidos, también llega a Puerto Rico la composición de *hija* (Fig. 8), combinando la seña de *femenino* con la seña de *bebé*. La misma secuencia que muestra Pélissier en su iconografía, con la diferencia de que, en sustitución de la Seña Metódica, se ejecuta la variante de *femenino* con el pulgar, una de las creadas por los sordos franceses. Tanto la seña de *mujer* como las de *hijo* e *hija*, siguen la regla de los marcadores de género, el *masculino* se ubica en el área de la frente hasta la sien, y el *femenino* en el área de las mejillas hasta la barbilla.

Esto demuestra que, con respecto a la combinación de las señas, se continúa colocando género primero y luego la seña raíz como estableció de l'Épée. La seña de *mujer* sigue la misma secuencia descrita para *hombre*, excepto que la mano sale de la barbilla. Lo mismo sucede con la seña de *hijo*, se hace la seña de *masculino* y luego la de *bebé*. Cabe destacar que, la seña de *hija*, como muchas señas compuestas, evolucionó en una variante simple (Fig. 9). Esta forma, seguramente, proviene del ASL, por razón de que también está presente en esa lengua.



Haga la seña de “femenino” una vez y baje la mano abierta hasta caer sobre el recodo del brazo izquierdo que apunta hacia la derecha.

**Figura 8** Variante compuesta de *hija* (Matos, 1990, p. 8)



**HIJA – DAUGHTER**

□ Mano en “B”, índice toca la barbilla y baja cayendo palma hacia arriba sobre el recodo del brazo izquierdo que apunta hacia la derecha.

*Ej. Mi hija está en cuarto grado.*

**Figura 9** Variante simple de *hija* (Matos, 1990, p. 8)

## Conclusión

Ciertamente los marcadores de género binario (masculino y femenino) y composiciones presentes en el LSPR, provienen de las Señas Metódicas, sistema artificial creado por un hombre oyente, para representar los elementos de la lengua francesa, y que sigue presente de forma directa e indirecta en varios lenguajes de señas relacionados. A su vez, los marcadores continúan colocándose al comienzo, estructura que se origina de colocar primero el artículo y luego el sustantivo, y utilizándose solo en señas que tengan en su semántica los conceptos de hombre y mujer. Su vigencia se puede deber a que sirve para que la persona sorda construye el concepto con base en una figura principal, estableciendo primero a la persona junto con su género y añadiendo el atributo. Por lo presentado, en un comienzo las señas de *masculino* y *femenino* se referían a hombre y mujer, o sea, a las personas, no a los géneros. La ausencia de una seña, en un principio, para estos conceptos en el léxico de los sordos de Francia, da a entender que para ellos no existían o, por lo menos, no los percibían. Por tales razones, es probable que, previo a que Michel de l'Épée introdujera los marcadores de género, los sordos utilizaran formas más neutrales en su comunicación.

Al presente, en el LSPR, no se ha descrito una seña para género, interesante, la seña de *sexo*, en ASL contiene ambos significados. Esto puede significar que los sordos

en Puerto Rico, así como tantos oyentes, desconozcan el concepto de género como constructo social y distinto a lo que es el sexo. Puesto que los marcadores de género continúan empleándose, se debe replantear si la percepción de ellos sigue siendo por el género de la persona o por el sexo. Sin duda alguna, para conocer la etimología de las señas del LSPR, que provengan del ASL, ya que se utilizan señas provenientes del mencionado sistema, en efecto hay que trazar sus orígenes hasta el LSF y las Señas Metódicas.

En fin, así como en las lenguas orales, en las lenguas de señas también existen los marcados de género binario. Pero, es importante recalcar que las lenguas no son inherentemente binarias o fóbicas. Hay que tener en cuenta que, aunque se dice que las lenguas son entidades vivas, porque son cambiantes, están subordinadas a la percepción de los hablantes, o señantes en este caso. Por consiguiente, si bien es cierto que la ubicación de los géneros en LSPR proviene de las señas creadas por los sordos, no es menos cierto que origen es un referente, como un sombrero o el cabello, y no prejuicio machista. Esto no quita que introducir los marcadores de género a una lengua perpetua el sistema binario de la hegemonía patriarcal. Como tampoco que los hablantes o aprendices de esa lengua mal interpreten las razones de los marcadores, en este caso, para la ubicación de los géneros masculino y femenino.

Por la evidencia citada, no se puede atribuir la presencia del género gramatical binario en el LSPR a los sordos, sino a un hombre oyente. Igual que ha sucedido en otras ocasiones, un ente externo influencia la comunicación de un grupo minoritario para moldearlo a la normativa social de la época. En este caso, los sordos franceses y todos los sordos que utilizan algún sistema de comunicación de la familia del LSF, se ven influenciados por la decisión histórica de introducir una interpretación binaria del género. Por otro lado, es necesario un estudio y reanálisis lingüístico entorno a cómo se expresa el género y el género gramatical en distintos lenguajes de señas. Por último, es importante describir como en los lenguajes de señas de otras familias lingüísticas, vale decir, que no estén relacionados al LSF o al ASL, se representa el género, género binario, o alguno otro, si es que ocurre.

Comparar las diferencias y similitudes es vital, ya que puede brindar una idea del impacto que tuvo el sistema de Señas Metódicas en la comunicación de los sordos de Francia, Estados Unidos, y Puerto Rico.

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# EL DISCURSO FUNDAMENTALISTA COMO OBSTÁCULO PARA LA EQUIDAD EN PUERTO RICO

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## Resumen

En años recientes el sector religioso de Puerto Rico se ha encontrado en el centro de varias controversias en las que se han manifestado en contra de la comunidad LGBTTTQIA+. En este artículo argumentaré sobre el problema del fundamentalismo religioso en Puerto Rico y cómo el mismo impacta directamente a las personas que no se alinean o se comportan conformes a sus ideologías. A continuación, presentaré diferentes instancias en las que el sector fundamentalista religioso del país ha intentado limitar los derechos de la comunidad LGBTTTQIA+ mediante la desinformación y discursos cis-heteropatriarcales.

**Términos clave:** derechos LGBTTTQIA+, fundamentalismo religioso, equidad, Puerto Rico, Latinoamérica

En Puerto Rico, como en muchos otros lugares de América Latina, existe un gran sector de la población que practican las religiones cristianas. En años recientes el sector religioso del país se ha encontrado en el centro de varias controversias en las que se han manifestado en contra de la comunidad LGBTTTQIA+. Esto no solo representa un problema para la convivencia social con la diversidad existente, sino que este sector ha impulsado y promovido políticas públicas que impactan negativamente a la comunidad LGBTTTQIA+ y a las personas gestantes en la capacidad de decidir sobre sus cuerpos. En este ensayo argumentaré sobre el problema del fundamentalismo religioso en Puerto Rico y cómo el mismo impacta directamente a las personas que no se alinean o se comportan conformes a sus ideologías. A continuación, presentaré diferentes instancias en las que el sector fundamentalista religioso del país ha intentado limitar los derechos de



la comunidad LGBTTTQIA+ mediante la desinformación y discursos cis-heteropatriarcales.

En el artículo II, sección 3, de la Carta de Derechos en la Constitución de Puerto Rico se indica que: “Habrá completa separación de la iglesia y el estado” (Rivera Ramos, 2015, p. 540). Sin embargo, miembros del sector religioso se han insertado en posiciones de poder dentro del sistema gubernamental con el fin de avanzar una política pública basada en sus ideologías religiosas. Tal como es el caso de la senadora por el partido Proyecto Dignidad Joanne Rodríguez Veve y la representante municipal del mismo partido Lisie Burgos Muñiz. Tanto la senadora como la representante han impulsado medidas antiaborto, en contra de la erradicación de las mal llamadas terapias de conversión y en contra de la perspectiva de género (PDG). De manera que estas acciones son alarmantes ya que limitan los derechos de las personas LGBTTTQIA+ y personas gestantes. Por lo que nos pudiéramos preguntar si verdaderamente en Puerto Rico se hace cumplir dicha separación de iglesia y estado.

Kang et al. (2017) mencionan la frase popularizada por las feministas en la década de los 1960, “lo personal es político” cuyo planteamiento es que nuestras experiencias personales son moldeadas por el contexto político, económico, histórico y cultural que nos rodea (p. 22). Adicional a lo anterior, les autores indican que aun cuando las personas sean capaces de dirigir el curso de sus propias vidas, el nivel de agencia que les individuos tengan puede verse limitado por la posición social que ocupen (p. 24). Reconocer que lo personal sí es político es esencial para poder identificar cómo el Estado desde su posición de poder puede limitar el acceso a recursos esenciales y derechos humanos a los que todos debemos tener acceso como cualquier otro ser humano. Esto es relevante cuando buscamos utilizar nuestras posiciones de privilegio para amplificar las voces de grupos marginados y señalar las injusticias que se cometen hacia ellos. Por lo que, las acciones de fundamentalistas religiosos dentro de los espacios políticos estarían propiciando mayor desigualdad e injusticia en nuestra sociedad.

Por otra parte, así como está protegido en nuestra constitución la separación de iglesia y estado también existe la libertad de credo por la cual las personas pertenecientes a grupos religiosos pueden practicar su religión sin ser perseguides. No obstante, el sector fundamentalista religioso insiste, con frecuencia, en imponer sus creencias y dogmas practicados por su religión al resto de la sociedad que no necesariamente comparte sus mismas creencias. De manera que, hay una doble vara ya que uno de los argumentos que hace el sector fundamentalista es a “que no se les impongan normas en las que ellos no creen”. Es decir, que estos grupos ultraconservadores que constantemente buscan imponer sus creencias no están dispuestos a ser educados sobre la diversidad existente. Sin embargo, es importante señalar que educar sobre la diversidad o exigir igualdad de derechos para cualquier persona, incluyendo a la comunidad LGBTTTQIA+, no es sinónimo de imponer creencias ni quitarle derechos a otros. Puesto que, los fundamentalistas

religiosos constantemente argumentan que sus derechos se ven limitados cuando se proponen políticas públicas que protejan los derechos de mujeres y miembros de la comunidad LGBTTQIA+.

Ahora me enfocaré en el lenguaje y los discursos utilizados por grupos fundamentalistas y ultraconservadores y en cómo pueden resultar peligrosos o dañinos. Mergal (2014) menciona que: “Ciertos usos del lenguaje, dependiendo de cómo se utilicen, con quién, en qué contexto, pueden ser muy violentos como también incitar a la violencia” (p. 233). Esta frase me parece importante ya que demuestra el poder que pueden llegar a tener las palabras dependiendo del fin con el que se utilicen. Asimismo, la autora señala que el lenguaje bíblico es persuasivo y que tiene un efecto en quienes lo escuchan. Por ejemplo, les fundamentalistas religiosos suelen partir de la premisa de que las personas no creyentes están “perdidas”, que son “inconscientes” o en los casos más extremos les consideran “un Satanás” (Mergal, 2014). De ahí que, utilizan estos discursos para demonizar a todo aquel que no crea en su religión ni se rija por las reglas establecidas en su grupo religioso. Utilizar este tipo de discursos y lenguajes es dañino ya que se criminaliza y margina a las personas por pensar o actuar distinto a lo que ellos entienden es lo que dicta su Dios.

En otro sentido, Rivera Pagán (2019) apunta que el surgimiento del fundamentalismo nace “de la tradición evangélica estadounidense como un rechazo a cambios culturales que sectores religiosos conservadores catalogaban de modernismo, secularismo y alejamiento de las normas sociales ordenadas por Dios” (p. 4). En cambio, Castells (1997; citado en Anazagasty Rodríguez, 2013) indica que desde una mirada sociológica el fundamentalismo incluye la construcción de una identidad colectiva con el fin de ajustar la conducta de los individuos e instituciones sociales a las normas religiosas según interpretadas por sus respectivas autoridades y que son aceptadas como únicas y legítimas. Aparte de esto, Anazagasty Rodríguez (2013, párr. 10) menciona que en Puerto Rico las feministas y la comunidad LGBTTQIA+ son chivos expiatorios de la fe evangélica y que son los responsables de “las culpas del pueblo”. Por consiguiente, el fundamentalismo resulta como antítesis a la secularización creciente en la sociedad y lucha en contra de diferentes teorías, entre ellas la teoría evolutiva, el feminismo y los reclamos de reconocimiento civil y dignidad social de la comunidad LGBTTQIA+.

Otro aspecto destacado por Rivera Pagán (2019) son los tres peligros potenciales que nacen desde la participación de iglesias y agrupaciones religiosas en los debates sociales. El primer peligro mencionado es lo que el autor llama “la inviolable voluntad divina” que implica atribuir sacralidad compulsoria a la legislación (ej. “Si la iglesia rechaza el uso de métodos anticonceptivos, el estado debe prohibirlos también”). El segundo peligro es el impedir que se reconozcan plenamente los derechos civiles y humanos de personas con diferentes orientaciones sexuales porque según ellos así lo ordena su Dios. Mientras que el tercer peligro es de índole teológica ya que:

al invocar a Dios para combatir la teoría de la evolución, la abolición de la esclavitud, la igualdad social de la mujer, sus derechos reproductivos o la validez antropológica, moral y jurídica de las diversas orientaciones sexuales, se atribuye a la deidad la responsabilidad última de esas represiones sociales. (Rivera Pagán, 2019, p, 7)

De modo que la imagen establecida por los mismos grupos religiosos, que promueven la represión de diferentes sectores de la sociedad, de un Dios misericordioso y bondadoso se vería afectada por sus discursos que promueven el odio y la marginación.

Ciertamente, pudiésemos cuestionarnos si el verdadero propósito de estas personas, que utilizan la religión como escudo para difundir sus discursos de odio, es salvaguardar la vida y el bienestar de las personas que conformamos la sociedad. Ya que, como he presentado previamente en lugar de promover la equidad y la aceptación solo provocan división y represión entre las personas. Igualmente, me pregunto si Dios mismo ordenó a que “amamos a nuestro prójimo como a nosotros mismos”, porqué hemos de sembrar odio y marginar a otros solo porque son distintos a nosotros. ¿No sería eso hacer lo opuesto a lo que Dios nos dijo que hiciéramos? También pienso en la famosa frase bíblica en la que Jesús les dice a los fariseos: “el que esté libre de pecado, que tire la primera piedra”. Entonces, ¿Por qué aun cuando reconocemos que todos somos pecadores, algunos se sienten en posición de juzgar a otros por la forma en la que hayan elegido vivir sus vidas? Nuevamente, observamos una doble vara o moral en la que solo algunos son merecedores de perdón y misericordia y otros merecen ser castigados y criminalizados por sus acciones.

En esta sección me enfocaré en presentar algunas instancias en las que el fundamentalismo religioso ha incidido en las políticas públicas que se crean en Puerto Rico. Como había mencionado anteriormente, las representantes del partido Proyecto Dignidad han mostrado su oposición activamente a proyectos de ley y políticas públicas que promueven la equidad y garantizan los derechos de las mujeres y personas LGTBTTQIA+. En enero de este año surgió una polémica en torno al currículo con perspectiva de género que se estaría implementando en las escuelas públicas de Puerto Rico. Según la Orden Ejecutiva (OE) 2021-13 del Gobernador Pedro Pierluisi se declara un Estado de Emergencia por la Violencia de Género y se deja en manos del Departamento de Educación (DE) la implementación de un currículo de enseñanza. Sin embargo, este currículo ya no se llamaría “Currículo de Perspectiva de Género” sino que será nombrado “Equidad y respeto entre los seres humanos” según un video publicado por la senadora Joanne Rodríguez Veve quien anunció haber llegado a un acuerdo con el secretario del DE (De Jesús Salamán, 2022). Adicionalmente, una fuente indicó al periódico El Vocero lo siguiente:

El objetivo de esta iniciativa —que es consistente con la perspectiva de género y la Orden Ejecutiva— es que no haya discriminación por razón alguna, incluyendo por género y orientación sexual. De igual manera, educar para erradicar toda

violencia verbal o física, es decir acoso o ‘bullying’, así como el machismo. Como ha dicho el gobernador y cito: “La etiqueta no hace la cosa; lo importante es la acción.” (Angleró citado en De Jesús Salamán, 2022, párr.10)

Estas acciones son alarmantes ya que como bien señaló la senadora María de Lourdes Santiago del Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño, es preocupante que el secretario del DE llegue a compromisos contradictorios a la OE con una funcionaria electa (De Jesús Salamán, 2022). Igualmente, la senadora por el Movimiento Victoria Ciudadana, Ana Irma Rivera Lassen expresó lo siguiente:

Mientras haya categorías de personas que preferimos no nombrar, son personas a quienes les estamos negando los derechos. Sin duda, el nombrar en muchas ocasiones no hace la cosa, pero en ocasiones el nombrar sí hace la cosa. Es la diferencia entre tener o no tener derechos. (citado en De Jesús Salamán, 2022)

El señalamiento de Rivera Lassen es esencial para comprender el problema que implica el no utilizar los términos correctos para nombrar diferentes categorías. Ya que, como bien afirma la senadora, el no llamar las cosas por su nombre invisibiliza y margina a las personas que no se nombran. Asimismo, Cabán Pérez (2019) dice:

el uso de lenguaje opresivo o en este caso, no inclusivo, impide que se cree o se reconozca nuevo conocimiento ya que la opresión sesga lo que se representa. Es decir que solamente visibiliza aquello que favorece los intereses particulares de quien escribe o vocaliza “x” planteamiento. (p. 4)

Esta reciente controversia sobre el currículo académico con perspectiva de género no es asunto nuevo, ya que en el 2015 el DE publicó una carta curricular explicando la política pública sobre la equidad de género y cómo se integraría al currículo escolar (Díaz Tirado, 2021). La autora de este artículo indica que luego de haberse publicado la carta curricular hubo una gran controversia en el país debido a un libro que se hizo viral en las redes sociales que supuestamente sería utilizado en las escuelas. Sin embargo, la administración del gobernador en aquel entonces Ricardo Rosselló negó que ese libro sería utilizado en las escuelas y bajo esta administración el currículo con PDG fue descartado. La Organización de las Naciones Unidas (ONU) define la PDG como:

el proceso de evaluación de las consecuencias para las mujeres y los hombres de cualquier actividad planificada, inclusive las leyes, políticas o programas, en todos los sectores y a todos los niveles. Es una estrategia destinada a hacer que las preocupaciones y experiencias de las mujeres, así como de los hombres, sean un elemento integrante de la elaboración, la aplicación, la supervisión y la evaluación de las políticas y los programas en todas las esferas políticas, económicas y sociales. (Díaz Tirado, 2021)

En otras palabras, la PDG no es más que el lente con el que miramos el mundo en torno a las relaciones y dinámicas de género que entran en juego en nuestras interacciones humanas. Por lo que, la educación con perspectiva de género busca que nos movamos

de una mirada androcéntrica, cis-heteropatriarcal a una inclusiva y justa para la diversidad existente. De ahí la importancia de nombrar las categorías correctamente para poder conocer lo que verdaderamente significan y emitir juicios informados sobre las decisiones que se tomen al respecto.

Por añadidura, resulta interesante ver cómo la misma biblia que utiliza el sector fundamentalista para basar sus discursos en contra de la PDG contiene ejemplos sobre como esta fue puesta en práctica por Jesús mismo. La teóloga feminista Agustina Luvis Núñez argumenta:

Jesús, desde el principio de su ministerio, empezó a atender a las mujeres, que eran consideradas no personas en la sociedad judía. Empezó a invitarlas a que se sentaran a estudiar con él cuando los hombres eran los únicos que podían estudiar. De muchas maneras, Jesucristo utilizó la perspectiva de género contra la cultura judía, que era una cultura muy patriarcal, para afianzar la dignidad de las mujeres. (Díaz Tirado, 2021)

Por tanto, dentro de los textos bíblicos existen representaciones de cómo la PDG siempre se ha encontrado presente y cómo Jesús la utilizó para visibilizar y reconocer a personas marginadas como miembros activos en la sociedad. Con este ejemplo, es posible ver una de las diferentes formas sobre cómo se llevaría a la práctica la PDG y el impacto positivo que tendría en la inclusión de la diversidad social. Del mismo modo, Lara Infante (2022, párr. 10) señala que “argumentar que se implementará un currículo de equidad y respeto hacia los seres humanos sin incorporar la perspectiva de género como una categoría analítica para explicar y solucionar las desigualdades no tiene sentido”. Por esta razón, destaco nuevamente la importancia de utilizar con cuidado las terminologías, categorías o conceptos para hablar sobre diferentes temas. Ya que el no hacer uso correcto de las palabras puede resultar en la propagación de violencias a través de la tergiversación de los discursos planteados.

En otro sentido, Torres Nieves (2022) presenta otro ejemplo en el que el sector fundamentalista religioso se ha encontrado en el centro de la discusión, en este caso sobre los derechos reproductivos de las personas gestantes. La autora indica que 12 de los 13 proyectos que se han presentado en la legislatura para imponer cargas a la práctica del aborto han sido de la autoría de las legisladoras del Proyecto Dignidad Rodríguez Veve y Lisie Burgos. Las legisladoras se han mostrado activamente en contra del aborto y su legalidad en Puerto Rico. En su proyecto más reciente el PS 693 buscan “restringir este derecho humano en Puerto Rico desde la semana 22 de gestación, cuando, sin criterio científico, se presume la viabilidad fetal” (Torres Nieves & Hsiao Sánchez, 2022, párr. 22). Sin embargo, las autoras también presentan un argumento de la licenciada Otón Olivieri en el que se indica que este proyecto de ley solo afectaría desproporcionalmente a personas en condiciones vulnerables como lo son las víctimas de violencia de género. Así pues, si según las legisladoras el propósito de estas medidas antiaborto es proteger ‘las dos vidas’, ¿por qué solo enfocan sus discursos en ‘la/él no nacido’? Esto pues,

siempre hablan de la ‘viabilidad fetal’ o de la ‘vida del feto’, pero no toman en consideración las repercusiones que traería el traer esa criatura al mundo. De modo que llevar a cabo un embarazo no deseado pudiese provocar la muerte en la persona que gesta, problemas económicos, emocionales o incluso maltrato y violencia infantil. Pareciera que para el sector fundamentalista religioso la vida del no nacido es más valiosa que la vida de quien gesta y que está vive actualmente.

En síntesis, para lograr tener una sociedad equitativa, justa e inclusiva debemos respetar la diversidad humana y de perspectivas. No obstante, el diferir o tener opiniones distintas no es sinónimo de discriminar u oprimir a las demás personas. Por lo que el sector fundamentalista debe mantenerse al margen de las decisiones que se toman sobre políticas públicas o cualquier foro gubernamental ya que con frecuencia transmiten sus mensajes de maneras violentas y opresivas hacia les demás. Puesto que deben entender que no todes estamos obligades a regirnos ni a respetar las normas que se dictan en sus textos religiosos ya que tenemos el derecho de expresarnos y actuar libremente según lo entendamos. Además de reconocer que el tener una identidad de género u orientación sexual fuera de la cis-heteronormatividad no nos hace mejores ni peores seres humanos. Si queremos avanzar y progresar como sociedad, nos toca abrazar la diversidad y estar abiertos a deconstruir las estructuras e ideales que nos han regido por siglos para construir caminos en los que todes podamos acceder a una vida digna y de calidad.

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**COSMOPOLITANISMS,  
HISTORIES AND SOCIETIES IN  
THE CARIBBEAN AND BEYOND**





# “SLAUGHTER, IMPRISONMENT, BEATING, VICTIMISATION, CONTEMPT, RIDICULE:” CORAL GARDENS AND THE PERSECUTION OF RASTAFARI IN JAMAICA

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## Abstract

One of the most ridiculed, policed and persecuted New World African Diasporic religions is Rastafari, which emerged in 1930s racist colonial Jamaica, influenced by the Pan-Africanist teachings of Marcus Garvey. This article explores the meaning of the policing and persecution of Rasta, through the lens of the infamous Coral Gardens incident in 1963, which led directly to the murder, beatings, forced trimming and other atrocities meted out to Rastafarian men and women. Coral Gardens remains deeply etched into the memories of many Rastas and is a seminal event that continues to shape the relationship between Rastas and the Jamaican state, with survivors currently petitioning the Jamaican Government to provide the promised reparations before many more of them die. The exploration in this article is framed in light of Barima’s (2017) argument that labelling Rastafari as criminal and engendering/expressing lunacy has justified both state actors and ordinary citizens in mocking, terrorizing, imprisoning, victimizing and murdering Rastas. It draws on the testimony of survivors from the documentary, *Bad Friday: Rastafari after Coral Gardens*, and the memoirs of a policeman who was caught up in the midst of the events.

