

Reparation as transformation: Radical literary (re)imaginings of futurities through decolonial love

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Abstract

This article examines how Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) and Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng's *Matinga: sangre en la selva* (2013) engage theories of reparations and futurities through practices of decolonial love. Through these readings I map how Díaz and Bacheng imagine and (re)imagine reparations in Afro-diasporic/Afro-exilic and decolonial contexts. The dialogue on reparations draws on the work of Robin Kelley and discussions of decolonial love draws on the work of Chela Sandoval, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Junot Díaz. In Díaz's *Oscar Wao* I examine reparations and decolonial love in relation to the psychological and psychosocial legacy of slavery and the colonality-of-power and gender. Mbomio Bacheng's novel *Matinga*, links the future of Equatorial Guinea to past political and activist struggles while making *Matinga*'s blood a crucial part of the reparations that would lead to a more loving future. Critical insights from Indigenous Feminisms enrich the analysis of *Matinga*. The article highlights two distinct ways that these Afro-Latinx and Afro-Hispanic writers conceive of reparations beyond the material and toward a philosophy of decolonial love.

Keywords: *decolonial love; reparations; Equatorial Guinea; Afro Latinx; Junot Díaz; futurities*

Introduction

And that is my reason for living. The future must be a construction supported by man in the present. This future edifice is linked to the present insofar as I consider the present to be something to be overtaken. (Fanon, 1952, p. xvii)

In 2013, the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) established National Committees on Reparations and a Reparations Commission in order to “establish the moral, ethical and legal case for the payment of reparations by the former colonial European countries, to the nations and peoples of the Caribbean Community, for native genocide, the transatlantic slave trade and a racialized system of chattel slavery.”¹ Citing the crimes against humanity that disenfranchised both the victims and the descendants of colonial genocide and slavery, the Commission brought forth a lawsuit against the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, and France in order to begin a “reparatory dialogue to address the living legacies of these crimes.”² Demands like these for reparations are part of a long history of marginalized peoples wrestling with the aftermath of imperial violence, slavery, and degradation. At its center, the CARICOM lawsuit underscores what theories of decoloniality have long emphasized: that the ideological structures, orders, and legacies of colonialism subsist even after colonial administrations ceased to exist in full.³ Aníbal Quijano (2000) calls these structuring processes the “coloniality-of-power” and this concept is central to the ways in which I analyze the struggles for reparations in the modern/colonial world. The quotation from Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* that prefaces this essay is part of his meditation on anti-colonial struggles and what he calls “a double process” of inferiority (xiv).⁴ For Fanon, the anti-colonial struggle must be waged on two levels: the objective and subjective, or the colonial administration and ideology. Proof of the need for this dual struggle can be seen in the failure of the political decolonization projects that reached their apex in the 1950’s and

¹ CARICOM member states include: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago. Press release 285/2013 (10 December 2013) CARICOM Reparations Commission Press Statement Delivered by Professor Sir Hilary Beckles (Chairman) on behalf of the CARICOM Reparations Commission Press Conference Regional Headquarters, UWI 10th December 2013 (accessed 11/9/14 http://caricom.org/jsp/pressreleases/press_releases_2013/pres285_13.jsp).

² The CARICOM suit also includes other slave-owning nations of Europe including Spain, Portugal, Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

³ Here I am referring to the genealogy of decoloniality, for which the modern/colonial world begins in the 15th century, and which contends that coloniality is “the continuity of colonial forms of domination after the end of colonial administrations” (Grosfoguel, 2002, p. 205). The coloniality-of-power also “brings together race and capital” to form new relations of power (Maldonado-Torres, 2006, p. 233). Please also see: Anzaldúa, 1987; Quijano, 1992, 1998, 2000; Mignolo, 2000; Grosfoguel, 2003; Maldonado-Torres, 2008, 2012; Mendez, 2014. This temporal scope is not representative of all decolonial thought.

⁴ Though Fanon is speaking to anti-colonial realities of the mid-twentieth century, his relevance is further manifest after the failed political decolonization projects in the 1950’s and 1960’s. Advancing Fanonian thought in the context of theories of decoloniality (emphasis mine) crystalizes its significance outside of his temporal moment.

1960's, projects that largely focused on transforming colonial administration. Similarly, in the context of decoloniality, reparations must contend with past evils and the current social and political injustices that stem from those evils. Any reparation that does not transform or attempt to dismantle coloniality is a failed reparation.

I contend that literary narratives offer discursive spaces through which to imagine and reimagine the possibilities of decolonial reparations as amends that are both material and immaterial.⁵ This piece is a meditation on how an exilic Equatoguinean and an Afro-Dominican text engage with ideas of reparations and futurities as decolonial love.⁶ I first look at theories of decolonial love and reparation as a frameworks for engaging the texts and propose that at the center of a decolonial reparation is decolonial love. I then analyze how Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng's *Matinga: Sangre en la selva*, imagine and reimagine the future through a decolonial love politic that posits a reparation of the self and a reconciliation of community as integral parts of imagining decolonial futurities.

