QUEER DYSTOPIAS IN LATIN AMERICA

by

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ABSTRACT

SARAH CAROLINE WYBLE. Queer Dystopias in Latin America
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The purpose of this thesis is to discuss the portrayal of queer characters and specifically trans and non-binary identities in dystopian fictions in Latin America. Through this lens I examine how the varying portrayals of gender and sexuality in Julio Hernández Cordón's 2018 Mexican film, *Cómprame un revólver,* and Rita Indiana's 2015 Dominican novel, *La mucama de Omicunlé,* at times play into patriarchal and cis-gendered, heteronormative conceptions and how, at other times, they combat these hegemonic narratives. This thesis argues that dystopian settings help construct warnings about what the future may hold while also creating a space to theorize narratives about resisting rigid constructs of gender and sexuality. *Cómprame un revólver* imagines drug trafficking as the newest articulation of continued colonial domination in Mexico. *La mucama de Omicunlé* engages with decoloniality to showcase and uplift queer identities, though it is set in a dystopian future where ecological crises have all but destroyed the Caribbean and the world. In both works, trans and nonbinary characters interface directly with the dystopian setting as they challenge the suppositions and attitudes that continue to impose a heteronormative, colonial mindset upon them.

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Introduction

In 2018, the Mexican dystopian film *Cómprame un* revolver, directed by Julio Hernández Cordón, was released. Three years prior, in 2015, the Dominican author Rita Indiana published her dystopian novel *La mucama de* Omicunlé. These two works place queer characters, and more specifically trans characters, into dystopian settings as they attempt to navigate a world that is quickly falling apart. Mexico and the Dominican Republic have seen an increased acknowledgement of sexual diversity in recent years, a fact evidenced by the increase in scholarly, literary, and cultural production engaging with an array of genders and sexualities in recent years. These countries appear geographically quite different, and they clearly face different challenges. Nevertheless, they have both experienced similar dynamics surrounding gender and sexuality. This has been visible both recently and since each country was colonized by Spain in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The conquistadores first reached the islands of Hispaniola and Cuba, where they encountered the Taíno civilizations whose culture encompassed a sexual fluidity (Herrero-Martin 60). In pre-Columbian Mexico, the Aztecs had words to reference various genders and sexualities in Nahuatl, with words that were similar in meaning to intersex and lesbian (Gontijo et al. 14). This shared colonial heritage means that, in both the Dominican Republic and Mexico, Westernized conceptions of heteronormativity were imposed onto their societies from the outside by a Spanish society that had rigid understandings of gender and sexuality. As a result, gender and sexual diversity became relegated to the margins of society.

The colonization of the region that we now call Latin America saw the imposition of a rigid, heteronormative, male/female gender binary that still maintains a grip on the region. During the Contact Period, so-called social hygiene was used to decry “abnormal” sexualities

which included all queer gender and sexual identities (Figari 232). This eradicated many indigenous cultural views on gender and sexuality. Erotic dissidence referred to gender expressions and sexualities that went against the masculine discourses of Western culture that sought to impose Catholic views on Latin America (Figari 231). The sexual hygiene in colonizing discourses upheld male-centric views on sex as a cis-hetero masculinity forced itself into the dominant position (Figari 231).

In this thesis I examine dystopias with queer approaches to gender and sexuality. I focus specifically on trans identities. My analysis examines how the varying portrayals of gender and sexuality in the film *Cómprame un revólver* and the novel *La mucama de Omicunlé* at times play into patriarchal and cis-gendered, heteronormative conceptions and how, at other times, they combat these hegemonic narratives. This thesis argues that dystopian settings help construct warnings about what the future may hold while also creating a space to theorize narratives about resisting rigid constructs of gender and sexuality. *Cómprame un revólver* imagines drug trafficking as the newest articulation of continued colonial domination in Mexico. *La mucama de Omicunlé* engages with decoloniality to showcase and uplift queer identities, though it is set in a dystopian future where ecological crises have all but destroyed the Caribbean and the world. In both of these works, trans characters interface directly with the dystopian setting as they challenge the suppositions and attitudes that continue to impose a heteronormative, colonial mindset upon them. As I will show, the dystopian mode opens up possibilities to criticize heteronormative and anti-trans discourses, but it can also be used to forward anti-trans and heteronormative ideologies. Chapter 1 explores how the dystopian mode promotes greater inclusivity, while Chapter 2 discusses a more problematic discourse.

I will briefly define what I mean by the term dystopia. Dystopia and utopia are closely intertwined terms. A utopia is the perfectly imagined futuristic society and dystopia is a futuristic society where suffering and injustice encompass apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic settings. During the Contact Period, Christopher Columbus and the Conquistadores wrote Latin America into a "utopia." Columbus specifically described Hispaniola as an ideal and perfect place (Kallendorf 450). However, because these utopias were always Spaniard centric, they erased Amerindians, African, and women from the utopia.[1] Those excluded from the utopia were labeled as "other" (Kallendorf 450). As Miguel López-Lozano notes, Europe "envisioned the New World as an earthly paradise" (3). As such, colonization and the notions of modernity projected utopia onto Latin America. However, modernization, globalization, and Westernization became part of dystopian narratives which contested the central tenets of these discourses. Indeed, dystopian fictions offered a means to criticize hegemonic power structures. As López-Lozano notes, the onset of NAFTA and further globalization led to dystopias criticizing these politics and the ideals of modernity. Dystopian texts imagined devastating futures marked by the suffering inherent to globalization and modernization.[2] Furthermore, Latin American dystopian fictions often create dialogues—even if only imagined—with the marginalized and excluded populations of the region. More recently, the region's literary and cultural producers have employed dystopian fictions to denounce the environmental destruction that has occurred in the region since the Contact Period and has intensified in recent years both through extractivism and the unrestrained use of fossil fuels.[3] As such, the dystopias within Latin America disrupt the coloniality of power and propose new ways of engaging the future.

[1] For further discussion on utopias during the Contact Period see López-Lozano (2)
[2] For further discussion on dystopian futures see López-Lozano (4)
[3] See López-Lozano (4-5) for a discussion on dystopias and environmental destruction.

In the space of Latin American dystopias there are authors and filmmakers using non-heteronormative gender and sexuality constructions in their dystopian imaginaries which will be exhibited in this thesis. This combination creates what I call queer dystopias. The term queer here is being used to encompass the range of sexual and gender identities and expressions that diverge from the cis-heteronormative expressions as well as diverge from the binary conceptions of gender and sexuality.[4] Furthermore, scholars of queer studies tend to view the term as less normative, and more agile in relation to the multiplicity of identities that can be encompassed by the term queer.[5] By using the word queer, the point is not to erase the individuality found within queer communities but to engage communities as united groups. The word queer is being used as a form of unity to engage the array of gender and sexual identities encompassed by the word queer. Using queer in this thesis, as a unifying word, stems from the way that Sayak Valencia uses the term transfeminisms to engage various gender and sexual identities within an intersectional feminist framework (270). In addition, David William Foster points out that any Latin American cultural text can be read from a queer perspective as the culture is so deeply rooted in heteronormativity and patriarchal norms (x). This means that any cultural production can be questioned to reveal internal contradictions, aporia, confused thinking, and strategic missteps that exercise patriarchal norms and heteronormativity (Foster x). Dystopian fiction provides a valuable vantage point from which to gauge discourses of gender and sexuality. On the one hand, the futuristic settings distance readers, and viewers from the contemporary context, thus allowing them to approach the text with a critical eye. On the other hand, however, they tend to be rooted in the contemporary moment in a way that posits the dystopian future as the logical result of contemporary attitudes. This means that gender and sexuality can be analyzed

[4] For a discussion on the term queer see Shay and Strader footnote 1 (172).
[5] For a discussion on the use of the word queer by scholars see Fiol-Matta (222).

and presented as an imaginary that challenges audiences to reflect and reconsider the current modes of being and power structures that relegate non-cis-hetero identities to the margins. The futurity of dystopias allows for a greater range of possibilities with portrayals of gender and sexuality while also creating a space for analysis that invites critiques.

Queer dystopias depict queer themes surrounding gender and sexuality that are contextualized by a country's individual political and economic climate within the Latin American region. This combination of the dystopian genre and queer themes creates queer dystopias. Vek Lewis notes that the positive reception of queer cultural productions in Latin America is a nuanced topic (86). Oftentimes, these works receive positive reception outside of Latin America. Nevertheless, Latin American audiences often do not wholly embrace queer genders and sexualities, and these works often struggle to circulate within their countries of origin.[6] We see this clearly in the case of authors and directors who have been praised by literary and film critics and have received awards for their works even though the general reception of their works in Latin America has not been particularly positive.[7]

Dystopias are usually characterized by scarcity, and different characters then must resort to violence to assert their control over finite resources (Becerra 11). With scarcity being a prevalent theme in both *La mucama de Omicunlé* and *Cómprame un revólver*, there is a need for characters to maintain their dominance in society to survive. The dystopian violence in *Cómprame un revólver* criticizes the extent to which illicit drug organizations control large swathes of territory throughout Mexico as well as gender violence. The film decries their barbarous methods to enforce rules that they themselves often do not follow. In *La mucama de*

[6] See Vek Lewis for a discussion on the reception of Latin American queer cultural productions inside and outside of the region.
[7] See Belmonte Grey (102) for further discussion on the reception of queer cultural productions among critics.

Omicunlé, cis-hetero characters use violence to obtain power and to perpetuate certain masculine modes of domination. However, this violence ultimately leads to their own downfall. This self-sabotage and downfall of cis-hetero characters works to uplift and forefront queer characters. Rita Indiana addresses colonizing conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality by creating a warning of the future with the use of the dystopian genre. Hernández Cordón's film also creates a warning of the future as the violent control of the narcos has led to a dystopic future which maintains control through gender persecution and manipulation. The futurity of dystopias allows for new possibilities to be imagined. Rita Indiana uses the genre as a way to criticize hegemonic power structures, while Hernández Cordón calls attention to violence that creates further gender divides rather than embracing gender diversity.

The ideas of utopia and dystopia are closely intertwined. As such, it is important to note that there are aspects of utopia within dystopian fictions. As Vivian Green notes, Latin American dystopias converse with aspects of utopia within a greater dystopian context and eerie speculation of the near future (2). A utopia does not necessarily signify an ideal or perfect society. Instead, a utopia would create "cognitive dissonance" between the reader and their own society (Copson and Boukli 516-7). A queer perspective on utopia would question the conventional norms of society that are often oppressive towards gender and sexual minorities who may consider their present lives a dystopia already. Furthermore, critical dystopias reject perfectionism unlike their utopian counterparts but keep the "hopeful spirit of utopia" (Seyferth 1). As such, utopias tend to offer solutions whereby critical dystopias show a path to survival in oppressive contexts (Fraile-Marcos and Noguerol 16). In addition, Ana Maria Fraile-Marcos and Francisca Noguerol classifies critical dystopias by their resilience narratives (16). As such, dystopias create unthinkable possibilities for survival while criticizing social structures of

inequality and oppression. Dystopias also allow for new possibilities in modes of being and thinking as power structures are questioned.

That said, not all queer dystopias communicate a discourse of liberation from heteronormative attitudes and structures of power. *Cómprame un revólver*, for example, employs queer themes through its portrayal of a nonbinary drug lord. The film lacks a call for transformative action—at least as it relates to queer and trans rights—because it focuses more on a reflection of violence that critiques drug trafficking and uses the Jefe as an allegory for this critique, thereby associating the Jefe with the violence of drug trafficking. The social critiques in the film are highlighted only through violence. The film may be considered a critical dystopia in some contexts as violence against women and drug trafficking is criticized by violence and scarcity. Hernández Cordón has created a film that borders between dystopian and critical dystopian as Huck's character criticizes injustices in Mexican society while the Jefe is merely a pawn within the plotline of the film and does not work towards challenging conceptions of gender and sexuality in society. The combination of the narco theme with a commentary on gender and sexuality allows for underlying criticisms of gender violence but fails to reimagine the position and experiences of people outside conventional gender norms.[8]

The science-fiction mode creates numerous opportunities for Rita Indiana to challenge the societal insistence on gender binaries and colonialist structures of power that continue to abound in the Caribbean and throughout Latin America. The novel can be considered a critical dystopia as Acilde's character and avatars–coupled with the overall questioning of gender and sexuality norms—creates the utopic cognitive dissidence while the book focuses on a path to survival. The novel thus challenges the structures of power that abound in the dystopian setting

[8] See Copson and Boukli for a discussion on trans utopias reimagining living beyond current gender binaries.

rather than offering utopian solutions. The use of the science fiction genre works towards queer agency as the genre allows for scenarios to be constructed that breakthrough traditional gender and sexual binaries and heteronormative beliefs. Furthermore, the questioning of the conventional norms of society that are often oppressive towards gender and sexual minorities provides a critical utopian space that exists within a broader dystopian imaginary. In this context, the novel creates utopian elements such as a queer protagonist and national hero within the dystopian setting.