**Key terms:** Rastafari, Jamaica, Coral Gardens, persecution and policing, Bad Friday

“Bring in all Rastas, dead or alive” – Alexander Bustamante, first prime minister of Jamaica, 1963 (see Cooper, 2013).

“Neither mad nor bad...You must be good, sacred, holy...” – Professor Barry Chevannes in the documentary *Bad Friday: Rastafari after Coral Gardens* (Jackson & Thomas, 2011).

To the Dreadlocks and the cause for which they stood, they were warriors, dreadful; to the society lunatics and outcasts. Public image was soon to change, first with the Claudius Henry affair in 1960 and the Coral Gardens incident in 1963, when violence erupted, lives were lost, and the image of the aggressive fanatical sect took root. By then ... most Rastafari were already Dreadlocks (Chevannes, 1998, p. 95).

Belatedly, the colonial authorities realized that Rastafari was not a temporary messianic movement but a philosophy with an intellectual purpose and a commitment to advance Jamaica’s African-descended population ... By the early 1960s, Rastafari had been publicly denounced, derided, and subjected to constant harassment, brutal raids, and repeated arrests by the colonial authorities. Yet their numbers, largely drawn from but not limited to poor and marginalized Black Jamaicans of African descent, had grown. (Wynter, 2014, p. 302)

## Introduction

210 On April 11, 2022, a photo made the rounds on social media in Jamaica. It showed a Rasta man surrounded by Jamaican police, who are visibly threatening him with batons as one of their number drags him by what could be a rope looped around his neck (Figure 1). It was accompanied by hashtags #BlackFriday, #CoralGardensMassacre, #Rastafari. Another photo of former prime minister of Jamaica and National Hero, Sir Alexander Bustamante, questioning why he is a national hero, having given the order for the imprisonment, beating, torture and murder of Rastafari, was also making the rounds as a form of online protest. It was accompanied by the same hashtags as well as #CoralGardens and #ReparationForRasta!



**Figure 1:** #BlackFriday, #CoralGardensMassacre, #Rastafari (@juschmagazine, April 19, 2019)

At the centre of this online protest is one of the most ridiculed, policed and persecuted New World African Diasporic religions – Rastafari, which, along with other African-influenced spiritual traditions, such as Revivalism, Pocomania, and Obeah, has been suppressed, violently attacked and criminalised in Jamaica. Rastafari emerged in 1930s racist, colonial Jamaica, influenced by the Pan-Africanist teachings of Marcus Garvey and the coronation of Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I. The early Rastafari saw themselves as different from and at odds with colonial society, which they contended epitomized the Biblical ‘Babylon’ (the biblical city embodying evil and defiance of God) and which they, therefore, shunned and resisted (Mulder, 2016).

Rasta has nothing to gain from the society. It respects none of its values, indeed it denounces them, exposing their fraudulence and inhumanity. It thus finds itself in the margin, beyond the pale, mad, a scandal to everything and everyone that is respectable, but whole, wholesome, at peace. (Chevannes, 2006, p. 120)

This article explores the meaning of the policing and persecution of Rasta, through a recounting of the infamous Coral Gardens incident of April 1963, which led directly to the murder, beatings, forced trimming and other atrocities meted out to Rastafarian men and women by the police, oftentimes assisted by ordinary citizens. The ‘atrocities’ of Coral Gardens remain deeply etched into the memories of many Rastas; indeed, Coral Gardens is a seminal event that continues to shape the relationship between Rastas and the Jamaican state, even as Rasta has survived, persisted and grown, while simultaneously being routinized and appropriated as the ‘face of Jamaica’ in tourist brochures (Chevannes, 2014). Indeed, as Broek (2018) maintains, “The detested and strange Rastaman prior to 1960 thus became the highly esteemed and prominent Rastaman in the 1970s and 1980s” (p. 39).

The exploration undertaken in this article is framed in light of Barima’s (2017) argument that labelling Rastafari as criminal and engendering/expressing lunacy justified state actors and ordinary citizens in mocking, terrorizing, imprisoning, victimizing and murdering Rastas. Barisma argues cogently that:

Labeling Jamaica’s Black spiritual traditions as criminal and madness served as justifications to terrorize, imprison and murder Obeah workers, Revivalists and Rastas. Addressing this theatre of ridicule and violence shifts attention towards Jamaica’s harsh racial milieu where the consequences Afro-Jamaicans suffered for clinging to African spiritual ways and seeking redemption through Ethiopian paradigms included, but were not limited to beatings, imprisonment and mockery. (Barima, 2017, p. 175)

In a deliberate effort to give voice to the victims, the discussion in this article draws on the testimony of survivors included in the documentary directed by John L. Jackson and Deborah Thomas, *Bad Friday: Rastafari After Coral Gardens* (2011, hereafter *Bad Friday*). The memoirs of a policeman, Selbourne Reid (2012), who, as a very young corporal, was caught up in the midst of the events and sought to defend the actions of the

state are also explored. A claim to a more balanced perspective is made in the Public Defender's 2015 Report on the incident, and this is also engaged herein.

### **The Coral Gardens Massacre**

In the Rasta Chronology of Macpherson and Semaj (1980), the events of April 1963 are summarised as: "The Coral Garden' - Holy Thursday Killings blamed on Rasta resulting in revengeful brutalization of Rasta. After the Prime Minister's order of bringing in Dead or Alive all Rastas" (p. 97). Although the events started on Holy Thursday, April 11, 1963, the Rastafari have named the Coral Gardens Incident "Bad Friday" playing on the "Good" of Good Friday, the solemn Christian holy day commemorating the Crucifixion and Death of Jesus Christ. Indeed, it was on Good Friday that the police began rounding up anyone with locks and a beard. It was on that day that Prime Minister Bustamante gave the order to "Bring in all Rastas, dead or alive". This opened the flood gates for police to shoot and kill poor Black Jamaicans and Rastafari with the kind of impunity that persists until the present day (Campbell, 2014). It is true that Rastas were not the only victims of Bad Friday, as many poor Jamaicans were also mistreated as events unfolded (Office of the Public Defender, 2015). Nonetheless, the impunity that the security forces have enjoyed in relation to their mistreatment of poor Jamaicans—including Rastafari - has become a defining element of state interactions with poor Black Jamaicans since Independence.

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Renowned Rastafari scholar Horace Campbell, who lived in the same communities as many of the victims of the Coral Gardens Massacre and knew many of those who were mistreated, incarcerated and trimmed, narrates his personal recollection of the events and their meaning for Jamaican Independence. He marks Coral Gardens as "one more episode in the long wave of repression against the ideas and philosophies of African Redemption" (Campbell, 2014, p. 200). For Campbell, Coral Gardens was a pretext behind which the Jamaican state mounted a violent campaign against the Rastafari in Western Jamaica. The incident highlighted the continuing struggle of poor Afro-Jamaicans for promised rights which remain largely out of their reach until today, especially in the context of continuing state violence and repression against the poor.

Coral Gardens was not the first attempt by the Jamaican state to repress Rastafari. For example, the colonial government responded to Rastafari, beginning in its formative stages, in a fashion that created much social unrest (Van Dijk, 1995) and personal distress for Rastas (Dunkley, 2014). Indeed, in the 1950s, the decade before Coral Gardens - "a period of rapid radicalization and heightened (millenarian) expectations" (Van Dijk, 1995, p. 67) - there were numerous incidents of repression, evictions, arrests, leading to increased militancy among a younger generation of Rastafari, such as the Youth Black Faith, as discussed below.

The destruction and death that ensued during and after the events of Black Friday mirrors the description of the destruction of a maroon community called Mi-No-Sen-You-

No-Come [The name of the village in Jamaican means “If I don’t send for you, don’t come.”] (all translations are by the author, unless specified otherwise) located in the Cockpit Country, in Western Jamaica, in 1824..This community, consisting of over two hundred farmed acres along with animals, poultry and well-appointed buildings, had been established for over a decade before it was betrayed to the planters by an enslaved Afro-Creole.

The treaty-maroons were a major factor in the attack on the town, the crops were rooted up, buildings were burnt and of the towns “citizenry” several were killed, whereas others were sent to the Parish workhouse (jail) for future punishment determined in what were then slave courts. White power again was preserved, and instrumental in the state’s violence were the treaty-maroons without whom, snuffing out Black resistance would prove difficult for colonial elites. (Barima, 2017, p. 175)

Jamaican poet Kei Miller wrote a poem about this village, “Me-No-Sen-You-No-Come”, where he intones, “In plain English: do not enter without invitation” (2014, p. 26). He invokes the story of flaxen-haired Goldilocks and reframes it in a postcolonial critique of the uninvited colonial assuming “her colonial right to porridge” For, “if only she had pennied [Jamaican for “penetrated”—thought through thoroughly; over-stand...] the secret names of places. Me-No-Sen-You-No-Come: without invitation, you’re not welcome. Or else, come in as you please-just know that this ground, these bushes, these trees observe you with suspicion many centuries deep” (Miller, 2014, p. 26). Deep!

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There are contending arguments concerning the total destruction of Mi-No-Sen-You-No-Come (Sivapragasam, 2018). Recent research shows that, a number of the runaways returned to the village and rebuilt it after the Accompong Maroons destroyed it. Today it is a part of Upper Aberdeen, in “the land of look behind,” so called because the English Redcoats rode two to a horse, one man facing forward and the other backwards, nervously on the lookout for Maroons. Mi-No-Sen-You-No-Come is today called “Quickstep”. Nonetheless, the echoes of the destruction of the Rastafari commune at Pinnacle and on the grounds and yards of Rastas across Jamaica in the Coral Gardens Incident in the attempted obliteration of Mi-No-Sen-You-No-Come are stark (Dunkley, 2014; Van Dijk, 1995). The police and the army invaded poor working-class communities in Western Jamaica arresting all Rastas. Communes in the hills were also raided and violated; many Rastas were forcibly trimmed; others trimmed their own locks for fear of the repression. While the numbers detained are unknown, the lock up in Montego Bay overflowed and many detainees were kept in the jail yard as the enslaved had been up to a hundred and fifty years before. One official is reported to have stated, “If the jail cannot hold the Rastafarians, put them in Bogue [the local cemetery, i.e., kill and bury them]” (Campbell, 2014, p. 211).

It is next to impossible to not compare the role of the treaty-maroons in the time of Enslavement with the role of the police in state-sponsored terror in the Coral Gardens and other such attempts to repress Rastafari. Treaty-maroons had played an important role as state actors in the suppression of the 1865 Morant Bay Uprising and the capture of Paul Bogle, and it is worth noting that the formation of the Jamaica Constabulary Force (JCF) occurred just after the quelling of the Morant Bay Uprising in a bid to prevent further such uprisings. Therefore, although Campbell (2014) rightly traces some of the roots of current state violence and repression against the poor Black masses of Jamaica to the Coral Gardens Massacre, there are other roots that clearly go back even further.

Perhaps “Bad Friday” was the most formative moment in the persecution of Rastas by the State and it continues to be memorialised by the Rastafari each year. In 2013, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Incident, a special commemoration was held by the Rastafari community. Indeed, the Public Defender’s Report marks Coral Gardens as a “significant watershed in the relationship between the Rastafari community and the State” (Office of the Public Defender, 2015, p. 26).

### **Detective Selbourne Reid remembers**

There are many strands that go into weaving the story of Coral Gardens, Montego Bay, April 11, 1963. Until today, there are contending views concerning what happened at Coral Gardens (Office of the Public Defender, 2015). From the viewpoint of the State and the media, police had to go in and quell an unlawful uprising instigated by Rastafarians after the killing of a man and the burning of a gas station. Selbourne Reid, a retired policeman, in a self-published memoir titled, *1963 Rastafarians Rebellion: Coral Gardens, Montego Bay Jamaica*, described the Coral Gardens Uprisings as “Bad Thursday” “because of the atrocities which occurred on that day” (2012, p. 138). He focused on Rudolph Franklyn as the main protagonist in the atrocities – aided and abetted by “the Landless, the Poor underprivileged, the semi-literate, the unemployed as well as the Disenfranchised, in the Montego Bay area and a group of youngsters with association with the Young Communist group of which he was a member” (Reid, 2012, p. 139-140). In Reid’s account, one does not detect much sympathy for the Rastas and their suffering, nor for the other poor Jamaicans afflicted as a result of the chaos. Interestingly, Reid does note the importance of the failure to provide land to the landless “small settlers” as part of the reason for the Uprising, despite Horace Campbell’s concerns as discussed below. Reid goes on to blame Franklyn for the outcomes of “Bad Thursday”, as well as pointing an accusing finger at the Claudius Henry Affair and the indirect influence of “certain intellectuals, who encouraged the Rastafarian movement and rebellion in Montego Bay and Jamaica” (Reid, 2012, p. x). Reid is also featured in the *Bad Friday* documentary (Jackson & Thomas, 2011).

The facts, as he recounted them, were as follows: On April 11, 1963, a group of Rastafarians with machetes and other primitive weapons attacked numerous people, including police officers and other residents of Montego Bay, in the Coral Gardens, Rose Hall and Ironshore estate areas. Many people were injured, counting colleagues of Reid's, as a result of the attack and eight were killed, including Rudolph Franklyn, the ring-leader, and Detective Corporal Melbourne, "a favourite icon of the citizens of Montego Bay" (2012, p. viii). Melbourne's death as well as other events tied to the Henrys led Montegonians to turn vigilante against Rastafarians—any person who wore a beard - so men who did not "sight up" Rasta would also have been detained and mistreated. This led to much chaos in Montego Bay and its environs for many days. Many were brought before the Court and given jail time or fined. A Commission of Enquiry was later held that led to demotions and transfers of various policemen. Injured policemen were not given assistance by the state although many years later Prime Minister Hugh Shearer did implement a policy of compensation for family members of any officer killed in the line of duty. Training for police officers increased; and the Special Branch initiated new strategies, including incognito surveillance (Reid, 2012).

The retired policeman, who notes proudly that his sources include an interview with Francis Kerr-Jarrett, asserts that "Divine Intervention Influences Public Policy" (Reid, 2012, p. 140). He concludes this is so because the government was eventually able to obtain land from the Kerr-Jarretts to be utilised by the poor and homeless in Montego Bay; these lands were used for housing as well as farming, including cash crops. He then makes the unusual if unsubstantiated claim that "Many western economies include and recognise Divine Intervention in their Public Policy decisions" (p. 140). Key to this of course, was his experience of having been spared during the altercation, as:

a Rastaman passed between [his] coworker and [him]self and chopped the coworker, in the back, whilst before [him]-within three to five feet-of where [he] stood [he] saw a Rasta-man chopping to death a civilian volunteer who joined the police party in trying to capture these men, yet [he] escaped without a scratch. (Reid, 2012, p. 140-141)

For him this was a demonstration of "Divine Intervention" (p. 140).

Naturally, Campbell dismisses Reid's retelling as "the Jamaican elite version of the confrontation" (2014, p. 198). Campbell tellingly critiques Reid's book for distorting the climate of hostility created by the White planter class and their allies in their treatment of small farmers who had embraced Rastafari. According to Campbell, the Kerr-Jarretts and members of the White planter class subjected the people to provocation and harassment and simply shot them when they defended themselves (2014). The "official" story recounted by Reid is also contested by survivors of the Massacre and Rastafari. Indeed, as Campbell laments, "As in many cases of confrontation between the poor and



the powerful, the narrative of the powerful is what gets reported in the mainstream media and then gets imprinted in the popular memory” (2014, p. 198).

### **Survivors of the Massacre speak**

In the documentary *Bad Friday* (Jackson & Thomas, 2011), Carole Narcisse, the narrator, sets the stage by declaring Rastas were “demonised and persecuted by the Jamaican Government in the early years”. The documentary was filmed at the suggestion of the survivors and its proceeds from sales go to benefit them. The format of the documentary allows these survivors, now elderly, to retell their stories of demonisation and persecution. One elderly male survivor claimed he was “beaten and sent to jail without a cause” (unnamed male victim 1). Yet, Rastafari community organiser Linnette Wilks identifies the cause:

The system was very cruel to anyone who didn’t conform or didn’t seem to conform to their thinking ... [and then we] began to see different kinds of abuses and extreme fear for the unknown. How dare you question the status quo, and [that] was exactly what Rasta was doing. (Jackson & Thomas, 2011, *Bad Friday*)

Listen to Kei Miller describe Coral Gardens in a poem entitled, “xxiii” in his collection, *The cartographer tries to map a way to Zion* (2014):

And Zion is a parcel/of land returned onto Natty/day; more than Africa,/but even the little corner/in Mobay dat dem tief/in 1963/to build gas station pon it/till Natty see de transgression/and whisper in him heart/more fire/and de spark from that curse/light de gas pump/that was right then filling/de tank of de Governor’s Benz;/and the gas station which/was on the rightful land of Natty/go BOOM/and bun down to the ground/causing Bustamante to call down/edict on all Rastaman -/Rastaman who in order to survive/the turble wrath of Babylon/had to hide themselves in mattresses. O Zion/is Coral Gardens revised,/a reassembling of every baton/that was broken/on de head of Natty,/now turned onto them/that first wielded those sticks. (p. 56; emphasis added)

Miller critiques the injustice of the treatment of the Rastafarians by the State and the wealthy, through the prism of the pivotal issue of land. In this case, it is land which he claims had been stolen from them to build a gas station. Land is a seminal construct in Rasta psychology, origins and identity (Hewitt, 2016). They charge that the forces of Babylon are responsible for uprooting them from and dispossessing them of their original homeland using politics (“politricks”), economics and religion; and that these powerful forces continue to steal the land of the people of Jamaica and dispossess them of their birthright (Hewitt, 2016; Perkins, 2019). Similarly, Campbell (2014) highlights the centrality of land in the events leading up to Coral Gardens:

In the specific case of the Rastafari movement in Jamaica and the confrontations that exploded in Coral Gardens, the Rastafari claimed freedom of movement for themselves and for other oppressed Jamaicans. They were being prevented from

walking along areas of the Coast close to the Half Moon Bay Hotel. These areas were being segregated in order to make the Montego Bay area ready for international investments in tourism. The fact that Coral Gardens falls within the area of the historic Rose Hall plantation, which was the scene of major rebellions during the time of enslavement, was not lost on the black citizens of the time. (p. 200)

This clash over land is also centred by the survivors of the Massacre, who tell of Rudolph Franklyn constantly defending his right to plant land based on a title given him by his father, against the claims of a plantation owner who maintained that Franklyn “cum dung too far” and so was trespassing on estate property (Jackson & Thomas, 2011). Certainly, Rudolph Franklyn and other Rastas faced constant harassment by the police at the instigation of the propertied classes in Montego Bay led by Francis Kerr-Jarrett. Police would constantly burn their crops, harass them using the Dangerous Drugs Act as well as surveil them relentlessly. Even former policeman Reid admits to being disturbed by the regular destruction of the Rasta’s crops just at the point at which they were ready to be reaped (Jackson & Thomas, 2011, *Bad Friday*). “These Rastafarians were criminalised for walking along this road which was being developed for tourists” (Campbell, 2014, p. 210). This led to constant confrontations between the police and that particular group of Rastafarians. So frequent were these altercations that the Rastas acquired bows and arrows to defend themselves. The dispute boiled over on April 11, 1963, a mere eight months after Jamaica acceded to Independence from Britain, when the Rastas again claimed their right to walk in the tourist area and defended themselves in the process.

In the altercation, a gas station was burnt, and eight people killed, including the much disliked overseer of the Kerr-Jarrett estate, and three Rastas. Notorious among the policemen who moved to enforce the will of Kerr-Jarrett and his ilk was Detective Corporal Melbourne, who, as noted previously, was killed on April 11, 1963. It was then that Prime Minister Alexander Bustamante flew from the capital city Kingston to Montego Bay, accompanied by several senior civil servants including the Police Commissioner and the high command of the Jamaica Defence Force. This was a clear signal to local and international investors that the Jamaican state would prioritize their interests above of the interests of the majority of Jamaicans. The police manhunt rounded up the remaining members of Franklyn’s group and then unleashed their wrath against the Rastafari community in Western Jamaica, often with the support of the civilian population, in response to Bustamante’s edict: “From you is a Rasta [Bustamante] says you must go to prison or die” (male survivor of Coral Gardens, speaking in Jackson & Thomas, 2011, *Bad Friday*).

Kei Miller channels and retells the story of Empress Enid Steele, the only female survivor interviewed in the documentary: “*Rastaman who in order to survive/the turble wrath of Babylon/had to hide themselves in mattresses*” (2014, p. 56). Empress Enid

recounts her story in the documentary of wrapping her Kingman in a mattress to save him from the police and citizens who hunted him without cause. Her painful story includes the harrowing premature birthing of her child, who lived but seven days. Empress Enid, who was born in 1932, has since died. She was among the seven survivors honoured by Clinton Hutton in his 2014 Photographic Essay in *Jamaica Journal* (Hutton, 2014). Empress Enid's story was not atypical and the Public Defender's Report details the arrest and detention of several Rastawomen, including Miriam Walker's pregnant mother, who spent three days in lock up and lost her baby due to internal bleeding.

The male survivors gave further witness: "One time, according to how the Government look on it Rastaman was like worthless and people neva look on Rasta as upfull [morally upright] and conscious people. Police would just harass you fi nothing at all" (Brother "Shorty" Gayle, speaking in Jackson & Thomas, 2011). Teddy "Silas" Davis lamented:

In truth and in fact, *Rasta was like a species* in Jamaica. We haffi stay pon the edge of society, like you haffi stay mostly in the hills. You kya too much inna the city and town. Dem no waa si yu because dem figure se yu a bring certain light to the people. (in Jackson & Thomas, 2011, emphasis added)

Ras Teddy captures the disdain which many Jamaicans felt towards Rasta in his description of Rasta as "like a species" (not human, perhaps?). While state violence was not uniquely aimed at Rastafari, it was part of state-directed activity aimed at eliminating "movements or peoples, irrespective of their beliefs, who challenges Eurocentric thinking and the status quo" (Barima, 2017. p. 165, sic.). By challenging Eurocentric thinking and the status quo, Rasta brought a "certain light" to the people.

Ras Simba lamented that "piepl muvd aginst Rasta mo dan di govament". He recalled the "stigma" spread against Rasta—that they were "Black heart men", who caught and killed people (in Jackson & Thomas, 2011). This local calumny caused the citizenry to fear Rastas and they often mobbed and beat them. Coral Gardens was no exception, then, and simply played out the fear of the ordinary Jamaican against the perceived lunacy, criminality and evil of Rasta. Chevannes (1998), in describing the development of Rastafari, particularly the origin of dreadlocks, maintained that to the non-Rastafarian Jamaican matted hair was a sign of "lunacy, dereliction and withdrawal from society" (p. 94). "All Rastafari who stepped out of line with the society were first thought of as mad and then dealt with harshly when found not to be" (Chevannes, 1998, p. 94-95). All the men who are today recognised as the first preachers of Rasta—Howell, Hinds, Dunkley—were treated thus. The Courts often remanded Rastas for medical examination, as was the fate of Leonard Howell, the "first Rasta" and master of Pinnacle. Resistance to the more sympathetic University Report when it first came out was on the basis that it defended lunatics. For example, Monsignor Gladstone Wilson, a polyglot Afro-Jamaican Roman Catholic priest, himself the victim of colonial racist ideology, argued in the same vein. He, having a degree in psychology (one of many degrees), was

called to examine the members of the radical group of young Rastas—Black Youth Faith (BYF)—among whom Chevannes (1998) argues such innovations as dreadlocks originated. Monsignor pronounced them lunatic for their appearance, utterances and beliefs, particularly that of the divinity of the Emperor.

The judgments made against Rastas were akin to those made of homeless men who roamed the streets with long, unkempt hair and dirty dress. These homeless men were regarded as outcasts by the rest of Jamaican society. The BYF intentionally adopted this way of carrying themselves in order to similarly and intentionally distance themselves from racist, colonial Jamaican society. This practice is similar to and a further radicalisation of the early 1930s adoption of beards by Rastamen to more closely associate themselves with Haile Selassie and to distinguish themselves from the general populace. “[Tellingly,] even though there have been women Rastafari since the beginning of the organization, the group was often referred to as ‘bearded men, the beards or beardsmen’.” (Lake, 2014, p 228).

The survivors of Coral Gardens paint a picture of a persecuted minority, whose rights were violated by the State and citizenry alike, in violence that was fuelled by sensational portrayals in the media. Initially, British colonial officials dismissed Rastafari as “a lunatic fringe that would disappear as quickly as it appeared” (Wynter, 2014, p. 302). This did not happen and Rastafari grew and spread its teaching about the truth about Africa, exiled Africans and the Black God Man - Selassie.