Decolonial love as politic

My interpretation of decolonial love draws from the work of Chela Sandoval (2003), Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2008), and Junot Díaz (2012). For Sandoval, decolonial love demands a recognition of humanity and affinity across difference, learning to see faithfully from multiple points of view which, I argue, requires a decolonial attitude.⁷ Central to imagining a radical repair/reparation in the modern/colonial world, or a decolonial reparation, is the concept of decolonial love.

Decolonial love, Sandoval (2003) argues, is a technology for social and political transformation, which is achieved through “a shared practice of hermeneutics of love in the postmodern world” (p. 4). This struggle is in turn fueled by the “decolonial praxis of love,” what Sandoval defines as an “attraction [...] and relation carved out of and in spite of difference” (p. 187).⁸ Sandoval argues that U.S. third world feminism represents the creation of a theoretical/methodological approach “that clears the way for new modes of conceptualizing social movement, identity, and difference” (p. 414). Similarly, Maldonado-Torres' (2008)

⁵ See: Tuhiwai Smith (1999); Boxill (2011); Chin (2013).

⁶ The framework of this paper understands the extensive work and influence of Afro-futurism as a way of imagining Blackness, Afro-futurities, fictive futures, reparations, and imaginative spaces for liberation. Though I do not engage Afro-futurism here, my forthcoming work makes connections with Afro and Black futurist works.

⁷ The decolonial attitude is a subjective disposition toward knowledge which sustains a “new ethics beyond coloniality,” and is an “expression of an ethical subjectivity that defines and positions itself in a way that promotes decolonization and re-imagines human relationships” (Maldonado-Torres, 2006, p. 242).

⁸ Mignolo argues that the colonial difference is the colonial classification of the world in the modern/colonial imaginary. This system of classification “transformed differences” - for example, race - “into values” (2000, p. 13). To transform or traverse these differences/values requires a fundamental shift in human relations. One way to transform these human relations is through decolonial love, which requires the decolonial attitude.

meditation on Fanon advances the idea that the oppressed or subaltern is best understood as *damné* or condemned who, under the weight of the coloniality-of-power, has the potential to “advance the unfinished project of decolonization” (p. 244).⁹ Maldonado-Torres contends that this condemned political subject,

“cries out in horror” in the face of the [...] modern/colonial “death-world” and aspires – through the decolonial praxis of love, [...], through an ethic of the liberation of life [...], and through a decolonizing and liberatory politics inspired by the “decolonial attitude” – to create a transmodern world “in which many worlds fit” and where the global dictatorship of capital, property, and coloniality no longer reign. (p. 244)

This decolonial perspective enters to the heart of the matter, enabling the condemned political subject to struggle for liberation in the modern/colonial system while continuing to imagine other kinds of worlds and futures. Maldonado-Torres poses that this attraction, kinship, or affinity, “goes together here with non-indifference and responsibility, both of which presuppose listening to the cry of the condemned” (p. 244). This non-indifference means a willingness to take action, a kind of move that is “no longer defined by the hand-that-takes but rather by receptive generosity and what Sandoval has aptly rendered as de-colonial love” (p. 187). Sandoval and Maldonado-Torres’ radical and complex understanding of kinship and love recognizes “alliance[s] and affection across lines of difference,” be they of the body or outside the body (Maldonado-Torres, 2008, p. 187).

Decolonial love is part of what fuels the work of decolonization as a political and social project. Maldonado-Torres (2008) considers decolonial love to be, “the humanizing task of building a world in which genuine ethical relations become the norm and not the exception” (p. 244). Decolonial love is an integral part of the imagining of decolonial futurities because it imagines a world in which ethical relationships beyond coloniality are built in spite of the impositions of the colonial difference (Maldonado-Torres, 2006). Decolonial love is a practice that bears witness to the past while looking towards a transformative and reparative future by unraveling coloniality, the matrix of power that is manifested in our contemporary conceptions of power, gender, and bodies.¹⁰ Junot Díaz (2012) also speaks about witnessing or “bearing witness” as an integral part of decolonial love. The recognition of the violence of dehumanization is necessary for forging ethical relationships based on love and affinity. Bearing witness to violence, to the past, and even to the present, is central to achieving decolonial reparations.

⁹ See, also, the forthcoming Maldonado Torres, *Fanonian Meditations*.

¹⁰ See, also, Mignolo (2000), pp. 16-23.

Decolonial reparations

Contemporary Afro-diasporic and exilic literatures often (re)imagine foundational concepts such as power, gender, and bodies. This work is primarily accomplished through attention to the changes in apparatus and ideologies of power that mark the shift between the colonial and the post-colonial moment. These authors' re-imaginings of well-worn themes and tropes also include a commitment to a notion of reparation. I argue that these narratives challenge popular notions of reparations as simple acts of government policy. Instead, the texts explore the possibilities of reparations as the result of acts of interrogating the linking of bodies with violence, redefining relations across difference, and the achievement of decolonial love.

