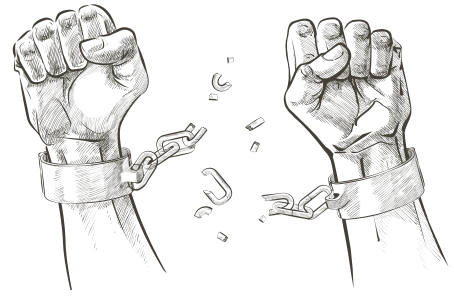




# RESEARCH PAPERS

# Redefining Freedom: Haitian Revolution

Aime Saldias



The Haitian Revolution refers to the liberation of the French colony Saint Domingue that occurred between 1791 and 1804, which resulted in the formation of the present nation of Haiti. Recognized as one of the most profitable slave colonies in the world, Saint Domingue soon became embroiled in civil wars between and among the distinct social hierarchies of the island.<sup>1</sup> In the midst of these conflicts a Black revolutionary army would be formed, led by former slave Toussaint Louverture, pushing for the same equality and freedom as declared in Paris under The Declaration of the Rights of the Man and of the Citizen to be applied to the colony.<sup>2</sup> This unique instance of liberation armies led by and made up of mainly former Black slaves succeeded in creating “the second independent state in the Americas, the first independent non-European state to be carved out of the European universal empires anywhere.”<sup>3</sup> The new Republic of Haiti would be declared in January 1804, followed by an official constitution adopted in the following year.<sup>4</sup> In an age of revolutions the question emerges about what specific characteristics of the Haitian Revolution made it stand out in the shadow of the already highly prevalent revolutions in France and the United States? In this essay, I argue that what made the Haitian Revolution distinct was its challenge to power structures based on racial hierarchies, its transmission of revolutionary ideas and economic consequences to nearby nations, and its weakening of French colonial rule. This essay will begin with an analysis of the significance of the nature of the Haitian revolution being conducted predominantly by former slaves, and how this challenged the role of race in the nation. Next, I will elaborate on the immediate effects the revolution had due to its destruction of Saint Domingue’s slave-based economy, and the impact on nearby nations through the spread of revolutionary ideals. Finally, I will present how through the revolution Saint Domingue broke away from the French colonial empire and opposed its attempts of reclamation to instead establish its own independent nation.

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<sup>1</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution*, Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005, accessed January 11, 2021, <https://hdl-handle-net.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/2027/heb.31944.1>.

<sup>2</sup> James Alexander Dun, *Dangerous Neighbours: Making the Haitian Revolution in Early America*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016, accessed January 13, 2021, DOI: <https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.9783/9780812292978.29>

<sup>3</sup> Franklin W. Knight, "The Haitian Revolution." *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 1 (2000): 105, accessed March 2, 2021, doi:10.2307/2652438.

<sup>4</sup> Robin Blackburn, "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution." *The William and Mary Quarterly, Third Series*, 63, no. 4 (2006): 647, accessed March 16, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4491574>.

The most prevalent and recognized feature of the Haitian Revolution was that it was conducted predominantly by former Black slaves. For the first time a revolution challenged the power structures of racial hierarchies by having liberation armies led by former slaves, legally abolishing slavery, and declaring all Haitians as “Black”. Primarily, the main leader of the revolution was Toussaint Louverture, a former Black slave himself. The leadership under Louverture challenged the role of slaves in the affairs of the colony by symbolically “declaring once and for all that the ideals of liberty, equality, justice, and self-determination championed by the preceding American and French revolutions belonged to all of humanity and not only to white European and American men.”<sup>5</sup> This feature is emphasized by scholars Alex Dupuy and Valentina Peguero who highlight the way the previous American and European revolutions were led predominantly by “white members of the elite”, an essential disconnect from the Haitian Revolution where instead the armies were led by Black leaders and opposed by the White landowners.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, these Black leaders would look beyond the colony and challenge the legal notion of slavery in France. Toussaint Louverture and another revolutionary commissioner in northern Saint Domingue both produced rival decrees of emancipation.<sup>7</sup> These decrees would be complemented by colonial delegates sent to France to argue the necessity of gaining the support of Black insurgents considering a looming British invasion to take control of the colony.<sup>8</sup> These pressures pushed the National Convention in Paris “to issue the decree of 16 Pluvôse An II... which abolished slavery throughout the French colonies, and indirectly recognized the role of Black insurgents in the preservation of the colony’s avoidance of foreign occupation, which will later be applied to France as well.”<sup>9</sup> This event signified the unique influence the Haitian Revolution held, where its colonial representatives were able to push forward a law that not only applied to their nation but applied to all French colonies, all while not yet being officially independent. Laurent Dubois as an essential scholar of the Haitian Revolution acknowledges that while “The revolution began as a challenge to French imperial authority by colonial whites...it soon became a battle over... the existence of slavery itself.” His analysis of the event retains a much wider viewpoint of the revolution than most scholars, with an emphasis on the ideological representation of the nation of Haiti in combatting the physical concept of slavery. Unlike the American and French revolutions which both opposed the political structure of the nations, Haiti went beyond its national borders and opposed a fundamental concept in the world which the revolution and its players were contained under and later liberated from.

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<sup>5</sup> Alex Dupuy, *Rethinking the Haitian Revolution : Slavery, Independence, and the Struggle for Recognition*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019, xix.

<sup>6</sup> Valentina Peguero, "Teaching the Haitian Revolution: Its Place in Western and Modern World History." *The History Teacher* 32, no. 1 (1998): 38, accessed March 20, 2021, doi:10.2307/494418.

<sup>7</sup> Robin Blackburn, "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution.", 646.

<sup>8</sup> Robin Blackburn, "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution.", 646.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 3.

Consequently, the remaining deep-rooted racism associated with the colony of Saint Domingue was overcome with the creation of the identity of “Haitian” for all residents of the island. Under the new designation of “Haitian” the liberated colony would give a psychological and symbolic blow to the continuing notions of racial division and White superiority in Europe and in America as all Haitians were officially denied as being “Black”.<sup>11</sup> While distinctions between “Black” and “mulatto” (of mixed race) were still present, they held “no legal force, and citizenship [was] extended to all, [including] some Poles and Germans who had defected from the French army.”<sup>12</sup> The racial designation which had previously meant that the person would always be placed beneath their White counterparts irrespective of the education or wealth they may have possessed, now became the very term referring to all people privy to the rights and privileges that came with being a Haitian citizen. The dynamics of a revolution conducted by the lowest class in the colonial social hierarchy completely overturned the state through methods not previously employed such as having an army led not by the elite class, challenging the legal notion of slavery in the colonial power, and removing the legal disadvantage of race by engraining the label of “Black” into the identity of “Haitian.”

The empowerment of the most oppressed in Haiti would be quickly acknowledged in other nations where the economic consequences and transmission of revolutionary ideas would be apparent. The revolution would present the unique ability to transcend borders and incite immediate international consequences through its destruction of the slave economy, and its fostering of a Haitian diasporic population that would inspire subsequent revolutions. Significantly, the economic consequences of the revolution were drastic as it ended the slave economy which the colony was based upon. Following the French revolution, Saint Domingue was one of the few fully functional segments of the French economy still intact, and losing this colony would be detrimental to the French Empire.<sup>13</sup> With nearly two-thirds of the empire’s foreign trade being centred upon Saint Domingue, the loss of high profit generated by slave labour with the legal abolishment of slavery in the colony would temporarily destabilize the newly formed Republic.<sup>14</sup> Eduardo Grüner and Ramsey McGlazer follow the common path of scholarly research on the revolution by focusing on the relation with France and putting the revolution in the context of causing a loss of an essential French colony, rather than the approach of the revolution inciting emergence of an independent nation. With the main author Eduardo Grüner being a sociologist, his focus on the economy of the colony needs to be seen as an analysis of a system which dictated the social interaction of slaves with the colonial leaders. Once destroyed these interactions would not only change how the former slaves went about establishing a unique self-reliant economy, but

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<sup>11</sup> Franklin W. Knight, "The Haitian Revolution.", 105.

<sup>12</sup> Robin Blackburn, "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution.", 647.

<sup>13</sup> Eduardo Grüner, and Ramsey McGlazer, *The Haitian Revolution : Capitalism, Slavery, and Counter-Modernity*, English edition, Cambridge, UK ;; Polity, 2020. 89

<sup>14</sup> Valentina Peguero, "Teaching the Haitian Revolution: Its Place in Western and Modern World History." *The History Teacher* 32, no. 1 (1998): 34, accessed March 20, 2021, doi:10.2307/494418.

also the way France would be unable to exploit the colony economically and socially. This view is contrasted by scholar David Patrick Geggus who instead concentrates on the revolution's impact on the Americas. This economic backlash would not only be felt in France but would largely impact Atlantic nations who would witness the dramatic drop in the world supply of tropical products, coupled with a subsequent stimulation of production by a new diaspora of colonists and slaves.<sup>15</sup> The economic power of Saint Domingue as a colony added a distinct feature of the revolution in the consequences it would incite upon the economic systems which were built upon it.