This thesis uses dystopian fictions to approach questions of gender and sexuality in Latin America. In this way, it identifies the representations and significance of gender and sexuality within Latin American speculative fiction. The thesis also speaks to the resistance narratives of marginalized gender and sexual identities in the dystopian context. Furthermore, this thesis examines the problematic portrayals of gender and sexuality. These portrayals play a significant role in perpetuating gender hierarchies while also examining the engagement of queer agency and cultural hybridity to disrupt the ideologies that perpetuate heteronormativity and gender binarisms.

Chapter One analyzes the novel *La mucama de Omicunlé*, written by Rita Indiana, which depicts the Dominican Republic after apocalyptic climate change causes a tsunami that destroys much of the island. In addition, a Haitian disease has spread to the Dominican. Within this novel, the main character, Acilde, is initially a trans sex worker but then finds himself at the center of a Yoruba prophecy which ends up creating three avatars and timelines for Acilde, who is given the task of becoming the national hero and saving the Dominican Republic from apocalyptic climate change. In this chapter, I analyze how the novel engages queer agency and cultural hybridities to combat toxic masculinity and the colonizing ideologies that perpetuate heteronormative and

binary structures in society. The analysis focuses on how cultural hybridities work with queer agency to contribute to the decolonial perspective. Through the decolonial perspective, toxic masculinity and heteronormativity are criticized and deconstructed through the characters' perspectives within the novel. The analysis foregrounds the hybridity of Caribbean Indigenous and African cultures with the queer community to demonstrate the Caribbean hybridity that leads to queer agency which further supports the decoloniality narratives. In addition, the analysis shows how Rita Indiana uses cis-hetero characters to dismantle the cultural hegemony of heteronormativity which works to disrupt the gender hierarchy that tends to be reflected in cultural productions.

Chapter Two analyzes Julio Hernández Cordón's *Cómprame un revólver*, a film that depicts a timeless and future Mexico that is controlled by drug cartels that are conducting a feminicide. Within this film, there is a little girl named Huck who is trying to survive while the main cartel in her area is controlled by a non-binary drug lord called the Jefe. In this chapter, I analyze the gender portrayals in this dystopian context as they fill spaces of inclusivity through subtle challenges to cis-heteronormative conceptions. That said, I argue that the film never disrupts the exclusionary conceptions of society that perpetuate gender binaries and hierarchies. Hernández Cordón is known for trying to uplift non-cis and non-hetero identities, but this film depicts problematic gender portrayals. *Cómprame un revólver* is critical of feminicide, which leads to showcasing the abuse of misgendering Huck as a boy as well as associating non-binary identities with criminality as the Jefe is nonbinary. Furthermore, through the demonstration of violence in the film, there is the perpetuation of the gender hierarchy, and the Jefe is used as an allegory to symbolize corruption. In addition, the film portrays women as victims in need of

masculine help to overcome male-perpetrated violence. These portrayals undermine Hernández Cordón's work towards diversity and inclusivity.

With a Mexican film and a Dominican novel, these works may seem unrelated. However, both works stem from a post-2010 time period that acknowledges trans representation in dystopian cultural productions. Each work contains its own criticism regarding how current events affect their respective context. *Cómprame un revólver* discusses drug trafficking, while *La mucama de Omicunlé* highlights racial tensions between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Furthermore, each of these works take a different perspective on trans identities and queer representation. This is precisely what makes these two works such relevant objects of analysis when compared one to another. My decision to approach both works as queer dystopias allows me to establish the existence of an array of queer narratives of resistance. This, in turn, allows me to critically assess continued depictions of coloniality from a queer perspective. The primary difference between Rita Indiana's novel and Julio Hernández Cordón's film is their interpretation of colonizing structures and gender violence. While Rita Indiana views transness in a positive light, Hernández Cordón perhaps inadvertently associates it with decadence and violence.

These two chapters discuss the varying portrayals of gender and sexuality and their effect on criticizing heteronormativity and gender and sexual binaries. This thesis juxtaposes the allegorical queer portrayal with the decolonized queer portrayal to better consider the disruption of heteronormativity and gender binaries. Furthermore, this thesis comments on the fact that representation is not liberatory in and of itself. Indeed, representations of diversity through inclusion is not sufficient, particularly if the representation is not focused on queer character development. The dystopian genre of both cultural productions allows for an alternative view of reality to be created which allows for nonheteronormative or non-cis identities to be highlighted

while also having the ability to criticize social structures within the Dominican Republic and Mexico. Despite their differing portrayals of queer identities, both the film and novel criticize gender and sexual violence.

Chapter 1

Queering the Weird: Decolonial Ethics and Trans Rights in Rita Indiana's *La mucama de Omicunlé*

Rita Indiana's novel *La mucama de Omicunlé* (2015) denounces the colonizing ideologies that perpetuate heteronormative and gender-binary structures. It does this through an array of cultural hybridities that emerge from its juxtaposition of Dominican queer communities with the historically marginalized Taino and Yoruba cultures. The author addresses racism, machismo, and anti-queer attitudes by using the dystopian setting to criticize societal structures that continue to perpetuate Westernized conceptions of race, gender, and sexuality. By juxtaposing the ambition of the trans protagonist with the misfortunes of the violently cis-heteronormative characters, the novel undermines male/female gender binaries and critiques the traditional heteronormative structure of Dominican society. The novel engages complementarities rather than the hierarchical opposites that form the basis of the modern colonial paradigm of knowledge (Pierce 322). The colonial paradigm of knowledge references the hegemonic, Eurocentric paradigms that elevate the knowledge of colonizing civilizations while marginalizing the systems of knowing of colonized societies (Grosfoguel 5). In challenging such ways of knowing, the novel creates a space from which queer communities, Santera and Yoruba communities, and Taino communities can commune with each other to build a decolonial order. In this way, Rita Indiana engages marginalized populations in the Dominican Republic to foreground their struggles in a way that combats those Westernized ideologies that have insisted on marginalizing minoritized racial, ethnic, gender, and sexual identities for centuries.

Rita Indiana establishes the novel's post-apocalyptic setting through numerous means. First, she describes the decimation of the Dominican Republic when a giant tidal wave, which has resulted from climate change, crashes into the island. Second, she imagines a disease transported to the country from Haiti. In the novel, these conditions produce a dangerous degree of scarcity throughout the island. The futurity of the novel is established in the descriptions of an injection called Rainbow Bright that carries out a complete, gender-confirming procedure without the need for surgery. The main character, Acilde, begins the novel as a trans man working as a prostitute to try to earn money to purchase the Rainbow Bright shot. Acilde meets a Cuban doctor named Eric, who introduces him to Esther, a Santera priestess who works as the personal priestess to the president of the Dominican Republic. Esther has a sea anemone that is key to a Yoruba prophecy that ends up encompassing Acilde. The Yoruba prophecy foretells that the person involved with the death of Esther will be the one who can save the oceans and the Dominican Republic from an apocalyptic climate disaster. Esther has been cursed by "brujería mala," which has led her to seek help in Cuba from her padrino, Omidina, who is a child of the Yemayá, the Ocean Mother Goddess of Santería. Prior to the novel, Omidina has cured Esther and named her Omicunlé, and it is prophesied that Esther's followers will protect Yemayá, the Yoruba ruler of the sea.[9] Esther gains a strong connection to the sea and makes prophecies about the person who can save the Caribbean Sea from its pollution following the tidal wave that has decimated the island. Acilde initially wants to steal the anemone and sell it for money. He plots this with an acquaintance, Morla. However, Acilde begins to reconsider when Morla breaks into Esther's home and kills Esther. Acilde manages to escape with the anemone and meets up with Eric, who administers the Rainbow Bright to Acilde. Afterward, Eric places the sea anemone on

[9] For further discussion of Yemayá see Herrero-Martín (59)

Acilde's head to fulfill the Yoruba prophecy. When the anemone touches Acilde's head, two additional timelines are created for Acilde to control and live out. One is Giorgio who knows the secret to restoring the oceans and the other is Roque who lives in a colonial, buccaneer timeline. Through these timelines and the avatars of Roque and Giorgio, Acilde is tasked with fulfilling the Yoruba prophecy. While this unfolds with Acilde, a failed artist named Argenis also experiences a timeline in the buccaneer era after being stung by an anemone in the ocean. Argenis is the son of a politician who taught him to be misogynistic and homophobic as a child. Argenis's bad relationship with his father has led him to repress his queer feelings and identity, but he explores these through the buccaneer timeline.

As this plot summary shows, one of the key elements of the novel is its depiction of avatars living in multiple timelines. Guillermina de Ferrari has noted that parallel timelines often provide a valuable space from which to call into question structural injustices by imbuing characters with greater agency (4). We see this clearly in the novel as more agency is given to characters through these timelines and avatars. Acilde is a trans man, and he has the opportunity to live as two different men in different times, a fact that allows him to identify his ideal life on the one hand, and to find a way to save the oceans on the other. The connection between Acilde and his different avatars challenges assumptions of gender and sexual binarisms in many ways as these three characters experience different moments while connected one to another through the mind of a trans man. These complex relationships show how Indiana's use of time travel helps rupture society's view of structural challenges that gender, and sexuality supposedly create. The communion of these avatars helps to question the coloniality of power within society. Viewed in this light, these timelines and the disruption of linear progression help reinforce the hybridization of characters.

Given the novel's ambitious narrative structure and its political commitment, it is no surprise that many scholars refer to Indiana as "one of the most important creative and critical voices of her generation" (Horn 255). *La mucama* is her most commented novel, having received significant attention from academics in the United States, the Caribbean, and throughout Latin America. Most of the scholarship on Rita Indiana focuses on her interest in telling the stories of those who have been marginalized along racial, sexual, and gender lines both in her music and in her narrative (Horn 255; Jaime 89; Sterk 22). At this time, her most important novel is *La mucama,* which won the Grand Prize of the Association of Caribbean Writers in 2017 (Soares 402). Laura Caicedo considers the novel's spiritual, temporal, and mystic aspects as vehicles that uplift individual identities and, as such, situates the novel within a body of decolonial literature (76; Jaime 88). This chapter contributes to current debates by highlighting Indiana's decolonial and anti-patriarchal discourse through a juxtaposition of the experiences of Argenis and Acilde. While Acilde holds the potential to save himself and his country by embracing his trans nature, Argenis's fall ultimately comes because of his insistence as a cis/heteronormative performativity that suppresses his own desires.