How should we conceive of the term “reparations?” What are the ways in which it has been historically deployed? The term “reparation” is derived from the Old French *reparacion* and references acts of repair or restoration. It first appears in the late 14th century as “reconciliation.”¹¹ The term stems from *reparare* (Latin), which is to restore or repair, yet the contemporary meaning of reparations as “compensation for war damaged owed by the aggressor,” can be traced to 1919 and 1921, referencing France and Germany post World War I.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines reparation as both (among others), “a healing, especially of an injury,” and “the action of making amends for a wrong or harm done by providing payment or other assistance to the wronged party; an instance of this. Also: payment or assistance given in compensation for such a wrong; an example of this.”¹² The latter definition is often the first that comes to mind when discussing reparations, especially within Indigenous and Black communities.¹³

In *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*, Robin Kelley (2003) provides a historical overview of reparations for U.S. black communities. Beginning at the end of the civil war with the promise of “no less than forty-acres,” to the political organizing of radical groups such as National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America, the Black Radical Congress, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panthers, the Black Economic Development Conference and a plethora of radical groups, Kelley poses that if we think of reparations as part of a broad strategy to radically transform society, then the ongoing struggle for reparations holds enormous promise for revitalizing movements for social justice, including redistributing wealth, creating a democratic and caring public culture, and exposing the ways

¹¹ Etymonline, s.v. “Reparation,” accessed April 1, 2014, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=reparation>.

¹² Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Reparation,” accessed February 1, 2014, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/162653?redirectedFrom=reparation#eid>.

¹³ Consider a few histories of reparations given: the United States’ reparation to Japanese Americans interred during World War II, the Canadian Apology for the Chinese Head Tax, the multiple apologies to Aboriginal and Indigenous populations (including Australia, Canada, and the United States), the German Holocaust Reparations, and the recent lawsuit brought forth by CARICOM as noted in the introduction.

capitalism and slavery produced massive inequality (p. 110). For Kelley, these movements for social justice start with a radical vision of justice and social reorganization, one that must begin with radical imaginings of what 'could be' after one recognizes what has been. Economic reparations are both ethically and morally justified, yet ending the process at monetary attainment would leave unreconciled the psychological and psychosocial effects of colonialism and the systems of dehumanization that have endured. As Staceyann Chin (2013) noted in the context of CARICOM's lawsuit, "People need an apology, they need acknowledgement of what happened, and they need the acknowledgement of how it has affected them generation after generation after generation." Material reparations, then, must go in tandem with a decolonial reparation, reparations which have a commitment to transforming both the ideologies and structures of coloniality.

The Afro-diasporic and Afro-exilic writers read here imagine reparations as part of future transformations. However, these texts are not bound by the idea of reparations as solely monetary gains or a formal apology, an official policy, or solemn promise.¹⁴ Reparations are reimagined as a redefinition of relations across difference, a recognition of structural, gendered, and intergenerational violence and a move away from its normalization. Reparations are (re)imagined as decolonial love. I pose that these conceptions of reparations are decolonial because they perforate the oft-used positivistic calculation of debts or apologies owed and instead engage in intergenerational and collective acts of love; they demand an understanding of (and an accounting for) the *longue-durée* of colonialism.

Imagining decolonial futurities

Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and Mbomio Bacheng's *Matinga: Sangre en la Selva* are novels that stage opportunities to envision reparations within and beyond the material. While each text speaks to notions of reparations and futurities, they do so in dynamically different ways. I argue that these writers imagine the future of their communities through radical (re)definitions of social and political concepts. Theories of decoloniality show how these novels reimagine reparations as a radical transformation of communities and as an attempt to repair broken societies, histories, and identities destroyed by colonialism and the coloniality-of-power.

This commitment to notions of reparations can be seen in other texts of the Afro-Latinx and Equatoguinean literary traditions including Ernest Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams* and Donato Ndongo's *El metro*. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and *Matinga: sangre en la selva*, undertake a decolonial approach to reparations by thinking beyond capitalist frameworks and focusing on the reparation of the imagination, bodies and nations wracked by violence, and of

¹⁴ For a critique on state reparations see both the essay and documentary entitled "A Sorry State" by Mitch Miyagawa (2012) where he examines his familial history and the multiple apologies they have received from the Canadian government. For an example of reparation as reconciliation at the intersection of Asian Canadian and First Nations Studies in the Pacific Northwest, note the forthcoming work by Janey M. Lew: "Towards an Ethics of Reconciliation: Reading Against Apology in *Burning Vision* and *The Kappa Child*."

communities at crossroads of liberation. I argue that they are committed to investigating and culling ways through which to practice decolonial love and (re)imagining decolonial futurities.

Imagining a stronger loving world

If decolonial reparations begin with understanding and subverting long histories, then Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* can be considered a critical text in this area. The novel's uses of multiple genres, narrators, and time-play are central in this context. This diasporic Afro-Dominican novel imagines futurities as intimately tied to the colonial and postcolonial moment. Díaz interrogates the colonality-of-power that engenders sexual and political violence and how this normalization of violence affects each generation of the Cabral and de León family in the Dominican Republic and in diaspora. Yunior, the novel's primary narrator, is also caught in this matrix of colonality. However, despite this long legacy of violence, the characters continually hope for the possibility of a different future.