*The Gleaner* newspaper, which styled itself as a defender of British colonial values, played an important role in stigmatising Rasta and other Afro-folk expressions, which it misrepresented as “branches of mental illness” (Barima, 2017, p. 169). This “diagnosis” was fabricated without any scientific or psychological basis and reflected the racism of the elite against Afro-Jamaicans. Predictably, Rastafari was labelled lunatic in the same fashion as Revival, one of its spiritual forebears. Indeed:

To further control the narrative surrounding Rastafari’s interpretation in the public space the *Gleaner* produced numerous articles where Rastafari played the role of lunatic, criminal, rabble-rouser and militant extremist. Fitting *Rastafari* into these stereotypes occurs from the moment they received publicity for their peculiar message regarding *Ras Tafari Makonnen*’s divinity, renouncement of Jamaican identity and an Ethiopia return. (Barima, 2017, p. 170)

### **Toward a conclusion: “Apology can’t be empty hand”**

These survivors and others who have already died have adamantly pressed for reparations, “Apology can’t be empty hand? Where is the recompense?” (unnamed male victim 2, Office of the Public Defender, 2015). The survivors of Coral Gardens made a claim against the Jamaican State for this recompense and were joined by the Office of the Public Defender, an office with the primary role of investigating allegations/complaints lodged by persons aggrieved by the Jamaican State or any of its statutory bodies

in order to seek redress for Constitutional and Administrative injustice (Office of the Public Defender, 2015).

The Office of the Public Defender undertook an investigation in 2011 into the Coral Gardens events in response to complaints from individual Rastas as well as the Rasta community. However, they noted that the constitutional and legal implications of the complaints far surpassed the specifics of the Coral Gardens incidents, which “led to the death of civilians and police, innumerable personal injuries and destruction of property” (Office of the Public Defender, 2015, p. 1). This led the Public Defender to make recommendations regarding policy changes designed to ensure that the rights and privileges of all Jamaicans—Rasta or not—are safeguarded against the repeat of incidents such as those that took place in and around Coral Gardens. That said, some may argue that incidents such as the 2010 Invasion of inner-city community Tivoli Gardens by the security forces are but a repeat of such disregard for the rights and privileges of Jamaicans.

Significantly, the Office of the Public Defender (2015) notes that the passage of time since the events of Coral Gardens in 1963 offer an important reason for their Report since “*the collective consciousness of the nation has not faced this seminal event in its history*” (p. 12, emphasis in original). Even more importantly, the Public Defender emphasised that Jamaica must not only face squarely the State’s mistreatment of a specific community, in this instance, the Rastafari, but also how the people of Jamaica:

... treated ... a minority of its members who did not share the beliefs of the majority. A maturing democracy demands this process of discovery on this issue, as a small measure to ensure that there are no repeats or attempts to effect same in the future. (2015, p. 12)

Specific to the Rastafari complaints, the two main findings of the Public Defender were that: 1) Rastafari as a religion had been subjected to systematic discrimination, denigration and scorn from its inception up to and including the events at Coral Gardens; and 2) Rastafari adherents had been subject to extreme violations of their basic human rights. Among their key recommendations were an appropriately worded apology from the State, the establishment of a centre to develop and preserve Rastafari culture and the setting up of a Trust for the benefit of the identifiable survivors. In response to recommendations of the Public Defender, in April 2017, the Prime Minister on behalf of the Government issued an apology:

Fellow Jamaicans, the Coral Gardens Incident was a grave injustice. The Government acknowledges that the machinery of the Jamaican state evolved out of an era when it was considered appropriate to utilize the heavy hand of the state against citizens.

Today, without equivocation, we apologise for what occurred in Coral Gardens.

We express our regret and sorrow for this chapter in our national life that was characterised by brutality, injustice and repression, which was wrong and should never be repeated. (Holness, 2017, para. 12-14)

A Deed was eventually signed by the Government in December 2019 to establish a Trust Fund for the survivors, but no one has yet benefited from the funding. More importantly, Rastafari are still awaiting the fullness of the reparations to come into effect, for the prophesised reversal where the oppressors who beat Rasta with batons, i.e., police as representatives of the State, then become the ones who are beaten and broken. Sadly and, more importantly perhaps, Rastafari lividity continues to be stigmatised, in particular locks, which, while becoming somewhat mainstream, remains stigmatised as dirty and unhygienic. The more things change, the more they remain the same.

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# **SPANISH CATHOLICISM VS. DUTCH CALVINISM: COMPETING RELIGIOUS/ IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS FOR THE COLONIZATION OF THE CARIBBEAN AND THE REST OF THE AMERICAS**

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## **Abstract**

In this article, Catholicism and Calvinism are compared and contrasted as competing religious/ ideological frameworks for the colonization of the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas, with the former prototypically associated with the Spanish colonial enterprise and the latter prototypically associated with the Dutch colonial enterprise. After a detailed examination of these two rival ideologies for enabling and justifying colonial plunder of land, labor, and minds, two case studies are considered, that of Puerto Rico and that of Guyana. These case studies demonstrate how religion has persisted as a key tool for the colonization of the land, labor and minds of the peoples of the Caribbean and the Americas, from the colonial past all the way up to the neo-colonial present, as the influence of reactionary fundamentalist Christianity extends its influence throughout the region. Finally, a note on obeah and other African and Indigenous influenced spiritualities is included as a manifestation of pervasive and persistent resistance to colonial religions and ideologies.

**Key Terms:** colonization, religion, Catholicism, Calvinism, Caribbean

## **The Spanish/Catholic paradigm of colonization in the Americas**

European powers invaded the Americas in the 15th, 16th, and 17th centuries, not only with the goal of conquest and plunder of land, labor and gold, but also with a religious agenda: “The history of the Roman Catholic Church in the colonial era is marked by the Church’s complicity with and support of Spanish colonial domination and exploita-



tion of Indigenous and African peoples throughout the Caribbean” (Edmonds & González, 2010, p. 45). The objective was to conquer the Caribbean lands by gaining control over territory, people, and spiritual beliefs.

The Spanish Inquisition and specifically the culmination of the approximately 800 year-long Reconquista of the Iberian Peninsula in 1492 greatly influenced the colonization of the Caribbean. The Spanish Inquisition began in the year 1478 and lasted until 1834, as a judicial office that persecuted Jewish and Muslim people as well as all those who believed and practiced varieties of Christianity other than Catholicism. From the Umayyad conquest in 711 until the fall of Granada in 1492, the Iberian Peninsula was the site of conflict between Muslims and Christians. When King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castile married in 1479, their kingdoms united and in the years to come they banished the Islamic Moors from the peninsula and issued the Alhambra Decree which mandated that all Jews leave the country. “The Reconquista was a brutal conflict fueled in part by devotion to Christianity – not just a war between Kingdoms but a crusade against infidels” (Walbert, 2018, para. 4). In other words, religious doctrine was used as a justification to consolidate political power.

The centuries-long era when Muslims, Jews, and Christians peacefully coexisted in Europe thus came to an end as Catholicism was imposed. *The Online Etymology Dictionary* explains that the literal meaning behind the English word ‘catholic’ is universal acceptance. In Medieval Latin, the term *catholicus* is said to have been used as a synonym of the term Christian, meaning constituting or conforming to the church, its faith and organization. Additionally, *The Online Etymology Dictionary* states that the Greek root of catholic is *katholikos*, which is defined as ‘on the whole’ or ‘in general’. Hence, the Spanish set out to subjugate lands and the people who inhabited them while enforcing Catholicism as the only faith to be acknowledged and practiced by everyone regardless of their previous belief systems.

It was in 1492 that the Spanish acquired total control of the Iberian Peninsula, and that same year, Christopher Columbus navigated to the Americas and came across Caribbean islands that had been populated long before by groups of Indigenous people. Yet, Edmonds and González (2010) note that the Catholicism that was brought to the Caribbean was not “a pure Catholicism but instead a Catholicism that had been mixed with folk religion” (p. 47). These authors cite William Christian, a specialist in medieval Spanish history, who argues that:

in the villages, towns, and cities of Central Spain (and [one] suspects, in most other nuclear settlements of Catholic Europe) there were two levels of Catholicism - that of the Church Universal, based on the sacraments, the Roman liturgy, and the Roman calendar; and a local one based on particular sacred places, images, and relics, locally chosen patron saints, idiosyncratic ceremonies, and a unique calendar built up from the settlement’s own sacred history. (cited in Edmonds & González, 2010, p. 47)

All in all, the form of Catholicism mobilized by the Spanish to colonize the Caribbean, was a Catholicism that “had been thoroughly influenced and shaped by other [non-Christian] European and African religious worldviews” (Edmonds & González, 2010, p. 47). Nevertheless, the Spanish Crown worked hand in hand with the Catholic Church for centuries in a project geared towards plundering land and converting people. The idea of spreading the gospel became an instrument for control.

Thus, “ultimately, the Catholic Church legitimized its role in the transatlantic slave trade by arguing that, through enslavement and conversions, souls were being saved” (Edmonds & González, 2010, p. 52). Edmonds and González mention three methods by which Africans, who were enslaved and brought to the Caribbean, were introduced to Christianity under the Spanish. The first happened prior to the Middle Passage, as there was some missionary activity along the West African coast itself from the 1400s onward. For example, Portuguese and other missionaries preached and performed voluntary baptisms in the Congo region, where local religious traditions and those of Catholicism began to merge to create new forms of religious hybridity. The second took place through obligatory baptisms with little or no exposure to Christian doctrine. Lastly, some of the enslaved received religious instruction upon arrival in the Americas since the Spanish Crown made it mandatory for plantation owners to construct a church on their lands and allot time for the enslaved to participate in religious activities, and receive hegemonic religious indoctrination (Edmonds & González, 2010, p. 59).

Juan Ferrando Badía (1972, p. 25) defines political power as “*la función social que consiste en establecer, mantener, sancionar, aplicar...los modelos de conducta vigentes en un grupo social*” [the social function that consists of establishing, maintaining, sanctioning, applying ... the prevailing models of conduct in a social group] (all translations are by the author, unless specified otherwise). The Spanish colonizers promoted Catholicism as a mechanism for consolidating their domination of the Americas by institutionalizing obligatory indoctrination and severely punishing all who refused to acknowledge Catholic dogma. Edmonds and González (2010) state that “A 1528 law required all Indigenous and African slaves to go to Santo Domingo for religious instruction” (p. 56) and more African and indigenous influenced varieties of Catholicism began to emerge. During the 1540s, the Catholic Church of the Americas was separated administratively from that of Spain. While there were important differences between the European Spanish and the Spanish-American churches, until the mid-1700s, they were united in their support of Spanish imperial hegemony.

According to Church historian Ramón Torreira Crespo (cited in Edmonds & González 2010), in Cuba “the period between 1697 and 1837 marked the high point of the Church’s control over the island; it owned a third of its riches and controlled the educational system, ultimately becoming a key component of colonial exploitation” (p. 54). However, when Latin American independence movements began to emerge, some Catholic clergy joined forces with them, while others supported the Spanish colonial

government. Faracías and Delgado (2021) sum up the role of Catholicism in the Spanish colonial enterprise as follows:

Catholicism is, by its very name, a universalizing and evangelizing religion, and the Spanish colonial enterprise both officially justified and defined itself ideologically first and foremost as an effort to make all of the peoples of the Americas part of a universal Catholic community. This was to be achieved preferably by consent, but wherever discursive force proved insufficient, there was little hesitation to deploy coercive force. This inclusive rhetoric and the (albeit often forced) inclusive dynamics that accompanied it were largely absent under the Northern European colonial powers until after the Haitian Revolution and the reconfiguration of imperial systems that followed .... In any case, Spanish/Portuguese language and Catholic religion were made freely available and accessible to all Iberian colonial subjects in the Afro-Atlantic, being held up as norms to which all, including the enslaved, could aspire, but also being imposed as norms to which all would be obliged to conform. (p. 39)

On the other hand, Haiti's encounters with the Roman Catholic Church were unlike those of Cuba and the Dominican Republic, first because it was colonized by the French, many of whom were Dutch-influenced Calvinist Huguenot Protestants, after it was ceded to them by the Spanish under the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697, and secondly because the first successful and permanent overthrow of a plantation regime by the enslaved in the Americas led to the independence of Haiti in 1804, at which point ties with the Vatican were severed until the Concordat of 1860. Edmonds and González (2010) outline the early history of the church in Haiti in this way:

The first priests arrived at the turn of the sixteenth century, initially Franciscans and Dominicans, two religious orders that played a pivotal role in the evangelization of not only Africans but also the Indigenous populations throughout the Spanish-speaking Americas. From 1697 until independence in 1804, the French colony was named St. Domingue. Priests in the colony owned slaves, and the transatlantic slave trade was legitimated by religious imperialism under the guise of saving Indigenous and African souls. (p. 58)

Citing Archaeologist José R. Oliver, Edmonds and González (2010) note that the French slave trade brought approximately 600,000 enslaved people of African descent to Haiti by 1787, mainly from the region occupied by the present-day nations of Benin, Nigeria, the Republic of the Congo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (p. 58). These Africans arrived with their own religious practices which they combined with those of Catholicism and those of the Indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. However, the French passed laws that formally required the enslaved to adhere to fundamental Catholic principles. The colonial authorities restricted gatherings of the enslaved without the pres-

ence of a Catholic priest and threatened slaves with death if they played drums in religious ceremonies, engaged in non-Catholic religious rituals, or attempted to leave their plantations for religious practices not formally approved by the Catholic church.

The preceding paragraphs offer a glimpse of early colonial Catholicism and support Levine's (1979) thesis that the relationship between religion and politics is:

both mutual and multifaceted; mutual because religion and politics have evolved together over the years, taking material and symbolic support from one another, and multifaceted because it embraces interinstitutional conflict and accommodation as well as more subtle and elusive exchanges whereby religious and political orders gave legitimacy and moral authority to one another. (p. 5)

### **The Calvinist/ Dutch paradigm of colonization in the Americas**

During the 1600s, a major shift occurred in the dominant paradigm of colonialism in the Americas, as the pre-capitalist economics and pre-racialized politics of the Catholic Spanish and Portuguese were superseded by the capitalist economics and racialized politics of the Calvinist Protestant Dutch, English and (Huguenot) French. As Faraclas (2021) explains, the Calvinist Dutch spearheaded this shift as they waged what they considered a 'Holy War' against Catholic Spain:

Between 1620 and 1650, the Dutch reorganized sugar production ... as a more capitalistic type of enterprise, combining Dutch and Sephardic financial expertise, trade networks and production techniques .... This new model of capitalistic production of sugar as a world commodity depended crucially on the transformation of Afro-Atlantic societies from 'colorist'/pre-racialized societies with *castas* to completely racialized societies ... to ensure much higher levels of labor exploitation and lower levels of *marronage* ... As Calvinists, the Dutch believed that their monetary wealth was proof that they were 'the elect', i.e. those who were 'chosen' by God and predestined for heaven. They also believed that the lack of wealth of the enslaved was proof that Africans were damned by God and predestined for hell. Therefore, the Dutch were not generally interested in sharing their church, their language and their lifeways with the enslaved peoples of African descent on their plantations. (p. 25)

Protestantism began in the 16th century in Germany, when "On 31 October 1517, Martin Luther, until then an unknown monk from Wittenberg in Saxony, voiced his objections against a series of practices of the Catholic Church" (Cantoni, 2012, p. 505). Cantoni explains that Luther's 95 theses, a list of propositions criticizing the corruption that riddled the Catholic Church at the time, was not only a moral document, but a political one, which inserted itself into "power struggles between [Holy Roman] Emperor, Pope and territorial lords as well as the support given to Luther by his [own] territorial lord,

Frederick III of Saxony” (p. 505). According to the digital dictionary at the vocabulary.com website (n.d.), the etymology of the word ‘protestant,’ can be traced to the Latin word, *protestari*, which means to publicly declare, testify, or protest.

But it was not the more mainstream Lutheran form of Protestantism that was to predominate in the colonial Caribbean. Most of those who directed the Dutch, English and French colonial enterprises adhered to the more radical Calvinist “Reformed” form of Protestantism, as promulgated by French theologian Jean Calvin and others from the 1530s onward. In their virulent anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic propaganda, English Calvinists “instruct[ed] the nation that it had a moral responsibility to establish colonies in the Americas, where it could spread pure religion, instead of allowing the Catholics to dominate the area with its corrupt form of Christianity” (Edmonds & González, 2010, p. 65). First the Dutch, then the English and finally the French used a combination of ideological (Calvinist), economic (capitalist) and innovative military strategies to establish their political dominance in the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas.

The first island in the Caribbean to be successfully occupied by the Northern Europeans was St. Kitts, which was briefly controlled by both the English and the French in the 1620s. After both were expelled by the Spanish, the English returned as sole rulers over the island in the 1630s. During the 1630s and 1640s, the English extended their control over other islands of the eastern Caribbean such as Nevis, Antigua, Montserrat and Barbados; the French established themselves in Dominica, Guadeloupe, Martinique and St. Martin; and the Dutch gained control over Curaçao, Aruba and Bonaire off the coast of Venezuela, as well as over Saba, St. Eustatius, and St. Maarten in the northeastern Caribbean. Many of these islands passed from one colonial power to another over their turbulent histories, and St. Maarten/St. Martin remains under the control of two colonial powers, the Dutch and the French up until the present day. By the latter part of the 1600s, the English had seized control over Jamaica and other areas of the Western Caribbean, and the French had taken the western part of Hispaniola to establish their colony St. Domingue, which was to become Haiti after independence. All in all, with the exception of Cuba, Puerto Rico and part of Hispaniola, virtually all of the Caribbean islands that the Spanish crown had laid claim to since the 1500s became the possessions of the Dutch, English and French from the mid-1600s onward.

Because the colonial classes of the Netherlands, England and France were primarily Calvinist, they showed little interest in converting the Indigenous and African descended peoples whom they enslaved in the Caribbean up until they found themselves obliged to completely reconfigure their colonial enterprises by the successes of the Haitian Revolution at the beginning of the 1800s. In many cases, this provided opportunities for other Christian denominations, including the Catholics, to evangelize the enslaved during the 1600s and 1700s. This is in fact what happened in Haiti as well as in Curaçao, where Edmonds and González (2010, p. 68) report that the conversion of the enslaved was left first to the Catholic diocese of Caracas, then placed directly under the

Vatican, subsequently transferred to Franciscans from Holland, and finally became a provisional diocese led by a delegate of the Pope, Martinus J. Niewindt, who consolidated Curaçaoan parishes, schools, and social service organizations. Edmonds and González suggest that “the Dutch ruling class tolerated the Catholic Church because of its usefulness in placating the slaves and discouraging them from militant activities” specifically since the slaves were denied social gatherings and the Church was seen as a “haven” for them (2010, pp. 68-69). While the Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church served the colonial classes of Curaçao, it was not as strong there as it was in Dutch Suriname, where it became the official religion of the colony in 1667 (Edmonds & González, 2010, p. 69). Even though some of the Dutch colonizers were Lutherans, the Dutch Reformed Church received financial support from the Dutch West India Company colonial government and the Lutherans did not.

The reluctance of the Calvinist colonial ruling classes of the English Caribbean to include the enslaved in their church was similar to that of the Dutch. The English considered the enslaved to be heathens who had no right to become Christians. Planters used their religion to foster exclusion and church doors served as bulletin boards for announcements in the interests of the slaveholders and the pulpit was used to justify enslavement. Gerbner (2018) points out that:

The Church [of England] stood together with the colonial government as an instrument of planter power .... [and] .... local vestries were able to consolidate control over the church in Barbados. Recognizing this imperial context is critical for understanding how and why Protestantism came to play such an important role in defining and maintaining the slave system that developed on the island. (p. 39)

Gerbner also notes that by the 1640s, the term Christian itself became a synonym for a person of European descent:

This shift in taxonomy was due, in part, to the “sugar revolution” that transformed the labor system of the island. As Barbados became a society with a majority slave population, Christianity increasingly became used as an ethnic indicator, juxtaposed with the word “negro.” ... The taxonomy provided an implicit justification for slavery by suggesting that “negroes” were “heathen” and thus could be legitimately enslaved. (2018, p. 42)

In order to prevent the two groups from unifying against their common oppressors, the English colonial ruling classes extended the term ‘Christian’ to European descended indentured servants while discouraging its use to refer to non-European descended slaves. These indentured ‘Christian’ servants included poor and working people of European descent, captured soldiers, and political prisoners. By establishing this discursive difference, the English ruling classes were able to “reorganize the entire labor force of the island” in their imperial interests (Gerbner, 2018, p. 45).

Kristen Block (2012) explains how the labeling of ‘Christians’ and ‘Negros’ as two groups in opposition to each other “was not a matter of religion, it was about putting in place a morally defensible political economy that yielded profits —the plantation model—one increasingly defined by racialized labor” (p. 144). Block also mentions the moral economy operationalized by the colonists “that addressed the intertwined issues of religion and race in the colonies, in which ‘Christian’ or ‘white’ servants were to be uniformly treated with more humanity than Africans and their descendants” (2012, p. 144). Block concludes that, by excluding them from the class of ‘Christians,’ the enslaved could be treated without any moral or ethical reservations “as objects to be bartered and traded, sold and mortgaged; they were treated as livestock, sometimes even given the same kinds of pet names. Most lived and died without any record, without names” (2012, p. 151).

The Haitian Revolution changed the political, economic, ideological and social landscape of the Americas. Faraclas & Delgado (2021) observe that:

European imperialism undergoes an existential crisis triggered by the successes not only of the Haitian Revolution, but also of a multitude of other resistance struggles led by enslaved people and maroons throughout the Americas. This existential crisis obliges the Northern European colonial classes to substantially reconfigure their political, ideological, economic and other agendas in order to reimpose imperial domination. These paradigmatic changes include a gradual replacement of chattel slavery with wage slavery in the colonies ...[and] a gradual replacement of coercive domination with discursive domination, including the propagation of imperial discourses of ‘the white man’s burden’ that gave new impetus to efforts under all of the colonial powers toward the internalization of hegemonic norms by the working classes, through the imposition of the nuclear family, universal evangelization, universal education, etc. (p. 34)

From 1800 onward, the Dutch, the English and the French begin not only to extend membership in their churches to people of non-European descent, but actually initiate a systematic process designed to force people of non-European descent to conform to the European linguistic, cultural and religious norms of the colonizing power. As the enslaved gradually attained emancipation over the course of the 1800s, the metal chains of chattel slavery were replaced by the mental chains of ideological allegiance and subservience to the colonizer, chains which were forged by indoctrination in colonial churches and colonial schools. Under this new colonial regime, Calvinist fundamentalist churches gradually came to play an increasingly important role.

Since the 1960s, when many of the islands of the Caribbean achieved their nominal independence from their former colonial rulers, these Calvinist fundamentalist churches have seen a spectacular rise in popularity, as they have become one of the main instruments through which Caribbean peoples are discursively and ideologically beaten into submission to the neo-colonial globalized world order of the 21st century. Levine

(1979) states that “religious notions of hierarchy, authority, and obedience reflect and reinforce the pattern of existing social and political arrangements to such an extent that the two orders often seem indistinguishable” (p. 5).

### **Christianity in Puerto Rico**

It was on November 19, 1493, that Christopher Columbus arrived in Borikén, as the archipelago was then called by some of its indigenous inhabitants. The discursive influence of Catholicism began immediately as Columbus renamed the island San Juan Bautista, in reference to St. John the Baptist, the ascetic Jewish prophet recognized in Christianity as a forerunner of Jesus, although Puerto Rico (‘Rich Port’) later became the formal name as quantities of gold were found on the island by the Spaniards (Duany, 2017, p. 9). From the moment Spanish colonization arrived in Puerto Rico, so did Catholicism. Together, the two institutions transplanted their political, economic, and religious structures, violently attacking the Indigenous people, and transporting many of them as slaves. “In 1511, Pope Julius II established the Archdiocese of San Juan as one of the first three ecclesiastical provinces of the Catholic Church in the Americas” (Duany, 2017, pp. 19-20). The Catholic Church effectively retained exclusive control not only over religion, but also over education in Puerto Rico until the late 1800s. The notion of freedom of religion was unheard of until around the 1860s when an Anglican congregation was formed in the town of Ponce and an Anglican school was founded in Vieques. Both of these Anglican projects had to be pre-approved by the Spanish Crown, and even then, there was a concern that these represented threats to the Catholic Church. “Spanish missionary priests sought to ‘save souls’ by imposing their religious beliefs and customs on the Indigenous inhabitants and later African slaves. ...[Overall,] a Catholic worldview permeated colonial Puerto Rican culture through folk beliefs, customs, icons, prayers, and devotions” (Duany, 2017, p. 20). An example of this which is still evident today is how every one of the main towns of the 78 municipalities into which the archipelago has been administratively divided has a central plaza that includes the town hall (*la alcaldía*) with a Catholic church situated across from it. This architectural configuration serves as a notifier and a reminder that colonial/neo-colonial politics and Christian religion have been and will continue to be interconnected. At the level of individual households, spirituality and expressions of faith are many times manifested through the presence of household altars, often with the Virgin Mary encased in a shrine near the entrance, as well as through the presence of rosaries and carvings, which often represent the patron saint of the local town. Nonetheless, up until the late 1700s, it appears that “the process of evangelization was partial and superficial in ample sectors of the population, especially among the peasantry in the most remote areas [which constituted the majority of the island’s [population at the time],” for Catholic influence remained concentrated in the few urban centers that were actually under colonial control before 1800 (Duany, 2017, pp. 20-21).