The science-fiction mode creates numerous opportunities for Indiana to challenge the societal insistence on gender binaries and colonialist structures of power that continue to abound in the Caribbean and throughout Latin America. We see this, for example, when Acilde learns about the Rainbow Bright injection. In using this technology to undergo a gender reaffirming operation without the need for invasive surgery, Acilde comes to embody certain aspects of Donna Haraway's cyborg, where the fusion of the body with technology allows for a resignification of the body and the gender and sexual constructs that this entails (117). These ties to cyborg subjectivity become especially clear as we consider Chris Hables Gray's assertion that

a cyborg is any body that is enhanced in some way through technology (2). Gray's explicit emphasis on vaccines and other types of medical enhancements as indicators of cyborg subjectivity makes the claim even clearer (2). Haraway's theory of cyborg subjectivity and resistance helps us explain how Acilde gains greater agency in the novel as he interfaces with technology and subversively resists oppression. Acilde thus becomes a fascinating example of Dalton's theorization of robo sacer. Not only does Acilde receive a gender-affirming procedure, but his avatars become major protagonists in a project to save the oceans and islands of the Caribbean. Acilde's cyborg body thus becomes the non-normative entity through which Rita Indiana criticizes a national identity built around heteronormative discourses.[10] Indeed Rainbow Bright exists to counter the inappropriate use of science and medicine to forward heteronormative, patriarchal, and even colonialist structures of power (Davis et al. 491).[11] As such, it represents a means through which people can use technology toward greater inclusion. Acilde's use of Rainbow Bright helps to construct a new conception of science and medicine that ruptures heteronormative worldviews and facilitates a more dynamic, robo-sacer identity.[12]

Ultimately, Acilde's cyborg subjectivity reflects the combination of corporeal, cultural, and sexual hybridity that his character comes to invoke. Hybridity and hybridization refer to the cultural engagement where antagonist or affiliative performances are produced, thus bringing the hegemon and the subaltern into contact one with another. This produces an in-between temporality that is neither fully subaltern nor solely hegemonic (Bhabha 3, 19). This in-between temporality facilitates the interrogation of the reigning power structures and a rethinking of the

[10] For a discussion of the heteronormative discourses inherent to Mexican nationhood, see Domínguez Ruvalcaba (67).
[11] For a discussion of how oppressive forces can leverage the ambiguous cyborg body to reactionary ends, see Dalton (*Mestizo Modernity*).
[12] For a discussion of how medical discourse engages with constructs of race, gender, and sexuality throughout Latin America, see García León (2022); Andrés (2022); Esch and Miklos (2022); Dalton (2022); Pacino (2022); Medina (2022).

connections between power and culture (García Canclini 260-61). In the Latin American context, hybridity has been theorized as a means to "enter and leave modernity" at will (García Canclini 260). We see this explicitly with Acilde; on the one hand, his usage of Rainbow Bright evinces the extent of his interface with modern medicine. On the other hand, he is immediately signaled as a Yoruba hero, an act that ties him to the ancestral knowledge of the African diaspora in the Dominican Republic and throughout the Caribbean. What is more, one of his avatars appears in a buccaneer timeline that takes place hundreds of years prior to his birth, during a time that clearly predates the modern era. We see the democratizing potential of hybridization in the novel as Acilde's racially and sexually hybrid status allows for a communion with Taino experiences and Yoruba culture on the one hand and European Jewish and Italian cultures on the other. This communion ultimately validates minority agency and disrupts hierarchical and hegemonic power structures. Homi Bhabha states that hybrid realities are produced by linking together unlikely traditions of thought (19). The varying timelines and avatars of Acilde and Argenis work to disrupt the linear progression of society which further denaturalizes hegemonic hierarchies that engage linear movement.

Throughout the novel, hybridity provides strategies to resist coloniality, but the wide array of hybrid figures means that the risk of an oppressive, homogenous hybridity rising to the fore remains low. Jessica Molina argues that Indiana's representations of hybridity "permite[n] que los personajes marginales creen sus propios espacios o 'contralugares'" (26). Molina uses the term "contralugar" to refer to the avatars and other timelines in the novel. As such, Molina refers to "contralugares" as other spaces that invert the rules imposed by society and can therefore be considered heterotopias (26). The stories of Acilde and Argenis come from within these spaces to disrupt heteronormative conceptions of society while simultaneously interacting

with the prejudice and discrimination that queer communities face. In this way, the novel functions as a manifestation of an array of Foucauldian heterotopias that are "capable of juxtaposing in a single place . . . several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 25). In addition, heterotopias are both isolating and penetrable: everyone can enter heterotopias but not everyone is included in the heterotopia (26). In this way, notions of heterotopia provide a valuable lens from which to view the avatars that appear throughout the novel. Argenis and Acilde enjoy certain types of agencies as their avatars interface with the heteronormative attitudes of society. The resulting narratives challenge heteronormativity by celebrating the agency of queer characters throughout the novel. This juxtaposition produces a kind of utopia that foregrounds the experiences of queer characters as they survive in a dystopian context. What is more, the heterotopia helps support the concept of decoloniality as it creates a space to showcase another way of being. In the pages that follow, I will compare the resistant mode that Acilde embodies to the heteronormative mentality of Argenis. I show that Acilde's inclusivity facilitates his position as a redemptive figure, while Argenis's queer repression brings about his eventual downfall.

Acilde and the Notion of Resistant Hybridity

Acilde's two avatars, Giorgio, and Roque, emerge following the Santera ritual. Giorgio is developed as Acilde uses his Italian connection to his father to construct his ideal man in a separate life. Giorgio is married to Linda, and he struggles to choose between living his ideal life with her and fulfilling his destiny to save the ocean. Acilde's third avatar is Roque, a buccaneer who engages in sexual acts with Argenis in a colonial timeline. These contralugares place Acilde and his avatars in a queer sphere as each of them struggle to find their place in society.

Acilde was forced into sex work as a trans man to survive the ecological and economic disaster occurring in the novel. However, Acilde put on the persona of an underage boy rather than that of an adult trans man. Acilde describes his clients as, "mayoría hombres casados, sesentones cuyas vergas solo veían a linda en la boca de un niño bonito" (Indiana14). These details scrutinize what Mauricio Espinoza considers as the traditional ideas of gender roles that are imposed by the patriarchy that force women—and, one could add, trans men—into positions to serve men's desires (90). Acilde's masculine outward appearance in his sex work challenges the heteronormative rhetorical dominance as older men seek to carry out their fantasies on him. This exemplifies suppressed homoerotic desires that are generally not placed into discussion as evidenced by Espinoza's discussion that focuses on women serving men's desires. Here, Indiana is challenging the views on sex workers as well as the gender dynamics involved in sex work. Mauricio Espinoza argues that the post-Latin American future will not be progressive in terms of gender issues unless the predominantly patriarchal history of the region is rewritten and depicted in radically alternative ways (90). Rita Indiana constructs Acilde in a radically alternative way that confronts Western-imposed views on gender and sexuality. In this context, Acilde's sex work and his queer gender and sexuality confront the hyper-masculine dominations in society as gender and sexuality are depicted as fluid concepts. These scenes depict the men exploring their repressed queer sexuality while presenting as cis-hetero men to society.

The novel details the abuse Acilde endured during her[13] childhood as her mother abandoned her with her grandparents after her Italian father abandoned her mother in Milan. Acilde's grandparents "le daban golpes por gusto, por marimacho, por querer jugar pelota," and "aborrecían sus aires masculinos. El abuelo César buscó una cura para la enfermedad de la nieta"

[13] The pronoun her is being used here to indicate Acilde as a child prior to transitioning.

(Indiana 18-9). These details of abuse allude to society's traditional conceptions on gender, sexuality, and women's roles and places within society. In addition, Michaela Rogers explains that trans and nonbinary people remain vulnerable to abuse in public and private contexts (2188). In Rogers's study, trans and nonbinary domestic and family abuse stories were analyzed, and Rogers found that there is an intersection between gender, sexuality, and cultural norms that contribute to abuse for trans and nonbinary people (2187). As such, Rita Indiana's depiction of the violence inflicted on Acilde shows society's traditional constructs of the gender and sexual hierarchies. However, Rita Indiana uses this violence to combat the modern heterosexual writing and criticism that, according to Robert Richmond Ellis, conceives the queer as antithetical to heterosexuality (9). For Ellis, queer identities are frequently depicted in the negative as contrary to heterosexuality. As a result, it is difficult to view queer characters as fully integrated into these works as characters unto themselves (9). Indiana avoids the pitfalls of Ellis's critiques by allowing for scenes of heteronormative violence against queer individuals and using them to decry masculine and heteronormative domination rather than to validate anti-queer attitudes. Indeed, these scenes of abuse play a key role in transforming Acilde into the strong, queer character who will eventually save not only the nation, but the oceans as well. In this way, Rita Indiana uses writing to criticize not only violence but binary and gendered conceptions of society in general.

Acilde's character construction further ruptures the colonizing ideologies in the novel. When Eric finds Acilde he tells her he has a better job for her than sex work. Acilde responds, "No quiero un marido que me mantenga" (Indiana 16). This scene challenges the traditional conception of gender dynamics, especially since society still reads Acilde as female at this point. The scene speaks to the domination of heteronormativity, machismo, and marianismo in society

as Acilde assumes that Eric wants her to be married to solve her financial problems. However, this is when Eric offers her the job with Esther. This alternative offer to marriage establishes a criticism towards the traditional views of women needing to be married to be taken care of and validates Acilde's gender identity as a man. The assumptions of marriage made by Acilde show society's tendency to favor hegemonic power structures such as the patriarchy. Acilde's objection to marriage challenges the unequal status of women who may be forced to comply with society's ideas of chastity, self-sacrifice, and morality. The fluid use of gender in the interaction between Acilde and Eric challenges the longstanding hegemonic structures of power that lead to sexual exploitation, abuse, and discrimination in society.[14]

Of course, the novel goes to great lengths to advocate systems of solidarity among an array of communities who have been relegated to the periphery along racial, gender, and sexual lines. In this way, the novel becomes a Dominican articulation of Gloria Anzaldúa's "mestiza consciousness" that proclaimed a shared history of oppression and resistant potential among LGBTQ individuals—particularly lesbians—and racially marginalized people. Indeed, Rita Indiana fully embraces the concept of Anzaldúa's mestizaje by positing Acilde as a queer character with Dominican and Italian parents, a fact that disrupts fundamental binary oppositions like European/Indigenous/Afro-Caribbean and male/female (Ellis 5). To be mestiza/x and "of Latinoamerica," there is a "legacy embodied in African, Indigenous, and European ideals" that can work together in the embrace of personal and collective identity (Arrizón 19).

The ramifications of mestiza/x identity in the realm of gender and sexuality are especially interesting in a Dominican and Caribbean context. At their most basic level, African and Indigenous cultures, and cosmologies function as conflicting counterpoints to the European-

[14] For further discussion on gender and abuse see La Fountain-Stokes (193).

descended actors of the region. Viewed in this light, the novel's engagement of Taino culture seeks to rescue the cultural legacy of the original inhabitants of the Caribbean: An Indigenous race whose culture celebrated a type of sexual fluidity that contemporary power holders in the Caribbean have sought to police and repress (Herrero-Martin 60). Indeed, the colonizers of Hispaniola wrote the island into a utopia, but they excluded the indigenous Taino people precisely because of their sexual practices, which offended Spanish observers (Kallendorf 450). As a result, a more conservative conception of gender and sexuality has undergirded Dominican society in the years following the establishment of Spanish settlements on the island (Kallendorf 450). Furthermore, the Dominican Republic has a long history with people of African descent who were initially slaves and have formed a large portion of the demographic population. Like their Indigenous counterparts, people of African descent have faced marginalization and social sanctions because of their cosmologies, which have frequently challenged Western social mores surrounding "proper" sexuality. As such, African religion and spirituality has been one of the strongest cultural influences in Dominican resistance of Western constructs of performativity (Ricourt 135). In engaging in an array of hybridizing activities, Acilde comes to embody a resistant mestizaje that incorporates elements of each of these marginalized communities. Indeed, only through this communion can he play out his redemptive role in the narrative.

The novel cements Acilde's connection to the Afro-Dominican community through its depiction of Santeria. In foregrounding this religious practice, the novel favors syncretic religions with a strong African component over traditional, European Catholicism.[15] In so doing, it validates the key role of the island's Black inhabitants in participating in the island's struggles

[15] For a discussion about the influence of African religions in Caribbean thought—both with regard to its syncretic ties to Catholicism and its ability to exist separate from Catholic discourse altogether—see Dalton (Santería and Resistance).

and successes. Esther reveals to Acilde that, when she was thirty, she fell in love with her jefa, but her jefa's husband paid someone to curse Esther with "brujería mala," which forced her to menstruate nonstop (22). The reveal of Esther's sexuality works to further promote solidarity among the queer characters of the novel as they combat the heteronormative status quo. Santeria is an Afro-Caribbean religion based on Yoruba beliefs and traditions along with Catholic elements and has its roots in Cuba (Lopez 9). Santeria is also closely related to Haitian voudou and Louisianan voodoo. Esther's Santera belief system is revealed alongside her sexuality which are both viewed as demonic in the Dominican Republic, where Catholicism is enforced to distance the Dominican from African ancestry, Haiti, Haitian vodou, and Cuban Santeria.[16] However, her character in the novel is revered for her knowledge of Santeria and for her mystical abilities. It is precisely her expertise in these traditionally Afro-Dominican and Afro-Caribbean cosmologies that allows her to work for President Bona to solve the apocalyptic climate disasters threatening their island.