Oscar Wao is a text where the protagonist incessantly imagines fantastic "futures" in his "never-to-be-completed opus" (p. 333). The novel centers on a Dominican-American anti-hero, Oscar de León, who shuffles back and forth from the urban centers of New Jersey to the post-dictatorial Dominican Republic. Through an analysis of Oscar's family history, Díaz critiques the volatile and often violent nature of postcolonial governments and their effects on national subjects on the island and in the diaspora.

The traveling curse, *fukú*, frames the novel and is associated with Columbus, the 'discovery of the Americas', and the subsequent slave trade. The *fukú* is later linked to the processes of diaspora and is reflected as, "Trujillo's payback to the pueblo that betrayed him" (p. 5). By making this link to diaspora as the final curse of a heinous dictator, Díaz highlights how the *fukú* travels from the cries of the enslaved, to the islands of the Caribbean, and beyond. *Oscar Wao* begins with the pillaging violence of the new world, the release of *fukú*, and ends with Oscar's last written words, "The beauty! The beauty" (p. 335).¹⁵ These final words, penned to Yunior while on a hideaway with his love interest Ybón, are attributed to the achievement of both love and intimacy. After pining for sex and loving relationships throughout the novel, Oscar finally has sex with Ybón, but he tells Yunior that, "what really got him was [...] the little intimacies that he'd never in his whole life anticipated" (p. 334). Achieving this kind of intimacy, though fleeting and deadly, enables Oscar to understand the profundity and possibilities of love. Oscar's writing is the point of departure for this analysis of reparation that envisions a beautiful future, in which decolonial love is key.

As a sign of Oscar's utopian imaginings, Yunior, one of the narrators, notes that Oscar - the one who had never defaced a piece of literature - circles three times the words: "a stronger loving world" in his beloved copy of the comic *Watchmen* (p. 331). Oscar is a non-normative character - for his family and for the reader. He dwells outside the norms of his family and

¹⁵ Here I note a literary reference to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), which I further develop in Yomaira C. Figueroa, *Decolonial Diasporas* (forthcoming).

community, “he had none of the Higher Powers of your typical Dominican male, [...] Had no knack for music or business or dance, no hustle no rap, no G. And most damning of all: no looks” (pp. 19-20). This lack of prowess makes Oscar an outsider both at home, where his oft-intoxicated uncle serves as a model of hypermasculinity, and in his personal and social life, where he can never embody the trappings of manhood as defined by both U.S. and Dominican standards.¹⁶

Oscar's only escape is imagining an unknown future, first through sci-fi escapism and later through writing his own narratives, a form of *zafa* or counter-spell, that he hopes will alleviate the family curse and transform the future. Oscar dedicates hours of labor to his craft, books that Yuniór pores over, and a final manuscript that is lost in the ether of the “Dominican Express” (p. 333). Through his writings he conjures a future where he finds beauty in the possibilities of love. Díaz portrays Oscar as a hopeless romantic, one that keeps the idea of love alive through writing and fantasy, and later through his relationship with Ybón. Oscar believes in love so deeply that he was willing to face death at a firing squad.

The final pages of the novel are intently focused on Oscar's writings and the possibilities therein. Yuniór lovingly stores all of Oscar's manuscripts in a refrigerator, “the best proof against fire, against earthquake, against almost anything” (p. 330). The reader discovers that Oscar has completed a science fiction “opus” which he believes will be the “cure to what ails us, the cosmos D.N.A.” (p. 333). This cosmos D.N.A. is the answer, the final *zafa* to the *fukú* that betrays the Cabral and de León family, the curse which enables violence beyond measure. The cosmos D.N.A. is decolonial love. In an interview with Paula Moya, Díaz (2012) explains that the text was meant to unravel a complex and decolonial understanding of love, “The kind of love that I was interested in, that my characters long for intuitively, is the only kind of love that could liberate them from that horrible legacy of colonial violence. I am speaking about decolonial love.” Only decolonial love could hope to liberate them from the inheritance of perpetual violence, the kind of violence that the narrators and the protagonists face in small and large ways.

The inability to confront sexual, gender, and structural violence stifles Yuniór's relationship with his girlfriend, Oscar's sister, Lola. Yuniór laments that if he could have loved himself enough, he could have confided his deepest secret and built with Lola an affinity across difference: “I'd finally try to say words that could have saved us. _____” (p. 327). These words, which are unknown to the reader, Díaz later elaborates, are “I too have been molested” (Moya, 2012) For Díaz this means that Yuniór, “couldn't bear witness to his own sexual abuse. He couldn't tell the story that would have tied him in a human way to Lola, that indeed could have saved him” (Moya, 2012). In the novel, Yuniór bears witness to prevalence of the sexual violence and the patriarchal rape culture in the Dominican Republic and in the U.S.

¹⁶ Machado Saez's reading of masculine queerness in *Oscar Wao*, indicts the narrator, Yuniór as the orchestrator of Oscar's inability to belong to the Dominican masculine mainline or the diasporic conception of maleness. It is Oscar's “sentimentality, virginity, and tears” that enable the reader to conceive him as queer, but it is also Yuniór's hyper masculinity and his hyperawareness of its tenuous claims that compel him to narrate Oscar in such hopeless ways (pp. 534-535).

yet he shies away from intimacy (and participates in the patterns of hypersexual masculinity) in his own relationships by constantly cheating on Lola and his other girlfriends (Taylor, 2015). The love that Oscar achieves with Ybón at the end of the novel is a kind of love that Yuniór could not access.¹⁷ Admitting to sexual violence, to the brokenness and dehumanization engendered by the coloniality-of-power would have undermined his performance of hypermasculinity, which in turn would have undercut his heteronormativity, the only kind of privilege available to him as a Afro-Dominican immigrant subject.

