Decolonizing Diasporas

Radical Mappings of Afro-Atlantic Literature

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PREFACE

How do we map relations? About twenty miles off the coast of West Africa lies the island of Bioko, one of the most important insular territories of Equatorial Guinea, the only Spanish-speaking nation-state in sub-Saharan Africa. There, in the capital city of Malabo, a salt-whipped bronzed plaque reads: "En memoria a los cubanos deportados en el siglo XIX a la isla de Fernando Po / 28 de mayo de 1869 / Embajada de Cuba en Guinea Ecuatorial." This plaque, dedicated to the memory of Cubans deported to Fernando Pó, Bioko's colonial-era name, marks an important and understudied history between Hispanophone Africa and the Hispanophone Caribbean.

In 1845, the Spanish Crown's Royal Order 13 saw to it that emancipated slaves from Cuba—Blacks and mulattos—be deported to the island of Fernando Po to labor in the newly solidified colony of Spanish Guinea.[1] By

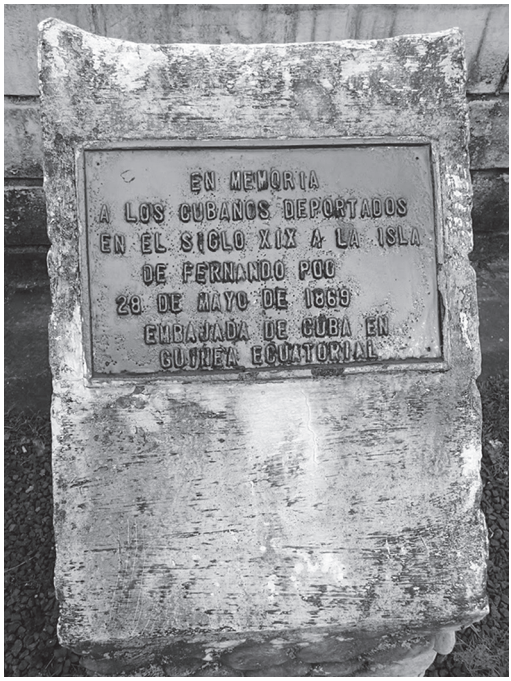

Fig. 1. Cuban deportee memorial in Malabo, Bioko, Equatorial Guinea.

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1865, these emancipados had been joined by political activists and dissidents from Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines who were "disappeared" from their homes and deported to Bioko's penal colony. It was not, however, until thirty years later, in 1898, when Spain lost the Spanish-American War and by extension Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines—its last remaining colonies in the Americas and the Pacific—that Spain turned its full imperial attention to its remaining African colonies. In "Rethinking the Archive," Benita Sampedro Vizcaya notes: "In the aftermath of 1898, when Spain lost what remained of its credibility as a global force and imperial anxieties passed through one of their most critical phases, the scramble for Africa by the European powers left little to appropriate. Equatorial Guinea would become, along with Morocco, the essential locus for covering the economic and psychological trauma and contributing to the formation of a public imperial imaginary."[2] The shift that left Puerto Rico, Cuba, and the Philippines in the imperial hands of the United States likewise ushered in an age of renewed colonial interest, extraction, and exploitation in Spanish Guinea, as it was then known.[3]

While each of these Caribbean island nations faced different political outcomes under U.S. imperial rule and later independence, protectorate, or commonwealth statuses, 1898 marks an important political, social, and

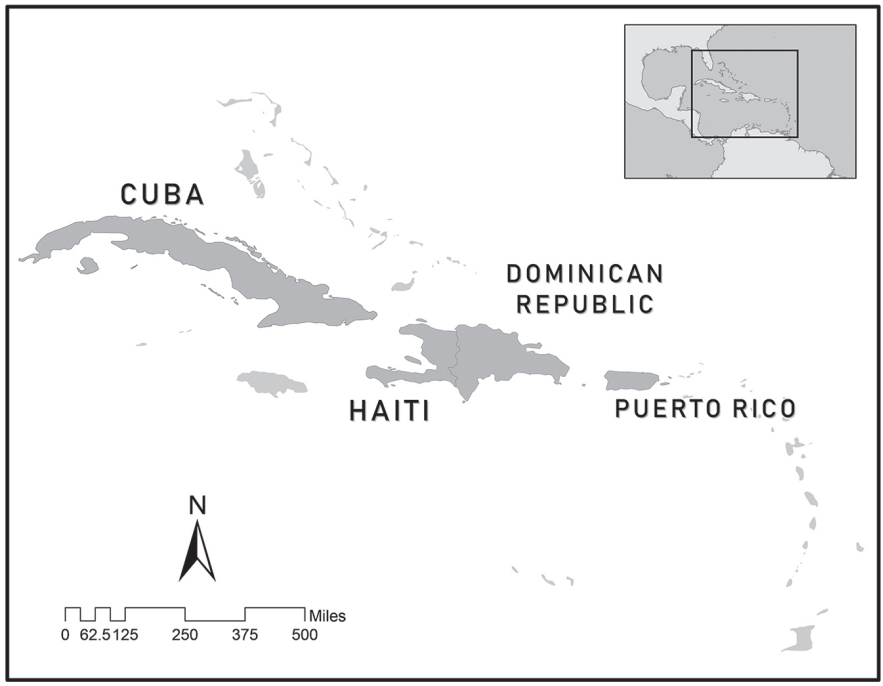

Fig. 2. Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic.