Esther's connection to her surrounding landscape proves especially interesting when viewed through the lens of ecofeminism, a current of thought that manifests itself throughout Caribbean literary and cultural productions. As Letizia Gramaglia and Joseph Jackson note, Ecofeminism examines the connections between women and nature and particularly women's oppression and liberation that is closely tied to nature (121). Given the deep connection among these topics in the Caribbean, ecofeminism has found an especially fertile ground in that context (Gramaglia and Jackson 121). Furthermore, there are connections between the oppression of women and the exploitation of the natural world with ecofeminism citing the subjugation of women and nature being rooted in hierarchical binaries (Gramaglia and Jackson 122). As such,

[16] See Paulino (136) for a discussion of Catholicism and African ancestry and culture in the Dominican

this intellectual tradition engages Haraway's cyborg theory. Haraway deconstructs both the divisions between nature and culture and those between nature and technology, a fact that challenges essentialist understandings of gender and nature (Alaimo 133). The novel hinges on saving the ocean based on the Santera prophecies of a lesbian priestess. This constructs the complementarities that the novel utilizes to support queer agency. The complementarities refer to marginalized groups who are linked together by cultural hybridity rather than placed into a social hierarchy. What is more, it becomes a powerful articulation of a mestiza order that follows many of the precepts of Anzaldúa albeit from a Caribbean rather than US-Southwest context. Esther's subject position as both Black and lesbian plays a key role in her ability as a Santera priestess to prophecy about the future of the island and put into action the scenarios through which liberation may finally come about.

After Esther's death, a hologram of her is played where she names Acilde the "Omo Olokun" (Indiana 114). This means that Acilde now has a responsibility and connection to the sea based on her prophecy. The Omo Olokun also has a connection to queer agency. The Yoruba Olokun[17] is constructed as having a sexual fluidity which supports the queer subjectivities of the novel. By Acilde being named the Omo Olokun, this hybridity of the Yoruba culture gives him more agency in the development of his avatars and of his own queer identity. The shared, decolonial drive of both Afro-Caribbean and queer discourses allows for different forms of visibility and the collective emergence of refusal to dualisms and hierarchies throughout the novel (Khoo 236). Instead, these discourses are viewed as complementarities which helps to stop the reproduction of colonial hierarchies of power and supports queer and Afro-Caribbean agency within society.

[17] For further discussion of Yoruba Olokun see Carta (118)

Rita Indiana challenges the coloniality of knowledge as she explores Indigenous cultural conceptions of gender and sexuality through Giorgio's timeline. We see this particularly clearly with his relationship with Nenuco and Ananí, two Taino people who find and help Giorgio because of his connection to the water and their belief in the man of water. By relinking with the legacies of Indigenous people, Giorgio works to preserve modes of existence within society that break the coloniality of hegemonic structures of race, gender, and sexuality in society. The combination of Taino and Yoruba beliefs and cosmologies supports the sexual fluidity within the novel by disregarding the Western ideologies against sexual and ethnic diversity (Herrero-Martín 60). The novel's inclusion of Taino culture denounces gender binarisms imposed on the Caribbean by Western colonization and imperialism.

Throughout the novel, the varying timelines, the avatars, and the Afro-Caribbean and Taino influences construct a heterotopian unity without universality. Acilde's different avatars that span the varying timelines allow for an illustration of continuities where divisions are seen by society, such as racial or cultural divisions (Quiroga 193). By the end of the novel, Giorgio and Acilde are still living two different realities. Giorgio holds the secret to what is at the bottom of the ocean, but he finds himself conflicted because he loves the life and identity he has created. Acilde is released from prison after ten years for the death of Esther where he was able to play out the narratives of his avatars to try to fulfill the Santera prophecy. The end of the novel focuses on Giorgio, who concludes that one day "se olvidará de Acilde, de Roque, incluso de lo que vive en un hueco allá abajo en el arrecife" (Indiana 181). This last line of the novel shows the convergence of Acilde and his avatars into Giorgio as he assumes his ideal identity and true self as a man. Perhaps somewhat troublingly, this decision pulls Acilde away from his dystopian present and moves him to a new context where he no longer needs to worry about saving the

Dominican Republic or the oceans. Nevertheless, he leads the life that he desires, and he does so on his own terms. In so doing, he has claimed agency and acted for himself without having to act as a tool for someone from a different sector of society. The novel further advocates for a greater freedom of sexual self-expression through the narrative of Argenis's failures. Far from a signifier of power, the novel depicts homophobic and heteronormative worldviews as potentially catastrophic for those who hold such views.

The Demise of Argenis

Argenis's demise is initiated by his sexualization of Linda, a Jewish woman whom he chases while swimming on the beach with the intention of seducing her. However, an anemone stings him in his attempt and creates an avatar who lives as a buccaneer in the Dominican coastal town of Sosúa during the colonial period with Acilde's avatar, Roque. The creation of this timeline dismantles Argenis's heteronormative privilege as he experiences queer sexuality in his colonial timeline. This colonial timeline is what leads Argenis to his eventual breakdown and the collapse of a heteronormative order. Argenis constructs himself as a heteronormative macho in the present, but after his avatar receives sexual favors from Roque in his buccaneer timeline, he begins to want to impress him in this past timeline. This shows a compartmentalization of Argenis's sexuality: he represses any queer feelings to maintain a cis-hetero masculine identity in the dystopian future, but he explores more flexible notions of sexuality in this secondary timeline. His sexual repression leads to everyone viewing Argenis as crazy in the future timeline, which ultimately leads to his downfall. Argenis's intense focus on the sexualization of women is what leads to his crazy actions in the present. He explores his repressed sexuality in the buccaneer timeline which seems to fuel his need to portray an ultimate macho persona in the

present. This fact serves to denounce the forced repression of gender and sexual fluidity that machista culture imposes. Indeed, Argenis's downfall ultimately comes about due to his refusal to accept his own sexuality in the present, a fact that underscores how rigid constructs of gender and sexuality hurt even those who reap the greatest privileges in a patriarchal society.

From the beginning, Argenis shows an exaggerated heterosexuality that he likely employs to compensate for his homoerotic desires. His compensation to suppress homoerotic desires is his intense sexualization and objectification of women that he narrates in his head for the reader. We see this in his description of Linda when he first meets her: "era la cosa más bella que Argenis había visto en su vida" and, "tenía unas tetas perfectas, que llenarían sin bosar demasiado las manos" (Indiana 46). This intense sexualization of Linda and other women by Argenis represents the colonial hierarchies and masculine categories that were used to establish and maintain rigid gender and sexual hierarchies in Latin American society during the colonial period, and which continue to exist into the present (Figari 231). Indeed, Linda's Jewishness even speaks to how the idealization of blanquemiento—which was inherited from the colonial period—shaped immigration policy in the Dominican Republic during the twentieth century. During World War II, the nation's dictator, Rafael Leónides Trujillo Molina, opened the island to asylum-seeking European Jews. Indeed, he went as far as granting them land in Sosúa to further whiten the Dominican Republic (Acevedo 133). Far from an act of charity, this was an attempt to whiten the nation; indeed, the dictator engaged in the genocide of Black Haitians during those same years. Viewed in this light, Linda signifies in many ways the anti-Black legacy of the Trujillo dictatorship that continues to scar the island nation. What is more, given Argenis's negation of his own queer inclinations, we can surmise that these colonialist and objectifying attitudes dehumanize him as well as those he fetishizes.

The scene at the beach further highlights Indiana's decolonial discourse. Both characters attend an artist retreat at Giorgio's oceanographic mission. While there, Linda invites everyone to snorkel with her. Argenis does so with the goal of seducing her. That said, he can never see Linda while snorkeling because the head of Malagueta—a Black artist whose sexuality is never identified—blocks his view (Indiana 58). In placing Malagueta in Argenis's way, this scene creates a disruption in the cis-hetero sphere that the novel constructs. The text posits Malagueta as a direct foil to Argenis. Malagueta is able to engage with the queer sphere without declaring an explicitly queer identity because of the elasticity that the queer sphere adopts.[18] As Fiol-Matta points out, "queer is not a marker of a clear subject but a zone of contestation and struggle" (226). As such, Malagueta's opposition to Argenis's cis-hetero and macho persona makes the Black artist's interactions a zone of contestation and struggle without directly naming Malagueta as queer and without forcing explicitly queer and cis-hetero identities to be directly opposing forces within the novel.

As Argenis chases after Linda while snorkeling, he breaks away from the queer sphere that Malagueta represents. Argenis has an attitude that reflects that he is better than Malagueta and that his desires supersede everything else. This shows Argenis's total disregard for anyone or anything other than his own desires and constructs an idea that selfishness and heteronormativity correlate. This correlation can be tied to the denunciation of binaries of gender and sexuality and a criticism of heteronormativity. Beyond a critique of harmful divisions of sexuality, this scene also reflects on the coloniality of power. Argenis tries to establish a racial and gender hierarchy by describing Malagueta as "un tipo enorme y negro como el carbón" (53). Argenis also dehumanizes and animalizes Malagueta by referring to him as a "mole humana" and questions

[18] For a discussion on the queer sphere see Fiol-Mata (226)

his validity as an artist (Indiana 72). The novel also describes how Argenis is lighter in skin color than Malagueta and is born into a more powerful family which helps to further reflect the colonial hierarchy Argenis's character works to establish. However, as opposed to Argenis, Malagueta's art fits into the changing climate of art which wants to recognize the flexibility and productivity of transformational art.[19] Malagueta creates a new identity through performative art that reflects the character's experience as a baseball player prior to becoming an artist. Malagueta faces racism and discomfort with his own body and appearance. However, as the novel progresses, this character discovers their body and reflects on their Blackness as well as the racism they experience in the Dominican Republic (Indiana 166-67). Malagueta uses art to address racial marginalization, which develops "al potencial transformativo de lo postmoderno, sino a su connivencia con desigualdades sociales y raciales" (Garrido Castellano 358). Clearly, Malagueta uses art to interrogate notions of race, gender, sexuality, and identity. Argenis, however, employs art to repress his own sexuality and to berate people from marginalized communities.

For example, while Argenis's patriarchal tendencies and internalized queer sexuality represent a clear threat to queer subjectivities, his attitudes ultimately bring about his own downfall. This, in turn, validates the queer agency of Malagueta, Giorgio, and Roque. In addition, Argenis's buccaneer timeline allows him to explore his sexuality in ways that he would not have in a linear progression. Argenis's two timelines create a breach between his patriarchal conditioning and his need for greater harmony between the cis-hetero and queer communities. Acilde's avatars lead to the politics of identity collapsing under the weight of multiple identities.[20] Acilde and his avatars are all connected but they each are able to develop varying

[19] For further discussion of transformational art see Garrido Castellano (358)
[20] For a discussion of the politics of identity see Quiroga (194)

identities in society and within queer communities which leads to a continuity between the various gender and sexual identities. Furthermore, the novel uses the timelines and avatars in combination with Afro-Caribbean and Taino influences to denounce the ideologies of racial and sexual impurities that have dominated the region.[21] The novel uses Esther's practice of Santeria to reinforce queer agency through the prophecies, which emphasize the fact that Yoruba spirits and symbols are gender fluid (Herrero-Martín 59). This also showcases the African cultural aspects that continue to be part of Caribbean culture and spirituality.[22] Furthermore, the novel develops Giorgio's timeline around Nenuco and Ananí which showcases Taino culture and the ambiguous gender conceptions that are encompassed in Nenuco and Ananí's beliefs (Herrero-Martín 59). The intersection of Taino, Afro-Caribbean, and queer communities creates a decolonial narrative and links marginalized populations to combat oppressive dialogues that have existed in the region since the arrival of the Spaniards.[23]

Many poets, novelists, and theorists have used heterosexual imagery to represent the Caribbean. A common trope of such writings is the feminization of the Caribbean landscape (Gramaglia and Jackson 122). Furthermore, throughout the region, women and nature have been dominated and oppressed by patriarchal and capitalist systems that focus on control and consumption (Gramaglia and Jackson 122). This stems from Christopher Columbus's utopian narrative of the Dominican Republic whereby he worked to exclude the native Taino people from his discovery of a perfect island (Kallendorf 451). Nevertheless, Rita Indiana uses cultural hybridity to call into question notions of colonialist superiority and domination. She engages with indigenous and African cultures to create a discourse that queers the representation and

[21] See Smith (2) for further discussion on racial and sexual impurities.
[22] For further discussion of African culture and spirituality in the Caribbean see Alcantara Almanzar
[23] For further discussion of oppressive dialogues in the Caribbean see Alcantara Almanzar (163)

landscapes of the Caribbean.[24] For example, the author establishes that the sea is gender fluid in its representation as a being and as a Santeria figure that counteracts the feminization of Caribbean landscapes, as Santeria views the sea as gender fluid instead of only feminine. In addition, the author addresses gender and sexuality as fluid concepts and portrays Caribbean society within the fluidity of the timelines and characters alongside the Taino culture which delinks from heterosexual representations within the Caribbean.