The new diaspora of people fleeing Saint Domingue during the revolution or leaving following the success of the revolution, not only presented a new work force but also a transmission of emerging revolutionary ideas. Evidently, the awareness of the success of the revolution in Saint Domingue would implant in the minds of other Atlantic slaves who began to act out against their slave owners as seen in the southern United States, Brazil, and Cuba.<sup>16</sup> These transmitted ideas about the possibility of a successful revolution mimicking Haiti led to a peak in the frequency of slave revolts in the 1790s, and a long-term legacy with the largest insurrections in the Americas occurring in the forty years following the original 1791 uprising in Saint Domingue.<sup>17</sup> These revolts had the noticeable participation of transplanted "free-colored" from Haiti, as well as those who took more active roles like the "black and mixed-race privateers from Saint-Domingue [who] organize[d] a revolutionary plot in Maracaibo, Venezuela, in 1799" although it was short lived.<sup>18</sup> While several of the revolutions were unsuccessful, the remaining diasporic population of Haitians would shape the local cultures and customs while keeping the idea of possible liberation alive until it would be ultimately achieved.

The way scholars present the spread of these revolutionary ideals differs in detail as well as claimed success. Scholar David Patrick Geggus provides the most in depth account of the revolution's immediate effect in the Americas. He contrasts the common scholarly focus on relations with France to instead emphasize the ideological and symbolic remnants of the revolution that would be found in the Black slave class of other Atlantic colonies. He briefly mentions Laurent DuBois who goes as far as attributing Guadeloupe's revolution from 1794-1802 to inspiration derived from the Haitian Revolution as "Guadeloupe was the only other French colony where slavery was successfully abolished."<sup>19</sup> While DuBois provides a wide scope of the revolution both in relation to Europe and Americas, his focus rests less on the specific revolutions that occurred outside Saint Domingue and more on how the Haitian Revolution presented "a crucial movement in the history of democracy" and what it meant for the struggle for human rights.<sup>20</sup> A different approach to both of these views is the one taken by Franklin W. Knight. He acknowledges the inspiration these revolutio-

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<sup>15</sup> David Patrick Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001, xiii.

<sup>16</sup> David Patrick Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, x.

<sup>17</sup> David Patrick Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, xii.

<sup>18</sup> David Patrick Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, xiii.

<sup>19</sup> David Patrick Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, xiii.

<sup>20</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 7.

nary sentiments would instill in the local populations, but he places importance onto the simultaneous belief by many of the racialized lower classes that the revolution in Saint Domingue was difficult to be duplicated. In this sentiment the knowledge that the “favorable coincidence of time, place, and circumstances that produced a Haiti failed to materialize again”, places a stronger emphasis on the uniqueness of the Haitian Revolution and is a confirmation of the way that successful revolution would continue to stand out in the legacies of several failed later attempted revolutions.<sup>21</sup> The distinct immediate repercussions of the Haitian revolution including the economic consequences to France with the destruction of the slave economy it profited off of, followed by the subsequent revolutionary attempts in other slave colonies attempting to mimic the success of Saint Domingue represents the unique impact the revolution had beyond its borders.

While the rise of revolutionary ideals in Saint Domingue would foster ties with other nations, these same ideas would sever ties between France and its most essential colonial possession. The efforts of the colony to weaken French colonial rule was seen through the successful defeat of European armies, the disruption of Napoleon’s Atlantic domination, and the creation of its own constitution as an independent state. Significantly, the international scope of the revolution beyond a colonial feud was seen in the way that for fear of the slave revolt spreading to other colonies, Britain and Spain sent troops to Saint Domingue.<sup>22</sup> Attempting to seize the colony from France while France itself attempted to reclaim it, all three states would compete for the support of Black colonial fighters to reinforce their own troops leading to fighting on all fronts between the three races.<sup>23</sup> Not only did this competition incite the French assembly to abolish slavery in the process to garner support as mentioned earlier, but all three European nations experienced over seventy thousand fatalities with a humiliating and costly defeat by the victorious revolutionary armies.<sup>24</sup> Relatively inexperienced armies made up of former Black slaves defeating the highly trained and organized European armies would especially affect the French reputation as a colonial power. Not only was the nation unable to reclaim the Atlantic colony after successive victories during the recent Napoleonic wars, but this loss of control over Saint Domingue was apparent enough to make other European powers believe they could lay claim to a formerly distinctly French possession, a huge blow to French colonial power.

Evidently, failure of controlling Haiti would cut short Napoleon’s plan of conducting French colonialism of the Atlantic. Napoleon’s ambition to expand French control would not only apply to its victories in Europe but also its overseas outposts. His plan to expand French control in the Americas would be centred around the colony of Saint Domingue both as an economic centre and a symbol of the foreign presence of France. The export of French troops under Leclerc to quickly reclaim the colony and restore slavery within the former racial order would be the start of a reconstructed plantation society.<sup>25</sup> The reclaimed colony would be supplied by the French Louisiana

<sup>21</sup> Franklin W. Knight, "The Haitian Revolution.", 114.

<sup>22</sup> Valentina Peguero, "Teaching the Haitian Revolution: Its Place in Western and Modern World History.", 34.

<sup>23</sup> Valentina Peguero, "Teaching the Haitian Revolution: Its Place in Western and Modern World History.", 34.

<sup>24</sup> David Patrick Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, xi.

<sup>25</sup> Alex Dupuy, *Rethinking the Haitian Revolution : Slavery, Independence, and the Struggle for Recognition*, 96.

territory, meant to act as a resource to ensure the efficient running of Saint Domingue.<sup>26</sup> This reliance of his colonial policy on the reclamation of Saint Domingue meant that when the European armies were defeated, Napoleon had no choice but to discard his subsequent plans for progressive Atlantic domination. The Haitian Revolution would be a significant factor in the sale of the Louisiana Territory to the United States which would strengthen the United States while simultaneously weakening French influence in North America.<sup>27</sup> Through opposing French colonial attempts in Saint Dominique, the plans for further colonial expansion would be halted making it apparent how important Saint Domingue was as a foundation to the French colonial empire in the Atlantic.

The original incentive for France to reattempt colonial domination of Saint Domingue, and the final indicator that French colonialism failed, was the establishment of the Haitian constitution. Principally, it was Toussaint Louverture, leader of the Black revolutionary army, who drew up a constitution in 1801 that recognized Saint Domingue as still part of the French Empire but subject to “special laws.”<sup>28</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte would write a letter responding to Toussaint Louverture declaring that his constitution contains articles that “are contrary to the dignity and sovereignty of the French people, of which Saint-Domingue forms only a portion.”<sup>29</sup> He would call for the constitution to be amended to properly acknowledge the French Republic as the colonial power, where failure to comply would cause the revolutionaries to “lose the many rights to recognition and the benefits of the republic, and... whose rebellion [the French] would, with difficulty, be obliged to be punished.”<sup>30</sup> This threat would not work as French armies attempting to reassert dominance of the colony would be put down by the revolutionary armies. This defeat would be supplemented with Haiti’s first official constitution which boldly offered citizenship to anyone living on the island of African or Indigenous descent, while forbidding European descendants to continue to own land, a distinct representation of anti-imperialism and testament to the freedom of its coloured residents.<sup>31</sup> Robin Blackburn briefly argues the belief that Louverture was compelled to have Saint Domingue retain relations with France so long as it had the ability to act as a sovereign state.<sup>32</sup> This accepted loss of their colony under direct French control for continued relations would be too much for France to accept and they would lose both instead. The ability of the Haitian Revolution to withstand under French direct opposition was a defining feature and the final characteristic allowing it to result in an independent nation.

The Haitian Revolution’s achievement of independence from colonial rule stood out from previous revolutions both in the Americas and in Europe such as the way that the majority of revolutionary participants were Black with many being former slaves, the extent of the revolution’s economic consequences and transmission of revolutionary sentiment, and colony’s approach to op-

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<sup>26</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 304.

<sup>27</sup> Valentina Peguero, "Teaching the Haitian Revolution: Its Place in Western and Modern World History.", 37.

<sup>28</sup> Robin Blackburn, "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution.", 647.

<sup>29</sup> Napoléon Bonaparte to Toussaint Louverture, November 18, 1801, in *The Louverture Project*, accessed March 18, 2021, [https://thelouvertureproject.org/index.php?title=Napoléon\\_letter\\_to\\_Toussaint\\_Louverture\\_\(1801\)](https://thelouvertureproject.org/index.php?title=Napoléon_letter_to_Toussaint_Louverture_(1801))

<sup>30</sup> Napoléon Bonaparte to Toussaint Louverture, November 18, 1801.

<sup>31</sup> David Patrick Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World*, viii.

<sup>32</sup> Robin Blackburn, "Haiti, Slavery, and the Age of the Democratic Revolution.", 647.

pose French colonialism. Most apparent, is the empowerment of the slave class of Saint Domingue through the representation by a revolutionary army formed by primarily former Black slaves in an age where all previous revolutions have been conducted by the White elite classes. Consequently, this very dynamic would be felt outside the colony through the subsequent destruction of the slave economy upon which it was built upon and the French Republic heavily relied upon. The diasporic population that left the colony would bring with it revolutionary sentiments that would permeate other slave populations which sought to carry out a similar revolution as in Saint Domingue. Finally, the opposition of French colonialism was seen in the unexpected occurrence of the revolutionary armies defeating the armies of three major European powers. This defeat of particularly the French armies would destroy the planned colonial policy of France to use Saint Domingue as the centre of a French Atlantic colonial system, causing them to give up other colonial territories in the Americas and have the constitution of Haiti confirm its official loss of Saint Domingue. Today, we look back at the events in Saint Domingue and recognize what would become a prominent revolution for the push for equality across the Atlantic and a place where “slaves became citizens in the empire that [had] enslaved them, and then founders of a new nation.”<sup>33</sup> ♦

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<sup>33</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World: the Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 2.