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economic shift that bears on contemporary realities. I would be remiss if I failed to note that the year 1898 had a significant impact on the place from which I am writing, the state of Michigan, which is on the ancestral, traditional, and contemporary lands of the Anishinaabeg—the Three Fires Confederacy of the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatami peoples.[4] As legal scholars Wenona Singel and Matthew Fletcher explain, the Burt Lake Anishinaabeg resistance to forcible removal in 1898 was followed by continued harassment in 1899, and culminated in the violent "burn out" of the Indian Village on Burt Lake in 1900. Notwithstanding these forceful histories and ongoing forms of dispossession, "Indian and Indian tribes have never forgotten their sacred homelands, and continuously seek to restore their lands."[5] Colonial legacies of dispossession and violence go far beyond and before 1898. Thus, while this book focuses on the Hispanophone Afro-Atlantic, I understand these histories as overlapping with the forceful removal, dispossession, and other forms of oppression faced by Indigenous, Black, and people of color around the globe. These are the palimpsests of oppression and resistance to which we must bear witness.

In the case of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and Spanish-speaking Africa, it is not only the legacy of Spanish colonial rule that connects these islands but also histories of war, dictatorship, migration, and defiance. The histories, and very often the imaginaries, of these islands and their diasporas often overlap in generative and complex ways. Spanish Guinea did not become Equatorial Guinea until it was administratively decolonized in 1968. Thus, as Spain shifted from fascism to democracy after 1975, Equatorial Guinea shifted from colonial rule to a fifty-year-long autocratic government.[6] In 1968 Equatoguineans elected their first president, Francisco Macías Nguema. By 1970, Macías had made Equatorial Guinea a single-party state, and within six months he had declared himself president for life. Effectively a dictatorship, his repressive rule saw the deaths of thousands of Equatoguineans and political dissidents, the displacement of the Bubi (the autochthones of the island of Bioko, which is central to political power), the severing of political ties with Spain and the West, and the ousting of anyone who had been educated under Spanish colonial rule. Many of those young students, like authors Remei Sipi Mayo and Donato Ndongo Bidyogo, were unable to return to Equatorial Guinea, and watched the nation transition from colony to democracy to dictatorship from their exile in Spain.

These oppressive maneuvers drove a surge of Equatoguineans into exile in Spain and led others to migrate to the neighboring nations of Gabon and Cameroon. Those who survived and remained in Equatorial Guinea suffered from malnutrition, state-sponsored terror, and coercive treatment from paramilitary and state power representatives—what Achille Mbembe has called "private indirect government."[7] This ethnic and ideological cleansing was intended to purge any political opposition, and to remove the memory of colonial-era rule. Macías went so far as to outlaw the word "intellectual."[8]

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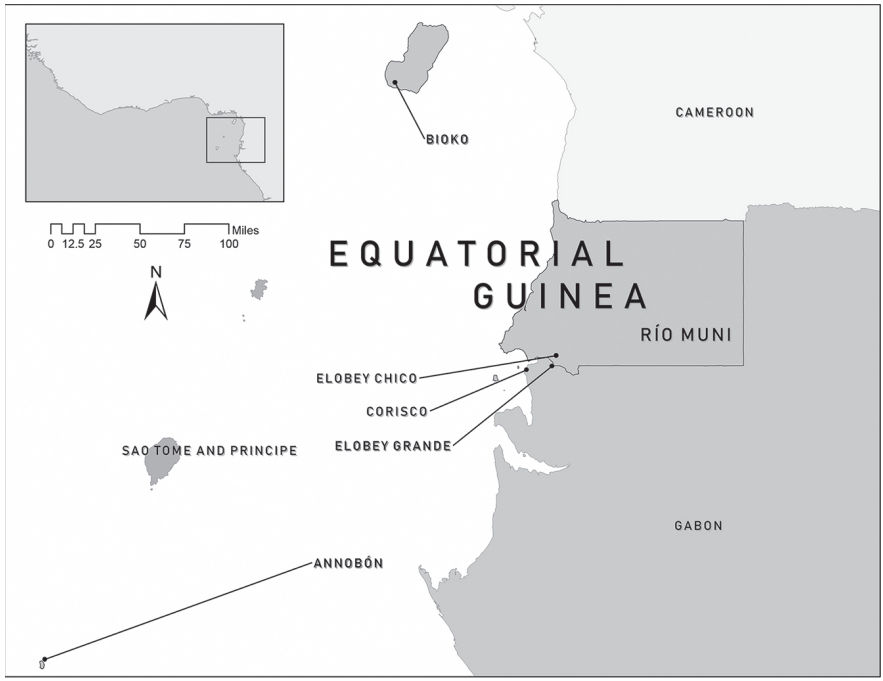