Catholicism also made its mark on language in Puerto Rico. There are popular phrases and sayings used today that contain references to church doctrine and the Bible. One example, often said in three different ways, is: ¡Ave María! ¡Ave María Purísima! or ¡Ave María Purísima, sin pecado concebida! This is a plea to the Virgin Mary which can best be translated as “Hail, purest Mary, conceived without sin.” Puerto Ricans tend to use this expression when they are surprised by something, are enduring stress, or are experiencing a strong emotion. Another example is *A quien Dios se lo dio, San Pedro se lo bendiga* [To whom God gave (something), may Saint Peter bless (it)]. This is typically said by Puerto Ricans to express that things happen by God’s will and Saint Peter can only obey and bless what God has permitted. This same expression is sometimes articulated using the name of a different patron saint. There are numerous other adages with religious denotations or connotations and while some seem to show a historical Catholic imprint, others are neutral, and some can be identified as alluding to Protestantism. (e.g., *A cada santo le llega su día*. [Each saint has his day. / Everyone will have his or her moment of glory. / Everyone gets what he or she deserves.] *El hombre propone y Dios dispone*. [Man proposes and God disposes.] *Le dieron como pandereta de culto*. [They hit him like a tambourine is hit during a service.]

Along with the colonial invading forces of the United States, Calvinist Protestantism also arrived in Puerto Rico in 1898, although some less radical Protestant churches had prior presence on the archipelago. At first Protestantism was seen as “an alien importation from the United States and entirely antagonistic” to Catholicism, which had been the dominant religion for approximately four centuries (Duany, 2017, pp. 118, 129). The colonial authorities of the United States explicitly promulgated an official discourse that their mission was to ‘civilize’ the people of Puerto Rico to make them more like North Americans in terms of their language, culture, attitudes, lifeways and religion. “In 1899, Protestant congregations—Presbyterians, Baptists, Congregationalists, Methodists—divided the Island into four regions to facilitate their missionary work ... other denominations later arrived...such as Pentecostals in 1916 ... and Congregation of Mita” (Duany, 2017, p. 130). Up until the present, the hundreds of sects established on the archipelago by Calvinist fundamentalist Protestant missionaries have shown great disapproval of many Puerto Rican traditions that they believe are products of Spanish colonialism and Catholicism, such as patron saint festivals, the consumption of alcohol and cockfighting.

As in the rest of the Caribbean, over the course of the 1900s, many Puerto Ricans converted from Catholicism to Calvinist fundamentalist Protestantism. This can be attributed to a variety of factors, including, in the earliest years, general discontentment with the cruelty of Spanish colonialism, and by extension, the Catholic Church. The substantial enticements offered by the well-funded Protestant missionaries have also played a role here, such as:

incentives to read the Gospel, the sense of belonging to a spiritual community, the active participation in religious ceremonies, the extensive system of health care, ... spiritual healing practices .... catchy songs, the convenience of marriage ceremonies for divorced people, and educational and social services (Duany, 2017, pp. 130-131).

Since fundamentalist Protestant congregations emphasize the accumulation of wealth through hard work, managing one's finances, and saving money, many have become 'mini-mafias', where new converts are given access to loans, employment, and other business opportunities. According to Duany (2017) and a 2014 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center, Puerto Rico is considered one of the Latin American countries with the highest share of Protestants, some 33 percent of the population (p. 129).

### **Christianity in Guyana**

Historians and archaeologists have established that Guyana's first inhabitants were Indigenous groups of Arawakan, Cariban, and Waraoan language speakers. Guyana (Guiana) is an Amerindian word which means the land of many waters. This name is inspired by its numerous rivers and waterfalls; its four major rivers are the Essequibo, Berbice, Courantyne, and Demerara which all empty into the Atlantic Ocean. Colonial historians note that in 1498 Christopher Columbus sighted the land of Guyana and claimed it on behalf of Spain, although the first Europeans to settle there were mainly the Dutch who founded trading stations upriver in the late 1500s. In the colonial era, the Guianas were often referred to by the colonial classes as the "Wild Coast," given the fierce and initially very successful resistance of their indigenous peoples to colonization as well as their climate and terrain, which were particularly inhospitable in the eyes of the European invaders (BBC News, 2019).

By 1620, the Dutch West India Company had secured its presence in Guyana with armed bases and the importation of enslaved people from Africa for the establishment of sugar and tobacco plantations. The Dutch Reformed Church ministered only to the Dutch settlers in their homes. Therefore, there was a great absence of church buildings. In the Dutch colony of Berbice which later became part of Guyana, Lutheran and Presbyterian missionary activity began and influenced a large part of the planter class. Some Moravian missionaries, members of a Protestant religious order with roots in what today is known as Czechia, were given permission to work with the enslaved in the late 1730s. Since the Moravians' evangelizing strategies involved teaching the enslaved to read and write, this brought about conflict with the plantation owners, and they were soon forced to leave. A brick building constructed by slaves became the first Lutheran church in 1753 in Berbice to minister to the planters. Other church buildings were constructed thereafter. The enslaved, however, were predominately Muslims or practiced traditional African spiritualities which were prohibited by the planters as heathen superstitions. The teaching of Christianity to the enslaved under Dutch rule was eventually permitted as a

method of hegemonic control. This resulted in some slave conversions, as well as in the emergence of religious practices such as obeah, that incorporate indigenous, African, Christian beliefs. (BBC News, 2019)

During the period of 1780-1813, colonial governance in Guyana alternated between the Dutch, French, and British. The latter gained absolute control in 1831 in the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars. Four years later, the abolishment of slavery occurred and indentured workers primarily from South Asia began to work the plantations. “Between 1845 and 1917, more than 400,000 Indian indentures were transported to the Caribbean with the largest concentration settling in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana” (Edmonds & González, 2010, p. 3). Because Guyana was originally colonized mostly by Calvinist Dutch and French businessmen, there was very little done to evangelize the enslaved. However, as a post-Haitian Revolution British colony and with the arrival of the indentured workers from India, Edmonds and González explain:

the Church of England (also called the Anglican Church) ... was as an integral part of the colonial venture, reflecting the situation in England, where civil and ecclesiastical authorities were closely allied. Settlers and governors were enjoined to preserve the integrity and authority of the Church. In some colonies, certain religious observances such as church attendance, the religious education of children, and even family devotions (Barbados) were legally mandated. (2010, p. 71)

234 According to Pinnington (1968), the Church of England was initially able to work in evangelizing both indentured workers and non-European descended people since there was financial support from England to pay for the clergy (p. 357), but colonial policy eventually changed and the British local government of Guyana was required to take on this responsibility. This became a challenge, and the language barrier between the colonizers and the indentured workers also hindered the church’s work from progressing. Catholicism contested Protestantism in Guyana with the arrival of Portuguese laborers in 1835, who insisted for years that a Catholic priest come and attend to them in their language, a demand that was ultimately met. By 1857, the Catholic Church was evangelizing South Asian and African descended people on the sugar plantations (Menezes, 1988, p. 63). Catholicism strongly persisted approximately until Guyana gained independence in 1966. This is because the Portuguese immigrants had by that time gained substantial control over the economy and politics. Although the interests of the Portuguese were generally aligned with those of the British, enmity began to emerge against them once Guyana became independent, at which time many Guyanese Portuguese emigrated. This brought about a decline of Catholicism in the country, in favor of Protestant denominations, especially Calvinist-influenced Pentecostals and Adventists. According to a 46-page document revised in July 2016 titled, *The Census Road: Compendium 2 Population Composition by the Bureau of Statistics Guyana*, in 2012 the largest religious group in the country was listed as ‘Hindu’ with 24.8 percent of the

national population. Hinduism was introduced in Guyana with the arrival of South Asian indentured workers, and despite the Church of England's attempts to proselytize this population, the majority refused to renounce their convictions. At that time, many of these indentured workers planned to return to South Asia and therefore, they wanted to maintain their religion. They also were suspicious about the connection between the Church of England and the British Government. In that same census, while Anglicans, Roman Catholics, and Muslims constituted less than ten percent of the population, Pentecostals and other Christian groups constituted 22.8 and 20.8 percent of the country's population, respectively. When enumerating religious affiliation in terms of gender, there was equal female and male representation in all groups, with the exception of the group of Non-Believers, among whom men exceeded women. Significant growth was seen among Protestants during the intercensal period, specifically among Calvinist-influenced Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, and Jehovah's Witnesses. (Bureau of Statistics, Guyana, 2016, p. 33)

### **Obeah and resistance to colonial religions and ideologies**

In the text, *Obeah: Healing and Protection in West Indian Slave Life* by Kenneth M. Bilby and Jerome S. Handler, it is explained that the Guianas are a region of the Caribbean with an extraordinarily significant number of African cultural influences, which are often incorporated into religious practices, such as obeah. For example, in French Guiana and the rest of the Guianas, "present-day Maroons maintain semi-autonomous, so-called 'tribal' societies. Their enslaved ancestors escaped from the coastal plantations into the interior forests during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and founded societies beyond the reach of their enslavers" (Bilby & Handler, 2004, p. 154). Beginning in the 1980s, Bilby conducted fieldwork for approximately twenty years among a group called the Aluku (Boni) who practice obeah or *obia*. The Aluku define *obia* as "medicine, remedy or healing" (Bilby & Handler, 2004, p. 155). Other groups of Maroons like the Ndyuka in Dutch-controlled Suriname also recognize obeah as a positive force of protection and benefit. In contrast to several online dictionaries that provide denotations for obeah that are associated with sorcery, witchcraft, wizardry, conjuring and trickery, Bilby and Handler state that Dutch colonial archival sources "rarely if ever denote malevolent sorcery meant to inflict harm" in reference to obeah (2004, p. 155). Nevertheless, "European interpretations of obeah were shaped not only by their racist ideologies, ethnocentric religious beliefs, and their own cultural perceptions of witchcraft and sorcery, but also by the limited opportunities they had to gain information" (Bilby & Handler, 2004, p. 156).

Bilby and Handler indicate that obeah "is not an organized religion" and prefer to argue that the word, obeah, most likely derives from Igbo or a similar Igboid language of the northern Niger Delta, in which the term *dibia* means doctor or healer and *abia* is knowledge acquired by them, including the knowledge of herbal healing (2004, pp. 153,

163). They also claim that obeah has two principal characteristics regardless of where it is practiced:

(1) ... [obeah] involves the manipulation and control of supernatural forces, usually through the use of material objects and recitation of spells and (2) ... [obeah is] primarily concerned with divination (e.g., foretelling, finding lost or stolen goods, ascertaining the cause of illness), healing and bringing good fortune, and protection from harm – although it was sometimes used malevolently to harm others. (pp. 153 -154)

If these two attributes are analyzed through the lens of resistance, it can be said that the maroons and the enslaved used obeah to combat the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual cruelty they endured at the hands of the colonizers. They needed hope to imagine a better future, aid in reclaiming their identities, guardianship from the abuse of the colonizers, restoration of wholeness, and transcendence of suffering:

The spiritual power of some obeah practitioners could be translated into political leadership and resistance to, or aggression against, white authority – surely one major reason Whites found obeah so objectionable and threatening. Throughout the West Indies, obeah men [and women] were alleged to have played prominent roles in slave revolts and conspiracies. (Bilby & Handler, 2004, pp. 160 -161)

This is reason enough for the European mental model of obeah to be one that erases any and all positive elements and maximizes the concept of diabolical evil. Therefore, to suppress it, “obeah became a felony punishable by death or transportation and was viewed as a monolithic form of sorcery or ‘black magic’” (Bilby & Handler, 2004, p. 161). The appendix of Bilby and Handler’s work offers evidence concerning anti-obeah laws in the Anglophone Caribbean. Under the section titled, “British Guiana/Guyana,” a timeline is provided beginning with a law outlawing obeah which was passed in 1855 and passed again in 1893. In the 1958 Criminal Code of British Guiana/Guyana, a punishment of three months of imprisonment or a fine was imposed on “whoever practiced obeah, or by any occult means or by any assumption of supernatural power or knowledge intimidates ... or pretends to discover any lost or stolen thing ... or inflict any disease, loss, damage, or personal injury...” (2004, p. 170). This law persisted until 1966, the year of Guyana’s independence. In 1973, under the governance of the Prime Minister Forbes Burnham, it was understood that he sought to revoke ordinances outlawing obeah and many began to practice obeah more openly. However, no official documentation substantiates the repeal of the anti-obeah laws. In fact, as recently as October 2018, headlines such as, “Guyana considers removal of obeah and witchcraft from law books” (Dowrich-Phillips, 2018); “Guyana scrubs witchcraft, colonial laws” (Wilkinson, 2018); and “Witches are free to operate in Guyana after dismissal of colonial laws” (Waweru, 2018) have been used to introduce news articles on the government’s supposed intentions to remove the practice of obeah from the criminal code, but no such measure has thus far been announced.

## Conclusion

In this article, Catholicism and Calvinism were compared and contrasted as competing religious/ ideological frameworks for the colonization of the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas, with the former prototypically associated with the Spanish colonial enterprise and the latter prototypically associated with the Dutch colonial enterprise. After a detailed examination of these two rival ideologies for enabling and justifying colonial plunder of land, labor, and minds, two case studies were considered, that of Puerto Rico and that of Guyana. These case studies demonstrate how religion has persisted as a key tool for the colonization of the land, labor and minds of the peoples of the Caribbean and the Americas, from the colonial past all the way up to the neo-colonial present, as the influence of reactionary fundamentalist Christianity extends its influence throughout the region. Finally, a note on obeah and other African and Indigenous influenced spiritualities was included as a manifestation of pervasive and persistent resistance to colonial religions and ideologies.

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# THE IMPACT OF THE US SUPREME COURT’S ‘INSULAR CASE’ DECISIONS ON LANGUAGE POLICY IN PUERTO RICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION\*

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## Abstract

Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States Government in the 1898 Treaty of Paris that ended the Spanish-American War. Shortly thereafter, a series of legal cases, known as the Insular Cases, came up before the US Supreme Court. In their decisions in these cases, the Supreme Court Justices not only expressed their legal opinions, but also voiced their personal perspectives concerning the new US territory and its people. In this article, an analysis of the legal issues involved in these decisions is followed by a discussion of the personal views of the Justices, which played an important role in the decision making of US Commissioners of Education in Puerto Rico from 1899 onward.

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**Key terms:** US Supreme Court, Insular Cases; US Commissioners of Education in Puerto Rico; Language conflict in Puerto Rico; Puerto Rican public education system

## Introduction

[T]he equality that exists at birth gives way to the politics of power, to linguistic conflicts, and to the political use of language, one of the tools of power. (Davies & Dubinsky, 2018, p. 1)

On July 25, 1898, United States military forces invaded the Spanish colony of Puerto Rico, an event that was “accompanied by a thunder of bullets” (Alejandrez & Liberato, 2022, p. 1). This was just one of what has been a more than 500 year-long series of imperialistic adventures into the Caribbean by European and North American powers that began with the invasion of the homelands of the indigenous peoples of the region in that final years of the 1400s (Roberts, 2008), including the seizure of the island of



Puerto Rico by the Spanish in 1493. Thus, after four hundred years of colonization by the Spanish, Puerto Rico became a colony of the US. In December of 1898, under the terms of the Treaty of Paris signed at the end of the Spanish-American War, Spain was required to cede Cuba, Guam, the Philippines and Puerto Rico to the United States (Trías Monge, 1997). Immediately thereafter, the US installed a military government that formulated and implemented a series of initiatives designed to Americanize Puerto Rico and its inhabitants.

Early in this period of substantial change to life in Puerto Rico, a series of disputes concerning tariffs and other commercial issues resulted in a series of important legal cases that were brought up initially before lower federal courts and then appealed to the US Supreme Court. The Supreme Court Justices converted their decisions in these cases into platforms from which to express their personal, subjective and prejudicial misunderstandings of the island and its people. Their views became emblematic of the gaze of the conqueror over the vanquished, which has given rise to over a century of policies that have resulted in grave violations of the human rights of Puerto Ricans. These cases, known as the Insular Cases, resulted in decisions that reflected US imperialistic perspectives of the time, and incorporated the Justices' personal paternalistic opinions and xenophobic views of the people of the island and their culture.

### **The Insular Cases**

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While Cuba and the Philippines have achieved their independence, Puerto Rico and Guam remain US territories. According to Trías Monge (1997), Puerto Rico holds the distinction of being the oldest colony in the world. Since the acquisition the spoils of the Spanish-American War, the 'American' Empire has faced a series of dilemmas as to how to manage, rule, and legally handle its formerly Spanish possessions. These dilemmas are in abundant evidence in the Insular Case decisions and accompanying opinions. According to the *Encarta world English dictionary* (1999), the word 'insular' is defined in part as "Ignorant of or uninterested in cultures, ideas, or peoples outside one's own experience." These decisions and opinions by the highest court of the land have done much to shape the legal (and to a great extent the political) relationship between the US and Puerto Rico, and have had an adverse impact on millions of Puerto Ricans. The Insular Cases are considered by some scholars to comprise several rulings which were made by the Supreme Court between 1901 and 1905. However, additional opinions, such as *Balzac v. Puerto Rico*, 258 U.S. 298 (1922) have also been included as a part of this body of cases.

When analyzing some of the Insular Case decisions, we encounter an imperialistic narrative with racial overtones. This is perhaps best evidenced in the language of the opinion in *Downes v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 244 (1901) in which the nine Justices, in a 5 (majority)-4 (minority) ruling, expressed in no uncertain terms that issues related to tariffs, taxes and commerce between Puerto Rico and the US would be handled with little or

no concern for the wellbeing of the island's population. Similar bias rears its ugly head in *De Lima v. Bidwell* 182 U.S. 1 (1901); *Goetz v. United States*, 182 U.S. 221 (1901); *Dooley v. United States*, 182 U.S. 222 (1901); and *Armstrong v. United States*, 182 U.S. 243 (1901). A particularly blatant instance of this negligence can be found in *Huss v. New York & Puerto Rico SS Co.*, 182 U.S. 392 (1901) in which the Supreme Court determined that Puerto Rico was, in their view, not an 'island' as intended in the language of a federal statute which might have benefited the colony in terms of trade. Such rulings ultimately evolved into major Constitutional determinations that would add even more imbalance to the already asymmetrical relationship between the colonizer and colony.

For more than one hundred years preceding the Insular Cases, the Northwest Ordinance had become the well-trodden pathway for newly acquired US territories to be fully incorporated into the US as full-fledged states. The Supreme Court, by way of their Insular Case decisions, established "as a matter of constitutional precedent rather than congressional policy that the Northwest Ordinance was *de facto* repealed. In its place, the Court devised the doctrine of territorial incorporation" (Gelpí, 2011). The Court justified its stance by echoing some of the racially charged language voiced in its opinion in *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901), making reference to the island's 'non-Anglo-Saxon' race, religion, culture and language as a set of sufficient criteria to deprive Puerto Rico of the normal path to US statehood. The Justices considered territories such as Puerto Rico to be:

non-contiguous islands, separated by miles of water bodies from the U.S. continental mainland ... populated by established communities whose inhabitants differed from the dominant stateside societal structures with respect to their race, language, customs, cultures, religions, and even legal systems. (Torruella, 2013, p. 62-63)

While these controversies were litigated in the courtroom, the question of what to do with the former Spanish territories was extensively debated, not only in several prominent law journal articles published between 1898 and 1899, but also in the 1900 presidential election. The question as to whether or not the U.S. Constitution applied to these overseas colonies would divide scholars and politicians alike, with those who favored excluding the newly acquired territories ultimately winning the day, as is dramatically illustrated in the Insular Case decisions and legislation such as the Foraker Act of 1900, the Jones Acts of 1917, and Public Law 600 of 1952. The following language from *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901) demonstrates how some of the 'greatest legal minds' of the time in the United States were basing their rulings on backward, paternalistic, imperialistic and demeaning attitudes and arguments:

There are certain principles of natural justice inherent in the Anglo-Saxon character which need no expression in constitutions or statutes to give them effect or

to secure dependencies against legislation manifestly hostile to their real interests. .... When the conquest is complete and the inhabitants can be blended with the conquerors, or safely governed as a distinct people, public opinion, which not even the conqueror can disregard, imposes these restraints upon him; and he cannot neglect them without injury to his fame and hazard to his power. .... It is obvious that in the annexation of outlying and distant possessions grave questions will arise from the differences of race, habits, laws, and customs of the people, and from differences of soil, climate, and production, which may require action on the part of Congress that would be quite unnecessary in the annexation of contiguous territory inhabited only by people of the same race, or by scattered bodies of native Indians (p. 280-282).

... Again, if he incorporates them with his former states, giving to them the rights, privileges, and immunities of his own subjects, he does for them all that is due from a humane and equitable conqueror to his vanquished foes. *But if the conquered are a fierce, savage, and restless people, he may according to the degree of their indocility, govern them with a tighter rein, so as to curb their impetuosity, and to keep them under subjection*. (p. 302, our italics).

### **The impact of the Insular Cases on language policy in public education in Puerto Rico**

242 In Sparrow's (2006) book on the Insular Cases and the emergence of the American empire, he affirms that "the idea of an American empire has been part of political thinking since the founding [of the nation].... From [its beginning], the nation's leading politicians and presidents believed in an American Empire" (p. 218). According to Anderson (1998, p. 30) once the colony of Puerto Rico changed hands from Spain to the United States, the American presence became "a manifestation of modern-day colonialism." The military occupation of July 25, 1898 led to direct military rule in less than three months. This represented a moment of political loss to islanders, because Spain had recently provided more autonomy to its colonial possessions, together with extending the right to representation in the Courts of Spain to their inhabitants (Trías Monge, 1997).

Given the dominant discourse of imperial power at the time, and the supposed advantages associated with imperialism under the colonial gaze, the take-over of Puerto Rico and its 1,869,255 people (Immerwahr, 2019, p. 11) was seen in US social circles as a "moment of liberation and as an opportunity to impose the joys and benefits of a superior system on ... [an] *immature and unfortunate people*" (p. 34, our emphasis). The 'civilizing' mission of the colonizer, according to various members of the political and symbolic elites (including several US presidents, such as William Taft, who served first as President and then as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court) was to Americanize Puerto Ricans, and was contingent upon the total eradication of all traces of a 400-year-

long history of Indigenized and Africanized Spanish lifeways, culture and language on the island. Alejandrez and Liberato (2022) observe that “The US government systematically used Anglo-centric language ideologies and policies during the first half of the twentieth century as a method of maintaining control of the colonial frontier” (p. 132). After the arrival of the Spanish, Puerto Ricans spoke many varieties of Spanish, heavily influenced by the languages and language practices of the island’s Indigenous peoples and African descended inhabitants, many of whom had been enslaved and forcefully brought to Puerto Rico as part of Atlantic Slave Trade. The variety of Spanish spoken in Andalucía arrived first with the initial immigrants from that region (Lipski, 1966), followed later by the varieties of Spanish spoken by immigrants from the Canary Islands and other regions of Spain. All of these varieties of Spanish not only gradually merged to some degree, but also underwent Indigenization and Africanization, so that after a number of years, Puerto Rican Spanish (hereafter PRS) emerged as the most prevalent way of speaking up until the present day. As Pousada (2017, p. 10) affirms, “[PRS] is Caribbean in nature (derived primarily from the speech of Spaniards from Andalucía and the Canary Islands and shaped by indigenous and African influences), a variety similar to that spoken in the Dominican Republic and Cuba.”