The queer hybridities of the novel are juxtaposed with the cis-hetero and machista impulses of Argenis. Coupled with his internalized heteronormativity, Argenis's homophobia contrasts with Acilde and Esther's decolonized, queer communion both among themselves and with the island's African and Taino cultures. Although Argenis is revealed to have queer desires, he spends a majority of the novel suppressing his feelings and sexuality, which leads to his outward expression of a cis-hetero identity. Sylvia Chant and Nikki Craske note that, throughout Latin America, men's actions, thoughts, and statements mimic what society dictates to be considered a "real man" (15). As such, Argenis's constant anger and frustration can be viewed as a result of his efforts to mimic what Dominican society dictates to be appropriate *macho* behavior, a practice that, not coincidentally, forces him to suppress his queer identity. Indeed, Judith Butler's theory of imitation explains how Argenis shapes his identity in his attempts to be a "real" Dominican (125). Argenis's character suppresses his discreet sexuality and is punished throughout the novel for this suppression. He also obsesses with sex with various women to compensate for his queer desires. The novel underscores how Argenis's suppression of his queer desire brings about his downfall when he is contrasted with Esther and Acilde, both of whom

[24] For a discussion of sexuality in the Caribbean see Smith (5)

openly embrace their gender and sexual diversity as part of their strategy to improve the world around them.

Of course, the novel also emphasizes that many of Argenis's challenges are rooted in his upbringing. The text makes clear, for example, that Argenis's father was a politician and Argenis saw him on obligatory biweekly visits as a child. In one visit, the text narrates that "cuando su papá lo levantó, él le agarró la cabeza con las dos manos y lo besó en la boca" and his father said "'Tú eres pájaro, ¿eh?'" (92). His father throws him violently to the ground as he says these words. This scene reverberates with the observations of Arturo J. Aldama and Frederick Luis Aldama, who assert that, in many instances, Latin American boys are taught to be a "man" by fathers who encourage misogynistic and homophobic attitudes and behaviors (4). Argenis embodies these traits in the novel, and his anecdotes about his past relationship with his father show how he was taught his internalized homophobia. Rita Indiana employs Argenis's toxic masculinity as a way for him to demonstrate his anger and self-sabotaging tendencies. These tendencies show that, within society, individuals are taught to accept patriarchal ideologies and to suppress queer desires, a fact that leads individuals to force conformity within themselves (Aldama and Aldama 295). Viewed in this light, Argenis becomes a tragic antagonist who embodies the dangers associated with those ideologies that deny people their queer agency.

Argenis's breakdown is his obsession with his macho identity and his heteronormative sexual obsession. The ultimate downfall of Argenis criticizes the heteronormativity and gender binarisms that remain dominant in society. In addition, it criticizes the toxic machismo culture that Argenis experienced as a child. These experiences have forced him to internalize the sexual ideologies that have led to his obsession with sexualizing women and portraying himself as the

ultimate macho man.[25]. Argenis is used to critique heterosexism in favor of recognizing non-normative sexualities in the Caribbean.[26] This criticism works to recognize that queer—and particularly trans—communities in the Caribbean should not be viewed as a threat to Dominican society. Instead, Argenis is used to criticize the overt pressures of heteronormativity and gender binarisms that are in society and that force a continued coloniality on people from marginalized racial, gender, and sexual communities.

In the end, *La mucama de Omicunlé* is a novel that engages the queer discourses of the Caribbean to support queer agency and denounce heteronormativity and the insistence on gender binaries. Furthermore, the novel criticizes the hierarchical structures that dominate discourses of gender and sexuality that produce male and cis-hetero-dominant structures. Rita Indiana uses the characters within the novel to critique coloniality as she produces a hybridity of queer, Afro-Caribbean, and Taino characters who come together to challenge colonialist discourses. In addition, she uses the dystopian genre to emphasize the uncertainties that queer individuals and communities face in the Caribbean as they work to dismantle the divisions of gender and sexuality that permeate society. The use of the varying timelines creates various perspectives that work to support queer agency and denounce the domination of cis-hetero discourses. The varying timelines also show the importance of individual identity that is unified to combat universality. Rita Indiana built a novel that addresses the importance of queer agency in the Caribbean while supporting this with Caribbean culture and history that has been oppressed by the colonizing structures that still dominate society. The novel works to construct a decoloniality of marginalized Caribbean culture while establishing the agency of queer Caribbean communities.

[25] For further discussion on sexual ideologies see Chant and Craske (15)
[26] For further discussion of non-normative sexualities in the Caribbean see Taylor (191)

Chapter 2

Exclusionary Inclusivity: Trans Allegories and Gender Violence in Julio Hernández Cordón's *Cómprame un revólver*

A key scene in Julio Hernández Cordón's *Cómprame un revólver* (2018) shows Huck, the film's protagonist, hiding in her trailer while a masked drug lord, the Jefe, interrogates her father, Rogelio, about the recent murder of a narco. Prior to deciding whether to execute Rogelio, the Jefe enters the trailer, finds a stick of ChapStick, and takes a seat. Huck observes as the drug lord, believing themself to be alone, suddenly removes their mask and reveals their long hair. Huck concludes at this moment that the Jefe is female, though she later learns that the character is nonbinary. After this moment of authenticity, the Jefe leaves the trailer and orders Rogelio's execution. Nevertheless, through a stroke of luck—literally—the bullets pass through Rogelio without harming him. In placing the nonbinary Jefe into a subjectivity that perpetuates violence, the film constructs an allegorical queer portrayal whereby the Jefe is used to critique the power structures within drug trafficking. The film portrays cis women as victims of structural gender violence perpetrated by drug trafficking who work to uphold a patriarchal society. Hernández Cordón employs diverse gender portrayals to call out gender violence faced by women. In addition, he also showcases trans and nonbinary individuals while also trying to push the boundaries of gender depictions in the film. However, *Cómprame un revólver* ultimately depicts problematic gender scenarios that further reflect heteronormative and cisgender hierarchies.

By combining themes of gender and sexuality with drug trafficking, the film reverberates with the observation of David William Foster that queerphobia often manifests itself through a continuum of terrorism (xi). In many cases, cultural productions with supposed queer themes undermine nonheteronormative subjectivities by perpetuating stigmas of non-heterosexual

peoples and cultures in ways that buoy hetero-masculine and patriarchal discourses. We see this explicitly in *Cómprame un revólver* where the nonbinary character perpetuates violence against women (they oversee a feminicidal order) and children (the Jefe amputates a child's hand, supposedly for stealing) to assert their dominance in this dystopian, yet timeless, Mexico. This creates the allegory of the Jefe's character. As such, the Jefe stands in as an allegory with the film portraying the Jefe as violent while masking their nonbinary identity. This allegorical portrayal gives Hernández Cordón a space to figure queer modes of being without being overly deterministic.[27] His positive representations of homosexuality have long formed a central tenet of his filmography, and they have hurt his commercial successes with conservative audiences in Guatemala (Belmonte Grey 102).

A brief plot description will facilitate my discussion. Hernández Cordón establishes the film's dystopian backdrop from the beginning with an exposition that states, "México. Sin fecha precisa. Todo, absolutamente todo es controlado por el narcotráfico. La población ha disminuido por la falta de mujeres." The director then cuts to an opening scene, where three imprisoned children escape from cages and flee by night into the rural desert. From there, he cuts to a rural mountain scene and depicts the protagonist, Huck, as she helps her father, Rogelio, bathe in a makeshift, outdoor shower. The film then follows the trials that Huck faces as she helps her drug-addicted father maintain a baseball field for the narcos to play on. This occurs while Huck is forced to dress as a boy and remain chained by the ankle so that the narcos will not steal her as they stole her mother and sister. Huck also befriends the three boys who escaped the cages of the Jefe. One of her friends, Angel, lost his arm when the Jefe cut it off. Angel now wants to reunite with his arm and avenge his injury with the cartel. After Rogelio survives his execution through

[27] For further discussion on allegorical queer portrayals see Karl Schoonover and Rosalind Galt's book *Queer Cinema in the World* (123-124)

luck, the Jefe orders him to attend their birthday party (and to bring his daughter). The Jefe explains that they want Rogelio's luck to rub off on them. During the party, an armed group attacks the celebration and kills most people in attendance. Huck survives and then finds her father chained to the back of a truck and being driven away. To protect Huck, Rogelio tells her to go find her sister and head to the sea; he then knocks her out to ensure she will not follow him to his presumed death. When Huck wakes up alone, she finds the injured Jefe and they flee to the river together where the Jefe tells Huck of their nonbinary identity. Later, the Jefe shows Huck how to use a gun on a makeshift raft. Huck then shoots the Jefe while they sleep on the raft to avenge Angel's lost arm. The film concludes as Huck swims to the riverbank and rejoins her friends. She is the new Jefa, and the three boys agree to join her in fighting the narcos and to try to save Rogelio.

Clearly, the film struggles to articulate and conceive of a liberatory trans identity. Sayak Valencia asserts transfeminism as a means through which people can critically engage the social constructs that abound and oppress (*Gore Capitalism* 103). Hernández Cordón's feminism is decidedly cis feminist; even as it acknowledges the existence of trans and nonbinary people, it subordinates them to more allegorical articulations of gender expression. Indeed, throughout the film, the denunciation of feminicide serves as a rhetorical tool that paradoxically contributes to the marginalization of trans and nonbinary individuals. The desolate setting and bleak depiction of society in the film criticizes the violence against women as the disappearance of women can be directly associated with the decreasing population and the degradation of society.[28] Nevertheless, this same denunciation of gender violence ultimately contributes to deepening conservative ideologies by associating the face of violence and destruction with the Jefe.

[28] For further discussion of feminicide and society see González Rodríguez (46,70)

Hernández Cordón's filmic strategies place Huck in tension with the Jefe. Huck relates to the Jefe's feminine identity and yet has a tension with the Jefe's violent masculinity that has affected her family and friends. The death of the nonbinary Jefe allows for a closure of sorts for Huck which troubles the idea of a liberatory narrative for queer identities that Hernández Cordón has shown commitment to in his representations of gay and lesbian subjectivities in his films. His allegorical and non-liberatory representation of transness thus largely underscores the fact that transness represents a type of nonheteronormative diversity that the director knows less well. Javier García León points out that the criteria for a film to be queer must go beyond the inclusion of queer subjects; indeed, many films use queer characters to reinforce gender binarism instead of criticizing it (93). We see a similar phenomenon in *Cómprame un revólver*, where a violent drug lord serves as the only trans character. This representation ultimately reinforces gender binarisms by associating the Jefe with masculine violence and criminality and not developing their nonbinary identity beyond their narco masculinity.

Like all of Hernández Cordón's films, *Cómprame un revólver* reflects a reality that Carlos Belmonte Grey refers to as a fiction-documentary, where "real stories [are] acted out by the characters themselves but adapted to a script also coming from [Hernández Cordón's] own personal history" (106). This style of fiction-documentary plays out in *Cómprame un revólver* as Huck is trying to survive ongoing projects of feminicide and the nonbinary Jefe is killed. These two aspects of the film draw attention to the feminicides[29] that have plagued the country on the one hand and Mexico's dubious distinction of having the second-highest murder rate for trans people in the world.[30] Furthermore, the film reflects the narrative power[31] of drug lords within

[29] For further discussion on feminicides see González Rodríguez (11)
[30] For further discussion on trans murder rates in Mexico see Monterrubio (171)
[31] For Further discussion on the drug trafficking narrative see Zavala

Mexico. Through the reflection of these varying realities, *Cómprame un revólver* is a speculative fiction that demonstrates the fact that society only needs "minimal tweaking to become eerily disturbing" (Betancourt 89). In the end, feminicide, drug trafficking, and trans violence make up the central tenets of Hernández Cordón's fictional dystopia. The film "works [to] reveal the disparities and inequalities that have become well known and accepted aspects of contemporary reality" (Betancourt 89). The reflections of contemporary reality place the film into a neorealist style that, according to Laura Reyes, plays out in many of Hernández Cordón's films, particularly *Gasolina*, *Las marimbas de infierno*, and *Polvo* (8). For Reyes, neorealism "se enfoca en la reflexión sobre las realidades sociales" which allow films to be used as "una herramienta para una crítica social más activa y fuerte" (8). *Cómprame un revólver* follows this style to criticize both drug violence and violence against women while also reflecting the violence that the nonbinary and trans communities in Mexico face. This violence includes verbal and physical violence, suicidal ideation, inaccessibility to healthcare and gender affirming care (Lozano-Verduzco and Melendez 236-237). The director's aesthetic uses film to portray intimate stories and "young people spending time in societies that offer them an empty and uncertain future" (Cabezas Vargas and González de Canales Carcereny 175).