Fig. 3. Equatorial Guinea.

During this time, many writers and teachers (among others) fled the country and were unable to return. The years of Macías's reign have been called the "years of silence," referencing both the silencing of writers and intellectuals and the extensive and demoralizing political and social silencing of the people of Equatorial Guinea. As such, literary poetics written from exile, as Benita Sampedro Vizcaya argues, "was one of the most forceful forms of resistance during the years of silence, especially under Francisco Macías Nguema."[9]

In August 1979 Teodoro Obiang, Macías's nephew and lieutenant, led a coup d'état, overthrowing his uncle and sentencing him to death by firing squad. Obiang became the second president of Equatorial Guinea and remains in power today. Obiang is now the longest-serving dictator in Africa, and the world's second-longest-serving political leader. His regime, though seen as less repressive than Macías's before him, remains an oppressive, ethnocentric, and autocratic rule with no free press, radio, or other outlets. The discovery of offshore oil reserves in the 1990s ensured Equatorial Guinea's rise on the global stage. Contemporarily, it is considered one of the wealthiest nations on the continent of Africa.[10] But the wealth from the oil boom is distributed extremely unequally; the majority of the population lives in destitute

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poverty, many without access to clean water. The oil boom and subsequent financial windfall further complicate the nation's human rights violations, in light of the Equatoguinean government's relationship with international oil corporations and countries like the United States, which has consumed more than one-third of Equatoguinean oil. Furthermore, there are currently hundreds of Cuban medical doctors, professors, and others working in Equatorial Guinea as part of international political and solidarity efforts between their countries.[11]

Due to the repressive political climate within Equatorial Guinea, resistance movements, much of the country's oppositional thought, and literary poetics that address postcolonial corruption, cultural resurgences, and liberatory strivings are produced in exile and diaspora in Spain.[12] The literary corpus of Equatorial Guinea falls primarily into the categories of colonial literature and contemporary works of poetry, drama, fiction, short stories, essays, music, and other artistic expressions. Contemporary works by Equatoguineans who were born in or came of age in Spain reveal their struggles with racial and ethnic belonging and their complex ties to a homeland made impossible by dictatorship and coloniality. These literatures also reflect affective and material relationships with other immigrants, African, Caribbean, and otherwise, in Spain.[13] The literature and cultural production of Equatorial Guinea, while preoccupied with the homeland, political economies, interethnic relations, and the everyday injustices of private indirect government, are likewise diasporic and transnational in their focus. As Marvin Lewis argues, "the capital of Equatorial Guinean literature" is in "the heart of every Guinean, whether in Spain, in France, or in Equatorial Guinea," because after the successive dictatorships, "a dislocation of the literary frontier is verified, and each author remains 'wherever he best finds himself,' from wherever he writes for his country."[14] Overall, however, Equatoguinean literatures written in diaspora and exile represent a broad range of concerns that are fundamentally linked in many ways to the literary corpus of Latinx Caribbean peoples in exile and diaspora. It bears mentioning that these literatures are rarely put into relation to each other.

On the other side of the Atlantic, the 1960s would also usher in a new era for Latinx Caribbean peoples in the Americas. For example, by 1963 over 215,000 elite and middle-class Cubans had fled Cuba after the 1959 revolution. Given the status of special refugees and aid in the form of U.S. subsidies, these Cuban exiles joined earlier waves of Cuban immigrants to the United States and necessarily transformed the cultural landscape of southern Florida.[15] During this same time and for decades afterward, Cuba underwent political, social, and cultural changes and suffered an embargo that would see it pitted as a political showcase vis-à-vis Puerto Rico.[16] Cuban migration to the United States would exponentially increase later in the twentieth century, as other middle-class Cubans in the 1970s, Marielitos in the 1980s, Balseros in the 1990s, and continuing waves of migration in the 2000s left the island by the thousands.