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# Machista barriers in Chilean Women's football: Issues of not-belonging and systemic injustice.



Helen Batchoun Riveros

**Question:** *Can women access espacios futbolísticos like men in Chile? What discourses or structures are behind those barriers that the players face? How do these discourses impact the players?*

As we have learned from feminist writers like Lorde, hooks, Anzaldúa and Crenshaw, women experience oppression differently, depending on our life experiences, environments, race, sexuality, and class. Instead of ignoring our differences, we must be aware of the possible factors that can lead to compounding oppression. Language can be a place of difference, especially when words have a particular meaning for different communities. Based on the language differences between North and Latin America, I spoke of machismo instead of misogyny or sexism. “Machismo” is how Patriarchy shows itself in South American culture. Machismo is the patriarchal discourse hiding under Latin American cultures to justify and enable the oppression of women. As Anzaldúa described it, its an adaptation to poverty, low self-esteem, oppression and product of hierarchal male dominance. When a “macho” loses his dignity and has a false notion of machismo, he ends up degrading women and even brutalizing them in order to “recover” his dignity and his self-esteem (Anzaldúa 83). The machista behavior is complicit to violence by excusing the oppressor/oppression as “normal.” Machista aggressions and oppressions are naturalized and culturalized in Chile. For example, we often think machismo is part of the Chilean culture—rather than a discrete system that can be removed.

Although the most evident (and dangerous) part of *machismo* is its interconnection with violence, it has other imperceptible and subtle effects. From daily cultural “traditions” to discriminatory, misogynistic language and microaggressions, machismo includes the harmful social and cultural discourses and practices embedded in South America, which continue to 2 oppress people every day, particularly women. I will focus on a specific gendered space, sports. We have seen athletes that challenged dominant ideologies of femininity in sports, such as Hope Solo and Serena Williams, and there is academic literature creating dialogue about their leadership (Heinecken 339). However, there is not much attention to Latin American athletes. I will focus on a men-centred sport, a fundamental part of the South American “Man’s World”

fútbol (soccer). In Latin America, fútbol is deeply connected to the macho identity, which is why women sometimes struggle to access it— fútbol is for men by men. For years, women football players in South America have demanded justice and the professionalization of women's football teams. However, “discrete and explicit” discrimination originated from a culture that refuses to accept women's football in Chile (Wheeler 5).

The main topics I will cover will be Machismo's effects on women's football, power relationships between players and clubs, gender perspectives on sports, language use and strategy-making abilities of the athletes as a response to the barriers presented by machista structures and hierarchal heteropatriarchal discourses within the sports spaces. Moreover, this paper will navigate the question: Can women access espacios futbolísticos like men in Chile? What discourses or structures are behind those barriers that the players face? How do these discourses impact the players?

Even though the exclusion is not always obvious, I argue that women face challenges or oppression when entering football spaces in Chile (cultural, physical or social). These discourses affect the football development of the Universidad Católica (UC) women's team while they perpetuate their underfunding. Moreover, these discourses affect players since they (re)focus the responsibility exclusively on the athletes (individuals), distracting from the systemic inequities with other men's teams. These discourses affect players emotionally yet are essentialized under machista exclusionary beliefs that protect the macho space from the “invasion” of women.

*“Which was the major barrier you had to face trying to access espacios futbolísticos? - Being a woman.” (Interviewee)*

This research focused on the interactions between the players and the discourse and the player's response to society's attempt to exclude them or restrict their interaction with espacios futbolísticos. When women players have difficulties accessing espacios futbolísticos, they adopt methods like persuasion and adapting their personalities. I will analyse the hidden discourses they face in the UC team in Chile (Santiago) and how they cope. Rather than focusing on “How can we make sports more just?” (lecture) I will work on the basis that football is not a fair sport for Chilean women. I will focus on what players do in response to the injustice (Trimble).

*“I knew that nobody was going to do it for me, so if I didn't take the first step, I would not have many the things I have today.” - Interviewee*

This research will mainly use secondary sources (theories and frameworks) to analyze and indicate points or arguments in the primary source (interviews, including my own experience). I interviewed three ex-teammates from the UC team, who will be called Anonymous, to respect their privacy. Since we played in the same team during the same periods (2015-2019), it will give me a variety of perspectives within the same team, time and age category. I adapted my initial questions for them because they felt too complicated and technical. I asked them to narrate stories or memories instead of using technical concepts since they might not know them as well as I do—they might not know them at all.

I initially thought of asking my interviewees to describe their strategies to “infiltrate” the machista exclusions. However, they explained how they do not think of strategies as a way to fight the machista systems. The structural exclusion might be normalized or invisibilized, such as feelings of not-belonging in football. Even when they see them, they might avoid challenging these systems—since it can be exhausting. I will explore this phenomenon later as a possible phenomenon, an “amnesia” that might have helped players cope with the exclusion and inequity. Their strategies worked; they got to play, which was enough—their goals led to the strategies they adopted.

Based on my experience, it is complicated to see structural exclusion without a collective, without more women that can relate to your experience—since a decade ago in Chile, these women were a small group. Thus, the players did not recognize the structural machista exclusionary norms until I brought up a gender lens. Moreover, the concept of “women collective” in the Chilean football space was not always possible in athletes' minds due to the scarcity of players. When we were younger, we only played with men.

This research took the shape of an essay since it can work as a guideline for studying other sports athletes' responses to machismo. It could hopefully help scholars create solutions or advice for leaders in the regulation area of women's sports. Solutions focused on the structural issues, those based on power dynamics. Relationships in sports environments are built on power. Furthermore, I will focus more on the player's perception of power dynamics (they might not even see the power dynamic in the first place). I will reflect on how women respond to these powers' impositions or the feeling of “being powerless.” On the other hand, notions of neoliberal discourse and subjects were essential for my thought process behind the systemic discourses in the club and team. Furthermore, they are also vital for analyzing the “Ideal UC women football player” (a notion I will explain further).

This research provided a channel or medium for me to share and reflect on my experience as a former professional football player in Chile. Focusing on my ex-teammates stories helped me process my own experience, heal in some ways, and feel anger and grief in others. My personal experience as their teammate benefited this project; it helped me interact with their responses and adapt my questions— Feminist Standpoint Theory (Gurung 113).

Based on the data collected, I found a strong circular discourse in UC's women's football, embedded in machista ideas. This discourse is usually given to players through institutional representatives like coaches, in the form of the "Ideal UC" for women players. This ideal stereotype is based on machista heteropatriarchal standards. It distracts from the systemic inequalities that affect and slow their football development, redirecting the responsibility to the individuals (similar to the neoliberal subjects). For example, in the shape of "football" feedback or teaching "how things work in the UC". This is incredibly delicate since many players start their football career young, leaving them susceptible to thinking of these discourses as truth.

The discourse is: Since women "can not" play football like men, they should not be allowed to play. If women do play, they have to follow the social expectations the institutions have for them, which are based (in this case) on the "Ideal UC women player." However, if women do not follow this ideal, they are punished (they are permanently left on the bench and sometimes expelled from the club). Thus, since women have limited resources and are also controlled by this "Ideal UC women player," their football development is more complex than the men's team, leading to slower development. Which again justifies the underfunding and poor training resources (Peers 302-11). As a circular discourse, the reproduction of this idea reaffirms the exclusion or underfunding of women in Chilean football.

While writing this paper, the news was trending about a Universidad Católica (UC) football press conference, they were presenting a new shirt for the team. In the press conference, Emilia Pastroján was explaining her goal for this new chapter, she said: "We want to get as high as possible, to change once and for all the old Católica, which was like the cold chest Católica. Now, it is a very renewed Católica, with very good players and a coaching staff that works one hundred percent for us" (Sánchez). 'Pecho frío' (Cold chest) is a concept used in Chilean football; it is considered an insult to players that "do not feel" the shirt of their club (meaning they play without passion or warmth). A pecho frío player does not leave everything for their team. Former players from UC expressed their disappointment at Pastroján's words. Francisca Silva (a player that I played with) said: "You should be proud of Católica's past, because everything you have is thanks to those "pecho frío" who had to put up with all the bullshit to have everything you have" (Sánchez).

Regardless of Pastroján's intentions, this was disappointing to hear as a former player in UC, as a pecho frío player. I echo Silva's message; it is necessary to remember the fight from those players before us. In contrast to my experience, we could only train three times a week, and our uniforms were the leftovers from other men's teams, so they often did not fit us (and did not have our names); we had to pay to play, and we had no gym for physical preparation—we were expected to spend money from our own resources. We struggled to get access to physical spaces to train, social spaces to get our opinions in positions of power and a physical space to change, shower and leave out belongings. For example, locker rooms are essential to build membership, making it a crucial space for sports, especially team sports (Greey 2). We sacrificed our time and energy to have the "privilege" of playing at UC.