Building a loving and ethical relationship, one that would have tied him in a “human way” to Lola, would have allowed him to connect with her history of sexual violence. The reader learns early in the novel about Lola’s sexual assault at the age of eight and her mother’s resolve to negate it:

When that thing happened to me when I was eight and I finally told her what he had done, she told me to shut my mouth and stop crying, and I did exactly that, I shut my mouth and clenched my legs, and my mind, and within a year I could not have told you what that neighbor looked like, or even his name. (p. 57)

Lola’s silence-turned-denial also feeds the intergenerational reticence and resentment. Her tumultuous relationship with her mother Belicia is circumscribed by the suppression of violence and fear. A rebellious and indignant Lola can only envision showing the depths of her aching, “If I could have I would have broken the entire length of my life across her face” (p. 55). It is years later when Lola learns about her own mother’s experience with physical and sexual violence and it is only in the knowledge and recognition of Belicia’s past that she can “begin” to unravel her own experiences (p. 75).

Díaz tells Moya in their interview that the central question of the novel is about the possibilities of decolonial love, “is it possible to overcome the horrible legacy of slavery and find decolonial love? Is it possible to love one’s broken-by-the-coloniality-of-power self in another broken-by-the-coloniality-of-power person?” And, in *Oscar Wao*, the legacies of slavery and violence are seen in multiple capacities. We first encounter the voices of the enslaved during the Middle Passage, slaves that bring the cries of fukú with them. We then see the repressive post-colonial régime of Trujillo, since he “treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master” (p. 2), and later we see the post-dictatorial island replete with intimate violence wielded by the state and its agents. Belicia’s early years of servitude as a criada, “a restavek” the footnote narrative tells us, leave her with a massive scar “as vast and inconsolable as a sea” (p. 51), a mark that Harford Vargas (2014) incisively reads as akin to violence endured by slaves and to the Middle Passage (p. 16). Lola and Oscar cannot escape the perpetual violence of coloniality as they are conscripted to the self-hate induced by diaspora which “short-circuited their minds” (p.

¹⁷ Though *Oscar Wao* does not infer sexual abuse in the case of Yuniór, we read as seven year-old Yuniór in *Drown* (1996) as the victim of a sexual assault on a bus. This may or may not be the violence that Díaz attests to in his interview, but nevertheless I believe the narrative arc of Yuniór’s own history of sexual abuse.

160). Furthermore, Yunior and Oscar's dependence on notions of sex, gender conformity, and masculinity only serve to uproot and destroy them from the inside out.

Decolonial reparations as love and repair

The legacy of slavery and the brokenness engendered by colonialism and the colonality-of-power is at the very heart of the matter. Díaz poses a question of love and repair in his novel: is it possible to traverse this perpetual violence and domination through reparation of the broken self and the broken other? Yunior tells the reader that, during one of their last nights as "novios," Lola cried, "Ten million Trujillo's is all we are," meaning that it is not only Trujillo's looming presence that is to blame, but also those Dominicans who have internalized this violence and perpetuate it amongst each other (p. 324).¹⁸ The future is left seemingly uncertain by the death of the protagonist in the cane fields, an echoing of Belicia's vicious beating, at the hands of Trujillo's henchmen.

Though colonization and slavery ended, their structures remain deeply embedded in the spaces they once occupied and in the psyche of the people they dominated. The legacy of slavery, of rape, cooptation, violence, and oppression are what create the broad strokes of brokenness. Díaz attempts to unpack the self-hate and inferiority complex introduced by the colonial difference and bred by inequality and the repetition of violent patterns in the novel through the story of Oscar and his family. That the novel deals with gender and sex as central issues is of major importance. María Lugones (2003), author of *Peregrinajes/Pilgrimages*, theorizes the colonality-of-gender as the intersections of gender, sex, race as embedded in the power structures of colonialism, domination, and colonality-of-power. For Díaz, both the colonality-of-power and the colonality-of-gender are essential parts of Oscar's narrative and of the history of the Dominican Republic and of Dominicans in diaspora.

It is clear through the telling and (re)telling of these familial, national, and Dominican diasporic histories that Oscar inherits oppression, violence, pain, rape, degradation, and the curse of the fukú. His own status as a child of Dominican immigrants in the U.S. marks him doubly as racial and linguistic other and he is triply negated because of his inability to be accepted as a "real" Dominican man. Though Oscar is continuously and obsessively writing his opus throughout the text, for the reader the content of Oscar's writing remains unknown. We do not have access to its plots, characters, or narrative arcs. However, by the end, we know that Oscar's death leaves his intellectual legacy mostly unknown. His final chapter is lost and never recovered. The text ends with Yunior anticipating that Oscar's niece Isis will hold the key to unraveling the fukú through her own readings of Oscar's papers and incomplete opus.