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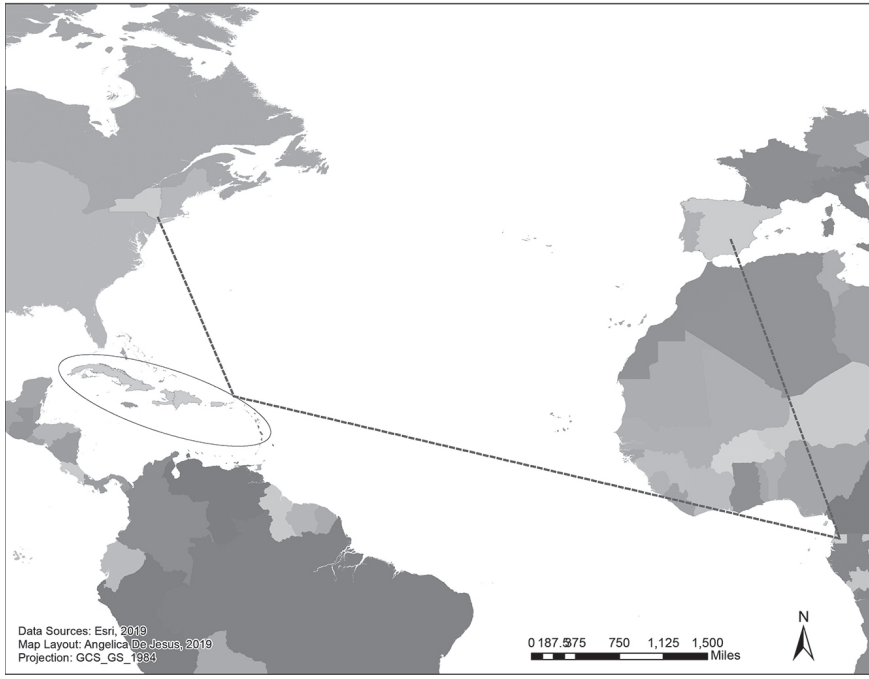

Fig. 4. "Let the Geographies Sink In": Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone Diasporas: Latinx Caribbean migration to the United States (New York highlighted) and Equatorial Guinean migration to Spain (Madrid highlighted).

Likewise, though a significant number of Puerto Ricans had been immigrating to the United States since the early twentieth century, dispossession and occupation after the Spanish-American War, coupled with efforts to rapidly industrialize the island through capitalist designs for a whiter middle class, meant that by 1960 there were over 600,000 Puerto Ricans living in New York City and hundreds of thousands more in Chicago, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and other locales throughout the continental United States and Hawaii. Puerto Rican immigrants were seen as a source of cheap labor and worked on rural farms and in factories in densely populated urban centers.[17] Waves of migration steadily increased throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, an era marked in Puerto Rico by economic depressions and deindustrialization driven by corruption, corporate tax evasion, ongoing dispossession, and the island's colonial (or commonwealth) status vis-à-vis the United States. The island's current fiscal crisis, due to the odious debt Puerto Rico has "accrued"—upwards of seventy billion dollars—can be tied to its commonwealth status and has propelled another wave of population dispersal which rivals that of the twentieth century. The year 2015 marked a historic moment in Puerto Rican migration history: there were officially more

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Puerto Ricans living in the United States than on the island. The onslaught of Hurricane Irma and then of Hurricane María in September 2017 destroyed much of the island's infrastructure, leaving millions without electricity, running water, or access to basic goods. FEMA and the U.S. and Puerto Rican governments' massive mishandling of recovery efforts after Hurricane María made for an unnatural yet predictable disaster that counted over 4,000 dead in its wake. It has also led tens of thousands to flee the island to cities like Orlando, Florida.[18]

The 1960s also proved to be a critical decade in the history of the Dominican Republic, as Rafael Trujillo's more than thirty-year rule came to an end with his assassination in 1961. In 1963, the democratically elected president Juan Bosch was overthrown after just two years in power. In 1966, after almost two years of military rule, Joaquín Balaguer was elected president. His twelve-year presidency, predicated on political repression, was reprised throughout the twentieth century, as he was reelected in 1986, 1990, and 1994. Thus, between 1961 and 1986, over 400,000 Dominicans fled to the United States, while another 44,000 migrated to the neighboring island of Puerto Rico. Political and economic instability likewise drove Dominican immigration to the United States throughout the 1990s and 2000s. A 2014 study from the CUNY Center for Latin American, Caribbean, and Latino Studies found that Dominicans had become the single largest foreign-born immigrant group in New York City.[19]

The decades following the 1960s saw a surge in literary poetics, arts, and musical genres in the diasporic populations of these nations. For example, the Nuyorican Poets Movement of the 1960s and 1970s radically changed the literary landscape of Latinx and U.S. literature and aesthetics. These groundbreaking decades saw working-poor and immigrant populations reflect their experiences as colonial subjects, immigrants, and racialized peoples in new and syncretic forms. This era also saw the formation of radical political Latinx organizations, neighborhood associations and grassroots activism, and, facilitated by bilingual education programs, an influx of Latinxs to colleges and universities. This growing number of people of color in the university system and their demands to see Eurocentric education decolonized and transformed led them to create new fields of thought that took seriously the knowledges, contributions, and cultural productions of people of color in the United States and the Third World. These new fields would not be like the area studies programs before them, which were often funded by and linked to U.S. military intelligence efforts, but rather, sought to transform Eurocentric knowledge production writ large.