Dystopias are usually characterized by scarcity, where violence emerges to maintain control (Becerra 11). With scarcity being a prevalent theme in the film, there is a need for characters to maintain their dominance in society to survive. This is evident in this film as the narcos are trying to maintain control over the land as well as the remaining people. Violence is used to show power and to perpetuate certain masculine modes of domination. The resulting dystopian violence criticizes the narco control over society and the barbarous methods they use to enforce rules that they themselves do not follow. However, as Oswaldo Zavala points out in

Los cárteles no existen, the drug trafficking in Mexico is largely a result of a political system that does not provide protection to its citizens and instead plays into a narrative that drug trafficking poses a threat to the State (88). As such, the violence of the film plays with the idea of a perverse government that has failed the people and resulted in a dystopian future ruled by violent narcos. The film also uses the dystopian society to represent the results of globalization in Latin America. The lack of economic regulations stemming from globalization and the domination of the rich elites as well as US corporations, resulted in essentially a second colonization of Latin America as the people without money or influence could not gain any power or agency within society (Becerra 12-13). This same lack of regulation later contributed to the formation of the illicit drug trade, which has helped people gain power and prosperity through violence (Becerra 12-13). This representation within the dystopian society of the film reflects a commonality in Latin American film where, according to Jasper Vanhaelemeesch, there is a "representation of past traumas in cultural narratives" (122). These past traumas "refer mainly to political and economic affairs, the continent's history of colonization and imperial rule, of repressive regimes, patriarchal hierarchies, authoritarian regimes, militarization, and structurally ingrained social inequality" (Vanhaelemeesch 122). This backdrop proves important to understanding Hernández Cordón's film, where drug cartels have taken over civil society.

The focus of the film is concentrated on a reflection of violence that is critiqued through the dystopian element of scarcity. The social critiques in the film are highlighted only through violent results. The film may be considered a critical dystopia in some contexts as violence against women and the drug trafficking is criticized by violence and scarcity. In addition, it is important to note that a utopia does not necessarily signify an ideal or perfect society, but from a queer perspective, a utopia would create "cognitive dissonance" between the reader and their

own society (Copson and Boukli 516-7). Furthermore, critical utopias reject perfectionism unlike their utopian counterparts but keep the "hopeful spirit of utopia" (Seyferth 1). A queer perspective on utopia would fall more into the critical utopian genre to question the conventional norms of society that are often oppressive towards gender and sexual minorities who may consider the conditions they face to be dystopian already. *Cómprame un revólver* employs the use of a queer theme through the portrayal of the Jefe but there is not a call for transformative action. Unlike critical utopia, which would offer solutions, this film, as a critical dystopia, shows no path for survival (Fraile-Marcos and Noguerol 16). In addition, Ana María Fraile-Marcos and Francisa Noguerol classifies critical dystopias by their resilience narratives (16). This resilience narrative is developed in the film through the portrayal of Huck as she continues to survive in an oppressive setting. However, the film does not provide the same path to survival crucial to Fraile-Marcos's and Noguerol's critical dystopias definition for the Jefe as it does for Huck (16). The Jefe does not find a path to survival in the oppressive setting despite their active participation in the violence. Hernández Cordón has created a film that borders between dystopian and critical dystopian as Huck's character criticizes injustices in Mexican society while the Jefe is merely a pawn within the plotline of the film who fails to challenge conceptions of gender and sexuality in society. The combination of the narco theme with gender and sexuality allows for underlying criticisms of gender violence, but it fails to reimagine the position and experiences of people outside conventional gender norms.[32]

The film depicts a backdrop of feminicide that creates certain contradictions in the character of the Jefe while at the same time reaffirming cis-heterosexual, patriarchal hegemonies. Within this dystopian setting, the film seems to absolve the state of any wrongdoings with the

[32] See Copson and Boukli for a discussion of reimagining gender norms in utopias.

violence depicted; Afterall, the violence is carried out by drug traffickers and other criminals. The film specifically absolves the state of any fault regarding feminicide by shifting the blame to the narcos. The term femicide references any gender-based killings of a woman or girls due to their gender. The term femicide differs from feminicide, which refers to the murder of women and girls due to their gender in a context of impunity (Toledo 45). Viewed in this light, the term feminicide implicates the State both directly and indirectly for its role in perpetuating the public and private murders of women (Fregoso and Bejarano 5). Furthermore, feminicide references the systemic violence against women that encompasses social, political, economic, and cultural roots (Fregoso and Bejarano 5). This distinction is crucial in Mexico as the state has historically not been effective in its responses towards murder and violence against women based on their sex (Fregoso and Bejarano 11). However, the blame placed on the narcos, in the film, is also a critique of the state, whose absence has allowed drug traffickers—and particularly the Jefe—to function as what Sayak Valencia calls a "parallel state" (213). As Dalton mentions, Hernández Cordón "interrogates the institutionalized state of exception that gives narcos dominion over life and death" (*Robo Sacer* 167). With this, the film places the blame on individuals using violence to gain control in a dystopian setting which critiques narco violence but does not implicate the broader societal structures that have led to the violence in the first place.

The film is highly critical of the narcos by equating them with feminicide. This shows the illicit drug trade's control over society and criticizes their violent approach to governing the land that they control. The film also uses feminicide to represent the dominance of men in a narco-controlled society. This patriarchal structure reverberates with the observation of Liliana González, who argues that "el narco mobilizes misogyny and homophobia as ways to reify its hierarchies" (98). That said, the film falls into the trap of "condemning" narco misogyny without

critiquing “the cultural nuances of western politics which have expedited misogyny and allowed homophobia to flourish” (González 98). In other words, the film uses an easy target (narcos) to make noncontroversial commentaries about gender politics in Mexico while at the same time ignoring questions of patriarchal violence and anti-queer discourse more deeply. Throughout the film, feminicide results from narco misogyny, a fact that largely absolves society at large of its misogynistic and oppressive tendencies and attitudes against women. At the end of the film, for example, Rogelio tells Huck that she has a sister and that he will meet all of them at the sea—where feminicide apparently does not exist—once he escapes. This assertion explicitly associates feminicide with the local drug cartel at the exclusion of other sorts of patriarchal violence. While drug traffickers have certainly played a role in exacerbating the feminicide crisis in Mexico, any attempt to pin the practice solely on organized crime reflects attempts at exoneration more than anything. Indeed, the principal cause of feminicide in Mexico is not women randomly kidnapped and murdered by narcos, but domestic violence (González Rodríguez 73; Cancino and Cristoffanini 7). The idea that Huck’s sister could find refuge by fleeing from northern Mexico to the sea alludes to an imaginary where violence happens along the US-Mexico border as such Rogelio believes that violence will be less likely on the beaches (Berlanga Gayón 106). Furthermore, the sea brings connotations of life and abundance as opposed to the scarcity depicted in the rural desert setting, they are currently in. Clearly, Huck lives in a dystopian setting where her gender leads to significant threats to her safety.

Huck and Gender Violence

Cómprame un revólver is representative of what Olivia Cosentino refers to as “slower cinema” which “describes a type of cinema that slows down spectators without lulling them to

boredom or inattention" (64). The slower cinema aspect of the film is used to criticize the violence, corruption, and destruction inherent to the drug trade and its entrenchment in Mexico. Slower cinema slows down the spectatorship, thus allowing for more recognition and reflection on the violence that is intertwined with everyday lives (Cosentino 77). The film shows Huck's life with her father as they try to survive in their trailer while maintaining the baseball field. These depictions show every aspect of their routine as well as Rogelio's drug use. The film's excessive commitment to detail allows for dynamics and relationships to be explored in depth. Unlike many Latin American films, which dwell on explicit representations of violence (Sánchez Prado 39), *Cómprame un revólver* tends to imply the violence that occurs offscreen. Indeed, the film shows the monetization of death and suffering that the narcos create in this necroliberal society (Dalton, "El consumo de la muerte" 7). The narcos have established a citizenship of fear whereby violence maintains itself outside of the boundaries of the individual and capitalizes on death as part of the functioning of society (Sánchez Prado 46). However, there is also the narrative of citizenship through violence which the Jefe displays and then Huck replicates.[33] Many of the killings in the film are heard and occur beyond the gaze of the camera. When Huck kills the Jefe, for example, Hernández Cordón films her as she loads and aims the gun, but he cuts to a flock of startled birds while she pulls the trigger. In another case, we see Huck's friends' scarred bodies; the physical trauma—and in one case, a missing hand—testify to violent acts, but the director focuses on the effects of this violence in people's lives rather than on the shock value of a gratuitously violent scene. This depiction of violence allows viewers to experience violence as an invisible, self-perpetuating system which represents the invisible systems of power and control in society (Cosentino 65).

[33] See Sánchez Prado (46) for further discussion on citizenship through violence.

The film's slower-cinema aesthetic plays into how "notions of utility conspire against queer temporality" (Schoonover, "Wastrels of time" 163). With this, Schoonover notes that alternate forms of living remain unfigurable in mainstream film ("Wastrels of time" 163). As such, this further plays into the Jefe's allegorical portrayal by not developing the Jefe's life outside of being a drug lord. The Jefe is shown throughout the film being escorted by armed narcos while giving orders, especially orders to kill, and is seen enjoying themself at the party. Although they help Huck to the raft in the river at the end of the film, they then instruct her on how to use a gun before going to sleep. The slower-cinema style invites the audience to question the Jefe's actions as a drug lord which seems to overshadow the Jefe's independent development as a nonbinary character. This slower-cinema aesthetic also allows the spectator to look longer than usual at those scenes that destabilize established social orders (Schoonover, "Wastrels of time" 161). The aesthetic allows the audience to further consider and contemplate elements of the film and allows for a questioning of the Jefe's portrayal primarily as a drug lord as the film gives little time for the Jefe's identity to be revealed and developed outside of their drug lord persona. The emphasis of offscreen violence allows the audience to interrogate the relationship more readily among violence and structures of power as well as "necroliberalism" which David Dalton defines as "un mercado que monetiza la muerte y el sufrimiento de los seres humanos" ("El consume de la muerte" 7).

The film heavily focuses on violence, especially violence against women which creates the association of drug trafficking with lawlessness and scarcity. The narcos fuel Rogelio's excessive drug usage while also using excessive violence to maintain control. This develops the violent masculinity that has led to the feminicide and desolate drug-addicted society. This negative association lends itself to criticisms of the illicit drug trade and the various associations

with drug trafficking within the film. The disappearance of women represents the clearest ties to the dystopian genre in the film. Indeed, contemporary Mexican thinkers like Sayak Valencia have referred to contemporary cases of gender violence as manifestations of a "gore-capitalist" dystopian reality that has plagued Mexico since at least the advent of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) (22-23). The film thus focuses on using the role of nonheteronormative performativity in producing a dystopian reality through Huck and the Jefe each having to suppress and manipulate their gender expression to survive. Given the significant violence against women, Huck alienates herself from her cis-female identity by masquerading as a boy to disguise her gender and avoid a similarly violent death to that of her mother (Dalton, *Robo Sacer* 172). As such, the Jefe, and at times Huck, each wear masks to create further gender ambivalence.