In this way, Oscar's imaginings are saved for the next generation. Oscar's idea of reparation is immaterial, or never materializes. Yet, somehow it is transformative for his contemporaries and holds promise for future generations. Oscar's hope for a stronger loving

¹⁸ Harford Vargas (2014) makes a similar claim in her piece "Dictating Zafa".

world is an impetus for other characters to imagine another way of living and being. Here I think about the ways in which Yuniór, a decade after Oscar's death, makes incredible changes in his life, "finally I woke up next to somebody I didn't give two shits about, my upper lip covered in coke-snot and coke-blood and I said, OK, Wao, OK. You win" (p. 325). Yuniór begins to write, "from can't see in the morning to can't see at night" (p. 326). Through reading and writing about Oscar's incomplete manuscript and his unyielding belief in love and the cosmos D.N.A., Yuniór is fueled to (re)imagine the possibilities of a life outside of patriarchal masculinity and violence, and the ability to transform himself into a new man: "Learned that from Oscar. I'm a new man, you see, a new man, a new man" (p. 326). I contend that Díaz's novel proposes a future in which being a man does not involve sexual or structural violence against women, where love and intimacy are beautiful achievements, and where decolonial love is finding the human in the dehumanized subject. This future is also hinged on Isis, Lola's young daughter, "dark and blindingly fast" who wears on a string around her neck with "three azabaches," protection from any kind of fukú (p. 329). For Yuniór, Isis is not only the daughter he never could have had with Lola, but also the key to ending the cycle of the fukú, one who will read, add to, and complete Oscar's manuscript. The practice of imagining decolonial futurities is both an imperative matter for this generation and future generations.

Futures of reparative blood

Joaquín Mbomio Bacheng's (2013) *Matinga: Sangre en la selva*, demonstrates a (re)articulation of reparations and futurities in the context of Equatoguinean struggles for liberation. This novel ties together power, gender, and bodies in a narrative that radically critiques colonial, post-colonial, and dictatorial power structures. *Matinga* tells the story of Matinga, a playera (beach or coastal peoples) Bolondo Corisqueña (Indigenous to the Equatoguinean island of Corisco but living on the island of Bolondo). She was a woman made nymph, sent forth from the world of the dead to save her people with her blood. Mbomio Bacheng's narrative is a radical retelling of Iberian Guinean history, within and beyond colonial borders, and a radical reimagining of reparations as pronatalism and as familial reconciliation. Rather than self-sacrifice this story is about the ways in which the menstrual blood of Matinga (imbued with the power of the ancestors) is seen as a fertile reparative force and as a method through which to heal and rebuild a nation in the midst of an anti-colonial and anti-dictatorial revolution.

In *Matinga*, reparations are first envisioned as anti-genocidal movements and later are reconceived as Matinga's search for a kind of collective and communal love that she has never known. In what follows, I problematize the ways in which the power and bodies of women are diminished by ideologies of compulsory pronatalism. I argue that the novel first figures Matinga as a vessel of reparations for the future of Equatorial Guinea, and then juxtaposes this narrative by presenting Matinga's agency well beyond her initial blood offerings. Matinga's reticulation of the relationship between her body and her community is a form of decolonial love that transforms the possibilities of decolonial reparations.

Mbomio Bacheng (2013) tells us that Matinga “was born where the waves die, in a narrow Guinean beach of the tropical universe, where the ocean ends and the jungle begins” (p. 9).¹⁹ This immediate apposition of life and death, “born where the waves die,” is a foreshadowing of the perilous nature of life that Mbomio Bacheng is presenting. Building the novel around this spatial and historical moment, Mbomio Bacheng paints the reader a juxtapositional portrait: jungle and fluvial natures that are living in the same historical present as the civil and political unrest of the (post)colony.²⁰ At the center of this story we see an isolated Matinga who travels every month to the littoral spaces of new communities in order to offer her menstrual blood as a token of fertility to Equatoguinean women. When she leaves the spatial beaches, the bloodstained sand is then given to the men of that community as additional tokens of fertility. Matinga’s blood is life giving, though she is unaware of the reasons why this is so and she is unable to control the fecundity of her blood and the movement of her body from island to island. The novel juxtaposes Matinga’s blood offering by the ocean waters with the bloodshed of the jungle where Equatoguineans are fighting for liberation, first from the Franco regime and later from their president turned dictator Francisco Macias Nguema. Matinga’s blood, then, is an integral part of building and replenishing the nation that is undergoing internal and external tumult.

This imagining of menstrual blood as a fertile reparative force or as a reparation of the homeland speaks to the role of women as builders of the nation. In “Affirmations of an Indigenous Feminist,” Kim Anderson (2010) considers the concept of pronatalism with respect to Indigenous women, “because we are survivors of smallpox, massacres, eugenics, enforced sterilization, residential schools, and child welfare interventions, it is not surprising that there has been some pro-natalist (i.e., encouraging women to bear children) sentiment in our communities” (p. 87). As Anderson (2010) later notes, nationalist and revolutionary groups, such as the American Indian Movement (AIM), have in the past, supported and encouraged these ideologies of women as bearers of the nation.²¹ Similarly, Mbomio Bacheng’s writing between and across two distinct continents, (Africa and Europe versus North America), walks us through this challenge as imagined from the perspective of an Iberian African nation.