In 1968 and 1969 the Third World Liberation Front, a coalition of Black, Latinx, and Pilipino student groups at San Francisco State University and the University of California at Berkeley, led the longest student strike in U.S. history. Their demand to decolonize the white supremacist curriculum and other structures within higher education led to the formation of ethnic studies,

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African American studies, Native American studies, Puerto Rican and Chicano studies, Latino studies, Asian American studies, Women's and Gender studies, and other such fields all over the United States. While this is by no means an exhaustive history, I do hope to mark some of the relations between migration, political resistance, and the movements that sought to transform knowledge practices. While I am wary of engaging in teleological narratives that flatten these dynamic histories and decolonizing projects, I am nevertheless committed to offering some of the important overviews and linkages that make this book possible.

With regard to Equatorial Guinea, the scholarship of these critical historical crossings resides primarily in the field of Hispanic studies and to a lesser extent in African studies, with Ibrahim K. Sundiata and Benita Sampedro Vizcaya underscoring the importance of the nineteenth-century deportations to penal colonies and Michael Ugarte, Elisa Rizo, and others engaging the salience of Equatoguinean literatures.[20] Furthermore, linguistics and sociology scholarship tracks the varieties of Spanish, including linguistic borrowings from Antillean Spanish, in the language practices of Equatorial Guinea.[21] In *Decolonizing Diasporas*, I aim to expand the ways we map these crossings between Spanish-speaking Africa and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean through a sustained meditation on their diasporic and exilic poetics. As Katherine McKittrick argues in *Demonic Grounds*, "Geographies of domination, from transatlantic slavery and beyond, hold in them the marking and the contestation of old and new social hierarchies."[22] Thus, I contend that putting into relation the preoccupations and reflections that emerge in post-1960s literary and cultural productions offers us a radical remapping of Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone subjects. This kind of relational project sees an often-ignored corpus of work as sites through which we can indict oppression, resist domination, and imagine decolonizing strategies. In mapping these imaginaries across these bodies of literature, I have found that, although distinct, they reflect similar preoccupations, experiences, and liberatory strivings. And although the historical, contemporary, literary, and ontological relations between Equatorial Guinea and the Hispanophone Caribbean islands—Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic—are rarely discussed in the context of Black, Latinx, and Hispanophone studies, I believe that such a study offers critical implications for these fields.

The connections between these poetics are not imagined. For example, we find intertextual dedications lauding Negrismo, a Cuban precursor to the Negritude movement, in the poetry of Equatorial Guinea.[23] One example is a 1993 poem published in the literary journal *El Patio*, a Hispano-Guinean cultural magazine. In it, the Equatoguinean poet and critic Carlos Nsue Otong offers an elegy to Nicolás Guillén, one of the foremost Afro-Cuban poets and political activists of the late twentieth century. Nsue Otong writes:

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> Quisiera tejer mi palabra / con esta emoción que me embarga
> y hacerla volar presurosa / a Cuba, mitad africana.
> Guillén Nicolás, compañero: / labré con mi canto corona,
> Maestro, Cantor y Poeta / salud a tu egregia persona.
> Robé el acento africano, / poeta soñé en la noche
> y era canto pregonero / al ritmo sonoro del bronce.
> Recibe mis versos, Guillén, / mi ritmo, mi metro, mi rima
> nativos del África madre / en viaje allá por Antillas.[24]
>
> I wish to weave my word / with this emotion that overcomes me
> and make it fly swiftly / to Cuba, half African.
> Guillén Nicolás, comrade: / I crafted with my highest song,
> Teacher, Singer and Poet, / a greeting to your eminent persona.
> I stole the African accent, / I dreamed of a poet in the night
> and it was the people's song / set to the sonorous rhythm of bronze.
> Receive my verses Guillén / my rhythm, my meter, my rhyme
> natives of Mother Africa / en route over there through the Antilles.

Here, Nsue Otong praises Guillén's lyrical virtuosity, establishing a link to his African ancestry, "nativos del África madre," and broadly hails Afro-Caribbean peoples as being "en viaje allá por Antillas." Through this elegy, Nsue Otong contends that Cuba is "mitad africana," and pleads that Guillén receive his poetic verses, "mi ritmo, mi metro, mi rima." What, then, do we make of this ode, of this "viaje," and of these long historical and contemporary poetic crossings between Equatorial Guinea, the Hispanophone Caribbean, and their diasporas? What can a mapping of these relations illuminate?