Hernández Cordón discussed in an interview with Carlos Belmonte Grey that he likes putting girls into a unisex style and making them do what boys do while also highlighting their lack of fragility (106). This aesthetic is developed in *Cómprame un revólver* through Huck but in a problematic way as Huck is forced into a unisex style so that her gender appears ambivalent for survival. Furthermore, the film follows a "cisgenderist paradigm" through its portrayal of Huck as she is forced to practice misgendering when she dresses like a boy to protect herself against sexual violence and feminicide (Dalton, *Robo Sacer* 172). Michaela Rogers defines a cisgenderist paradigm as promoting "the belief that all people are expected to identify within the confines of the gender binary; subsequently, people are judged and accepted on whether they do or do not comply" (2190). The forced misgendering of Huck demonstrates the cisgenderist paradigm while at the same time emphasizing the abuse that she must face due to her gender. As such, Huck imitates the dominant gender of men for survival and is able to implicate and be

implicated by the regimes of power (Butler 125). Huck finds that she has no power and agency as a girl and that she is also more at risk of being killed whereby as a boy her power and agency is portrayed by having a better chance of survival in the dystopian future. While her male friends have undergone violence, for example, this has generally been retribution for stealing and other acts. No characters have tried to kill them specifically due to their gender.

In addition, the film perpetuates the idea that femininity and fragility are closely associated, while adult masculinity and power are closely associated. As such, women must abandon femininity to be powerful. This plays into Judith Butler's ideas of imitation, whereby cis-hetero identities are constantly imitating their own idealizations which are focused on hegemonic masculine identities (125). Butler also explains that discrete genders are part of what humanizes individuals. Those who fail to perform their gender "appropriately" are regularly punished (141). Huck is dehumanized through her misgendering as her discrete gender is not able to be shown until the end of the film. What is more, the film punishes the Jefe for their association with the narco violence and feminicide which criticizes their suppression of their nonbinary identity. Hernández Cordón's representation of gender does not allow characters to perform outside of masculine domination nor does it rupture binary conceptions of gender despite the Jefe's nonbinary nature. According to Vek Lewis, trans identities and cross-dressing identities have been "allegorized to symbolize corruption and contradiction in the sociopolitical order" (10). We see this in *Cómprame un revólver* as Hernández Cordón uses cross dressing and the nonbinary identity of the Jefe to allegorize the problems with the Mexican State and drug cartels while also denouncing and bringing attention to violence against women. He uses Huck's cross dressing as a symbol of gender violence but simultaneously creates more problematic

gender abuse through forcing her into an identity she does not belong to and instead shows the isolation that results from her lack of femininity as she forcibly embraces masculinity.

Alongside gender violence, *Cómprame un revólver* contains violence that is characteristic of narco portrayals in film. It reflects the drug trade's violent ways in gaining agency in society. Narcos frequently use violence to send messages to the public, police, government, and rival narco cartels (Lantz 264). This messaging uses fear, which then causes a paralysis of action that allows control and power to be established and then used to dominate people and regions (Lantz 264). The film suggests that people can only achieve agency through violence (Dalton, *Robo Sacer* 176). That said, this violence tends to promote masculine domination in public spaces. In the film, the cartel uses violence to maintain control over the region through an aggressive campaign of feminicide and by killing any men who stand in the way of their absolute control. This use of violence exhibits an imaginary of masculine control within the Mexican drug trade. It is no mistake that the Jefe never performs their nonbinary subjectivity in public; indeed, they always appear wearing a mask. They must embody masculinity and power if they wish to inspire—or frighten—others enough to follow them. O. Hugo Benavides notes that Latin American films tend to showcase the patriarchal component of violence because it is the easiest to criticize; nevertheless, this strategy leads to films with limiting possibilities for anyone who is not cisgender and male (125).

As the title suggests, guns play a large role both in maintaining and in challenging the status quo. Sophie Esch refers to firearms as "protheses of citizenship" because they can give marginalized actors a voice they would otherwise lack (17). The characters in the film participate in direct violence with guns to be seen and heard. Esch underscores the highly patriarchal nature of guns when she points out that they are "deeply tied to gender" and "extreme masculinity can

emerge" based on the ideals of a "dominating and ruthless male figure" (22). The gun represents agency and control in society which is also used as phallic symbolism representative of violent masculinity (Esch 181). The Jefe imitates these male gender norms with the gun, which they use to impose dominion throughout their territory. Of course, the film also emphasizes the fact that any claims to legitimacy that are predicated on violence will always be vulnerable to other, new cases of violence in the future. We see this clearly when a group of armed attackers—we never learn if they are state actors or a rival cartel—opens fire on the partygoers at the Jefe's birthday party. This act of violence shows how other people use violence to obtain agency over other violent entities which directly reflects the ongoing battle between governments and the narcos. This scene shows the destruction caused by narco violence by focusing on the various power struggles that occur between cartels and perhaps with the government as well. This power struggle catches innocent people—such as Rogelio and his band, who only have attended the event after being threatened with death—in the crossfire. This scene thus underscores the fact that both the government and the drug cartels display an inherent lack of interest in protecting everyday people caught in the middle of this fight for power and control (Dalton, "Narcocorrido" 81). Indeed, this precise dynamic has fueled significant distrust among many Mexicans for the government itself as it attempts to curtail the activities of drug traffickers throughout the country.

In the beginning of the film, Huck says "todo lo que se encuentra en esta película es real. La suerte es real, y hay hombres con suerte. Y estos hombres les heredan su suerte a sus hijas y ellas a sus hijas o a sus hijos… Estoy segura de que mi papá tiene suerte. O si no, ¿cómo sobreviviría un lugar bronco?" This ushers in Hernández Cordón's magical realism, which reflects a violent order where dominance and resistance are both articulated through a logic of violence (Dalton, *Robo Sacer* 174-75). Huck talks about luck at various points in the film and

uses her mom's tooth as a symbol of luck as well as her dad possessing luck to pass on to her. In Huck's emphasis of how luck is passed from parent to child, luck can thus be associated with heterosexuality. Juan-José Sánchez-Soriano and Leonarda García-Jiménez observe that films have used luck as a trope for heterosexuality whereby sexual diversity is associated with tragedy and trauma (104). The lucky tooth can also be read as Lee Edelman's "reproductive futurism"; the hereditary rights of luck are conceived and passed down in a heterosexual context (2-3). This is how Huck can embody the luck from her mother's tooth after inheriting luck from her father. The tooth proves lucky as Huck survives the Jefe's party massacre and finds Angel's arm once she discovers the tooth in her pocket. This luck can also be attributed to the various opportunities and barriers associated with gender. For example, Huck is trying to inherit the luck from her father, which seems to suggest that her development is ultimately predicated on her ability to attain characteristics typically attributed to men (Held 79). Through luck, Huck is given a character development that prioritizes the need for her to replicate certain domineering characteristics associated with masculinity. Huck's luck is only obtained after Rogelio is captured by the narcos towards the end of the film. This scene shows the direct inheritance of luck and reproductive futurity represented by luck. This casts marginalized subjects as hopeless in a dystopian world which negates any sense of marginalized belonging (Muñoz 97-99).

The Jefe

Huck's cis-hetero luck continues to serve her while she is placed in direct opposition to the Jefe in the scenes following the massacre. This proves especially problematic as it serves to criminalize transness by reinforcing the gender contradictions in the Jefe's character. This contradiction is highlighted further during the Jefe's and Huck's escape on a raft down a river

following the party. The Jefe tells Huck "a veces me gusta ser hombre y a veces me gusta ser mujer," which brings into question the masculine portrayal of the Jefe prior to this point as well as the Jefe's involvement and leadership in the ongoing feminicidal violence. The Jefe's power before Huck becomes inversely related to the girl's perception of the drug lord's masculinity. This slow loss of agency asserts that queer people must seek different strategies to achieve sexual citizenship.[34] Even as the strongest narco in this area, the Jefe's citizenship ties remain predicated on an assumed masculinity that becomes especially necessary in the context of a dystopian Mexico overrun by feminicide. To maintain control, the Jefe has concealed their true gender identity from their subordinates. As a result, the Jefe has been forced to suppress their own gender identity if they wish to maintain control. The Jefe represents a dichotomy of male and female, and the male side wins out in large part by perpetuating the oppression of women. As Robert McKee Irwin argues, patriarchal masculinity is associated with the impulse to pose as masculine and assert masculinity at the expense of a rival's masculinity (193). This would suggest that the Jefe poses as masculine despite their nonbinary identity precisely to maintain their power. Writing during the mid-twentieth century, Octavio Paz asserted that "el ideal de la 'hombría' consiste en no 'rajarse' nunca" (26). This same problematic ideal of masculinity appears to be at play with the performance of the Jefe, who needs to invoke a masculine imagery if they wish to remain in control of this narco society.

Indeed, the film combines the Jefe's loss of agency with their loss of masculinity, and this vulnerability ultimately culminates with their death at the hand of Huck. This perpetuates the anti-trans imaginary that associates the trans community with deviant and criminal activity (Irwin 97). The killing of the Jefe after revealing their nonbinary identity to Huck reinforces

[34] For a discussion on sexual citizenship see Ruby Grant and David Evans

their allegorical portrayal as they are killed and criminalized for their violent acts and drug trafficking association in the film. The film creates what Arturo J. Aldama and Frederick Luis Aldama call a "hierarchy of masculinity" that places cis-hetero, hypermasculine men at the top and queer men at the bottom in a way that perpetuates cis-hetero-male privilege through queerphobia and misogyny (140). The film places queer subjectivity opposite cis-hetero subjectivity with the Jefe as they relinquish their cis-hetero-male privilege after divulging their gender identity to Huck. This, in turn, relegates the Jefe to a lower and less privileged spot than Huck on the hierarchy, especially after the Jefe teaches Huck to use a gun and hands her the weapon while they sleep and as such hands their violent masculinity to Huck.

Given the nature of my discussion, it is of special importance that Huck's male friends encourage her to kill the Jefe and that the film ends when she swims to them and joins their group. She relies on the boys' help to survive in the desolate landscape dominated by masculine violence. Furthermore, this reiterates the gender hierarchy that asserts masculine violence and the replication of such violence to maintain agency over other subjectivities. However, Huck had found Angel's arm at the party and was carrying it with her to return to him. As Dalton notes, Angel's arm amputation alienated a part of himself (*Robo Sacer* 169). As such, Angel's amputated arm has excluded him from the ability to obtain agency through violence. In his retrieval of his arm, he bridges in part the gap between himself and his severed arm. The Jefe cut Angel's arm off prior to the beginning of the film which shows the Jefe's total control, agency, and violent masculinity that Angel did not possess. This allowed for Angel to be portrayed outside of the violent masculinity that dominated the film and given the potential for queer gender associations. However, when Huck finds Angel's arm in a cooler it begins to give Angel part of his agency back as he regains control over his body. This does not change his position

within the hierarchy of masculine violence as this has left him permanently marked and relegated him to a subordinate position within the hierarchy much in the same way that the Jefe was permanently marked by their nonbinary identity. Huck's reliance on boys and men demonstrates what Virginia Held refers to as the institutionalized dependence of women on men for protection against male assault which gives women reasons to seek male approval (83). Huck is ultimately the one to pull the trigger to kill the Jefe, but she does this believing she is protecting her friends who are urging her to kill the Jefe as he is the one who relegated Angel to his subordinate position. The boys befriend Huck and include her, but the film constantly places Huck around men or in a group of men for her to survive. The film ends with Huck and her friends working on a revenge plan which casts Huck as relying on another group of boys/men for survival. Viewed in this light, while the film criticizes the drug trade's violence, it does little to address the gender hierarchy that the film continues to perpetuate in Huck's survival.

In placing a cis, heterosexual girl against a nonbinary narco, the film allegorically enforces the concepts of "purplewashing"—or the process of using feminist struggles to legitimize exclusionary policies and acts against other, even more marginalized populations (Valencia, "El transfeminismo" 32). The film wants you to believe there is support of strong and independent women in society by allowing Huck to survive and kill the "bad guy" (Sánchez-Soriano and García-Jiménez 97-98). The film wants to portray an empowering feminine character with Huck, but it ultimately reinforces the types of gender and sexual divisions upon which the patriarchy depends to continue to exist. As a result, Valencia's transfeminist utopia has no chance to take root and a dystopian reality takes its place (*Gore Capitalism* 109). The film also uses "queerbaiting" by making a character a member of the LGBTQ community, but then proceeding to undermine queer agency by associating the sexual and gender diversity with

tragedy and violence (Sánchez-Soriano and García-Jiménez 104-105). This juxtaposition of sexualities and genders helps to further reinforce and support a heteronormative social order through its depictions of violence and its use of slower cinema techniques that draw attention to the dynamics of gender and sexuality.