¹⁹ “Nacio donde mueren las olas, en una angosta playa guineana del universo tropical, donde termina el oceano y empieza la selva. Entre tierra y mar.”

²⁰ The novel’s temporal and spatial location is at the very heart of the colonial project. Spain’s colonies in the Americas lost after the 1898 defeat in the Spanish American War meant a reassessment of its final colonies in Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa. A renewed focus on Equatorial Guinea meant that political decolonization for this continental and island nation would not occur until 1968; the very moment in which Spain was transitioning from fascism to democracy. See Michael Ugarte (2010), *Africans in Europe: The Culture of Exile and Emigration from Equatorial Guinea to Spain*.

²¹ This is also true of Black Nationalist movements, see Lauri Umansky’s (1994) “‘The Sister’s Reply’: Black Nationalist Pronatalism, Black Feminism, and the Quest for a Multiracial Women’s Movement.”

Matinga inhabits the role of an involuntary birther of an emerging state in the midst of a liberation struggle. Anderson (2010), critical of this kind of imagined role for Indigenous women, poses that feminist literature can offer insightful critiques that turn the gaze away from women's wombs and toward the confining dictates of patriarchy:

Feminist literature exposes how pro-natalist movements and ideologies related to the mothers of the nation have been common in countries worldwide during war or postwar periods and within liberation movements. Feminist history has shown just how disempowering these movements have been for the women involved, because they typically confine women to motherhood roles within the patriarchal family. (p. 87)

For Matinga the role of the fluvial token of fecundity is disempowering because she has no corporeal control over where she journeys. Furthermore, she is isolated from her family and community, and she does not know the origin of her lifeblood powers.

In the penultimate pages of the novel, we see Matinga widowed. She had a brief and fulfilling love affair with Mbele, a water nymph who in avenging the death of his brother lost his life (p. 94), and Matinga's relationship with Mbele is her first step toward fulfilling her own desires and rejecting the involuntary movements of her body. Matinga's act of self-determination is illustrated as both loving Mbele in spite of the overbearing directives of her body's movements and exercising her own freedoms by traveling where she chooses. Matinga, now pregnant, travels to the island of Bolondo to visit a curandero, or medicine man, in order to understand the source of her blood's power. There, under a trance, she learns that her father was a man named Mecheba who was "a lover of justice and of liberty" (p. 125).²² Mecheba is revealed to be a colonial era revolutionary who, in dying, bartered his newborn daughters body in order to allow his spirit to see his child for a first and final time. Mecheba chose to "allow the ancestors to use the body of his child to repopulate the spatial beaches, to alleviate the depressions caused by the colonial period, and to forestall the bloodshed that would occur after independence" (p. 126).²³ The ancestors transformed Matinga's blood into a reparative force that could offer life-giving sacraments replenishing the decimated nation. Matinga is told that she was sent to, "repopulate this country which will lose many of its sons in the bloody years that are to come as price for their independence," and that her nymph blood had, "germinated the soil of our lands. As a result of your labor, new generations have been born to extinguish the fires of tomorrow that are gestating today in our Guinean nation" (p. 124).²⁴ This news is transformative for Matinga particularly because it is knowledge that liberates her from the shackles of uncertainty.

²² "Amante de la justicia y de la libertad [...]."

²³ "Tuvo que aceptar que los ancestros utilizaran el cuerpo de su criatura para repoblar el espacio playero, para palir las bajas causadas por el periodo colonial y prever tambien el derramamiento de sangre que tendria lugar despues de la independencia."

²⁴ "Fuiste enviada por los ancestros, para repoblar este pais que va a perder a muchos de sus hijos en los anos sangrientos que se avecinan, como precio por su independencia. De pueblo en pueblo, ano tras ano, tu sangre de

Confronting dispossession

In Matinga's newfound understanding of her familial past and the nature of her powers, she is relieved of the reparative acts of her blood. The curandero tells her, "Today the spirits liberate you so you may return to the island of Corsico and join your mother. There you will care for your child whom will also be the New man of our african [sic] country that advances (there) within the seas" (p. 125).²⁵ Matinga reclaims her body as her own, free from ancestral control, and she can finally choose to imagine her future beyond the reparations her blood offers. Matinga's fertile blood and the reparative forces of her fluids were elements out of her own control - she was a vessel that provided life to others while she herself was barren, loveless, and unable to commune with neither her mother or relatives because the gravitation of her powers were too intense. The inability to control her body and her complete isolation is a problematic portrait. In relation to this limiting and controlled existence Anderson (2010) laments that, "sadly, dominance and control of women have been the classic response to nations struggling with liberation movements, war, or postwar recovery" (p. 87).