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Introduction

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Relations

> Peoples do not live on exception.
> Relation is not made up of things that are foreign
> but of shared knowledge.
>
> —Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

Decolonizing Diasporas makes a critical move toward engaging the relations between Equatorial Guinea, comprised of five islands and a small continental swathe, and the Latinx Caribbean islands of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, through a study of their diasporic and exilic literary productions. Rather than an exhaustive linguistic, historical, or sociopolitical study, *Decolonizing Diasporas* is suggestive in its remapping of diasporic Afro-Atlantic literary and cultural aesthetics. Each chapter builds on a particular theme that emerges as a shared preoccupation within the analyzed works. In it, I critically engage eleven novels, a series of visual/sonic works, poetry, essays, and a short story. Through this undertaking, *Decolonizing Diasporas* engages topics such as the intimacies of colonial domination and erotic freedom practices; the act of faithful witnessing; the phenomena of dispossession, or what I call destierro; the possibilities of a reparation of the imagination; and visions of Black futurities as apocalypsos. In conceiving this project, my aim is to render legible what these texts offer to subjects who resist ongoing forms of colonialism, as intellectuals, as post/colonial subjects under coloniality, as organizers and activists, and as peoples who necessarily document often-unacknowledged sets of histories. By studying diasporic Afro-Puerto Rican, Afro-Dominican, and Afro-Cuban literary texts and cultural productions in relation to those emerging from Equatorial Guinea and its diaspora, I track the relationship between Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone subjects. I argue that these multilingual and insurgent works push the boundaries of decolonial thought by offering radical perspectives from the underside of the Afro-diaspora.

This project of relationality across Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone diasporas is made possible through the work of decolonial thinkers and decolonial and women of color feminists, who have continually framed literature as a critical space in which to create coalitions and relations across difference, to imagine

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radical liberatory futurities, and to reimage the human. These thinkers, including Audre Lorde, Michelle Cliff, Sylvia Wynter, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, Chela Sandoval, Vanessa Valdés, and Laura E. Pérez, take seriously the cultural productions of those rendered invisible by coloniality. As part of this tradition, I propose that we see the works of the Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone diaspora as archives of indictment and as liberatory discourses that fashion and imagine what I call "worlds/otherwise" (the subject of chapter 5). *Decolonizing Diasporas* maps decolonial poetics through a sustained engagement with the multiple perspectives, experiences, histories, and lived realities of different peoples living under various conditions of colonialism (including settler colonialism, coloniality, and manifold modes of domination and extraction) as well as the radical resistance and imaginations they use to counter these structures of oppression.

In using the term "Afro-Atlantic" I am necessarily hailing the term "the Black Atlantic," which Paul Gilroy defines as a "rhizomorphic, fractal structure of the transcultural international formation." What Gilroy coined "the Black Atlantic world" includes the "historical conjunction—the stereophony, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed with the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering that I have heuristically called the black Atlantic world."[1] Gilroy urges cultural historians to use the Atlantic as an analytic beyond metaphor, and to consider it "one single, complex unit of analysis in this discussion of the modern world and use it to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective."[2] The use of the term "Hispanophone" in relation to the Afro-Atlantic is not to demarcate solely Spanish/Castilian language cultural productions, but rather to engage the complexities within the field of global Hispanophone studies. In their introduction to the special issue on "Global Hispanophone Studies" of the *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, Adolfo Campoy-Cubillo and Benita Sampedro Vizcaya argue that using the term "Hispanophone" is an "invitation to branch out beyond the traditional archives of Hispanism, engaging with some of the dispersed geographies, cultural and linguistic traditions . . . It is also a determination to break away from the overarching Iberian/Latin American binary and to embrace other communities, histories, experiences and repertoires."[3] Throughout this book I use the term "Hispanophone" to signify the political and linguistic geographies of the Afro-Latinx and Equatoguinean diaspora in a way that is not restricted by linguistic borders, points of origin, or distant homelands. In fact, the examination of these Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone cultural productions in relation to one another complicates language practices because they are written in Spanish, English, and Spanglish as well as French, Yoruba, and various Indigenous languages such as Ndowe, Fang, and so on.