In their determination to impose the officially mandated policy of the Americanization of the island and its people, the military command, together with presidential appointees to key positions such as the US Commissioner of Education for the island, wasted no time. In order to justify his swift imposition of the Americanization policy, Victor Clark, the first Commissioner of Education, labeled PRS a form of ‘patois’, in other words, a variety of speech unworthy of being considered as a ‘real language’:

Among the Puerto Rican multitudes, there does not seem to be devotion for their language nor to any national ideal ... another important consideration is that the majority of the people on this island do not speak pure Spanish. The language is a patois that is almost incomprehensible to a native of Barcelona or Madrid ... It has no literature and is of little value as an intellectual instrument. (*Informe sobre el idioma en Puerto Rico*, 2004, p. 9)

The prejudicial attitudes and biased assumptions concerning PRS which are evident in Clark’s words above served as the unquestioned basis for official language policy on the island from 1900 to the late 1940s. In their determined, but ultimately futile, attempts to eradicate PRS in favor of US Standard English, successive US Commissioners of Education modified the language policy in the public schools of the island seven times. Because they made their decisions based on political expediency rather than on any sound knowledge about language or pedagogy, they created complete chaos in the schools, which has had a lasting negative impact on the attitudes of Puerto Ricans toward English in particular and formal education in general (Rodríguez Arroyo, 2013). The position of English in the curriculum thus fluctuated erratically from language of instruction to foreign language.

The situation worsened when Puerto Rican teachers of elementary and/or secondary-level students were obliged to teach non-language subjects such as geography, history, math, and science in English, a language foreign to them and to their students. If teachers failed to give their lessons exclusively in English, disciplinary measures were taken to chastise them, including expulsion from the public school system. From an educational point of view, this not only represents a pedagogy that is doomed to failure, but also a gross violation of the human rights of both teachers and students. A strong and eventually victorious movement of resistance against the imposition of English among local teachers and students was therefore born early in the process of US colonization. These disastrous policies prevailed until the 1940s, when Puerto Ricans were finally granted the right to elect their own governor. In one of his first acts as Puerto Rico's first freely elected Governor, Luis Muñoz Marín appointed local educator Mariano Villaronga as Commissioner of Education. Villaronga enacted a new policy that made Spanish the medium of instruction at all levels of education and English a compulsory foreign language subject, which is essentially the language policy that has persisted from that time until the present, despite a series of legislative initiatives that have been passed regarding the place of Spanish and English in the civic life of the people of the island.

For the overwhelming majority of the island's people, PRS is a non-negotiable aspect of what it means to be Puerto Rican. This is even true for those who support the one of the two major political parties on the island that favors full US statehood for Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans know full well that English is a global language (Crystal, 2012) and they understand that in today's world, the prestige of English is such that it needs to play an important role in the linguistic repertoire of any educated person, but never at the expense of Spanish.

\*This is the modified, shorter version of a more comprehensive paper presented at the May, 2022 First Camps Conference at the University of Graz in Austria.

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# LANGUAGE, REVOLUTION AND IDEOLOGY: A CASE STUDY OF THE 1979 AND 1981 REVOLUTIONS IN GHANA

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## Abstract

The study upon which this article is based was designed to undertake an ideological analysis of the discourse surrounding the 1979 and 1981 revolutions in Ghana from a linguistic perspective. The data for the study was drawn from four speeches by Jerry John Rawlings who led both revolutions; the first two speeches that he delivered during the 1979 revolution and the first two speeches he delivered during the 1981 revolution (as found in Ziorklui, 1993). The procedure for the analysis of the data followed a careful selection of mental models, lexical items and metaphors seen to be carriers of ideology.

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**Key terms:** Ghana, June 4th 1979 revolution, December 31st 1981 revolution, political discourse analysis

## Introduction

After gaining independence in 1957, Ghana enjoyed a relatively stable political atmosphere under her first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, before series of military adventurists took over political power in 1966, 1972, 1979 and 1981 (Shillington, 1992, pp. 14-30). From historical accounts, the reasons advanced for these military interventions were mostly about poor leadership style or economic mismanagement, as was the case for the June 4th 1979 and the December 31st 1981 revolutions (Awoonor, 1984).

According to Boahen (1989):

Heads of [state] corporates and even private firms were often ordered to supply goods, particularly cement and flour, to the favourites of Acheampong and his officers. Never in the history of this country have we seen so many business-



women and women contractors whose usual qualifications were simply their attractive figures. The disastrous economic performance of the second era of Acheampong was the operation of the notorious system of corruption, hoarding, black-marketing, profiteering and smuggling which was termed Kalabule. (p. 13)

Similar remarks were also made by Shillington (1992) on the prevailing situation in the country at the time of the occurrence of the military interventions:

The incompetence and mismanagement of the early years was coming home to roost and it was soon clear that the government had lost control of the economy. As the economy fell apart, those military officers in positions of power began to help themselves to the country's dwindling coffers. Senior military officers, now in charge of ministries and state corporations used their positions to look after their own interests. The scope for their nefarious activities was almost infinite. It ranged from diverting state funds and selling import licenses, to using army labour and equipment to build private houses for themselves. At the same time those military officers who headed state corporations left themselves open to exploitation by corrupt civilian businessmen who manipulated contracts and deals to make illegal fortunes for themselves. (p. 22)

Such debilitating circumstances continued until June 4th 1979, when junior ranked military officer Jerry John Rawlings and other junior officers of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) took matters into their own hands by ousting the elected government and subsequently supervising fresh elections and handing over power to a new civilian government within 112 days (Okeke, 1982, p. 41; Boahen, 1989, p. 23). Rawlings' own words of reassurance to the nation made these intentions clear:

We wish to assure the nation that we do not intend to cling to power. The Armed Forces Revolutionary council will ensure a smooth transition to constitutional rule as planned. In this way preparations for the elections should therefore go on uninterrupted. (1979, in Ziorklui, 1993, p.440 - 441)

The civilian government of Dr. Hilla Limann emerged victorious in that election and was in charge of the country until 31st December, 1981, when Jerry Rawlings and the junior ranks once again seized power, given that Limann's regime was not meeting the expectations of the majority of Ghanaians (Awoonor, 1984, p. 11). Shillington (1992) describes the general feelings of the ordinary Ghanaians at the time as: "one of poverty and hardship for the majority, contrasted with the wealth and self-satisfaction of the elites" (p. 72).

In the case of these two revolutions, the civilian population was actively mobilised through the use of language to reawaken a new consciousness among them to mark a clear departure from the old ways of governance, as can be observed in the following statement by Rawlings:

We have seen enough of a traditional form of leadership which abandons the people once it is in power. We have seen that the tradition is incapable of thinking further in seeing to our welfare and we reject it. The alternative that now lies open before us is for you the people to take over the destiny of this country, your own destiny and shaping the society along the lines that you desire, making possible what has been denied to you all these years (1981, in Ziorklui, 1993, p. 440 – 441)

This uncharacteristic behaviour of the military, that is, its choice to deploy the discursive force of language to engage the people, instead of the coercive force of military might, led the present researcher to conduct a formal linguistic study on the discourse deployed by Rawlings to organise the people to resist the abuse of political power abuse and to demand social justice. As Hall (1985) puts it; “we have to analyse or deconstruct language and behaviour in order to decipher the patterns of ideological thinking which are inscribed in them” (p. 97).

### **Objectives, research questions and methodology**

The scholarly work of van Dijk (2002, p. 279) and Fairclough (1991) has shown that ideologies and discourses can be developed and deployed by dominated groups as a useful weapon for resisting hegemonic or discursive domination. Many historians and political scientists, such as Hansen (1991), Buah (1998), Boahen (1989), Shillington (1992), Okeke (1982), and Yankah (2017), have depicted the 1979 and 1981 revolutions as embracing a mishmash of socialist, capitalist, and totalitarian ideologies, but such statements are often made with little or no supporting evidence. The study upon which this article is based was designed to undertake an ideological analysis of the discourse surrounding the 1979 and 1981 revolutions from a linguistic perspective. In order to achieve this objective, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What ideologies were (re)produced during the 1979 and 1981 revolutions?
2. How were mental models of social justice activated in the course of these revolutions?
3. To what extent did these mental models become full-blown ideologies?

The study adopted a qualitative method for data analysis. According to Kothari (2004, p. 1), a qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour. Qualitative research strives to explore and bring to the fore, motives, forces and any other social factors responsible for the occurrence of events within the larger world. The functions of qualitative research have been referred to as descriptive and exploratory by Marshall and Rossman (1999) cited in Ritchie and Lewis (2003, p. 25). The study focuses on ideology which, according to van Dijk (2004), is articulated via a range of language structures and rhetorical strate-

gies, including metaphors and the deliberate and repeated use of particular lexical items.

The data for the study was drawn from four speeches by Jerry John Rawlings, that is, the first two speeches he delivered during the 1979 revolution and the first two speeches he delivered during the 1981 revolution (as found in Ziorklui, 1993, p.527 - 529). The procedure for the analysis of the data followed a careful selection of mental models, lexical items and metaphors seen to be carriers of ideology (Hart, 2014; Sauer, 1989). The selection was done in terms of the relevance of each to answering the research questions.

### Literature review

Social phenomena are complex and so is language use (Bourdieu, 1989). Among the aims of van Dijk's (1993) multidisciplinary framework of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)/ Critical Discourse Studies (CDS) is to critically investigate political discourse by analysing how language is used both to create discourses of domination for the abuse of power, as well as to create discourse of resistance to domination and power abuse. For example, van Dijk (2017) conducted a sociocognitive analysis of how politicians and the media in the UK have employed metaphors in emphasising the negative aspect of the arrival of many immigrants in Europe. These immigrants were metaphorically referred to in the *Daily Telegraph* as a 'wave' sweeping through Europe (van Dijk, 2017, p. 26, see also Cameron, 2012), thus casting them in a negative light by implicitly comparing them to a potentially devastating and destructive natural phenomenon.

Metaphor had for centuries been treated as a figure of speech utilized in literature. However, research by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) has shown that metaphor is not purely used for literary purposes, but is also a ubiquitous cognitive strategy involved in ordering our daily experiences (Geeraerts, 2010, p. 204). Conceptual metaphors are relatively stable associations between conceptual domains, which typically involve mapping from a more concrete source domain onto a more abstract target domain. Thus, metaphors seek to explain one concept (target) in terms of another (source), and often make abstract more understandable and accessible (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to Dirven et al. (2003) cited in Hart (2014, p. 139), metaphors are salient in social and political discourses.

Hart's (2014) study of media discourse surrounding the London protests of 2011 centres on how the print media employed metaphor to invoke fear of the protestors in the minds of the readers, and how they focused on looting, arson, the destruction of private property, and violent confrontations between police and protestors, rather than on the social injustices that provoked the protests in the first place (p. 145). Adjei-Fobi (2011) turns our attention to the place of metaphors in the speeches of Jerry John Rawlings and Kwame Nkrumah, but bases this study more on Aristotle's framework

for the interpretation of metaphors (i.e., in terms of ethos, pathos, and logos) rather than using the sociocognitive framework proposed by van Dijk (2004, 2009) and Geerearts (2010). Essentially, this type of classical analysis emphasises the emotional effects that speeches have on the audience. Nyako (2013) uses the CDA/CDS framework to investigate the persuasive techniques deployed in the campaign speeches of Nana Addo Dankwah Akuffo-Addo and John Dramani Mahama during the 2012 presidential elections in Ghana. Though persuasion is a predominant feature of discourse analysis, CDA/CDS also focuses on exposing inequalities in society and how these are legitimatised through language. For example, Boldyrev and Dubrovskaya (2016) stress the need to explore the sociocognitive aspects of discourse whereby participants compare, analyse, and organise information into discourse according to the sociocultural knowledge they obtain as active members of a particular society, that is, according to culture-specific social roles, values, norms, and other modalities that result in national, professional, religious, gender, age and other identities (2016, p. 61).

Saucer's (1989) linguistic analysis of Hitler's speeches during World War II found that the dictator's constant repetition of the lexical item 'fate' persuasively legitimized his genocidal fascist regime by depicting him and his audience as the agents of a divine power. Hart (2014), Gee (2011) and Evans (2006) also show how a particular lexical item can serve as a map or point of access to concepts that are embedded in a range of lexical meanings. The discourse of military and totalitarian regimes was also studied by Schjerve (1989) who attempted to establish a relationship between futurism and Italian fascism. Schjerve argues that in order for the fascist regime to substantiate its aggressive messages, opponents and enemies had to be created against whom one was obliged to mobilise all forces within society (p. 65). For example, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, a diehard futurist and fascist, depicted socialism and communism as the mortal enemies of the Italian people by referring to them using highly figurative and manipulative language, such as "dictatorship of callous hands," "criminal absurdity," and "the outgrowth of a bureaucratic cancer which gnaws away mankind." (Schjerve, 1989, p. 65) The justification for genocidal violence against these 'enemies' included such utterances as: "war cannot perish because it is a law of life" and "war as the only hygiene of the world" (p. 65).

In typically abusive fashion, the fascists and futurists used mythology and stereotypes to manipulative ends, while describing all their own actions using positive terms and those of their enemies in negative terms. As posited by van Dijk (1993, 2004, 2009, 2017) positive depiction of the in group (Us) and negative depiction of the other (Them) is a typical feature of hegemonic discourse. Words such as 'blood', 'race', and 'genius' featured in the discourse of the futurists and fascists. According to Schjerve, the lexical item 'genius' was used to promote notions of Italian superiority while 'blood' was used in a similar way as 'fate' was used by Hitler to refer to divinely

willed “mysterious and vehement forces which drive man and from which he cannot escape” (1989, p. 67).

Van Dijk (2004, 2009, 2017), proposes a theoretical framework that analyses discourse from three main perspectives: Society, Discourse, and Cognition, which often overlap in the discourse construction and analysis process. Van Dijk (2017) argues that a sociocognitive approach not only makes explicit the fundamental role of mental representations, but also assumes that many structures of discourse itself can only be completely described in terms of various cognitive notions, such as information, beliefs, ideologies, and shared knowledge of participants (p. 3). The sociocognitive approach claims that there is no direct link between different discourse structures and society, and that social or political structures can only affect text and talk through the minds of language users (van Dijk, 2017, pp. 28-29). This is the case because people represent both social structures as well as discourse structures in their minds and are able to relate these mentally before expressing them in actual text and talk (van Dijk, 2001, p. 138). This framework allows for a multidisciplinary study of cognitive, discourse and social structures in any text. A sociocognitive approach allows for analysis of lexical items and rhetorical devices that create mental models in discourse. During discourse, such lexical items and rhetorical devices often reveal to us the speaker’s conceptualization of the world (van Dijk, 2004).

## **Results and conclusions**

The first research question which the present study attempts to answer is: What ideologies were (re)produced during the two revolutions under study? Our analysis indicates that Rawlings consistently used lexical items, such as ‘people, citizens, welfare, society, power, government, wealth’ to create an ideology of ‘the empowered citizen’, which claimed to restore power or authority to the ordinary people in the governance process, as shown in the following passages from his speeches:

(1) That the wealth of this country cannot be defended by soldiers alone or policemen alone or border guards for that matter the wealth of this country will need to be defended by 14million warriors; that is by 14 million Ghana citizens (in Ziorklui,1993, p.527 – 529)

(2) I have come to the studio for the second time since the events of the 31st December to explain to you this attempt to enable the people of this country to become a real part of the decision-making process of government. (in Ziorklui,1993, p.530 -540)

Linguistic items such as ‘defend, warrior, wealth’ for instance, created a mental model of social responsibility to defend the wealth of the country. In this speech, the people (Ghanaians) were seen as ‘warriors’ who with arms must protect the resources of the state, against those who had been plundering that wealth. The ‘war as liberation’ metaphor invoked the scene of a battlefield where all Ghanaians would fight a common

enemy for a good cause. The speaker laid a burden of collective social responsibility on the citizens to 'defend' their country. The language used expressed an intention to make the people "a real part of the decision-making processes of government." All of this implied, through an Us vs. Them scenario, that the country was being plundered by foreign companies and corrupt Ghanaians and that this was so because ordinary Ghanaians had been excluded from the decision-making processes of government.

The mental models constructed in passages (1) and (2) provide the basis for the justification of Rawlings' two revolutions, expressed in excerpts (3) and (4) below:

(3) Without the close co-operation of the civilian population of this country on whose behalf and for whom we have dared to act, our aims to make this country better will be incapable of achievement. (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

(4) We have seen enough of a traditional form of leadership which abandons the people once it is in power. We have seen that the tradition is incapable of thinking further in seeing to our welfare and we reject it. (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

In (3) and (4) Rawlings created more mental models via such lexical items as 'dared, act, rely, cooperation, civilian' to highlight his concern for the civilian population and their welfare. The expression "to make this country better" implied that Ghanaians were suffering, and the use of such terms as 'abandons, incapable, welfare' in (4) places the blame for this suffering squarely on the shoulders of the previous governments.

In talking about past governments, Rawlings deployed the 'power as a building' metaphor relating power to a physical structure, a container in which political leaders dwell. This metaphor made political power a more concrete notion, as well as allowing Rawlings to invite all Ghanaians 'into the room' to share that power:

(5) .... The alternative that now lies open before us is for you the people to take over the destiny of this country, your own destiny and shaping the society along the lines that you desire, making possible what has been denied to you all these years. (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

In (5), Rawlings extended the 'power as a building' metaphor, by using a 'participation as construction' metaphor to call on Ghanaians to rebuild their nation, which is metaphorically depicted as a structure that must be built, molded and shaped. Lexical items such as 'take, over, country, destiny, denied' were designed to persuade the populace to become the owners of the government of their own country.

The people and their welfare were focused or topicalised in this and other passages. And according to van Dijk (1995), topicalisation is a persuasive strategy deliberately adopted by speakers to highlight a particular topic for discussion, thereby projecting certain ideologies through their discourse. In passages (6) and (7) below, Rawlings further stresses the importance of all Ghanaians in determining the destiny of their country:

(6) Only a manifest support and involvement of you the people will enable the carrying out of the tasks that we have thought necessary (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

(7) .... we are looking up to you to give a national expression of your feelings. (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

Here, Rawlings uses a 'power as task/burden' metaphor to underline the fact that power is a burden to be shouldered by all Ghanaians. Even though Rawlings is a military officer, he chose to address his speeches to his "Fellow civilians" as a strategy to bridge the gap between himself and the civilian population and to identify with them in an attempt to advance his 'empowered citizen ideology'.

The second and third research questions which the present study attempts to answer are: How were mental models of social justice activated in the course of the revolutions? and To what extent did these mental models become full-blown ideologies? According to van Dijk (2004), ideology forms the basis of group activity. Members of a social group sharing the same norms, values and/or beliefs have aims, interests, and targets which they work towards by pulling resources together. van Dijk (2004) argues that when people engage in discourse, their discourse projects their identities as members of social groups. Excerpts (8) through (14) below indicate how the organisation of particular social groups under the auspices of the two revolutions laid the groundwork both for activating social models as well as for transforming those mental models into ideologies:

(8) The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, comprising junior officers and other ranks, has been setup. (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 450-452)

(9) The new Revolutionary Council has to come to replace the Supreme Military Council (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 440 -441)

(10) I would like to take this opportunity to announce that there will be People's Defense Organization next to a National Defense Organization (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

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(11) We intend to hold serious discussions with all organisations to see how the new course of the nation is to be charted in detail if it is the people's wish that this be done. (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

(12) Apart from the Provisional National Defense Council and other central national bodies, we are asking for a local Defense Committees at all levels of our national life in the towns, in the villages, in all our factories, offices and work places. (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

(13) A coordinating committee of these local Defense Committees will be later established. (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

(14) We call upon the management and workers organization of every working unit in this country to spend time for the first few working days of this country to organize meetings to appraise their unit's contribution to the national effort and thereafter send memoranda to the office of the PNDC.

The Us vs. Them dynamic in the creation of mental models and ideologies can be activated with particular force by the creation of new organised groups to replace older ones. (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

As seen in passages (8) through (14) above, Rawlings oversaw the organisation of a number of new groups with such goals in mind, and he manifestly invited all Ghanaians (in 'towns, villages, factories, offices, workplaces') to become part of these groups in order to resist and reject political power abuse and political domination. Using a 'time as path' metaphor, he justified the formation for these organisations as a means to "chart a new course for the nation". Excerpt (13) expressed the intent to establish a central organisation whose function would be to coordinate the other groups toward the achievement of a common purpose based on common mental models and ideologies of social justice.

A full-blown ideology according to van Dijk (2004, p. 17), has aims, interests, goals and objectives that it seeks to accomplish. Already established ideologies, such as democracy and liberatory revolution were used by Rawlings to assist him in transforming the mental models that he was constructing into new ideologies, as shown in passage (15) below:

(15) These Defense Committees are to defend the democratic rights of the people and expose corruption and the tendencies to undermine the Revolution (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

In the end, it could be said that these discursive efforts succeeded, for a time at least, in constructing and propagating the ideology of 'Rawlinism,' justified in part by using metaphors of 'labour as enslavement,' 'bad as low,' 'productivity as honour,' 'idleness as shame,' and 'suffering' as falling' to dramatize the state into which the nation had fallen, as illustrated in passages (16) through (18) below:

(16) Of the adult population of this country over the last few years, even if they have not resorted to suicide to escape the shame of their condition, there has been for them no point to this life, nothing to look forward to except a continued slaving for others to enjoy (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

(17) People slaved away producing cocoa only for officials of the state to live in the most comfortable conditions (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)



(18) Government members were crisscrossing the world begging for foreign aid. And yet, within the country, foreign exchange earners like cocoa and coffee have remained un-evacuated since (Ziorklui, 1993, p. 530 -540)

These excerpts are examples of what van Dijk (2004, 2009) refers to as negative other representation, which is a common feature in political discourse. It is a style often adopted in the construction of an ingroup (Rawlings and his 'fellow civilians') to find fault with an outgroup (corrupt politicians) in order to find legitimacy and justification for their actions.

Since Rawlings' discourse matched the realities lived by most ordinary Ghanaians, the mental models that he advanced did to some extent become a full-blown ideology of 'Rawlinism' as an ideology of 'the empowered citizen'. Under this ideology, the poor socioeconomic conditions of the people need to be improved, and the people liberated through the intervention of ideological groups organised to solve the social, political and economic challenges facing the country. These groups served as points of convergence at which the dominated sectors of Ghanaian society were persuaded and mobilised to resist the elite or dominant groups. Hence, 'Rawlinism' or 'the empowered citizen' ideology became a basis for fighting social injustice.

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**COSMOPOLITANISMS AND  
ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IN  
THE CARIBBEAN AND BEYOND**



# CRITICAL MALE GAZES ON HISTORY, CULTURE, MAS- CULINITIES AND MUSIC IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AND THE REST OF THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

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## Abstract

This article focuses on the dynamic intersections between maleness, masculinity, history, culture, Calypso and the Carnival aesthetic. It juxtaposes the perspectives of two musicians who are gendered as male from the twin island nation of Trinidad and Tobago and highlights their interrogation of expressions of maleness in a Carnival culture where Calypso and Soca figure as prominent festival musics, within a range of male-dominated artforms. The interviews reveal a deep and comprehensive understanding, as well as a thoroughgoing and critical analysis, of the history, present challenges, and future possibilities regarding gendering and masculinities, both in Calypso and Soca music in particular, as well as in African diasporic societies in general.

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**Key terms:** Calypso, Soca, Carnival, Trinidad and Tobago, male gaze, gendering

## The study: Calypso, Soca and gendering

It is generally agreed that musical meaning is dependent on social context (Smyth, 1928), and that it is “socially and culturally constructed” (Olsson, 2007, p. 989); “a culturally defined artifact” (Lipscomb & Tolchinsky, 2005, p. 384); “growing out of specific social context, and expressing the assumptions of that context” (Citron, 1993, p. 120); and telling “the truth about life” (Solie, 1993, p. 10). Calypso and Soca music from Trinidad and Tobago typically speaks to societal and cultural phenomena of interest in the twin island nation, the Caribbean region and the African diaspora. Calypso and Soca have their root of the pre-lenten Trinidad and Tobago festival of Carnival (Boyce-Davies, 1985). Sofo (2014) observes that Carnival and its accompanying Calypso music are inextricably interwoven with the identity of the Afro-Trinidadian:

The Carnival of Trinidad is a performative ritual of cultural resistance and awakening, claiming a space and celebrating freedom from any kind of oppression. The history of this ritual is strictly connected to the process of cultural decolonisation and political independence of the Caribbean country from the mother land; it is in Carnival and for Carnival that Trinidadians have successfully fought colonialism to gain their freedom. (p. 17)

Using the perspectives on gender and music adopted by researchers such as Sergeant and Himonides (2016), Taylor (2012), Treitler (2011) and McClary (1991), this article provides a snapshot of the complex and shifting topography of gendering in Calypso and Soca music from Trinidad and Tobago through the lenses of two musicians who are gendered as male: a Calypso/Soca singer and a socio-cultural activist/performer. In the interviews that constitute the data for the study upon which this article is based, these two cultural workers discuss how the gendering of music has been operationalized in Trinidad and Tobago and beyond into the rest of the African diaspora, each from their own vantage point at distinct but similar angles of entry into the music festival space. The musical genres under consideration in this article are Calypso and Soca, both of which have a tradition of being male dominated. The structure and questions that framed the interviews were designed to allow the interviewees to construct story and narrative from their own personal experience (Riessman 1993), and were informed by a critical understanding of categories such as sex, gender, and sexuality as adopted by investigators such as Melby (2005), Prause and Graham (2007), Twenge (1997), Guck (1994) and Deaux (1987), as well as by the American Psychological Association (2012).