Matinga's pregnancy is also seen as the next possibility, a continuation of the struggle for liberation and reparations. If this is so, then her impending motherhood can be read as a perpetuation of the novel's pronatalist sentiment, but this time it is a choice that Matinga makes for herself.²⁶ Indigenous Feminism offers ways to think about the roles of motherhood and the maternal body in ways that counter Western feminist cynicism toward the perceived injustice of such roles. Anderson (2010) offers community and collectivity as approaches in order to think outside of the fixed subjectivities that Western liberalism offers. "If we want to embrace essential elements of womanhood that have been problematic for Western feminists (such as motherhood and the maternal body)," Anderson says, "then we have to ensure that these concepts don't get stuck in literal or patriarchal interpretations" (p. 88). Matinga leaves Bolondo and travels to her mother and her kin on the island of Corisco in order to raise her child amongst relations. Her role as mother, daughter, and community member is not constrained by nationalist ideologies, dictatorial rule, or even by the ancestors. It is this second radical reimagining of reparations (the first is woman's blood as fertile force for the nation) that results in the reformulation of familial and community relationships. This is both decolonial love and a decolonial reparation, a transformative way to repair the violence inflicted on Matinga. Matinga also confronts the colonality-of-gender when she rejects the obligation to offer her blood, which dispossess her of her own body and instead chooses human relations over structures of power.

ninfa ha germinado el suelo de nuestra tierra. Por tu labor, nuevas generaciones han nacido para apagar mañana la hoguera encendida por el drama que hoy se gesta en nuestra patria guineana."

²⁵ "Hoy te liberan los espíritus para que puedas volver a la isla junto a tu madre en Corsico. Allí cuidarás a tu criatura, que será también el Nuevo hombre de nuestro pueblo africano que avanza allende los mares."

²⁶ This agency does not free the novel of indictment, though my reading through theories of Indigenous Feminism and decoloniality overlooks the possible interpretation of this novel as analogous to Greek mythologies of the underworld.

Matinga is also a folk story that is imbued with the long and lingering histories of colonialism, post-colonial/dictatorial, and decolonial imaginings. The narrative bears fruit much like Matinga's blood: radical re-imaginings of the future are made possible through acts of love but also through a belief in the power of future generations. It is in literary (re)imaginings that the difficult process of conceiving of decolonial reparations can take flight. As author Angie Cruz (2007) muses, "Fiction is one of those last places where the world is bound between these pages, and you can sit with it for a while and imagine humanity in a completely different way" (p. 748).

Conclusion: Literature, radical thought and decolonial imaginations

Though distinct in many ways, Afro-Latinx and Afro-Hispanic populations share a history of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, and a host of other ills whose effects are still palpable. While *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and *Matinga: sangre en la selva* have different approaches to the notion of reparations, they are useful when thinking about the array of possibilities of achieving liberation and decolonization in the Afro-diasporic and exilic literary imaginaries. Díaz and Mbomio Bacheng's narratives feature protagonists living in nations under post-colonial and (post)dictatorial rule. In the case of *Oscar Wao*, coloniality, represented in Trujillo's rule, sets the stage for gendered violence and co-optation that affects multiple generations of Oscar's family. Mbomio Bacheng's narrative, *Matinga*, portrays the oppressive and genocidal rule of European colonial powers and later postcolonial dictatorships in Equatorial Guinea. Efforts of ethnic cleansing under the latter wiped out over one-third of the population, while forcing thousands into exile.²⁷ Interpreting these texts using theories of decoloniality reveals the authors' awareness of and attempts to think through the effects of coloniality-of-power and the coloniality-of-gender.

In both texts, reparations are conceived of as struggles beyond the accumulation of material gains. The texts feature characters that have hope in future generations' abilities to continue the struggle for reparations in the face of coloniality. In *Oscar Wao*, Yunior believes that Isis will eventually unlock the written imaginings of her uncle Oscar and with her own knowledge, provide the zafa to the family's fukú. In *Matinga*, the ancestors believe that Matinga's unborn child will become a leader in struggles for justice and liberation.

While both *Oscar Wao* and *Matinga* imagine reparations through a future generation, they also imagine reparations as decolonial love in the present. Matinga's choice to unite with her family and radically redefine the terms of her body is a form of decolonial love that transforms her relationship to herself, the ancestors, and her extended community. In *Oscar Wao*, the recognition of being "broken by the coloniality-of-power" is the first step in atrophying the inherent violence of colonization and moving toward a practice of decolonial love. Yunior attempts to move beyond the patriarchal heteromascularity, which prevents him from achieving

²⁷ See, Michael Ugarte, 2011; Marvin Lewis, 2007.

intimacy and building an ethical relationship with Lola, by working towards the “stronger loving world” that Oscar envisions.

These literatures are tied to a long-standing commitment of marginalized and disenfranchised peoples to work toward decolonial reparations in the modern/colonial world. The narratives speak to the longing to continually (re)imagine reparations in ways that address the injustices of the past and the current social and political inequalities that stem from those injustices. Engaging these novels in a comparative approach highlights how Díaz and Mbomio Bacheng craft different visions of what a more loving and repaired world could be. These imagined future worlds emphasize the need for reparations as a project beyond positivistic attitudes that translate historical and contemporary harms into quantifiable variables. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and *Matinga: sangre en la selva* are but two contemporary examples of Afro-diasporic and exilic literatures that imagine reparations as transformative projects beyond the scope of the material and toward a praxis of decolonial love.

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