In engaging what has ostensibly been one of the most important concepts of the twentieth century, I am also calling attention to what M. Jacqui

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Alexander calls "the Crossing," which alludes to the told and untold histories of the Middle Passage and pushes us to consider the relations that emerge in the wake of these histories of modernity. The "Crossing" is likewise a pedagogy that disrupts the binaries inherent to modernity and "interrupt[s] inherited boundaries of geography, nation, episteme, and identity that distort vision [and] enable an understanding of the dialectics of history, enough to assist in navigating the terms of learning and the fundamentally pedagogic imperative at its heart: the imperative of making the world in which we live intelligible to ourselves and to each other."[4]

In his landmark book *Poetics of Relation*, Édouard Glissant traces the possibilities of relationality, beginning with the Middle Passage and the endless crossings of the Atlantic. Enslavement, a "debasement more eternal than apocalypse," is but the beginning of relations, and Glissant aptly centers the Caribbean as a site through which to examine the multiple and overlapping ways that modernity connects and disconnects peoples across the globe. For Glissant, the effects of the abyss—the ship, the ocean, and life at the "edges of a nonworld"—are intergenerational and shared experiences that "made us, the descendants, one people among others." As such, he contends that "peoples do not live on exception. Relation is not made up of things that are foreign but of shared knowledge. This experience of the abyss can now be said to be the best element of exchange."[5] Living in the chasm of the abyss and its aftermath requires ways of reckoning. For Glissant, poetry and poetics become a technology that bears witness to the known and unknown terrors that we live and share. Relations are thus political and require both a reckoning with the *longue durée* of our histories as well as a commitment to seeing relations and disjunctures across the Black Atlantic and across the world.

Throughout *Decolonizing Diasporas*, I use the term "Afro-Atlantic" rather than "Black Atlantic" as a way to call attention to how "Afro" as a prefix has been used throughout the Caribbean and Latin America to signal or claim afrodescendencia, or Afro-descendance. As Agustín Laó-Montes notes, "['Afro'] has been used on the southern side of the American hemisphere since at least the early twentieth century," and using this term would "allow us to analyze the differences and particularities, as well as the articulations and common ground of the manifold histories of the African diaspora in the Americas."[6] Joseba Gabilondo argues that the term "Hispanic Atlantic" is a useful vector of analysis when considering historical and contemporary migrations to Spain from Latin America and Africa, as well as Spain's enormous economic and political investments in Latin America (second only to those of the United States). Gabilondo argues that this "two-way flow of capital and bodies across the Atlantic brings to the fore a host of political and historical problems that have not been fully addressed by either Latin Americanists or Hispanists." This "underscores a new reading of modernity that goes back to the Spanish colonization of the Americas."[7] I add the prefix

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"Afro" to the term "Hispanic Atlantic" in order to more directly address the ways that Atlantic modernities are contingent upon forms of racialization and domination that are most often expressed through modes of anti-Blackness. Using the prefix "Afro" also allows for Africa to be central to the configurations of Atlantic circuits, especially in light of my focus on Caribbean and African islands and their diasporas.[8]

My emphasis on diasporic perspectives is also purposeful, as this concept helps to fracture national, regional, and racial cartographies.[9] Laó-Montes argues that theorizing Afro-diasporic perspectives "can allow us to rethink self, memory, culture, and power beyond the confines of the nation as a unit of analysis (and the dominant form of political community), and to develop a politics of decolonization beyond mere nationalism."[10] This is not only true of Afro-Latinx Caribbean literature, but is also an important node within Equatoguinean literature. Marvin Lewis notes that after national independence and two successive dictatorships that saw the exile of over a third of the country's population, "the capital of Equatorial Guinean literature was now neither Santa Isabel (Malabo) nor Madrid, but rather the heart of every Guinean, whether in Spain, in France, or in Equatorial Guinea. Because from that moment on, a dislocation of the literary frontier is verified, and each author remains 'wherever he best finds himself,' from wherever he writes for his country."[11]

While anthropologists were some of the earliest to discuss theories of diaspora, cultural and literary theorists have offered invaluable dimensions to diaspora studies. In fact, Kim Butler argues that "much of diaspora experience is unwritten: it is inscribed in the creative arts, material culture, and oral traditions."[12] As such, I start with the imaginary, looking at diasporic cultural works in relation to one another as a way to expand what we can know about diaspora studies. Diaspora is likewise a literary contact zone.[13] Building on the work of Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel and Marisel Moreno, I see diasporic literary and cultural productions that "reflect on the postcolonial and neocolonial cultural exchanges" and "address the continuities that can be observed between the literature" of homelands and diasporas.[14] Samantha Pinto's concept of 'difficult diasporas' dislocates conceptual notions of belonging, dispersal, and furtive returns, while subverting the notion of linearity and of being able to trace oneself or others back to points of origin or homelands.[15] Diaspora as an analytic reveals structures, relationships, and phenomena that are instrumental to understanding modernity. Antonio Benítez-Rojo's foundational study argues: "If someone had to define, at once, the meta-archipelago's historical novel and its folk narrative, using just two words, these would be, unquestionably: *revealer* (to reveal and re-veil in Spanish) *violencia*."[16] I contend that these diasporic Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone literatures reveal not only violence, but also insurgent forms of resistance and the radical potential of Afro-futurities.