Attempting to make create equal opportunities in women's football in Chile is a Sisyphean task. Pastrían's words reminded me of Dean's book. In this case, Fútbol UC is a "sadistic uphill rock-pushing circuit that never ends." Many of players that broke down barriers and got better resources for the women's teams are forgotten (Dean 33). Women not only have to focus on improving their performance, but they also have to do so with a system against their improvement. It becomes imperative to remember the efforts and sacrifices necessary to get these resources, and we must remember the names of those who gave everything for future generations. The conditions players now have are drastically better than those a decade or two ago, but structural discourses still slow the growth of Women's UC football, and in Chile.

On a structural level, the club expects the women players to follow the "Ideal UC women player" behavior. This ideal player follows western and heteropatriarchal standards of beauty (feminine, thin and delicate women), one that is obedient and always loyal to the club, who, instead of complaining, appreciates the "privilege" of playing in the team, and gives everything for her performance and the club—regardless of the price. Players must follow this "Ideal UC woman player" archetype that works similarly to how neoliberalism, healthism, and postfeminism discourses work. These notions "emphasize the individual and disavow structural, systemic, and historical conditions" (Riley and Evans 224) (Trimble). Thus, the "Ideal UC" archetype works as a tool to distract players from the structural and systemic conditions that might affect their performance and redirect that responsibility to their own decisions.

This "Ideal UC woman player" is not only encouraged but rather imposed and mandatory. Based on my experience, if the players did not follow this ideal, they could be punished or alienated. For example, when coaches from the club had cared about their women players enough to speak up to the administration, they were often replaced or fired from the club. Those that aimed to challenge the systemic conditions were punished, just like the players (Anonymous). My interviewees helped me understand how players negotiate the tensions between being seconded as players and the pride they might feel of playing in the team.

The players often struggled to find issues or barriers they faced when accessing espacios futbolísticos, they often responded, "I don't remember facing any problems at all." That response was striking since I wondered how players could forget. It looked like a memory phenomenon, as if the players had amnesia on these subjects. However, when I added the gender to the formula, they would remember hardships they faced.

Barriers issues described by players were both in a collective and an individual level. Collective barriers mostly appear from a gender perspective, they affect the team as a whole. The problems became evident when they gave me examples in the UC team. An interviewee said, "They did not give us any space, resources, locker rooms or medical support. We had negligent coaches, which slowed our progress... You can not expect women to be at the level men are, even though, we are

reaching that level without the infrastructure behind”. Additionally, the coaches constantly reminded us that as part of the women's team, “we should not complain, rather be grateful that they let us play ”(Anonymous). The interviewees explained the discourse always came from the “institution,” which in this case were the coaches. Thus, women football players were mistreated, underfunded and then asked to “appreciate” what they did have instead of complaining on what they did not have—in contrast to the men’s teams in the same level.

Individual barriers the players discussed were mostly around physical appearance and socioeconomic class. One of them disclosed that the physical coach on the national team (outside of UC) would threaten players with their weight. “They used to say, if anyone weights more than 60 kilos we’ll kick them out”, this led to some players not eating for days before their training— to make sure their weight was “within the norm” (Anonymous). The players had to take in the mistreatment and move on, since they could be replaced if they spoke up. Another player explained; “People treated me differently since I belonged to a different economic class, making the beginning of my formation as a player harder” (Anonymous). Her socioeconomic class was a factor of alienation, of not-belonging. Other players admitted how their class was a privilege. Some players did not have the resources to play on this team, even if they had family support, “others faced worse or more barriers”(Anonymous). However, the most significant differences were the treatment they received compared to men’s teams at the same level.

Women were treated differently than men in the UC club. This inequity creates feelings of not-belonging and outsidersness, making them question their belonging to the space and team. I know there might be other experiences that they could not remember or are too painful to speak about. Sometimes the struggle becomes the norm. When I was dealing with these hardships, I decided to “ignore” as much of them as possible or not recognize them as barriers, admitting them would have been heavy. I would have had to accept that I was not as welcome in a space I loved—giving me more reasons to stop playing. Maybe the other players also used this strategy, attempting to balance or bargain against these challenges. This “amnesia” could have been a method of self-protection, self-preservation, in response to these machista systemic inequalities. They reminded players of their outsidersness from a place of power.

The power dynamics are reflected in the systemic discourse players heard constantly; they were “allowed” to play there, and the conditions could change if they did not comply with the terms. Thus, this discourse reminded the players who were in power and had to follow their rules —the club has the power, and they imposed the conditions on the players. This idea of “player amnesia” could be connected to the conformity that was imposed by the football coaches or directors. Some players do not play in the UC anymore, while others still do. How does that change their testimony? Who gets to complain? Who does not? And who is complaining?

These players might not think of their actions as resistance, and they challenge a sport that structurally centers on men. Even though they might not intentionally fight the exclusionary machista systems in football, they might create change. Their entrance to these spaces positively impacts younger generations by creating more opportunities and visibilization through representation (culture wheel). Many women football players were once children that defied the norm. They did not deserve the daily discrimination, yet they continued and chose to play football the next day (Wheeler 25). Moreover, younger generations also inspire professional women players. Younger players can get inspiration from professionals, and professionals can inspire themselves from the younger players “following their steps” (Wheeler 23). We should do this for the children who will grow up knowing they have a space in football and deserve to be there as much as the rest.

Even though this research initially wanted to focus on a more “positive” area, such as the strategies women created to facilitate their experience playing football, the interviews made me realize there is much work pending on the barriers themselves. Before discussing how these women overcome these systemic barriers, it is imperative to name, identify them and redirect the responsibility to how the institutions are slowing women’s football development. We need more dialogue, with players, within players and institutions. Lastly, I wanted to thank my interviewees for their trust and the valuable information they gave me, this paper would not have worked without you! I hope the academia will start listening to Latin American athletes on issues like this, since there is much we can learn from their resilience, passion and intelligence. ♦



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# Canadian Addiction Harms Colombian Farmers

Sameer Gupta, Sherly Molina, and Marcus Quong



## Introduction

Soaring coffee prices is a development that Canadians may find particularly unwelcome (Lerman & Wright 2023). Coffee has eclipsed water as Canadians' beverage of choice, being consumed by 71% of the population; and today, the average Canadian drinks more coffee than their American counterpart (Davies 2024). Meeting Canadians coffee demands, however, requires imports from tropical or subtropical regions, like those part of Latin America. But there is a bitter reality to this trade, one where migrants, children, and smallholder farmers are pressed into an industry characterized by poverty wages and forced labour; the unsettling backdrop of the cheap coffee prices Canadian consumers have come to expect. Countries with flourishing coffee industries, like Colombia, are some of the leading exporters of coffee beans to Canada (Government of Canada 2022), even though such industry has not brought prosperity to rural workers and Indigenous communities that harvest the coffee beans. While much has been written about the western multinationals profiting from opaque supply chains, Canada's absence from the roster of leading coffee majors has led some to overlook Canada's role as enabler of extractive patterns of accumulation which continue to characterize coffee cultivation across the Global South.

This is made more apparent when one analyzes a country like Colombia, where the disturbing admixture of exploitation and violence has long plagued the Colombian people, and Canada's relations to it. The Canadian government has extended support to coffee companies and politicians in Colombia with troubling human rights records, and even when this information is made public, support for these entities continues. The global supply chain for cherished commodities like coffee necessarily imply forced displacement, fuelling what Carlos Sarmiento referred to as Colombia's "business of the violence" (Bergquist et. al 1992, 125). While direct Canadian involvement in the coffee trade does not meet the level of its counterpart in Colombia's mining sector, it is necessary to consider how the cycle of militarization-fuelled political violence—which has accompanied mining-oriented development—represents but the latest iteration of the same colonial-capitalist process which first made coffee a leading Colombian cash crop.

Colombian cash crop brutality has been conducted with quiet encouragement from

Canadians, seeing their interests best served by the succession of right-wing governments whose penchant for violence is unleashed upon dissidents, and whose servility to free market doctrines ensures a steady stream of profits to Canadian firms and cheap goods to Canadian consumers. This sinister pragmatism persists even under Liberal governments which never fail to interject its diplomacy with the language of human rights, revealing a consistent strategy of internationalization of Canada's corporate class. But while growing criticism of coffee's exploitative underbelly has pushed the industry to adopt numerous sustainability and social responsibility initiatives, what is often ignored is Canada's leading role in entrenching the extreme precarity of rural life in Colombia by pioneering the strategy of market-driven securitization which has come to define modern development.

### **Background**

Canadians have a significant coffee habit, consuming 5.03 million 60 kg bags in 2020-2021 (Davies 2024). In 2023, Canada imported over 15.6 million tons of coffee beans, with roughly 27% originating from Colombia. While the \$21 billion Canadian coffee market is dominated by multinational giants like Nestlé, JDE, and Keurig, Canadian firms such as Zavida and Mother Parkers occupy profitable niches as suppliers and white label manufacturers—even making inroads into the US market (United States Securities and Exchange Commission 2016, 5). Each emphasizes their ethical sourcing practices: Starbucks boasts of forming the industry's first responsible sourcing program back in 2004; Keurig (2019) flaunts its partnership with Fairtrade Canada, supporting “climate resiliency” and “inclusive growth”; Tim Hortons has entrusted its reputation to Enveritas (2024), whose groundbreaking approach to “sustainability assurance” using satellite surveillance is the subject of gushing profiles in the philanthro-capitalist space (Sen 2018); all eliding thorny questions of consent and creeping securitization of supply chains. Nonetheless, virtually all of these companies state they are working toward 100% of their coffee beans being sustainably sourced, with most currently claiming that at least half of their supply is “certified” (Kuepper & Kusumaningtyas 2020, 40). But have these efforts ultimately made a difference in alleviating old endemic issues such as poverty, child labour, and poor working conditions?