## Results

In the presentation of excerpts from the interview texts below, the following abbreviations were used: **I** for Interviewer, **S** for Calypso/Soca singer, and **P** for socio-cultural activist/performer.

**I:** *There are different manifestations of masculinities in the Caribbean, particularly in Jamaica. How do you describe masculinity and how is this articulated in your work as an artist?*

**S:** Masculinity in my work is based on the norms learnt about the Caribbean man. These learnt perspectives came from the family and schooling predominantly. I also was privy to seeing and understanding the perspectives in Jamaica especially through dancehall music. However, in ... Calypso music there is a level of boasting of manhood in the lyrical content of some music which I also find myself partaking in when constructing music. However, most of the audiences in performative spaces [have] understood the context of the meanings within the lyrical content.

**P:** I am quite clear that many aspects of masculinity are artificially constructed and gendered, a creature of the historical moment, changing depending where on

the ethnic ancestral timeline one may choose to enter. I am clear that in ancestral Africa, Native America, East India – LGBTQ individuals were not persecuted and, in many cultures, had their own Secret Societies etc. I am clear of the more nuanced acceptance of difference that existed in ancestry and that many behaviors we are witnessing now are in fact ‘modern’.

I am clear that many aspects of present tense Caribbean and Black male knee-jerk antipathy and in extreme cases – violence - against LGBTQ manifestations comes from a post-plantation war on the part of the West against Black maleness which in one of its pernicious manifestations is the feminization, rape, castration, cuckolding, and obliteration of Black maleness in its existential nakedness. This brutalization manifests itself in a myriad of ways: from thousands of mainstream images of Black male bodies being dominated by White male bodies in violent sometimes homo-erotic ways in Hollywood and modern media, to entire provinces in islands like Barbados and Jamaica where White male tourists traffic Black male bodies for sexual sport, to a prison-industrial complex which incarcerates more than 1 in 10 of Black males in the West worldwide and whose unspoken lived lexicon is male sodomy - effectively meaning that vast percentages of working class Black men in the West have been raped!!!

I am clear that Black men intuitively understand that it is patriarchy against patriarchy and they are in a predator-prey relationship with the West. I understand that that pain many times looks like violence. I am clear that male gender narratives are complicated by the fact that LGBTQ people need to be liberated and to have full civic, social, and existential personhood whilst at the same time understanding that heterosexual men need to defend themselves against predatory White Supremist hegemonic capitalist military industrial forces which use their feminization as a key part in the destabilization of the African community and its revolutionary potential.

I am also clear of the thousands of registers of masculinity available- from the softest to the hardest. And that all are valid, all human.

As an artist I am interested in heterosexual maleness at this complex present moment. I am interested in constructing narratives of what maleness looks like in this time of hegemonic war and the clash of Empires and the collapse of the West. I am interested in maleness at a time of negotiation with burgeoning Female Power, with the complexity of changing roles. I am interested in the difficulties of this moment which is real. Especially for Black men and women negotiating all kinds of differing power shifts in a New World that has never granted power to either (and always conditionally), and who loves to pit one against the other. I am interested in authoring the way out of our present predicaments and problems on our own steam with our own compass, with full awareness that there have been many others pulling our strings. We must acknowledge



our powerlessness and cultural manipulations at various times if we are to understand how we got to this difficult knot of a moment when we could not be further apart. I however do believe that there are some bright spots that show we are magnetizing together again, but to unravel what has been done to us will take patience, detective work, exorcism, counseling, understanding history, a revolutionary consciousness, and an embrace of our African Futurist Infinity.

**I:** *Caribbean artists, male musicians in particular, especially in some genres, have come under criticism for portraying and celebrating a toxic masculinity. Does your work interrogate consciously or subliminally this popular toxic portrayal of masculinity, and if so, in what ways?*

**S:** A variety of genres in the Caribbean have come under criticism but the artform continues to produce and mass distribute the criticized content as a form of spectacle or pleasure. This is interpreted according to how troubling or not the content may appear to be, based on the space in which it is consumed. My work however tends to find creative ways to portray the realities in society yet still stimulate thoughts on who we are in terms of our sexuality in the Caribbean.

**P:** My music so far has not been self-reflexive, been critical, or about the music itself and other musicians. The toxic masculinity in Black music is real, and completely artificial. In waves, the mainstream American White music and cultural industry worked out ways to counteract waves of African-American Golden Age music and its revolutionary potential. In the 1950s they appropriated Rock and Roll and Pop for White stars and erased Black practitioners. In the 1970s they neutered Funk, Soul, and revolutionary Black and White pop with Disco - a drug-fueled music whose sole purpose was dancing without consciousness.

However, it was in the 1990s that the most diabolical method of subterfuge was created - the weaponising of the Music against the Culture and the People itself. Blacksploitation Cinema in the 1970s gave White industry the clue which they would perfect in the 1990s drug war. In the 1970s revolutionary Black communities worldwide were destabilized by the assassination of Black revolutionary leaders and the flooding of the communities with drugs and guns alongside a scrupulous attempt to cultivate a criminal class to supplant the revolutionary class in these communities. These tactics worked and Blacksploitation cinema began an incipient culture of the glorification of that degraded lifestyle.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, the Hollywood war against the Black image would take on terrifying proportions with the kinds of stereotypes of debasing of Black people in popular culture reaching insane proportions. Black people could live their entire lives without ever seeing a heroic, non-debased image of themselves in mainstream media! In the 1990s revolutionary Hip Hop started changing the conversation in Black communities worldwide. Spike Lee's Malcolm X movie

came out and a series of independent Black movies emerged with revolutionary potential. The White cultural backlash was extreme. The violence of Black stereotypes in White mainstream Hollywood was ratcheted right up but moreso - for the first time White executives decided to start controlling the Black narrative in music itself. In the same way they infiltrated ghettos with guns, drugs, and criminal icons they did the same with Black music.

When I was in the US in 1995, in every single city I went to the most popular people on the streets were Conscious Rappers. It did not matter where you went - Chicago, Boston, New York, Atlanta, Miami - Black Conscious rappers were all the young people talked about. NOT ONE OF THESE RAPPERS EVER GOT SIGNED TO A RECORD LABEL DEAL. Instead, millions of dollars were thrown at gangstas and hedonists. Hundreds of these debased artists were signed and flooded the market. The previous generation of Hip Hoppers were placed on the shelf and the new gangsta rapper and male misogynist was sold as the face of Black America. It was sold as aspirational and even the gateway into the American industry for all African Diaspora musics.

The Black male icon changed overnight into the gangsta. That version of maleness became the only Black male narrative given sanction. It became the dominant narrative. Films, videos, albums, TV shows, posters, books, conferences, lectures - toxic masculinity was the cry and Black males were its most prurient face. Alas 'What is Joke for Schoolboy is death fuh Crapaud' and these fictive narratives and personas which may have been true for small fringe portions of the Black urban community were now being marketed like Coca Cola to the world - especially to the targeted communities.

This culture of criminality and toxicity was being marketed at precisely the moment when there was Iran-Contra/crack cocaine and another wave of drugs being pushed into Black communities and the corresponding War on Drugs and expansion of the Prison-Industrial Complex with for-profit-prisons/ three strikes you're out/ and the school to prison pipeline. That two decade period saw to the geometric [increase in] incarceration of Black men across the Western world and the consolidation of the toxic masculinity culture as the mainstream of Black musical and popular culture.

This happened in less than five years. From one moment, [a scenario where] Black music and culture was historically seen as the music of love, revolution, harmony, peace and innovation throughout the 20th century with mainstream Black male faces across the spectrum of gendered identities in the 1990s from Michael Jackson, Prince, Public Enemy, LL Cool J, Lionel Richie, Stevie Wonder, Lenny Kravitz, Will Smith, Arrested Development, Wu Tang Clan, Maxwell, Eddie Murphy, Boys to Men, etc. - to [another completely different moment,] a scenario where black genocide, drug dealing, female abuse, robbery,

and predatory gaming of your community was *de rigeur*. The Western elevation of the Black Gangsta as the face of the Black community corresponded to a series of real-life forces that [push] economically disenfranchised Black communities worldwide and push working class Black men into the prison industrial complex. The downstream cultures of toxic masculinity are part of the slipstream.

**I:** *What were some of the biggest influences in your development as a man? In other words, growing up, what cultural norms, local as well as imported, impacted how you perceived manhood, and ultimately influenced the kind of man you are today?*

**S:** The idea of the man being the leader of the household and leader in society impacted my perception of manhood. However, as I grew older, I was privy to discourses on diversity and gender equality.

**P:** My grandfather and father were family men of immense integrity, morally, professionally, and in terms of their patriotism and sense of community. My grandfather was a working-class tailor who worked all his life in rural poverty in colonial Trinidad and took all the slings that took and raised my father with my grandmother - a domestic. He was a witty dapper gentleman that belonged to that generation of noble rural 'peasants' whose lives constitute the memory bank of the Folk. Good people who did the best with what they had. They were able to send my father away to university and change the family's stars.

My father was a patriot *extraordinaire* who was a lecturer and then senior public servant who was vocal in his opposition to government shenanigans and pandering to vested old interests, at a time when such dissenting views were met with stiff penance. He eventually would help form two opposition parties. The first time my family paid for this with death threats and us having to hide in safe houses. The political victimization that followed impoverished my family to the point where my mother would have to work seven jobs for us to keep our home. My father was marked a social pariah and unemployable and if you so much as spoke to him you would be excommunicated too! It was a long Gethsemane, but he stuck to his beliefs and was able to triumph and outlive his tormentors! These two men set a template for commitment and belief in Idea and family to me.

I also had a strange calling in my life where I believed in the power of the immortal ritual of initiation and apprenticeship with Masters. As a multi - media artist working in 8 mediums, it meant that I found myself seeking out and sitting at the feet of a cohort of Elder Masters in multiple disciplines. They could not be [more] different from one another in terms of their constructions of masculinities - but what they had in common was their Genius, their Trinidad and Tobagian-ness, their Caribbean-ness, their revolutionary sensibilities, and their oceanic humanity. LeRoy Clarke, Peter Minshall, Tony Hall, Earl Lovelace, Christopher

Pinheiro, Christopher Laird, Horace Ove, Albert LaVeau, Andre Tanker, Brother Resistance, Olakeela Massetunji, Wayne Brown, Professor Gordon Rohlehr, Charles Applewhite, Boscoe Holder, Ravi Ji .... I spent years under the tutelage of many of these phenomenal men. It molded me into the Man I am.

**I:** *In general, what area of the arts, visual as well as performing, do you think has the largest impacts on youth? What do you see as some of the dominant images/ messaging that Caribbean youth receive from these mediums? Do we need to counter these images, and if so, how?*

**S:** Music, revelry, woman is Carnival. I don't think it should be countered, but more context and diversity can be added in the visual work to highlight a holistic view.

**P:** Music has the visceral power. It is the thing that determines the tempo of the age. The men at its center define masculinity to many. But it is reinforced by Hollywood and filmic imagery. Large Hollywood tropes and myths tend to dissolve the edges around many truths and insidiously plant themselves as truths. Altering historical trajectory and placing new gods at our centre - erasing authentic heroes at the same time .... The fact that we are still, now, constructing Caribbean manhood out of the crucible of gangsta myths constructed in 1990s Black American gang neighborhoods speaks to the power of the constellation of the American music industry and its partnership with the Hollywood machine. We still have not untethered our ideas and notions of self and masculinity from the dangerous seeds that were sown in the 90s with the specific aim to destroy the Black race ...

The solution to all this lies on two fronts. The first is the emancipation of local Dreamers and Voices in all their diversity by imposing the 50% Local Content Quota Laws on all broadcast media with special stipulations for movie theatres and cable and streaming services and higher quotas during prime-time hours. With 10% CARICOM quotas inside there. What this does, is emancipate the ability of the community to respond to the war on identity. There is no telling what will be produced when sovereign voices are given space. What dreams may come ... The other thing that we must do, is to animatedly move to counteract the dominant culture that is aggressively selling guns, drugs, and dysfunction to our community in reality and symbolically in culture. We must blockade against it, counsel communities against it, inoculate them against it, and educate people so it cannot recur.

**I:** *How can visual as well as performing artists use their medium to guide young men about the diversity and multiplicities of manhood so they feel comfortable in deciding on a path of manhood that is wholesome and unique?*

**S:** The content in the arts.

**P:** I am interested in articulating registers of heterosexual maleness that has dimensionality. Artists must model what they want to advocate in their work. As icon, as narrative, as tropes, as symbol, as moral tale, as aspirational .... I am interested in the Afro-Futuristic Man, the fully realized Black Infinite. I am interested in how we get there and what that looks like. An emotionally realized man that is Genius and committed to his woman and family, community and tribe, a man about his mission who is not confined by others' definition of him, outside of the tyranny of history, free to Act! Such a man is represented as much as how he looks and how he acts as the kinds of relationships he has with the people around him - family, community, nation, tribe, world, his relationship with the past, present, and future .... It is the duty of us who understand the war against the Black and Caribbean Icon to create the counter-narrative. This at times will lead by openly dismantling the dangerous false gods placed in our path for us to worship, and we must also destroy the demons that puppet these illusions to us - but we will also have to lead by ignoring the old shibboleths and simply construct the new Adams, the Neo-Shangos of the future.

**I:** *Suicide of young men is daily increasing in the Caribbean, which indicates a crisis. What are some factors that you believe contribute to this crisis? Simultaneously, rape of women and gender-based violence are also increasing. Do you see any parallels? If so, elaborate.*

**S:** I can't speak much about this in my capacity; however, I can point to an increased depression rate within the society, antagonized by the communities embedded in social media.

**P:** I spoke [before in the interview] of the converging historical forces on Caribbean men - especially working class urban Black men, most of whom have absolutely [no] clue as to this history. He has no map for the extremes of historical wildernesses he will be constantly teleported into. These men cannot articulate themselves out of the vice grips of all these evils they have to contend with which manifest themselves as existential threats and personal grievance. They act in the present moment with what they have at hand, a primary school education, popular culture, and conspiracy theory. It is not a fair knife fight. Especially when the next side actually is fighting with guns, bombs, and chemical warfare ....

Generation Y and Z also have less defense mechanisms than previous generations. They have been brought up by parents who saw them as friends and not as children to be parented. Corporal punishment was removed from the equation. Thus, we have a generation who has no sense of boundaries or consequences to action. They are inured to immediate satisfaction without a sense of process and labor. They are mercenary and believe everything can be negotiated or bought.

They learn about the real world all too quickly and [are] at once in the deep end of the real world itself, where the consequences can be dire.

All of this makes for a generation that tries on identities for size and [tries on] experiences as endorphin highs. There is a hint of the sociopathic in such scenarios. The moment is dangerous. When consequence is not a factor, when all reality seems virtual, then we have a serious disconnect between the action and what the individual feels the action does. This generation needs to be grounded in process and consequence to snap the cycle.

**I:** *What symbols, traits or themes do you use in creating visual as well as performing art to represent masculinities? Are these framed in Caribbean realities?*

**P:** The Black male body is at the centre of most of my visual art. A sovereign body. A lot of time - divine, heroic, incarnate, with agency, with revolutionary capacity and intent, in action, in many forms of diverse action, at play, at rest, triumphing, in revenge, in reparative action, as a cosmic force, intimately with a mate, in love, costumed, naked, contemplative, self-possessed .... Free. Infinite. That is Caribbean Reality for me. Afro-Futuristic Reality.

**I:** *Does your work on masculinities serve to promote gender justice? If so, in what ways?*

**S:** I offer a perspective which describes the realities of masculinities in the region while still empowering the feminine gender. Much more work will be done to further promote gender justice.

**P:** Yes. There are a range of female icons in my work which are of the Black female Icon with the exact same charge and agendas as the male, as above. I want to model reparative relationships in my work. I know the traumas. I know the complexity and the angst. I know the demons outside our doors and the puppeteers who have made us mutiny against ourselves in our own home. I am not interested in giving them power. I am interested in putting them to the sword and creating the New Republic the New Kingdom. In every medium I work, the aim is to repair the hurts and traumas of old inequalities, to salve the strains of us growing now. I am interested in the Magic of Repair ....

**I:** *Are attributes associated with masculinities in the arts in dire need of redefining themselves in opposition to attributes of femininities? Explain.*

**S:** The performative space of the artform I practice is dominated by men. Despite the female performers who often portray their sexuality in their music, the Calypso and Soca space is often regarded as an arena of power for the male gender. Their lyrics and performance construct realities about their own sexuality.

**P:** No. Those are artificial Western binaries. That is not our history. We have to untangle our history and cauterize the wound with revolutionary gunpowder. We do not have the luxury of forgetting, because that will only leave us at the mercy of other people's narratives. We have to do the hard work and retrace steps and exorcise. Forgive. Move forward. Claim our Infinity. Claim a Destiny bigger than the tyranny of history. And embrace what that means.

**I:** *Do you think that new masculinities in the arts necessitate political, cultural, economic and social collaboration/engagement?*

**S:** Yes.

**P:** I think what it demands firstly is the Emancipation of the Caribbean Arts. The Caribbean creative sector- like Black creative sectors worldwide - are artificially aborted and stultified on purpose because Black Dreaming is revolutionary, diverse, and humanistic. If our narratives were not manipulated the delinquent, gangsta, .... we would have a wonderland of stories. So, the first matter at hand should be the implementation of the enabling environments for the creative sectors of the Caribbean - all the facilitative legislation, policy, and institutions necessary to emancipate the voices of the People. Once that happens, then we will see all kinds of voices arise - diverse voices, voices that force us to contend with ourselves, challenge ourselves, voices that will force us to grow and become more beautiful.

From that - a paradise.

Separate and apart from [what] I spoke about [earlier in the interview, there are] a series of real-life social forces warring against our communities - imperial forces flooding our revolutionary communities with guns, drugs, and criminality, [and] we are in the fifth decade of this phenomenon. It has wiped out millions of lives with murder, addiction, poverty, and incarceration. It is part of a worldwide war against Black Lives. We have to fight it at macro and micro levels but fight it we must. We obviously cannot fight it as we have been fighting it, as that has been a zero-sum game. I believe we must fight it by flipping the story and calling the ruse out. We have to fight it with story. We have to flip the script on the gangstarisation of our communities and our Black Icon. We must flip it. Reject their definition of us. This has everything to do with working class justice, African Reparations, marijuana reparations, and male identity and Black male-female relationships. When we redeem the Icon of the working-class Black Man and transform it from Gangsta to Revolutionary to God, then we will begin the repair of a lot.

## Conclusion

The interviews reveal a deep and comprehensive understanding, as well as a thoroughgoing and critical analysis, of the history, present challenges, and future possibilities regarding gendering and masculinities, both in Calypso and Soca music in particular, as well as in African diasporic societies in general. The powerful and inspiring words of the interviewees indicate that the current situation is in flux, and that there are actors on the ground, on the stages and in the studios who are ready to usher in a new era of healing of the wounds and repair of the damage that have been inflicted on people of African descent, not only over the past five decades, but also over the past five centuries.

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# TRANS-LEXIS

A PLAY WRITTEN BY: GABRIEL E. SUÁREZ  
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## Introduction and characters

Trans-Lexis was written and produced to educate and un-educate audiences on topics such as trans-, homo- and other phobias, gender, women's agency, and the family, as well as on the themes of art and the theatre itself. The play was produced including songs by *Plena Combativa*, a Puerto Rican female band that plays *plena* and *bomba* music as a means of resistance to patriarchy. The writer recommends that those who are interested should adapt the play to other times, places, technologies, etc., with the active participation of as many 'actors' and 'directors' as possible. The characters include the following:

**Lexis** is a 28-year-old transgender woman. Her physical features evoke a strong young female of mixed skin tones and black hair, who may have undergone hormonal treatments. She wears a short skirt, a shiny long-sleeved shirt, and sneakers with torn nylon stockings - all black. She likes to read and act.

**Mía** is a 16-year-old woman who attends high school. She is someone with a range of intelligences, and, like her mother Sofía, she enjoys the performing arts.

**Sofía** is a 44-year-old professor of diction and acting in the Drama Department at the University of Puerto Rico. She enjoys her job and her family and is getting ready for a presentation at a sociolinguistics conference.

## Scene 1

Mía: *Oye ma'*, What do you think about me presenting a *plena* for the talent-show?

Sofía: I didn't know it was going to happen this year.

Mía: We requested it, but of course, it will be online.

Sofía: Any ideas yet?

Mía: Well [or *Pues*], the other day you were listening to the *Plena Combativa* on Radio Universidad and I am interested.

Sofía: Ay, Mía.

Mía: What?

Sofía: Nothing, I think it's a great idea? Will you dance or sing?

Mía: I was thinking about dancing to background music. Can you help me?

Sofía: Of course, but remember that we are recording for the *congreso en la Universidad*.

Mía: Yeah, yeah, that's why I am excited about the topic.

Sofía: It's a female group.

Mía: *Lo sé*, I googled them.

Sofía: Do you have a song in mind?

Mía: For now, I'm just picking up the rhythm. I want a long skirt so I can start rehearsing.

Sofía: It doesn't need to be a skirt...

Mía: [interrupts Sofía] ...the skirt makes me feel happy.

Sofía: You almost fit in my clothes. Check my closet, there must be one around.

Mía: This will be my contribution against racialization [goes to get a skirt].

Sofía: Eeeeeee...what? What are you saying, *niña*? Ay, *santo*, *esta hija mía*. I can tell that you are listening to my conversations with colleagues over the phone.

Mía: [returning with a skirt] *Eso*, for all the girls, women, and all those who feel like them.

Sofía: Good try. But...

Mía: [interrupts Sofía again, while she's trying the skirt on] Ma', did you forget about the trans woman who has been visiting and working with us for almost three months?

Sofía: No, you know I haven't. You've been helping me with the videos I want to present at the conference. And I haven't forgotten that she considers herself black.

Mía: We have a mate who started wearing makeup and clothing designed for women.

Sofía: You hadn't mentioned that either.

Mía: He said he preferred to dress like his sisters; that he feels like a girl. The teacher reported him to the school principal. *¡Tiene sendo revolú!* [keeps holding up the garment because it is too big for her waist]

Sofía: Ay, ay, ay. It's a bit complicated. There was already an incident with the skirts for boys at school...

Mía: [interrupts Sofía and starts taking off the skirt] Exactly! Yesy, as he calls himself, tells them it's his right to decide how to dress. He has even mentioned Lexis, but we know these cases are different.

Sofía: The same judgement. *¡Suena la plena!* Help me with the recordings and I'll help you with the essays. We'll have more things to do; we'll alter your dress. I thought it would fit you.

## Scene 2

Mía: Okay, *mami*. I'll turn on the camera. *Uno, dos, tres*; action.

Sofía: Remember you are going to ask the questions I gave you.

Mía: What is your project about?

Sofía: These recordings compile several videoclips created with Lexis, a transgender woman who was the victim of a hate crime back in February 2020. The idea came together sometime after the first lockdown.

Mía: Did you know her?

Sofía: We met at La Placita in Santurce. We were rehearsing for a play and the *actriz* needed some props. That's when I saw her. She was carrying two bags and a big purse. I quickly explained I was directing a piece and was in need of a big purse. "Of course; it's my pleasure. But, get me some coconut water." she said. I think her shy gaze and sweet voice captivated me. "I'll give you your tip once we finish" I answered.

Mía: Why did you decide to work with her?

Sofía: On that same day I discovered she loved theater, so I hired her to help out with the house chores. The pay would be a sort of *trueque*; she would water the plants, take out the trash, and walk the dog while I taught my diction lessons. "Cut."

Mía: Why? Keep it up; it's going well.

Sofía: Yes, thank you *hijita*.

Mía: Recording.

Sofía: She told me her name was Lexis and that she was 28 years old. She also mentioned she grew up in a *barrio* in Carolina along with her mom and dad, both faithful members of *Iglesia de la Sangre de Cristo*.