Conclusion

The social hierarchy and gender dynamics that are presented and explored through the lens of slower cinema in the film perpetuate the tendency that everyone should strive for masculine privilege (Hind 42). This privilege is revealed in the way the Jefe prioritizes masculine aesthetics to survive the dystopian society that has attacked women. The Jefe embodies "marginalized masculinity" as they are part of the subordinated social class with their queer identity, but their use of violence works to legitimize themself within the constraints of hegemonic masculinity (Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* 100). The violence seen in the film shows how violence is presented as an integral part of masculinity and is used to gain male privilege while also viewing dissidence as dystopian (Hind 126 and Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* 100). Rogelio is also part of the "marginalized masculinity." However, we see him suffer more within the dystopian context because of his dissidence with concealing Huck's gender and protecting her. This dissidence is viewed as a form of violence towards the hegemonic structures while also creating layers of dystopian contexts in the film (Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* 100). The Jefe is a leader in violence in the film which helps to characterize their masculine identity. Huck is a victim of violence and violent circumstances that set her apart from men. However, Huck becomes a curator of the male heritage[35] as she uses violence to gain agency. Violence comes to

[35] For further discussion on male heritage see Hind (140)

signify the preservation of masculine identities and is used to reinforce a social hierarchy that promotes cis heteronormativity.

The film recognizes the horrors of violence that drug trafficking causes in society and reflects those horrors throughout. The depiction of what Dalton calls “quotidian violence” shows a context of narco violence and state corruption “where acts of cruelty have become mundane due to their everyday nature” (*Robo Sacer* 167; Bunker and Cruz 714). The violence and dystopian landscape show the corruption in the Mexican state and policies which has led to rampant criminality. This has led to a link in “la legitimidad masculina con el poder adquisitivo” by using violence (Valencia, “Teoría transfeminista” 71). This masculine legitimacy through violence is depicted in the film through the Jefe’s use of violence to control the cartel and establish dominance publicly as a man while also identifying privately as both man and woman. The film criticizes the need for masculine legitimacy through violence and the use of violence to gain control while also establishing that women must gain control in society by imitating masculine actions. This reflects the demands on women to prove themselves to a male gaze and perspective prior to being considered legitimate. The daily violence and corruption that is shown in the film shows the link to masculine legitimacy and power, thus further revealing the patriarchal hegemonies that the portrayals of the illicit drug trade have helped to perpetuate.

Conclusion

In the study, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society*, Ruth Levitas argues that "Dystopia displays the darkness of the lived moment, the difficulty of finding a way out of a totalizing system" (110). The works discussed in this thesis validate her assertion by underscoring the violence that continues to be meted out upon LGBTQ—and particularly trans and nonbinary—individuals both in Mexico and the Dominican Republic. At the same time, these Latin American dystopian fictions also push back on her claim because, far from simply reproducing the violence of contemporary society, they also imagine strategies through which their trans and nonbinary characters can live fulfilling and authentic lives in the face of oppression. In both of these fictions, the development of queer subjectivity proves integral to the story. The different iterations of trans and nonbinary subjectivities in *Cómprame un revólver* and *La mucama de Omicunlé* further highlight that there are numerous ways to advocate for (or hinder) trans and LGBTQ subjectivities through literature, cinema, and art more generally. As discussed in Chapter Two, Hernández Cordón's film engages, perhaps inadvertently, in a problematic discourse that creates an allegorical nonbinary portrayal associated with lawlessness and violence. At the same time, as I showed in Chapter One, Rita Indiana's novel employs a type of decolonial, queer discourse. As I have demonstrated, it is precisely these differences that makes a comparison of these works so compelling. Viewed together they show the potential and the dangers of using the dystopian genre to approach queer subjectivities and resistance in Latin America.

Cyborg theory provides a valuable insight into each of the cultural productions discussed in this thesis. Indeed, in both works, Haraway's theorizations help to tease out the relationships between queer subjectivity and technology—both modern and futuristic—and how this can aid in

resisting the heteronormative hierarchies that so frequently surround questions of sexual identity. The cyborgian figures in both works challenge gender ideologies that insist on gender binaries that only recognize the existence of cis men and cis women, but they do so in very different ways. *La mucama de Omicunlé* dialogues with cyborg theory through its depiction of Rainbow Bright on the one hand, while also showcasing the productive and independently developed character of a trans protagonist in living an authentic, meaningful life on the other. As such, the queer character is not given an allegorical portrayal where their actions stand for an overarching message that does not allow them to become a fully developed and independent character within the plotline who is productive for their own character. In *Cómprame un revólver*, however, the most visible cyborgs are gun-toting narcos—and, eventually, even Huck herself—who view their weapons as "prostheses for citizenship" (Esch 21). These two different representations of cyborg subjectivity show how different actors can use technology to uplift or oppress queer individuals in a dystopian setting, or even in real life.

One of the most important reasons for cyborg theory's ability to engage questions of gender identity and decoloniality is its necessarily hybrid nature. Cyborgs are, after all, hybrid entities that fuse the organic with metal (Gray 2; Haraway 151) According to Homi K. Bhabha, hybridity and hybridization refer to those cultural engagements where the hegemonic and the subaltern come into contact and produce an in-between temporality (3, 19). This in-between temporality results in an interconnectedness of the hegemonic and the subaltern that allows for power structures to be questioned and to rethink the connections between power and culture. The anthropologist Nestor García Canclini refers to precisely this idea in his book *Hybrid Cultures* (260-61). The process of hybridization makes evident the binarisms that exist within society and separate the subaltern from the hegemony (García Canclini 259). This hybridization is what

helps to disrupt hierarchies; indeed, the existence of a hybrid entity necessarily challenges rigid hierarchies that demand division. Viewed in this light, hybridity creates resistant subjectivities that challenge hegemonic ideas not only within dystopian fictions but likely in the real world as well. We see hybridities clearly developed in *La mucama de Omicunlé* as the Taino culture, Yoruba spirituality, and queer subjectivities come together to resist hegemonic power structures and build a path toward survival in this dystopian version of Dominican society.

As my discussion shows, another key concept that I have discussed throughout this thesis has been that of decoloniality. Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh describe decoloniality as a method for unlearning the westernization and universalization of the production of knowledge. In addition, decoloniality seeks a way past modernity and questions what would come after modernity or, as these fictions have suggested, in an alternative modernity (4). In a decolonial context, knowledge can be produced and evaluated through a lens that considers individual experiences and perspectives, especially those experiences and perspectives that have previously been marginalized. Decoloniality works to create new areas of thought rather than to dismantle current areas of thought. As a result, it transcends the Western and universal ideas imposed upon Latin America and instead attempts to showcase autochthonous discourses and ideals that may challenge the beliefs of hegemony (Mignolo and Walsh 7). The dystopias that I have discussed in this thesis engage with decoloniality to illustrate other modes of being. Given the demands of the dystopian genre, these works also build on notions of futurity to subvert the hegemonic power structures. *Cómprame un revólver* does not reach the level of decoloniality that *La mucama de Omicunlé* reaches. Nevertheless, the film does criticize the power structures related to drug trafficking and the weak state involvement that has allowed drug trafficking to become prolific in the early twenty-first century. *La mucama de Omicunlé* employs a decolonial mode through its

representations of hybridities and heterotopias that create spaces for queer subjectivities throughout the novel.

There is a strong tradition of Latin American literature and cinema that narrates fictional stories of resistance against colonization, Westernization, oppressive regimes, neoliberal capitalism, and any hegemonic structure and repressive hierarchy. Dystopian fictions from the region warn against these structures of power by imagining cases of suffering and injustice in the future that could potentially result from the power structures that exist in the present. The combination of gender and sexuality studies with the dystopian genre allows for the exploration of queer theory and decolonial theory in the analysis of resistance narratives created in these dystopian works. Both works that I have discussed show the problematic portrayals of hierarchies of gender and sexuality while also developing hybridities that engage with queer agency to disrupt the Westernized ideologies that perpetuate heteronormativity and gender binarisms.

In queer dystopias, there is the allegorical queer portrayal and the decolonized queer portrayal. In allegorical works, portrayals of queer genders and sexualities are used as subjectivities of inclusivity where subtle challenges to cis-heteronormative conceptions occur without disrupting the gender binaries and hierarchies that control society. In this way, they are often more aesthetic than transformational, and they tend to leave contemporary modes of oppression intact. This causes serious questions for the reader of such works: dystopian fictions that do not aim to disrupt these constructs create a paradox of exclusionary inclusivity where queer characters are used to combat other discourses rather than those that most affect their own communities. Decolonized portrayals stand in direct contrast to the allegorical mode. In decolonized queer portrayals, dystopian fictions engage an array of hybridities to promote queer

agency and combat those colonizing ideologies that uphold cis-heteronormative structures that insist on tidy gender binaries in contemporary society. Viewed in this light, decolonized queer portrayals use queer characters to not only combat colonizing and cis-heteronormative discourses but also to create new decolonized discourses and modes of being. Beyond reacting against an oppressive force, they strive to create a new, more inclusive order that will permit them to lead authentic lives.

Despite the varying portrayals of queer characters, the dystopian genre allows for alternative views of reality that construct new modes of being. The fictions discussed in this thesis use this to criticize oppressive social structures in their respective countries. As I have shown throughout this thesis, queer dystopias tend to criticize oppressive structures through the engagement of hybridity. We see this clearly through the various cyborg subjectivities found within these works. Transfeminism and cyborg subjectivity both work to criticize hierarchies of gender and sexuality (Valencia, *Gore Capitalism* 262-80). In addition, transfeminism subverts violent masculinities that work to maintain control over gender identities. Latin American queer dystopias thus work to create alternative modes of being that disrupt the linear path toward Westernized modernity and allow for queer resistance narratives to be developed. In most cases, these futuristic cultural productions reflect present-day referents in which LGBTQ people face an array of discriminations. Although not all cultural productions succeed in depicting a fully decolonial, queer subjectivity it is important to note that there is an increase in visibility and inclusion of queer subjectivities in Latin American cultural productions.

In this thesis, I limited myself to discussions of a Dominican novel and a Mexican film. Nevertheless, we should note that queer dystopias are common in twenty-first-century literary and cultural productions throughout Latin America. Indeed, further research could speak to

representations of transness from an array of dystopian fictions throughout the region. Such a study would shed further light on the liberatory potential (or not) of queer dystopias as they negotiate the place of LGBTQ—and particularly trans—people in Latin America. An important film that would extend our discussion is Alejandro Brugués's post-apocalyptic Cuban zombie film, *Juan de los muertos* (2011), which imagines postcolonial zombies on the one hand while also reproducing problematic discourses surrounding transness and homosexuality on the other. Another very important contribution to the discussion would come in the form of Nicanor Loreti's *Kryptonita* (2015), a movie that was based on Leonardo Oyola's novel of the same name. The film follows a ragtag team of street-level superheroes based on DC Comics's Justice League but based in the streets of Buenos Aires. Unlike their US counterparts, however, these heroes have a trans Wonder Woman named Lady Di who is problematically played by the cisgender, male actor Lautaro Delgado. Lady Di's character opens a space for emancipatory representations of transness on the one hand, but on the other hand she blurs distinctions between drag and transness. What is more, she plays into stereotypical attitudes that associate trans women with an unbridled sexuality. Moving beyond Spanish America, one could turn to *Super Drags*, a Brazilian animated series geared toward adults that also has a dystopian element to it (Venkatesh, *Capitán Latinoamérica* 214-15). In discussing this series, we could gauge how discourses of transness have registered in the Portuguese-speaking, Brazilian context. Clearly, all of the cultural productions I have mentioned here would offer valuable contributions to the questions I have encountered throughout this project.

Ultimately, however, this thesis has considered a novel from the Dominican Republic and a film from Mexico. While my study has not been nearly as broad as it could have been, it has shown a certain diversity of thought in Latin America. These cultural productions come from

two very different countries with distinctive cultures; nevertheless, they also reflect many similarities. Both were released after 2010, and both take a pointed interest in LGBTQ and specifically trans subjectivities. As a result, it is valuable to read these texts alongside one another because they show how different countries throughout the region have engaged queer themes, and specifically trans and nonbinary identities.

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