A 2018 review conducted by Fairfood shed light on the distressing reality faced by many Latin American coffee growers, revealing instances of abuse, isolation, and physical and sexual violence (Miralles 2018, 14). Additionally, workers reported experiencing intimidation, threats, confiscation of documents, withholding of wages, entrapment in debt bondage, hazardous living conditions, and excessive overtime. In some egregious cases workers were forced into labour, indicating that this grave problem within the industry has hardly vanished. Additionally, the pervasive use of temporary workers enables plantations to more easily exploit racialized workers—usually Black or Indigenous internal migrants who frequently take up these jobs. Lured by false

promises of good pay, they end up being conscripted into an industry rife with abuse. Moreover, a 2017 U.S. Department of Labor grant summary included an alarming statistic: of over 390,000 Colombian child labourers, the highest concentration were found in the coffee industry (Bureau of International Affairs). This staggering figure highlights the continued relevance of child labour in Colombia's coffee sector, where smallholders' meagre incomes incentivizes the use of children to maximize household yields. Despite momentum across the industry ostensibly swinging toward sustainability and fairness, why does it persist?

The obvious answer would be chronically low pay which Colombian farmers receive for their crop. While covering farmer protests in 2013, Andrew Gold alleged that Nestlé used its oligopsonic power to deny Colombian suppliers a living wage (Andrew, 2013). This is echoed by another report from 2019, which found that an astonishing 82% of Colombian coffee farmers did not earn what could be considered a livable wage (Pedersen & Backer 2020, 28). Farmers receive 24 cents per pound, which Nestlé turns around and charges consumers \$3.60 for—a 1,500% mark-up (Andrew, 2013). Such exorbitant profit margins have been ruthlessly defended by the corporation: credible reports suggest that in 2002 it consorted with a right-wing paramilitary group in order to derail unionization efforts at one of its factories (Infact Canada 2023); others even implicate Nestlé in the murder of trade unionist Luciano Romero (European Center for Constitutional and Human Rights). This is but a glimpse into the violent economic machine which sustains the supply of coffee and a bevy of other commodities to the Global North at cut-rate prices: fueled by and at the expense of impoverished growers, through opaque middlemen, reaching international, consolidated and liberalized markets, where a few large firms (5 western-domeciled firms control over 30% of trade) effectively impose prices, raking in astronomical profits (Kuepper & Kusumaningtyas 2020, 25). The lopsided structural power which these corporate giants enjoy within the present trading system are emblematic of the entrenched inequality which the Canadian government has long championed as the ideal paradigm for North-South relations.

### **Canada's Market Developmentalism**

Throughout the 20th century, Canada was a vocal opponent of every attempt by commodity-dependent countries in the Global South to shield themselves from volatility and maximize export earnings by forming resource cartels. Even the 1963 International Coffee Agreement (ICA) championed by the U.S. was no exception (Engler, 2023). After all, the ICA provided Colombia with a modicum of stability with which to pursue autonomous development, enabling a period of growth which contrasts favourably with the outcome of the neoliberal period which followed. But even well before the ICA came into effect, the Canadian government was already pioneering a synthesis of state and private interests in its diplomacy with Colombia in the 1950s. In 1956 Colombia became the first non-NATO country to acquire Canadian F-86 fighter jets, an event which Stefano Tijerina (2019) argued that reflected the triumph of pecuniary interests over any lingering colonial-era deference to Anglo-American feeling in Canadian foreign policy (130-132).

Alongside security cooperation came official development aid, which was explicitly framed in terms of advancing Canadian commercial interests in Colombia amid rising competition from Europe and the U.S. (Tijerina, 134). Canadian experts and aid would support the *Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical* (CIAT), a bulwark of extractive developmentalism that was tasked with industrializing agriculture, and reorienting Colombia's formidable capacity for food production away from subsistence and toward international markets (136-137). This effort was carried out under the rubric of the so-called "Green Revolution", when the Global North's capital-intensive agricultural methods were adopted by developing countries in a bid to boost yields and transfer labour into resource and industrial sectors. Canadian aid was salient throughout this process, with the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) basing its regional operations in Bogotá (136). Its founding President David Hopper had cut his teeth bringing the Green Revolution to India (Fine, 2011); and under Hopper's tenure the IDRC's Colombia office would champion a similarly ambitious program called "Integrated Rural Development" (DRI) (Carty, 1979).

In turning to the DRI, the Colombian government sought to defuse the peasantry's deep rooted resentment of the rural plantocracy which controlled over 90% of Colombia's farmland. Critically, it hoped to do so without having to indulge the peasants' long-standing demand that the wealthy large estates be broken up, and the land redistributed. Here entered the IDRC, proposing a strategy of commercialization, as Robert Carty and Virginia Smith (1981, 137-140) noted, faithfully executing the World Bank's directive that development should "put primary emphasis not on the redistribution of income and wealth ... but rather on increasing the productivity of the poor" (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1974). And while the program's backers presented it as an overdue turn toward the rural poor, a closer inspection reveals the legacy of the DRI and other similar programs to be something else entirely. For one, the effort to finance this process through private credit markets effectively disqualified those with little or no mortgageable land with which to pay for seeds and equipment. Others who did qualify for loans often felt it was not worth gambling their livelihood, leaving wealthy planters and multinational agribusinesses as the primary beneficiaries of this new dispensation. This was even admitted by the IDRC when later co-sponsoring the Caqueza Project in order to bring "Green Revolution technology to Colombian peasants" excluded from the DRI (Development Educational Centre 1983, 10).

Nevertheless, the wider counter-insurgency framework which enfolded these Canadian-backed development initiatives ensured that the Caqueza Project also failed in its goal of uplifting the peasantry, with one review blaming administrators' inability to "identify the real need of the peasants—access to land" (Development Educational Centre 1983, 12). Given the political prerogatives which drove them, these programs can be best understood as a chapter of a class project which sought to consolidate domestic and international capital through extractive accumulation, suppressing the growing opposition from below.

That opposition had by this point already spilled into a deadly guerrilla war, killing thousands and dragging on well into the 21st century, leaving 6.8 million people internally displaced (UNHCR, 2024). The state's stubborn refusal to address the social and economic roots of the conflict are a major reason for its intractability, and pursuing this stance was facilitated by ample Canadian military assistance. Since that initial fighter jet deal, Canada-Colombia security cooperation has blossomed to the point where some have alleged Canadian complicity in the militarization of security and environmental policies in Colombia (Patterson, 2022).

### **Towards Fairer Revenue**

The coup de grâce was the dismantling of the ICA in 1989, part of wider trade liberalization across the globe zealously exploited by Canada in order to facilitate the expansion of Canadian businesses overseas. Since then, the technocratic ethos characterizing Canadian assistance to Colombia ebbed from the market developmentalism of the 1970s into a more overtly securitized modality, reflecting how “integration with the emergent neoliberal order was effectuated through the intensification of repression” (O'Connor 2021, 215).

The globalized nature of contemporary commodity markets served as the wellspring for this bloody “reconquest” of Colombia's coffee sector. Illustrating the nakedly exploitative status quo, Ugandan President Yoweri Museveni denounced the “neocolonialism” of coffee's multibillion-dollar industry: of its global value of \$460 billion, coffee-producing countries like Colombia capture a comparatively meager \$25 billion, “to be shared among export companies, governments, and an estimated 125 million coffee farmers and their families” (Smith 2016, 31). An agreement like the ICA, even with its shortcomings, offered an important instrument for helping workers and countries at the bottom of the value chain claim more of the surplus. As it stands, in 2009 “the roasting, marketing, and sale of coffee added \$31 billion to the GDP of the nine most important coffee-importing nations, more than twice as much as all coffee-producing nations earned from growing and exporting it” (Smith 2016, 34). As such, the reestablishment of a similar cartel is an important first step in countervailing the gross theft of value which has enabled Global North firms to monopolize the high-margin upper echelons of the coffee industry and freeze exporting countries in a state of underdevelopment.

Although the ICA's abolition introduced enormous volatility into the market for coffee beans, the Canadian-led engineering of Colombia's economic restructuring is equally important in undermining farmer livelihoods, and must also be addressed. Gustavo Petro, Colombia's first left wing President, has expressed grievances regarding the harmful trade agreements the country entered into with foreign nations, limiting his capacity to implement more production over extraction (Fernández, 2023). His stance provides a glimpse into how thoroughly countries like Canada and the U.S. have sought to foreclose reforms to the structures which undergird these immense transfers of wealth masquerading as “trade” in coffee and other raw commodities.

Progressive forces in Canada consequently must push their government to cooperate with this effort to undo decades of policy focused on providing low-cost inputs to the economies of the Global North, to the detriment of farmers and rural communities in the Global South.

In the context of coffee-producing countries, Vietnam has been comparatively successful (Okoth, 2022). By implementing “coffee statecraft”, and not abiding to “fair trade”, countries robbed of the higher-margins of the industry may curtail the disparity (Fridell 2016). However, it requires policies opposed by Canada: subsidizing necessary inputs, creating sustainable communities around coffee cultivation, and insulating farmers from the vagaries of the market. It demonstrates how problems stemming from integration into the circuits of global commodity production cannot be solved at the barrel of a gun, and instead require social reforms anathema to neoliberal ideologues, who cannot permit space for accumulation from below (Ajli, 2023).