Mía: Tell us about your first experiences with Lexis. [hands Sofía a glass of water]

Sofía: [drinks a bit of water] During her first day on the job, she took the bus to Rio Piedras and then walked all the way to our apartment in Santa Rita. I explained I would be out for three hours and that my daughter would be studying. I introduced her to Alfa, the puppy she would be taking care of. I also showed her the other chores that needed to be done. When I returned from my classes at UPR, she was waiting on the balcony with a book by Marina Arzola. "You have good taste." I told her, and added "That will be one of our resources during the workshops".

Mía: What's wrong?

Sofía: It was difficult to sleep that night. I kept wondering about my new student's whereabouts.

Mía: Take it easy *madrecita*. I'll give you a pedicure tonight and I'll even include a massage.

Sofía: I'm thankful. I'll keep adjusting the skirt then; it needs new elastic. I'm so glad your grandma taught me how to sew. [the lights suddenly go out]

Mía: *Se fue la luz*, again!

Sofía: Ay, *santa Luz*!

Mía: Your phone is ringing.

Sofía: Thank you. Good afternoon... [pauses for the person on the line to speak] ...one minute. Mía, please get the batteries and the flashlight, just in case. I need to take this call. Hello... yes, this is Sofía Pérez speaking. Who am I speaking to? I see... yes, I have been waiting.... Well... no, I can't speak right now; I have my sixteen-year-old daughter here with me and I haven't told her yet... yes, yes... the appointment is this Friday at 10. Thank you.

### Scene 3 [Lexis' first Tuesday recording session]

Sofía: I used that text for my thesis.

Lexis: ¿Ah?

Sofía: As I was finishing my graduate studies, I had to write a book, sort of.

Lexis: I see.

Sofía: Basically, I proposed that poetry be used more as a way to do theater.

Lexis: Fantastic! I'm a drama queen, but I never finished middle school.

Sofía: [takes Lexis' hands] Schooling is a very delicate subject on this island. There are people in the government who use discrimination as a way to distract people from their own corruption. On the other hand, family problems... Anyway, let's change the subject.

Lexis: Okay, what should we talk about? Sometimes you speak *jeringosa* to me.

Sofía: Forgive me. Better yet, let's go on to the reading. It'll be a Well-experiment with the senses. May I record you?

Lexis: Yasss! I feel like Lupita from Black Panther.

Sofía: Do you consider yourself black?

Lexis: I'm not blind. Look at me! I'm all black! Sorry. You have to be on the edge when you're out there on the streets.

Sofía: Let's start with the eyes. I bookmarked several poems for the exercises we will be doing.

Lexis: I need a mirror.

Sofía: You don't have to worry about that. I want it to be as natural as possible. Sit over here. [shows her a new place to sit]

Lexis: OK, but don't make me look like a crazy person. I get enough of that with the insults people scream at me on the streets "*mera loco, recógete*" or "*Cristo te ama, arrepiéntete*".

Sofía: We don't judge you; but I can't offer any shelter. Our place is very small and Mía, Alfa, and I are already sharing it.

Lexis: No problem. Maybe you could give me some other chores in exchange for food.  
[places her belongings under the chair]

Sofía: I'll think of something. This is today's poem. We'll only work on some verses like we did during the yoga workshops and our quick readings last week. *Toma*, page 19, third stanza.

Lexis: This one?

Sofía: Yes, I'll record your eyes. Concentrate and express yourself through them.

Lexis: I'll try.

Sofía: *Vamos*, it's already recording.

Lexis: "*A ver, aunque así fuera cortada en el cascajo, aherrojada en espejos, y polvo y fría sien, aunque corte en retazos el viejo lampadario tus edificios rectos, sin curvas, a tropel*"

Sofía: "Cut."

#### Scene 4

Mía: [massages Sofía's feet] *Mami*, why a trans woman?

Sofía: [measures and cuts the elastic for the skirt] As women, indigenous and black women in particular, we have been marginalized for millions of years. ¡Ay, *suave con la uña!* I'm looking for an alternative to that silence and erasure.

Mía: I get it. The neighbors talked about us. They said that we had a *loca* working in the house.

Sofía: They're also sick, but contrary to Lexis, what they suffer from is confinement and other types of loneliness. Let them talk.

Mía: I wonder what *papi* thinks about it.

Sofía: You know that your father is open-minded. I was the one who had to re-educate myself. At your *abuelos'* house this was not allowed. They were catholic, you know

Mía: I think so. We never got married and we loved each other when we conceived you. Later, he left college because he liked working with electricity more. One day, he met Miguel and now they've been together for 15 years. And I dedicated myself to you.

Mía: Do you like women?

Sofía: Ay, Mía, *pero* is today the DAY to ask questions?

Mía: Bueno, I have to know.

Sofía: No, I still feel attracted to the opposite sex and facial hair.

Mía: There are women with beards. With so much surgery there are even more male stereotypes embraced by lesbians.

Sofía: ¡Mía!

Mía: Sofía.

Sofía: How about you just continue with my feet?

Mía: Ok. [starts to apply the patchouli oil to Sofía's feet] Why are you getting so many weird calls?

Sofía: Mía, I am tired. Today was an intense day at the university. There are a lot of uncertainties about the course offering for next semester.

Mía : Who is *Dra. Muñiz*?

Sofía: Put a bit more oil. I like the smell of patchouli.

Mía: *No me pichées*. I found a notice for your next appointment with her. I was looking for a shirt for the talent and it was in your clothes.

Sofía: Okay, I won't lie. For the past six months, your mom has been doing individualized therapies for breast cancer.

Mía: [stops massaging] What?

Sofía: It's not as bad as you think. Medicine has greatly advanced in that area.

Mía: Now I understand why you were tired and dizzy. You should use cannabis. [restarts the massage]

Sofía: Mía, I am sorry for not telling you before. I didn't want to worry you. For now, let's continue with the herbs that we have.

Mía: [fills her mother's feet with kisses] You know we're a team. I'm here to help you.

Sofía: Thank you. How nice your hands feel!

Mía: I'm glad. I am going to turn down the lights, so you can relax.

## Scene 5

Mía: [records Sofía] Talk to us about your schedule with Lexis.

Sofía: [speaks into camera] We met from five to seven every Tuesday and Thursday night. During the first three weeks of December, we found her reading rhythm. She was a really good reader and she transformed herself as she read poems. She told me that she was always on public transport and she would travel from Bayamón to Toa Baja by bus, train or by hitchhiking. I asked her to be careful. "It'll take more than two people to stop me," she answered. "Cut."

[speaks directly to Mía] Even though my blood ran ice cold, I tried to act normal. Not even García Márquez with his "*Crónica...*" made me tremble as I did when I thought of how she danced with death. I told her that we would continue with the exercises for my presentation at the University. "*Yo, la estrella*" she added with tears in her eyes.

## Scene 6 [another of Lexis' recording sessions]

Lexis: It smells like *gandules*.

Sofía: Yes, it's been raining, so we made *asopao de gandules*. In this house we cook every day to resist eating fast foods, and promote subsistence as an ideology. If there were a man in the house, he too would have to cook.

Lexis: I don't really love cooking, but I can help with the meal prep and even do the dishes.

Sofía: You're hired. That way you can take some food to go.

Lexis: Thank you. What will we be recording today?

Sofía: Your nose. [searches for her phone to record]

Lexis: I haven't trimmed it. It's giving Ruth Fernández vibes.

Sofía: A very good singer. [sings] "*Color de piel*". Ha ha. I'm always the one most out of tune. Look, these are the verses. I'll turn on the camera, and you can start.

Lexis: "*Y tú: perfume de mi cuerpo alto como cereal molido de cipreses...*"

## Scene 7

Sofía: Make sure it's on, Mía.

Sofía: *¿Ya?* Are you done?

Mía: So, what if I like women?

Sofía: Turn off the camera for a second. [pauses as Mía turns off the camera] It would be better than liking men, who knock you up and leave.

Mía: What?!

Sofía: Honey, it's normal; these are other times. Another era! I'll accept you as you wish, but you have to be sober about it.

Mía: I don't drink.

Sofía: Political sobriety, as Pepe Mujica says. We need to regroup and work alongside these new technologies towards the betterment of humanity in a global context.

Mía: Remember, I'm not one of your students, there is no need for fancy words.

Sofía: Yes, but you act and ask questions like them.

Mía: I like Malik's hair. It's black and curly, and reminds me of Ernestito, our neighbor.

Sofía: We are all humans, men and women. In essence we're all the same, just different tones of brown. How are your rehearsals going?

Mía: I'm narrowing down the songs. I'm choosing between the last three. This is one of them. [sings "*El tumbé*"]

Sofía: Excellent. I finished your skirt. Go get it, so we can see how it fits you.

Mía: I'm going. [goes to change clothes]

Sofía: I put it on your bed.

Mía: [speaks from her room] *Ya*. Give me a second. Turn up the music; I'll dance for you.

Sofía: No, this is not a concert. The neighbors are locked down too, and it might bother them.



Mía: Yeah, but it's 5 o'clock. [returns to the stage]  
 Sofía: [talks over the loud music] You look like a pro.  
 Mía: *Gracias, mami*. Check out these moves. [starts to dance, but her steps are not coordinated]  
 Sofía: [approaches Mía] *Bendito, hija*. It seems we both still have two left feet. Look; it's like this. [shows Mía a couple more steps]  
 Mia: [perplexed] It's been a while since you were my teacher. *Por eso te quiero tanto*.  
 Sofía: *Y yo más. Te amo*. [They hug and then continue with the recordings]  
 Mía: [records Sofía] Do you have an anecdote you would like to share?  
 Sofía: The night we did the audition, she told me that she loved when the rain made sounds more intense than the *coquís*. It was that night when she asked me for a towel. I thought it was an odd request, but I gave her a white one I used to dry my hair. When she left my house, she wore it like a veil over that black hair net she always had on. "Cut."  
 [speaks to Mía] It's so hot. It must be because of today's therapy session.  
 Mia: Rest. I'll continue rehearsing in my room. [leaves the stage]

**Scene 8** [another of Lexis' recording sessions with Sofia in the living room on her computer, as Lexis enters with a cellphone]

Lexis: I think your phone's ringing; it keeps blinking on and off like a Christmas tree.  
 Sofía: Let's see... Ay, it's from the clinic again. This week I don't want any trouble. I won't answer. I'll call them later and confirm my next appointment.  
 Lexis: But...  
 Sofía: [interrupts Lexis while she closes her laptop] Relax. Today is all about the audition. These are the verses.  
 Lexis: Let me fix my curls, so I can show off these pair of black ears.  
 Sofía: We have time; tomorrow is *Día de Reyes*.  
 Lexis: That was my mother's favorite. Poor dear, the asthma took her too quickly. She was only 52 years old.  
 Sofía: I'm sorry.  
 Lexis: Let's not get sad. Is there any good music to set the mood on this Queen's Day Eve?  
 Sofía: [shouts out loud to Mia who is in her bedroom] Mia, put on some music! [*"Con Calma"* by Daddy Yankee plays in the background for a couple of seconds]  
 Lexis: Yasssss.  
 Sofía: That's enough. We have to be serious while recording. That *macharran* is part of the patriarchal clan. Perhaps something with your drums, Mia. [A segment of "*Para las niñas felices*" by *Plena Combativa* plays in the background]  
 Lexis: I like that one. As long as it's not gospel music, I'll listen to anything.  
 Sofía: [holds her phone in hand] Read, and we'll record your ears.

Lexis: “*Llanto: cuánto te amé en tus dos mitades. ¡Qué silencio de azul y de ceguera!*”

**Scene 9** [another of Lexis’ recording sessions the following Tuesday]

Sofía: Lexis, we have two more recordings left, but you can keep working here. This semester, I’m teaching three courses, and I have to prepare differently for each one. In any case, we’ve grown used to your *heliconias* and your company.

Lexis: Thanks, but I’d rather stay outside, on the streets.

Sofía: That’s not living.

Lexis: Another job will come my way, and everything will be OK.

Sofía: All right. Please know you can count on us for anything.

Lexis: Thank you. We’re missing my mouth and hands. I’m wearing the nude lipstick Mia gave me. I feel like a teenager.

Sofía: Ok, the mouth it is. [uses her cell phone to record] Ready? And, “action!”

Lexis: “*¡Sí, sí! Es aquí en mi casa, clara como la leche de lo amargo estival. (...) Sí, que cuando se ama es un secreto amargo de morada fatal.*”

Sofía: “Cut” [stops recording and asks Lexis] Have you ever been in love?

Lexis: Well, I have loved how God wakes me up every morning like the sun, and every night I fall in love with the countless stars in the sky... [pauses] I loved my mom and dad, but they never did understand me.

Sofía: That is pure poetry, Lexis. We’ll see you next week. Stay safe out there. Please. Let’s hug.

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**Scene 10** [another of Lexis’ recording sessions]

Sofía: Here, have some chamomile tea to calm you down. That way, you’ll be more comfortable during the recording. [gives Lexis the cup, leaves the room, and comes back with her cellphone] Here we go. [records] Tell me a story from when you were in school.

Lexis: The day of my ninth-grade graduation, my dad gave me a beating so bad I saw Jesus. All because I was wearing a pair of hot pants under my gown and some thigh high stockings.

Sofía: A little showy. Don’t you think?

Lexis: I mean, it was cheaper than a dress and a pair of heels. By then, they had already dragged me to three services to rid me of the demon they blamed for my wanting to become a woman.

Sofía: What would you do after that?

Lexis: Well, first I would ask God for patience, so I could fight the urge to beat my dad with a baseball bat. Then, I would go to the school counselor, Miss Judge, but she was a Bible thumper, so she would just get some of the teachers to pray for me.

Sofía: That’s terrible.

Lexis: It was those same teachers who put me into those ‘special’ therapy sessions. After burning my graduation outfit, mom made me go to another service on account of my impure thoughts.

Sofía: Seriously?

Lexis: The next day, I left home. I went to live with Mama Rudy, the Queen of all Drag Queens. She kept telling me to go back to school, but instead I started washing cars to make enough money for my hormones. Then I met... him.

Sofía: Him?

Lexis: I spent five years as a *picaro* for a little old man in the Dominican Republic. I met him one day, crossing Ashford Avenue, pretty close to where I worked washing cars. He asked if I would go to Puerto Plata to work for him. I didn’t have anything to lose, so I was on a flight the next day with don Salvador. I would spend the days reading to him the Spanish version of “*Las mil y una noches*.” While there, I transitioned, but shortly after, my employer passed away, so I came back to San Juan.

Sofía: ¿*Entonces*? And then?

Lexis: Then, at a bus stop in Puerta de Tierra, I met a sweet old lady who needed some help around the house, and, in exchange, would let me sleep on her balcony. It was covered in these huge handmade Puerto Rican flags, and at night, an old cot she had there would become my grand abode.

Sofía: Thankfully.

Lexis: Yeah, but I was going through Hell because we didn’t have a lot to eat, and the older lady - Her name was Pura - lived off of food stamps. Her children wanted nothing to do with her, and her husband had left her more than 20 years before that to go live with another woman in New York. I couldn’t find a job either. As soon as I opened my mouth, I would get cut off and told to try my luck at a nightclub.

Sofía: That’s illegal, but unfortunately these things haven’t changed much.

Lexis: Every month, I would go get Doña Pura’s measly check from the mailbox, and we would survive off of that. She was 77; I kept her house in order, helped her bathe, and cooked for her. Every night, I would read to her from the newspapers that her neighbors left on the doorstep, and would dramatize the horoscope section, Anita Casandra style. Heck, I might have even done it better than her. All of this until she died on me, and *empezaron los días de mi peregrinación*.

Sofía: Excuse me, Lexis. We have to stop the recording here.

Lexis: Miss, are you all right?

Sofía: I think I’m a little dehydrated, and I need to rest for a bit. We’ll come back to your hands on Thursday. See you later, Lexis.

## Scene 11

Sofía: [lays a blouse over Mia to match the skirt that she will dance the plena in] Mía, I know you're still busy preparing for the talent show, but please understand that I don't have very many people that can help me with this presentation. We're still in lockdown and teaching virtually. Just a few more recordings and I'll finish the editing. Your dance is coming along quite nicely. Trust me.

Mía: [adjusts her blouse, and does a few moves] Ok, I'll do as you say, but tonight we dance. It's daddy's birthday.

Sofía: Let's go on for one more hour. Then, we'll dance and call your father and Miguel on WhatsApp. (pauses) It looks perfect on you.

Mía: Agreed.

Sofía: Make sure the camera doesn't turn off; it's ready. [gives Mía the cellphone]

Mía: Yes, I am. "Action!"

Sofía: We were covering the topic of theater improvisations, and I suggested to my students that they incorporate poems into their work. I took the opportunity to explain the mini-workshop that I was doing at home, and they asked me to share the recordings we did with Lexis in class.

Mía: [stops the recording] I don't understand the connection between the poet and Lexis. [points to the tea on the table] Drink the pennyroyal tea I prepared for you. It'll help with your period cramps.

Sofía: Thank you. [tastes the tea] Keep recording, please. The poet was not considered to be black, but like our guest, was the subject of marginalizing comments.

Mía: [gives Sofía the cell phone that she has been using to record. Another call from the clinic. Just lay down on the couch, while I put some warm towels on your forehead and massage you. [steps out and returns with massage props to massage her mother]

Sofía: [answers her phone] Hello?... Yes, ok... Friday at 8:00 p.m... I'll stop by before the conference. Thank you.

[speaks to Mía] Look, I know it hasn't been easy for you either being stuck between these walls since we first heard of this Coronavirus and all of the safety precautions on the news. Everything will be fine. [sits back down] Let's keep going

Mía: [records] What's your last memory with Lexis?

Sofía: She arrived at the house with an expression of sheer horror, like a surreal version of the portrait of Arzola in her book *Palabras Vivas*. She told us that she woke up surrounded by flames. People had thrown lighted candles at her makeshift cardboard ceiling, under the stairs of the train station in Bayamón. She had to spend the day hidden by Condado lagoon. Her hands looked like charred archangel wings.

Mía: Ay, sí, I remember that.

Sofía: I went to the kitchen to get water, and when I returned, found a card from her. It read: “I can’t continue this drama. I feel like I’m being watched and followed. I am taking the train to Toa Baja, where I’ll find somewhere to stay for a few days”. There were some changes in her physical appearance: her clothes were more flamboyant, and she wore exaggerated make-up. Also, she started walking around with a car mirror, which she used to look behind herself. A week later, she was in the headlines, victim of a murder. Our last recording was of these verses:

[shows the video recording of Lexis reading] “*¡Y bien! Vienes cielo cortando mis cercados, cortando mis granados obtusos al nacer, maíces de los zumos astutos de la tierra, estultos graniceros de seca raíz: ¡hez! (...) Y es la mancha cerrada, tétrica en siglo inerte, siete enanos marchando de veinte cuevas: cien, siglo que has muerto solo cargando en los escarnios de verme apresentida, aprendida en ser.*”

**Scene 12** [Sofía stands behind a podium with a microphone]

Sofía: Greetings to all. Mia, I know that you are watching. Thank you for your assistance in this project. No need to worry anymore, there is no need for surgery. [addresses the audience] She knows what I’m referring to.

Today, I will present my project director: Lexis. She has recently become another statistic in the Police Department files, where over a dozen trans people have been listed as murdered, just in the short time that has passed since she was killed, just for being who she was. For centuries, indigenous women from both sides of the Atlantic and other continents of the world and their linguistic varieties have engaged with life through its reproduction, through the care, the cooking, the language, the education, the farm work and even the medicine that keeps us all alive. Their life-giving agency, however, has been erased and they have been marginalized, along with anyone who dares to want to celebrate the power of being a woman.

Lexis was not an evil person or possessed by some demon, as those who hypocritically hated her in the name of a gospel supposedly based on ‘love’ said she was. Her self-imposed silence was her choice against patriarchy and its multiple manifestations. She believed that there is good around us, but only received verbal assaults, physical abuse and eventually deadly bullets in return. As we speak, there are young people, including some of our students, being condemned by these same people to the violence of conversion therapies. After the theater workshops that I held with Lexis, and under the restrictions imposed because of COVID, I asked my daughter to record some videos of Lexis talking about her life. Unfortunately, those recordings will have to serve as a memorial to a life that was cut short too soon by those who choose hatred over love, dogma over

kindness, and an artificial virtual reality over the real world in all of its wonderful diversity. Thank you, this is the story...

### **Scene 13**

The play ends with Mia's performance of "*Bembetea*" by *Plena Combativa*.

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# MEMORIES OF A SOUTH BRONX NUYORICAN GIRL

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## Prologue:

### Pa los New Yorles

Voy a buscar vida Mai! Pa los New Yorles!  
Polque dicen que los trabajos están por montones allá.  
Aquí no hay na ... ni trabajo ni comia, no nos vamos morir de hambre!  
Y con que te vas? no tienes ropa pa esa maleta?!  
Dice que hace un frío pelú en New Yorl ... Dios mío tú no tienes abrigo ...  
Mai ... ji ... ese Belda ... pero me voy con la maleta aunque sea vacía ...  
Voy regresar con dinero ... pa comprar te una casa ... y no pasar más lucha ....  
Tranquila voy a escribir toa la semana vieja ...  
y quién sabe si regreso está hablando el difícil, el ingish ....  
Adiós vieja ya me voy, me veo bien? dame la bendición ... es que  
Voy a buscar vida Mai! Pa los New Yorles!

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I remember hearing somewhere that stories that are not told are forgotten, with time many memories have been lost and replaced with others along the way. Yes there were traumatic experiences, and economic hardships. Nonetheless, at my age I choose to remember my childhood with a romantic nostalgia. Despite the struggles faced, my recollections fill me with happiness and a deep sense of sadness of a beautiful time passed that will never return. The people and the places I recall, many if not most are long gone sometimes even from the memories of those that lived those moments with me. But these recollections will forever exist in my heart and soul as an integral part of my life. They are my reality and unforgettable to me...

Bryant Ave., a seemingly obscure block smack in the middle of “*El bron*”. It was full of burned down and decrepit buildings that were the only surviving sign that at one point many years back gangs ruled New York and they had burned hundreds of buildings on landlords’ orders. These tumbled-down structures were our permanent view.



Many years later because of public safety reasons the city tore down these buildings, however they remain vivid in my memory. Yet our weather-beaten building had been spared and still stood; barely, but it stood. The brick walls were black with soot, dirt and the occasional “*puta*” or “*cabron*” was graffitied under someone's window. Most of the windows were always broken with no window guards, which led to the time when we were horrified by the death of a beautiful baby boy who fell through an open window. Just in the same nightmare our building was infested with giant rats that were fat from feasting on the enormous trash bags set out at night to be picked up at 5:00am. These rats with their snarling teeth and claws were so lethal that even feral street cats that ran in packs with eyes missing and battle scars were afraid of them. Next were the mice that would eat anything, wood furniture, clothes, and any food that wasn't stored in reused ‘Export’ saltine cracker metal tins. Mouse traps were set with cheese or meat each evening. At night we heard the squeaking of the mice as they tried to eat through the wire brillo pads that we stuffed in holes in the floor and walls to keep them out. At that same time, we were dealing with the roach infestation, but no matter how much we cleaned, they made their way into everything. These disgusting insects with flattened oval bodies and long threadlike antennas, left a dirty urinal smell. Mothers were afraid to leave their new babies with milk bottles in their cribs, as in a matter of minutes they would find roaches crawling over their babies' mouths and bottles. Our apartment had peeling lead paint from years passed, which poisoned many children who ate the paint from hunger. We also had leaky plumbing in the kitchen that left a constant dampness, which left the old metal cabinets rusty and full of holes. Last but not least, there were the giant aluminum radiators that never gave heat in the winter.

Well, if you didn't know it, winters in a raggedy old apartment on Bryant Avenue in the South Bronx with a broken radiator were unbearable. But those unendurable freezing conditions sparked her ingenuity and creativity. First, she covered the windows with pages from the *Vocero* newspaper, trash bags and duct tape to stop the frigid draft. Second, she hung a long heavy curtain to keep out the bitter cold. All this left our bedroom devoid of any light, there was no view of the stars or moon at night, there were just a few words from the *Vocero* newspaper. Another part of her scheme was to make sure that we were never exposed to the morning chill in our apartment. Therefore, we always bathed the night before with buckets that were filled with hot water that was heated on the stove and carried to our huge tub because “*el frío de la mañana los enferma*” she would say. Nonetheless, not all of her plan worked out well, because oh, how my body ached from wearing a coat and heavy clothes under a massive wool blanket to keep my small body warm during the night. Sleeping with clothes on left me with swollen feet, hands, and even bruises. Despite recalling this misstep in her plan, I also remember my mother's sweet soft voice saying “*Es hora de ir a la escuela*”, and seeing her loving brown eyes that would transcend the pitch darkness in my bedroom on winter mornings. I also fondly recollect the almond shape of her eyes and her beautiful long black hair,

porcelain skin and petite stature. These memories time can never steal from me. The last bit of her ingenuity, as I look back, was in the kitchen. There she had a hot stove with four boiling pots, three held water to give warmth and one a hot sweet porridge, spiced with cinnamon, sugar and milk. The stove's oven door was kept open to give us a bit of heat.