## **Conclusion**

Canada helped shepherd Colombia into world markets as an overexploited periphery, directly fueling many of the issues which today are being cited to justify further hikes of the price that Canadians pay for coffee. It would be simple enough to say that the Canadian government should suspend military ties and exports to Colombia and scrutinize the supply chains of the coffee majors operating in Canada, but it behooves critics to ponder the reasons why these necessary steps have not been taken by a government infatuated with the vocabulary of democracy and human rights. Much like how Colombia’s effort to resolve its “Agrarian Question” comprised a distinct class project, the class character of Canadian foreign policy has sharply influenced the course of Colombian development, for the worse. In seeking a fair deal for farmers and the planet, activists in the Global North must resist the depoliticization and tendency toward self-exoneration that has long plagued fair trade (Hussey, 2011). With revolt against austerity brewing in the Global South, alongside who will Canadian coffee connoisseurs stand? ♦

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# The Many María Lionzas of Venezuela: Navigating Mestizo and Indigenous Notions of Self Through Representations of Venezuela's Most Prolific Spirit Queen

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## Abstract

This paper analyzes the social and historical constructions of María Lionza, Venezuela's most prolific Indigenous Deity revered by both Indigenous and Mestizo Communities. By looking at her beyond legend and as an applied and embodied method for conceptualizing one's social positionality, there opens up possibilities for the constructions of new identities and ways for identities to interplay and engage with one another. In the context of a country as multicultural as Venezuela, the pluralistic space María Lionza provides for varying interpretations of her to coexist is essential to making sense of the political *assemblage* Venezuelan Civic Society is, arguing meaning can be made through the semiotic codes available within its own cultural ecologies. This paper focuses primarily on Indigenous and Mestizo Identities through personal reflection and conversations with Venezuelans from those respective communities, while also critically engaging literature written on the subject thus far and proposing openings for new types of scholarly engagement with the subject.

## 1. Introduction

Everytime I take a trip to Peru I contemplate more than usual about what it means to be a Venezuelan living in the diaspora. As I've lived more than 20 years away, memories of Caracas have faded and this aspect of my identity feels somewhat like a shell of its former self, one that missed all the political and social context that has shaped how being Venezuelan is both perceived by outsiders and embodied within. Yet as other aspects of myself start to more prominently contour my sense of being, the cultural and ritual practices of Venezuelan Espiritismo taught to me by my grandmother still greatly shapes my ontological worldview even as my secular understanding of Venezuela starts to drift away.

During my last trip to Peru, I met a Venezuelan friend who lived in a neighbourhood not too far away from mine back when we both lived in Caracas. Though it wasn't what we initially connected about, he quickly became intrigued by my involvement in a dance collective that practiced and performed Afro-Cuban choreographies depicting the Orishas, and my Grandmother's upbringing in a house that lived from Tobacco divination. He thought it fascinating that someone, all the way in Canada, who was completely disconnected from the socio-political history and reality of Venezuela, had preserved this tradition; this one thing that had become an invisible aspect of the country's identity by international media as more pressing issues of economy and politics came to the forefront.<sup>1</sup> Though his initial reaction was, as is expected of most Venezuelans I meet, one that seemed to straddle the line between disgust and intrigue, he slowly started to open up to me about his own spiritual upbringing.<sup>2</sup>

First, he told me his neighbour was a Santero. Then, he revealed he had gotten various readings from Santeros throughout his life, but his family were "proper" Catholics. Well, except for his uncle, kind of. A devotee of La Virgen de Coromoto, syncretized with María Lionza, he would host great parties at the family house and pay *Materías* to deliver the necessary messages one expects from the Spirits.<sup>3</sup> And everyone came through that house, whether *Vikingos* or *Indios*, through the bodies of the *Materias* and all under the auspicious gaze of the Virgin (also known as the Queen).<sup>4</sup> On our last day together, he revealed that through his various consultations with Santeros, he always was told Eleggua has a particular love for him and watches over him greatly, though he was holding out hope he may, in fact, be a child of Yemaya.

These stories always ended with the same sentence, "but this stuff is not for me," which I never questioned but was intrigued by. I asked him if he missed this aspect of Venezuela, the esoteric and immaterial aspect one lives and sees everyday yet struggles to explain in a different country detached from the Venezuelan social context. He says it was certainly a powerful memory etched into his existence, but "I like what the Indigenous do here in Peru, they go to the mountains and pray to Mother Nature. That is nice too." I mentioned that that reminded me a lot of the Espiritismo of Yaracuy State, where the sacred mountain of Sorte is located; encouraging bathing in pristine rivers and hiking through lush forests as much as it does engaging with the spirits. "Oh yes, that is the best one [espiritismo], the real one," he responded, beginning to clearly make delineations between an urban Mestizo Espiritismo he experienced in Caracas and an "authentic" natural Indigenous practice.

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<sup>1</sup> Though these practices were ignored by mainstream media, they were in fact heavily involved in shaping the social and political movements in Venezuela. How Chavez and his legacy government are understood is done by most Venezuelans through a very Espiritista or Lukumi worldview. For more on this, refer to *The Magic of the State* by Michael Taussig or Rafael Sanchez's essay *Theopolitics and the Retreat of the Politico-theological in Venezuela (and Elsewhere)*, both of which will be referred to in this paper

<sup>2</sup> In my experience, the legacy of historical marginalization of these spiritual practices has led to negative public reactions towards openly professing to the tradition, even if the same people who express these negative sentiments privately will engage with the tradition in some way.

<sup>3</sup> Literally Translating to Subjects, this term refers to those in Venezuelan Espiritista Culture who are considered to be adept at being "mounted" or possessed by Spirits. It may also refer to Spiritual Essence in another context.

<sup>4</sup> *Vikingos* are a court of Spirits representing Nordic Vikings, and *Indios* are the court of Spirits that represent Indigenous Peoples, often either warriors (for male spirits) or healers and elder knowledge keepers for women.

The “Postcolonial” era of Latin America and the Caribbean has seen the deployment and revocation of citizenship and identities towards various ethnicities who live in one of the many countries that were born on the continent after respective struggles for independence from the Spanish Empire. This is particularly clear in “post-”colonial Venezuela, which has seen constant movement and migration constantly construct and renegotiate the social imaginary seeking to answer unresolved questions about identity (singular), particularly in the Chavista era, where the government has claimed itself as a representative of “The People” (singular)<sup>5</sup> As extremely diverse bodies of “People” represent and position themselves as “The People,” (again, singular) a fundamental question that stands at the centre of discourses around these conflicts is “*Who is this country?*” Each generation, ethnic group, and political body will answer differently, and one country may return many answers. In Venezuela, the collapse of institutions and their role in governing and shaping public space, after a long time working vigorously to define it, has led to a proliferation of expressions occupying the public sphere.<sup>6</sup> While, as Rafael Sánchez points out, there is an attempt in Venezuela to define who constitutes “The People,” this cannot happen without a contrasting subject that provides context and opposition. This puts Indigenous Peoples, who are often an afterthought in political discourse beyond the “pillar” they are supposed to occupy, in a very precarious position as an “Indian Problem” for Venezuela’s attempts at homogenization of the state’s population in order to subsume it under its control.

### 1.1 Who is María Lionza?

Venezuela, a country with a (officially) super-majority “Mestizo” population, deploys historical figures of Indigenous descent to foster a sense of Indigeneity which enforces state-managed patriotism, often through their canonization into the spiritual pantheon that serves as both a historical archive and an active community of spirits. Mestizos and Indigenous folks alike draw spiritual power from to solve their most pressing issues. One of the country’s Gods is María Lionza; a (probably) Indigenous woman who lived during the colonial era and who was the daughter of chief Yaracuy in the state now known by the same name.<sup>7</sup> The version which I recollect (not the only one) is that her community was invaded by the Spanish which forced her to hide in the mountain of Sorte, now a sacred site. Upon looking at her reflection in the mirror, she was eaten by an anaconda, yet before being digested had prayed to God and God made an agreement with her; to represent the Venezuelan People and become one with the mountain in exchange for her freedom. She was freed from the snake and absorbed into the mountain, which gave her the spiritual capability to kill off the European invaders who eventually came to the mountain seeking her out. I will note that, in retellings, I have often heard she was a Mestiza because her father, the village’s chief, had had her with a Spanish woman (who is never explored as a character in the story), but this detail is not always added even when the same person has told me the story multiple times.

<sup>5</sup> Sánchez, Rafael, “Humpty Dumpty Populism: Theopolitics and the Retreat of the Politico-theological in Venezuela (and Elsewhere),” *Social Analysis* 64, no. 4 (2020), 141.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

<sup>7</sup> I write “probably” in brackets because there are different versions of lore which retell her origin, and Indigenous perspectives will often dispute Mestizo perspectives while indicating some precolonial continuity of the cult. This can be potentially disruptive to the social imaginary of “Venezuela” in which there was nothing before. To this day, many residents of Caracas will trope that “outside of Caracas is just forest and snakes,” which makes invisible the people of states like Amazonas where Indigenous populations reach over 50%.

## 1.2 Mestizaje and María Lionza

María Lionza's story, in all its variations, is one about triumph against colonialism, and interweaves the connection between political struggle and land/nature to foster an appreciation of Venezuela as a living natural entity as well as an official state structure. Venezuela has, like all of Latin America, a violent history towards its Indigenous populations, but also, similar to Bolivia with Pachamama and Mexico with many figures, has deployed the use of a (probably) Indigenous Goddess, by the name of María Lionza, to tell the story of a (seemingly) Indigenous nation and post-colonial nation building project.<sup>8</sup> On the surface, however, this would seem to conflict with a concurrent dialogue that centres Mestizaje in everyday life and its permeation into the constructed identity of María Lionza. Mestizaje as an ideology sees racial mixing not as a virtue in of itself but rather a means to an end for the eventual European-ization of the country; the construction of the "European Elsewhere," as anthropologist Micheal Taussig calls in his book "The Magic of the State."<sup>9</sup> This logically pits Indigeneity and Mestizaje/Criollismo into conflict with one another.

This resonates deeply with my recollection of childhood stories in which, during social interactions where ancestry became a topic of conversation, my family's European-ness was over exaggerated and in others claims were made to Indigeneity or Blackness. I could recollect these stories as examples of conflicts, which to some extent they are, but this is where I know, without a doubt, the Venezuelan worldview still permeates the way I construct my identity; I am acutely aware that, in Venezuela, multiple realities co-exist at once, and no single one can bear complete claim to the truth. This is who Sanchez refers to when speaking of:

*"[a] 'people' so agonistically contrived out of an ever-disseminating social field is a necessarily fragile, precarious assemblage, held together by the state in tension with a host of deconstructive centripetal forces that continuously chip away at its existence."*<sup>10</sup>

Politically, across Latin America, Indigenous, Campesino, Black, and other marginalized sectors of societies have expressed codifying this assemblage as an essential feature of the State through a political structure known as Plurinationalism, which opens the road to begin to understand these embodied social expressions as parallel rather than in contestation.<sup>11</sup> I will not deny that pluralism can lead to conflict when diverse opinions come into contestation with one another. However, assemblage is, in fact, the perfect word, because the assemblage cannot exist if objects are removed, thus rendering the messiness of the collection necessary albeit complex.

<sup>8</sup> Similar to the word probably when referring to Maria Lionza's Indigeneity, I am using *seemingly* in brackets to raise questions about how notions of Indigeneity are constructed under Mestizo logics. Taussig, in his book *The Magic of the State* repeatedly refers to Venezuela as the "European Elsewhere," reflecting a tension between the an aspiration towards Western Prosperity (tied to notions of race) and Indigenous DNA the majority of the population can credibly claim to have.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Taussig. *The Magic of the State* (New York: Routledge), 174

<sup>10</sup> Sánchez, Rafael, "Humpty Dumpty Populism: Theopolitics and the Retreat of the Politico-theological in Venezuela (and Elsewhere)," *Social Analysis* 64, no. 4 (2020), 154.

<sup>11</sup> I use this metaphor as a homage to the Orisha Elegguá, reinforcing the notion that multiple streams of thinking must influence our approach to this subject.

The differences between how María Lionza is seen and how that relates back to perception of self in Indigenous compared to Mestizo communities is reflective of Venezuela's plurinational character: she possesses an ability to absorb all perspectives of her into her "body;" she does not mean the same thing to everyone but she does belong to everyone. When parallel understandings of her are disseminated more thoroughly, we can discredit the idea of the singularity of the State's constructed image of a society and María Lionza's place at the centre of it only being able to exist in a very specific way, but rather see her as a motif through which policies such as plurinationalism and multiculturalism can be understood and navigated.

In order to understand where the parallel discourses lay, I will reflect back on stories and conversations like the ones above and with a close friend, Juana (not her real name), an Indigenous Kali'na Woman from Monagas, in the east of Venezuela whom I had worked with for many years in organizing cultural gatherings and ceremonies, to develop a greater understanding of Indigenous perspectives and how they compare to Mestizo and Criollo perspectives of María Lionza and State Power which has been the main source of information on the Goddess from authors and scholars on the traditions.<sup>12</sup> It became clear during these conversations and subsequent re-assessments of work that I thought were authoritative bodies on "Venezuelan Identity" that the way in which scholars currently study political and social structures contort complex realities by privileging certain perspectives while ignoring others. This paper, which engages with relevant literature on the subject but is grounded in stories reflective of the lived experiences recalled, is one which attempts to plant seeds on ways we, as scholars, can approach and engage with pluriverses such as Venezuela's to represent more textured perspectives on spirituality and religion but also on politics, civic society, and economy, which are ultimately not mutually exclusive categories separable from the realm of the spirits.

## 2. Dismantling the idea of "One Venezuela"

A recent but deeply informative perspective on the topic of citizenship in contestation can be found in J Brent Crosson's book *Experiments with Power*, which takes place in the neighbouring Trinidad & Tobago and concerns Black Citizenship and the role "Obeah" plays as a public charge to police and persecute Black Spiritual Expression. African Rites and rituals in Trinidad & Tobago often come into conflict with state management of religion, and lower class Black Tribagonians, understanding the unease their rites give the creole political class, may use what gets charged as "Obeah," a deeply negative term, to assert self sovereignty in the face of persecution.<sup>13</sup> What this is called amongst the community is not a religion but rather an "experiment with power" which serves as an alternate source of justice against an oppositional state.<sup>14</sup> Whether their religious rituals produce outcomes because of divine intervention is irrelevant; Obeah is policed because of its perception of power, a form of oppression which has roots in colonialism and its subjugation of sla-

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<sup>12</sup> See: Taussig, Coronil

<sup>13</sup> J Brent Crosson. *Experiments with Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2

<sup>14</sup> J Brent Crosson. *Experiments with Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 5



ves.<sup>15</sup> Because colonial law, which made the basis for state law, was founded in the Caribbean with the intent of subjugating and inflicting harm towards subaltern populations, which are also primarily racialized populations, the tenets of Liberalism and state law are *not* sought as the primary sources of justice or freedom for said subaltern populations, and from this an alternative model is conceptualized that centres Black spiritual expression.<sup>16</sup> “Obeah,” while being a term that traditionally describes what is considered beyond the pale in the national religious discourse, also then becomes something that is “owned” by its practitioners, while police, courts, and other official bodies are “owned” by the state,<sup>17</sup> and within the realm of that ownership, spiritual workers like the interlocutors Crosson interviewed become “spiritual judges” within their own right, ultimately developing a socio-political structure that was created beyond Liberal State tenets and in control of its own direction;<sup>18</sup> the ideas and concepts of Blackness and Black Spirituality now move away from tradition and become “Power.”

Crosson’s work is a focus on the moments of conflict that occur between these two citizenries yet his fieldwork observes complications with a redundant idea that the conflict is some sort of “Battle for the State,” simply because these two entities (the Obeah practitioners and the State) need each other to survive.

As we’ve discussed, The Liberal Nation State is in direct opposition to Black conceptualizations of self, yet this has not stopped leaders of the Nation State to engage with Orisha Communities or even Orishas themselves; former Trinidadian Prime Minister Kamala Persad-Bissessar, a rumored child of Oshun, who identifies as Indian, Hindu, and Baptist, has herself done when bringing her party, a dominant force in Indo-Caribbean Communities, closer to Afro-Caribbean minorities such as Spiritual Baptists and Orisha Worshipers.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, subaltern subjects source from a rich variety of spiritual sources to realize greater power, their religion becoming increasingly blurred in the process.<sup>20</sup> This spiritual navigation is what Crosson’s interlocutor sees as a refusal to settle on a “Nation;” instead occupying a “crossover” liminal space where an assemblage of “confused” spiritual practitioners settle to construct new meanings from established traditions.<sup>21</sup> Both the State and the Spiritualists need each other to sustain the ecology they live in, for otherwise they cannot express the context that forms the foundation of the constructs they live in.

## 2.1 Plugging In

Growing up, I remember the complexity of how spirits were organized to co-exist; vikings, Indigenous chiefs and warriors, Congos, and Saints, amongst others, all seemed to become embodied into the communities they were called into.<sup>22</sup> Chavez himself got wrapped up into this, with rumours abound that he was a Palero, a Santero, an Espiritista, a devout Catholic, perhaps all of the above while leaving room for more.<sup>23</sup> Eventually he became a spirit himself.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 56

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 62

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 53

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 82

<sup>19</sup> Ibid 177, 178

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 3

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 160

<sup>22</sup> Black Spirits from West-Central Africa

<sup>23</sup> Placer, David. “A Revolution of Santeros.” Armando.info (2017), <https://armando.info/en/a-revolution-of-santeros/>.

Even in the face of state-sanctioned marginalization; Venezuelan social and ethnic groups operate within a semiotic ecosystem in which they both possess (in the eyes of others) and make (for themselves) their own forms of meaning. The absence of one social group, thus, could arouse a much more tense situation than the conflict that arises from two groups in conflict, since their existence is, once again, foundational to express the context that forms the foundation of the constructs they live in.