Once we had a full belly, were properly covered in five layers of clothes, mine were mostly hand me downs from my younger chubby little brother. These clothes made me look like a little boy, and they called me tom boy which I remember hating. Next it was off to school down the steep stairs we shared with our neighbor. As soon as the door opened and the bitter cold hit our faces, we were awake. The school was not more than 5 blocks away, but the walk seemed like miles. As we strolled closely by mom's side, we felt safe and protected. It didn't scare us or matter that the dreadful abandoned buildings on our way to school were full of homeless people. We had become accustomed to seeing hobos burning wood in old rusted out barrels with flames that seemed to reach the sky on the corner of our block. Sadly, we were numb to those ghastly and appalling buildings that were the landmarks on our way. As we advanced down the street, we were forbidden to play in those abominable buildings because many kids had fallen through holes in the floors and broken legs, or worse, died.

Our only fear was the Crackheads that roamed those decrepit structures, for it was rumored they had lost all humanity "*en el vicio*". Nonetheless, as we marched up Bryant Ave., we found happy familiar faces along the way - other moms and their children heading to school. We strolled carefree. It was beknown to all that no one messed with us, adult or child, for she was a lioness and we were her cubs. Upon arriving, we went our separate ways. Each of us lined up in the school yard with other children from neighboring "*familias*". We stood waiting for our teachers to lead us into the school under chalk written numbers and letters that represented our grade and tracking levels. These ran from K to 6 for grades and A-D for tracking, A designating the 'smartest' group and D the so-called 'dumb' group. But right before entering the school I can remember hearing a stern "*portate bien, los veo en la tarde*", followed by a small kiss on the forehead; which, as I got older, I became embarrassed of. Then my mom would turn, walk slowly, occasionally looking back, and make her way up the icy cold street to our building and home.

"*Las familias*" in our building were mostly Puerto Ricans, with a few Dominicans and a small sprinkling of African Americans. These families consisted of blue collar workers including factory workers, taxi drivers, truck drivers, maids, and 'single mothers' who were on Welfare or other government programs. As soon as the weather permitted, these so-called 'single moms' put their salsa records of the great Hector Lavoe, El Gran Combo, and La Lupe on full blast with speakers blaring out the windows. They sat outside on the buildings' stoops with their house chairs, beach chairs, shopping carts and strollers, gossiping or shouting at their children. They wore cut out jean shorts, and

tight strapless t-shirts with no bras on. Some would even dare to venture out in “*batas*”, slippers, large hair rollers held in place by hair nets, and the typical Duby. And then around afternoon time Bryant Ave. would suddenly be empty of the mothers. But the aromas of sweet peppers, garlic and old fashioned Sofrito would permeate the air, and we knew they were busy cooking their delectable dishes. We were called home to come and eat, then we were sent back out. The summer nights occasionally brought cool breezes that encouraged spontaneous gatherings, most of which soon gave way to stories of Puerto Rico. Commenting on its wonderful beaches lush with palm trees, the final conclusion always was that “*El Bron*” could never compare to back home, and that summer in their new home was loathsome.

If winters were cold and harsh on Bryant Ave. the summers were intolerable. Our building was made in a way that made it impossible for fresh air to run through it. The concrete sidewalks with no trees or vegetation gave no shade or relief. And if rain fell, as soon as it hit the sidewalk, it turned to vapor making it even hotter. But regardless of the heat, school was out, and summer was here. Our constant poverty-stricken state led us to make well thought-out plans during the summer, including getting a group of us kids together at about 11:30am and making the rounds of each public school’s free summer lunch program near our block. You see, each school had its own menu, and we made sure to eat at each of them, since most of us were not sure that there would be anything to eat at home in the afternoon.

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If we were lucky, the word would come down that one of the schools was serving pizza, sometimes with tiny pieces of some meat that they claimed was ‘pepperoni’. If God was on our side, the lunch program would have icees that came in triangle-shaped paper containers. We loved them because they cooled us off from the blasting heat of the day. Another cooling agent was Coco, Coquito! a coconut creamy sugary treat offered by vendors from wooden carts that were painted white and covered with a large patio umbrella or beach umbrella attached to them with improvised rope. These coquito carts were the first and official sign that the summer had arrived in the Bronx. These makeshift two or four wheeled carts with their bells hanging from a string could be heard from miles away. The carts were usually pushed by older men and women with dark tan leather skin from the long days out in the sun. These *coqueros* were originally from some town in Puerto Rico, and they too had dreams of someday returning. Once they hit the corner, they calmly awaited their customers, with smiles on their faces. I was shocked to see a Coquito man smile once with two front teeth missing. On hot and humid days after playing outside all day, I would drag my sweaty and stinky brothers to help beg our mother for 75 cents to buy one Coquito each. With money in hand, we would desperately run and get in line with all the kids from the block to get our Coco, Coquito! and return to playing on the street.

*Un verano en Nueva Yol* was, as I remember, packed with street games, red light-green light, tag and Skully. The boys lined up with old broom sticks to play stickball. These

boys held on tight to a wall or rusted gate to play Johnny on a Pony. We girls loved double dutch, playing jax, hopscotch, Simon Says and Kick the Can. We played in whatever space we could find – from the middle of the street when no cars were coming, to open empty lots, abandoned burned down buildings, and the stairs on our stoops. These games took up my summer days, and did not require real physical ability, because let's face it, we had little or none, but they allowed us our own realm. In those days, parental watchfulness was mostly limited to coming back home when the light post came on. Oh, and God forbid I lost track of time, and mom yelled my name from the window, that meant big time trouble, and I might not make it out to play the next day. The thought of having to sadly watch from the window or fire escape as others played made me drink out of fire hydrants and almost pee on myself, just to not hear mom say, “Well since you came up, *te quedas aquí ahora*”.

Those fire hydrants not only served as drinking fountains but as cooling stations. When the summer heat engulfed us, they were our saving grace. The neighborhood boys opened the fire hydrants full blast with wrenches, then rummaged through the trash for an old can to spray the water pressure through. Eventually, the cops who patrolled the area installed sprinklers on the street hydrant, so the water pressure wasn't so harsh, allowing us to play safely. I loved running through the sprinklers. I recall cars driving through and pausing directly under the sprinklers and getting a free car wash. The nostalgia that overwhelms me may be blinding, but I have no memory of the children from our or neighboring buildings ever fighting. It was just about the moment. Now so many years later I can only remember some of their faces, the names are long lost to me, yet I recall all the children as my friends, playmates who made me feel content and worry-free.

During the summers as a young girl, I was also delighted to observe Bryant Ave.'s many special *personajes*. There was a group of middle-aged men smoking cigarettes, wearing tropical colored shirts and shorts standing outside the *bodega* that also served as the *bolita* bookie joint. These men anxiously waited to see if they hit the number to say “*Me Pegue!* I'm going back to Puerto Rico to buy a big house and car”. These were the same men that would place a domino table smack in the middle of the block and play for hours drinking and shouting at all hours of the night during the suffocating heat of summer. I also watched the old, heavy set, woman that was the official *Santera* of the *bloque* all dressed in white with colorful *santo* beads around her neck, and a tightly wrapped white scarf on her head. She stumbled down the Bryant selling red candles for *San Miguel Archangel* to help protect your family, *banos de rosas blancas* ' for good luck, *libros de sueños* that explained what dreams meant, and what number to play in the *bolita*. All these people shaped my life, from the drunken couple that beat each other half to death and then kissed on the way home, to the beautiful woman I saw one night being pinned to a vehicle, having heroin injected into her arm, and then being pushed into the car. From the man that we called *El Loco* who was fed by the entire block, who

we tied up with rope to scrub and wash with the water from the fire hydrant in the summer, to my chocolate skinned African-American best friend April who I played with and secretly wished was my sister. These colorful characters and stories are imprinted in my heart. Up until this day, I wonder what has become of them and if I continue to have a place in their recollections.

Still, some of the happiest memories that I hold close to my heart are from the first of the month, that's when the food stamps came. I was delighted when I got a one dollar food stamp, because that meant I could go to the *bodega* and spend it as I pleased. The "Spanish American Grocery" sign that once stood in bright yellow letters was now barely legible and the improvised cardboard that said "*Vendemos productos latinos*", was barely readable beneath the layers of dirt. But I loved the salsa and merengue music they played. They had a little speaker that echoed the music outside onto the *bloque*. As I entered the store pulling the door covered with sexy women in bikinis leaning against cars with beers and cigarettes in their hands. The smells were overwhelming from cat piss to beer, fruit, meat, and *Buena Suerte* incense. However, I knew my one dollar Food Stamp would be well spent on the standard 10 cent 'juices' that were nothing more than just colored sugar water, penny candies, potato chips, Twinkies, Mary Janes, Now and Laters, Jawbreakers and any other candy that would rot my mouth out.

But on the other side of the coin, the first of the month was also when I'd run to the *bodega* with a dirty torn piece of cardboard on which the month's grocery credit or *fiao* was written that I had to pay. I didn't understand it at the time, but what I felt was humiliation and degradation. I hated walking in to a store packed full of people with the *bodeguero* saying "*Delen gracias a Dios que yo les fio porque si no hasta del hambre se murieran*" or ranting about how he always took a loss because he waited a whole month to get paid. My full hatred for him came on the day my mother sent me to the store with the dirty cardboard paper to get some milk and bread. The *bodeguero* laughed and said, "Nothing else fits on this paper, girl. But then who is your mother" he asked. I answered and then, as I was walking away, with a creepy voice he said "Tell her to come later tonight, when the store is closed but I am inside and I will give her whatever she needs for you kids". At that moment my stomach turned, I was young but wise beyond my years. I told my mother "*Ese cabron dijo que no, no te puede fiar.*" My mother turned her face away so I could not see her tears and said okay. Later mom walked to the *bodega* on the other block and got credit for the milk and bread we needed. I recollect feeling untroubled by the lie I told her because I knew she would have done anything for us, but this I couldn't allow.

Shamelessly, I was also unworried about another little secret I kept. Each time I ran an errand to the *bodega* or A&P Supermarket I kept some of the change. When I had just enough change saved, I would make my way to the *bodega* counter, guarded by bullet proof plexiglass specially made so as to conceal the *bodeguero* and anything behind him. I would tippy-toe and try to look over the counter to see the shelves. These shelves

displayed an array of household objects like can openers, mops, brooms, rat traps, brillo pads, crazy glue, paint brushes, cleaning products like Clorox and Mistolin as well as individually packed Tylenols, Pepto Bismol, and Vicks. And yet there I stood paralyzed at the sight of so many candies and an assortment of 25 cent toys. I would jingle my four quarters in my small hand, and I'd carefully pick out a number of candies and a pack of brand new jacks that came with a pink ball. Then I would drop my not so well earned money hard on the counter like a winning hand of dominos, and happily make my exit.

Needless to say, as I have rendered these accounts of my life, I understand that the floodgates have been opened. There are countless everyday images and incidents that I have recalled and want to pursue. Yet, I can retrace the street I grew up in, satisfied and thankful for the important role all these moments played in my childhood. I began this memoir process knowing it would lead to a catharsis, and it has. I was unaware of how much those years had constituted who I am today. Now I realize that as a child I was unable to articulate what I perceived. Yet today, this South Bronx Nuyorican girl has found her voice and I no longer have a prosaic truth, but instead I have an unparalleled one.

## Epilogue:

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### *Hey Mira Ma' y'all Boricua?*

Mira pa', it's like this somos el Boogie down Bronx, El Barrio in East Harlem, Williamsburg Brooklyn, and El viejo San Juan, el chicharrón de Bayamón, los cariduros Fajardo.

O y claro también somos Murphy Housing Projects, and old rat infested buildings on Hoe ave and lovely houses on Charlotte Street y que carajo somos los caseríos LLoren Y Celso Barbosa, y las finas urbanizaciones Los Paseos y Sabanera en Dorado.

And Dios mio somos "The time is 3pm, we have reached our destination New York City's JFK airport, the weather today a brisk 34 degrees."

¡Como también Wepa! Y aplausos al oír "Son las 3 de la tarde y hemos llegado a nuestro destino San Juan Puerto Rico, el aeropuerto Luis Muñoz Marín, el día está solidado 84 grados."

Mmm, we are "un verano en Nueva York" de Andy canta at Orchard beach, and at the buildings stoop talking, drinking a 'fria' all night. Y si somos acho "papi me voy pa Puerto Rico este verano" a la playa el último Trolley, Condado, and Boquerón en Cabo Rojo, you know to get a real tan ...

Somos “qué fucking calor vamos a comparar un coquito from up the block” oh and “loco busca un peseta pa ir a la vieja de los limber de coco y piña de la casa de verde la esquina”

Perate’ no puede faltar, somos a pizza slice from the corner of Southern Blvd, a Coney Island Nathan’s hot dog, and a Downtown greasy juicy Cheeseburger. Wait cause we are also los bacalaitos gigantes de Vega Baja, allacuparias de Loiza and most definitely Lechón de Cayey.

Y que! “somos vamos Janguiar para la parada Puertorriqueña el 6 de Junio” con la bandera Boricua en mano, and we chillin in las Fiestas de la calle San Sebastián a beber un “Yard de Gasolina”.

Chico somos Crimás at the Rockefeller Tree and Macy’s department store but we are the fiestas de navidad en familia en el campo, and we la nieve artificial de Plaza las Americas.

For sure my man we Christmas ham, mash potatoes with apple pie. But we ¡Ay qué rico! La Jartera de Noche Buena con perrito y arroz apastelado, pasteles, tembleque, flan.

Oh almost forgot, Mira pa’ we rhythm too, somos Biggies hip hop, La India’s house music, Lil Suzy’s “Take in your arm” freestyle, uff and yes Salsa del Gran Combo, y Latin Jazz del gran Tito Puente y si ahora hasta Trap de conejo.

Oh yeah let me school you cause we “Hi grandma”, seco sin beso, ni pedir bendición, diablo pero también somos “Bendición abuela ... y besos en la frente. y una abuela diciendo “Dios te cuide. Pss! ven acá toma estos chavos y no le digas a nadie que te los di, shhh callao!”

Y mira para que te quede claro pa’ somos the heart and blood that courses through our Boricua mothers’ souls! Ave Maria! and we are Tanio, *negro*, Español, is that Boricua enough for you?

oh so you think I said too much ... it was just a “simple” question ... you’ll Bori? Mira, guess what pa’, you the one that wanted to know? you asked ... so hell yeah we Boricua pa’

# USING ART TO COPE WITH DISASTERS IN THE CARIBBEAN

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## Abstract

The long history of natural disasters in the Caribbean has had traumatic consequences for both humans and the environment. Many creative artists have witnessed these catastrophes or have identified themselves with these events. Numerous literary works have articulated the mechanisms adopted by the people of the region for coping with the aftermath of the traumas inflicted by these disasters. This article examines some of the literature and other art forms created in response to natural disasters in the Caribbean.

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**Key terms:** Caribbean, natural disaster, coping mechanisms, literature, art

Many, if not most, people in the Caribbean have experienced one or more natural disasters (Schwarz, 2015). These catastrophes have traumatizing consequences which affect each society and each individual differently. Artists have striven to express this trauma in all of its diversity through different creative media. Many have done so in order to cope with the aftermath of a catastrophe, both personally and as members of their devastated communities. Using the arts to cope after a natural catastrophe can help to heal individuals and societies that still bear the festering invisible wounds that often result from a disaster (Pennebaker, 1990).

Some very interesting examples of the use of art as a mechanism to cope with disaster can be found in the repertoire of Playback Theatre. Founded by Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas in 1975, Playback Theatre has been influenced by both psychodrama and oral storytelling traditions (International Playback Theatre Network). In Playback Theatre, there is an interaction with the audience as the actors, conductor, and/or storyteller perform improvisational stories about their lives. Performances are centered on personal experience, using stories that are voluntarily and spontaneously told without prejudice



and discrimination, in order to help the audience to understand and identify with the storyteller.

Playback Theatre performances have incorporated disaster narratives about loss and grief, with the aim not only of healing, but also of reconstruction and future disaster preparedness. Theatre can offer the possibility for the group to unite in problem-solving and create an atmosphere where this is safe and acceptable. For example, in response to the traumas inflicted on the islands of Grenada and Carriacou by category four Hurricane Ivan in September 2004, the Agency for Reconstruction and Development (ARD) Playback Theatre Company performed “De day we see wind in Grenada” as a kind of psychological debriefing mechanism to help the local audiences search for answers within themselves and start the process of healing.

Music is a key element in Playback Theatre. Theories on music therapy claim that: “Music is a form of sensory stimulation that provokes responses due to the familiarity, predictability, and feelings of security associated with it” (Menen, 2004, p. 13). Music helps individuals develop relationships that stories alone cannot evoke. The use of music assists people and communities in communicating and expressing feelings when words are not capable of doing so. Music can promote well-being, stress management, and pain alleviation, thus promoting physical and emotional rehabilitation.

In her novel *Volcano*, Yvonne Weekes (2011) used her creative writing to support the people of Montserrat, the island of her parents, to cope with the series of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes that had been happening there since 1995. With more than half of Montserrat under ashes, family, friends, and neighbors were lost, and communities found themselves in constant relocation with many leaving permanently to join the diaspora. One of the central purposes of Weekes’ work was to deal with all of the accumulated stress, by making her audience laugh and sing, in the hope that people would realize that life goes on and that there are always ways out of even the worst of situations.

Uniting culture and church, Weekes helped organize a community caravan to perform a series of playback-type performances with music and dancing titled “God will find a way” between April 1996 and August 1996. In these performances, individual memories were shared and transformed into collective memories, with people’s social remembrances being spread from one person to another in a therapeutic social process. In her 2019 poetry collection *Nomad*, Weekes used poetry and photography to share coping mechanisms related to her survival in the diaspora as a result of the eruptions on Montserrat. The photographs give readers an understanding of her most profound memories of the catastrophe and its aftermath.

Jonnel Benjamin’s 2016 documentary film *Rising from Ashes* focuses on how much of what was destroyed by the volcano on Montserrat has been nurtured back to life by the people of the island. The documentary showcases testimonies where people explain

their experiences with loss, the struggle to survive and their eventual means of coping with and overcoming the damage inflicted by the disaster.

Collective memory can give rise to public forms of commemoration, including shrines and ‘catastroffiti.’ Alderman and Ward (2008) explain how graffiti can be history, defiance, desperation, territoriality, humor, prayer and political commentary. Such public commemorative art forms help victims and communities share their collective needs, sorrow and grief. For example, after the earthquakes of 2010 and 2021 in Haiti, survivors expressed their need for medicine, water, and food through catastroffiti on the walls of the streets of Port-au-Prince. In 1985, a landslide occurred in Mameyes, Puerto Rico during which a limestone wall came crashing down on a community killing 91 people, including whole families. The site was sealed as a mass grave and today a memorial has been built called, *Memorial de la recordación del Barrio Mameyes*. Many objects left at such memorials and shrines symbolize long-lasting relationships with those who have passed away as a result of a disaster. Some visitors leave family names, gifts, messages, and expressions of religious faith, such as crosses or stones with inscriptions.

Anna-Maria Dickinson created a series of post-disaster oil paintings on canvas related to the 2010 earthquake which left thousands dead and millions homeless in Haiti, for example *Haiti out of the rubble* (Dickinson, 2011). In her paintings, she depicts the people of the island digging themselves out of the rubble, in order to create visual images to signify to the world how Haiti was before, during, and after the disaster. During an exhibition in December 2017 titled “Catharis” at El Museo de Las Americas in Old San Juan, Puerto Rico, Nick Quijano evoked the pain caused by Hurricane Maria in 2017 through the creation of works of visual art (Acevedo & Quijano, 2107) in an attempt to connect with his audiences in their healing process.

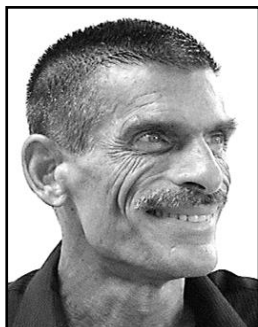
During the aftermath of a natural disaster, the creation and appreciation of art can improve the physical and mental health of the victims, enabling them to reconnect with their inner selves and to release themselves from fixations on loss. Over time and with repeated exposure, art can provide nurturing and sustenance to those who have suffered natural catastrophes, until they are better able to cope with the psycho-emotional effects of the traumatic events that they have experienced.

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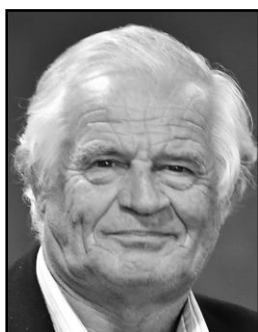
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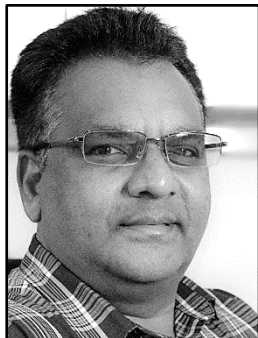


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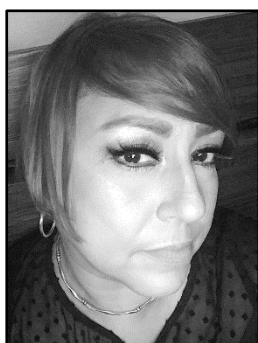


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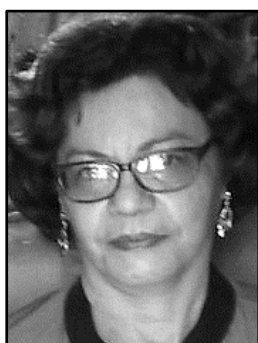
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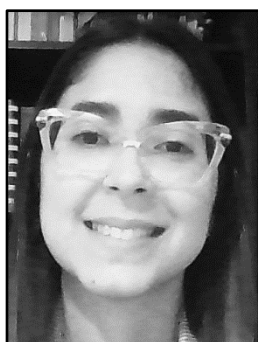
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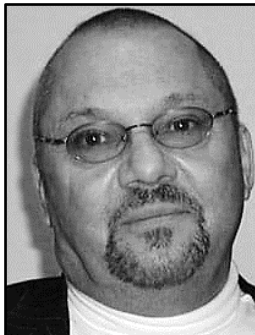
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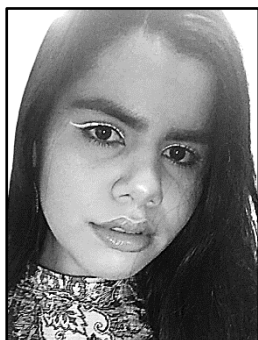
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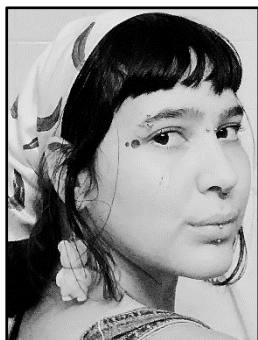
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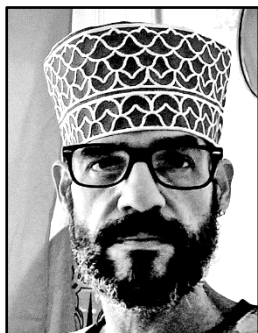
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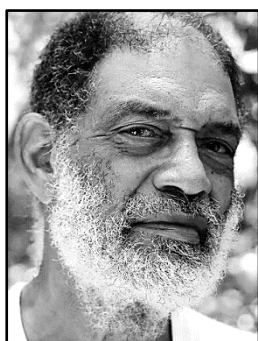


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#### ABOUT THE COVER ARTIST



**Richard Doest Bsc. Mechanical Engineering** (Curaçao) worked as an engineer for the local oil refinery and is known as a musician and drum maker. Then he discovered painting. With passion and in a unique and colorful way, Richard Doest depicts the contemporary and daily actions of the Curaçao people. His portraits evoke emotions through the gaze of his subjects. His choice of theme contributes to the recording and spreading of the Caribbean cultural heritage. He describes his art as pragmatic and the creative process itself as the biggest challenge. Each creation is a new test in terms of color, shape and technique. [rhdoest@gmail.com](mailto:rhdoest@gmail.com)