Like Crosson observed amongst his Black Interlocutors in Trinidad's "Rio Moro," Juana, who provides one of the foundational perspectives from which my paper is argued, also similarly comes from a background in which her cultural expression as an Indigenous woman was criminalized and persecuted, ultimately leading to obstacles in preserving her culture and religious expressions. In an effort to preserve these expressions, there are moments where her community "plugs in," as she calls it, to intervene and steer the discourse within "Venezuela" to the benefit of Indigenous communities, which requires identification as a Venezuelan Citizen. Parallels can be drawn here with the Black "Dual Citizenship" in Trinidad which Crosson calls a "double bind," in which Black Trinidadians place hopes on the Liberal state while also having their own mechanisms they can rely on should the state fail to meet them where they are (as it often does).<sup>25</sup>

Juana herself identifies as having three citizenships; one to Venezuela, where she works as a State Employee, one to her Kalina Nation, where she has voted in elections since she was 10 years old, and "El Mundo Indígena,"<sup>26</sup> which she describes as a transnational confederacy of *Pueblos Originarios* that communicate, trade, and exchange culture and socio-political expressions extensively with one another.<sup>27</sup>

### 3. The "Europe Elsewhere" and "El Mundo Indígena"

Of course, it would feel untrue to say "El Mundo Indígena" and "Venezuela" don't have extensive areas of overlap. However, during these moments of overlap, both states tend to morph the material outcome of those interactions into something they can own and incorporate into their own respective state-building (and identity-building) projects. Such is observed amongst the Yukpa. An Indigenous group within Venezuela and Colombia's borders, the Yukpa cosmology has an organized citizenry and civil society which delineates groups and identities amongst its traditional territories, while placing Whites and Mestizos completely outside their cosmology and thus foreign entities.<sup>28</sup> However, creolization of certain members of their nation has led to some permeation of the dominant Mestizo culture into their own, challenging the narrative that they are entirely "closed

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<sup>24</sup> Juana Vargas (Pseudonym - Kali'na Anthropologist and Venezuelan State Employee) in discussion with author, April 4th 2021

<sup>25</sup> J Brent Crosson. *Experiments with Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 57

<sup>26</sup> Trans. *The Indigenous World*

<sup>27</sup> Trans. *Original Peoples*

<sup>28</sup> Ernst Halmbayer, "Mission, Food, and Commensality among the Yukpa: Indigenous Creolization and Emerging Complexities in Indigenous Modernities," *Tipiti: Journal of the Society for the Anthropology of Lowland South America* 11, no. 1 (2013), 70

off” from “modernity;” many, in fact, embrace it.<sup>29</sup>With both technology and defining the citizenship of Yukpa who become creolized and lose their language or eating habits but still retain Yukpa citizenship, the Yukpa show themselves extremely capable of absorbing new forms of “Yukpaness” into their national framework while still preserving a distinct society and not assimilating entirely into the national Venezuelan State as “Mestizos.”<sup>30</sup>

The Venezuelan State undergoes a very similar process as it both tries to develop a national character and detach from elements it deems “regressive” within its geography. Fernando Coronil describes this process well in explaining the Euro-centrist approach that Venezuela, as a “postcolonial” state, still takes; while the Venezuelan Discourse on “Modernity” rejects European Colonialism and its imposed ideas on the surface, it internalizes the “civilising mission” Europe undertook centuries ago.<sup>31</sup> Oil, which in Venezuela is understood as a national resource,<sup>32</sup> complicates this more as the State attempts to coherently absorb the many universes that live within its borders. So while the country fashions itself as an “oil nation,” one of shared wealth and identity, national figures, like María Lionza, express both The State’s balancing act of attempting to absorb non-European Ideas into its character while still fundamentally being beholden to the European Colonial project whenever they enter into the discourse.<sup>33</sup>What this means for María Lionza is that, as a figurehead, fundamental questions about her race, nationality, and who worships her are frequently in dispute.

Returning to my first recount of my friend in Peru, he was born in Caracas, hardly a centre of Indigenous culture in widespread practice. Yet he clearly was able to construct a social imaginary of the Indigenous which informed how he perceived them spiritually within Venezuela and in comparison to his construction of Venezuela when observing the Peruvian Cultural Practices of “going to the mountain.” And while I think we need to make intentional efforts to distinguish Indigenous and Mestizo perspectives from the discourse on “Venezuelan Spiritual Traditions,” we cannot isolate them either, but rather invite some level of interplay to understand how they reinforce one another. This is the representative essence of María Lionza; her Body Politic.

#### 4. The Body Politic of María Lionza in Venezuela

The King's Two Bodies Political Theory by Ernst Kantorowicz can be summarized as the belief that rulers, particularly monarchs, have a *Body Natural*, which is their corporal form and subject to all mortal defects like aging, injury, and death, and a *Body Politic*, which is an item of intangible and immortal heritage that defines the political landscape both during their rule and beyond to justify their rule and shape the national character through adherence to their place as the civil centrepiece of the discourse.<sup>34</sup> It is important to remember a central component of María Lionza’s lore is that she existed, and became one with nature, in the same way Kantorowicz’s King existed yet came to

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 79

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 79

<sup>31</sup> Fernando Coronil, *The Magical State* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 73

<sup>32</sup> IE, belonging to all Venezuelans

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 88

<sup>34</sup> Ernst Kantorowicz. *The King's Two Bodies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 7

represent something beyond his carnal existence. As a result, Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities within Venezuelan society “straddle tracks” that foster dual citizenship as they weave into different nations and discourses. Mestizos similarly do so by “straddling tracks” much in the same way the interlocutor in Crosson’s work observing the Trinidadian Context, in which she refused singularity in favour of the potential that was birthed from liminality.

María Lionza, as someone who is conceptualized if not outright revered by so many sectors of Venezuelan Society, but understood differently in Mestizo and Indigenous Communities, exists as a spirit crossing over “between the nations;” resolving contradictions and conflicts between groups that “straddle tracks” as they navigate conflicting realms of citizenship within the State. Thus, the Queen’s *Body Politic* is a site in which the varying sectors of the *assemblage* we call “Venezuelan Society” can come together through embodiment in order to manage contradictions.

## 5. Mapping the Pluriverse - Conclusion

Dual Citizenship can often feel like a very delicate balancing act even for Mestizo Communities who are not *entirely* represented by the State either, even though the State does covet Mestizaje as a tool for its civilizing mission. For many Venezuelans who were living through the crisis, including my family, their access to “something else,” such as Espiritista Communities, Orisha Houses, or collectively managed lands, were essential mechanisms to survive the crisis. The proliferation of these spiritual practices were essentially synchronous with Venezuela’s crisis period, indicating that dual citizenship is also a praxis in which the use of Espiritismo Marialioncero (one citizenship) is a method used to navigate crisis within the other (Navigating the Venezuelan Crisis as a Citizen).

My attempt here has been to outline the extremely complex situation in which Venezuelan Communities use their spiritual traditions to try and manage their relations with one another as members of the contradictory assemblage they have been positioned into. My way of making sense of these ontologies and how they interact with one another has been mostly semiotic, using María Lionza as a symbolic focal point from which Venezuelans begin to define themselves. Given that she is a focal point from which symbolism is created, this also implies she possesses the capacity to be “many things” for many people. For my Mestizo friend, much of which resonated with my family tradition, María Lionza and her network of spirits were “real” entities in that they become embodied by the *Materias* through possession, making them present to engage with. Indigenous communities such as Juana’s similarly understand María Lionza as “real” however do not see her through embodiment but rather as synonymous with the earth and their natural surroundings; and my

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<sup>35</sup> We have still not had much opportunity throughout this paper to discuss the third “track” or “nation” which is the government itself. Rafael Sanchez, whose essay “Theopolitics and the Retreat of the Politico-theological in Venezuela (and Elsewhere)” I engaged with at the beginning of this essay, observes the role of María Lionza through a theopolitical lens which primarily dissects the way the government straddles tracks itself both as an entity separate from Venezuelans and one that supposedly represents them; I encourage his work as a reference to a more in depth analysis of the Bolivarian Government than the one I will provide.

<sup>36</sup> Of course, this would be a very coveted tool for a government in power, which is why, from Perez Jimenez to Chavez, there have been attempts to manage María Lionza on their terms.

<sup>37</sup> AP News “Venezuelans seek strength, healing from mythical goddess” AP News (2019), <https://apnews.com/general-news-travel-59b4213a564d4478abff7c9dcd96051e>.

Mestizo friend perceived Indigenous traditions in this way too and also admired and integrated them into his belief system by perceiving them as “a better way” or “real way.” Of course, similar to how Mestizos observe and even adopt Indigenous Traditions, Indigenous Peoples are capable of doing the same. This puts Venezuelans of all stripes in a liminal space in which they “straddle tracks,” refusing singularity and accepting the “crossover space” Crosson describes as a site of praxis and power.

In the context of such a crisis stricken country, I think back to a conversation with my grandmother, who grew up around Espiritismo, saying “Tobacco doesn’t need the human, it is there regardless. And it holds its messages regardless. So the Venezuelans will never abandon it.” It is often very easy to look at Venezuela through certain political, economic, and social scientific lenses to make sense of the country’s current condition, but it is much harder to observe Venezuela as its own semiotic ecosystem which different communities within the country can engage with to make sense of and navigate their citizenship, strategies for survival, and senses of belonging. For this reason I have worked to weave stories from friends and family into this work; Venezuelans are capable of understanding themselves and each other. And María Lionza, as a central entity in the Venezuelan Cultural Canon, can be utilized as a way to understand the meanings born out of the assemblage that is the country’s civil society through engagement with its different sectors. ♦

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