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The Peripheral

Building on the works of Silvio Torres Saillant and Ramona Hernández, in *Decolonizing Diasporas* I argue that the aesthetic productions of these Hispanophone Afro-Atlantic subjects are "peripheral," or better yet, "peripheralized," and are situated at the far extremes of already marginalized peoples, nations, and histories.[17] I am particularly interested in how a sustained meditation on peripheralized literatures allows us to glimpse often-ignored sets of knowledges and experiences, and offers a radical remapping of diasporic Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone cultural productions. I conjure a "periphery" here to highlight the ways in which both Afro-Latinx and Afro-Hispanic literature and cultural productions remain at the edges, or the periphery, of already marginalized texts and experiences.

For example, if African literature is marginalized in relation to literary Eurocentricity, then Equatorial Guinea, surrounded by Anglophone, Francophone, and Lusophone nation-states and literature, stands alone as the only Spanish-language literature in sub-Saharan Africa. Although much Equatoguinean literature is produced in exile in Spain, these literary works are not necessarily considered part of the Spanish canon. When examined, Equatoguinean literature is often discussed as a reflection of a colonial past or as a signifier of the legacy of Spanish democracy. Benita Sampedro Vizcaya has argued that "it is particularly unsettling to note that, in the construction of (trans-)Atlantic paradigms from the Spanish and Latin American standpoints, Africa, and its multiple intersections with both Europe and the Americas, has frequently been absent. If and when Africa actually makes an appearance, it is often under the (useful but nonetheless limited) rubrics of migration, diaspora, or creolization."[18] In these contexts, the literature, narratives, and experimental works produced by Equatoguineans represent the periphery of the margin. I believe that Latinx Caribbean literature is similarly positioned.

In the United States, we find Latinx literature juxtaposed to canonical and popular Anglo texts but rarely taken seriously as sources of study, and continually subordinated by white supremacist markets and logics. The works produced by Afro-Latinx writers are often overlooked both in the Caribbean and in the United States. Petra Rivera-Rideau posits that "Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, along with many other Afro-Latino American and Afro-Latino populations, have often been left out of conceptualizations of the African diaspora, despite the presence of substantial African-descended populations, histories of black resistance, and African-based cultural practices there."[19] In Rafael Pérez-Torres's study of Chicano poetics, he argues that Latinx literature (and, I would add, Afro-Latinx literature) traverses "the gaps . . . [and] bridges between numerous cultural sites" and is an accounting of the "discontinuities of history and power."[20] However, even with the international recognition of Afro-Latinx writers such as Piri Thomas, Junot

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Díaz, and Mayra Santos Febres, the work of Afro-Latinx Caribbean writers is underrepresented overall and often remains unacknowledged. Although more recently, critical approaches to Afro- and Indigenous Latinidades are becoming more visible in Latinx studies, with a turn away from ideologies of mestizaje and notions of "la gran familia," Afro-Latinx literature and scholarship has remained peripheralized and much more work needs to be done.[21]

Decolonizing Diasporas joins the challenge posed by Latinx Caribbean scholars, whose work rejects notions of a Latinidad based on social and political racial hierarchies founded on mestizaje and anti-Black discourses on the islands and in the diaspora.[22] A recent cultural and sociological turn to Afro-Latin America has seen an increase in the study and critical documentation of Afro-descendants' cultural work and activist organizing.[23] Several important edited volumes and collections published in the 2000s also represent some of the few works that have carved out a space to discuss Afro-Latinidad and Afro-descendancy.[24] Many of these works interrogate how colonial Spanish forms of anti-Blackness in the Caribbean and Latin America, and Anglo forms of anti-Blackness in the United States, have undermined the ways in which Afro-Latinxs belong in/to these spaces. In building on these works, I look towards mapping critical cartographies of Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone subjects in exile and diaspora through a relational framework that uses their resistance writings as a point of departure.

And yet this project does not intend to argue for the inclusion of Equatoguinean literary studies into a U.S. Latinx Caribbean framework, or for relegating it to the Hispanist canon. Rather, *Decolonizing Diasporas* offers another way of radically remapping Afro-Diaspora studies and the Afro-Atlantic writ large, with Equatorial Guinea and Afro-Latinxs as central thinkers, actors, and anticolonial and decolonizing agitators. In this way, the critical cartographies offered in *Decolonizing Diasporas* mark new inroads for Black, Latinx, and Hispanic studies through a sustained engagement with the decolonizing poetics of the peripheralized Afro-Atlantic subjects who are often absent from our discourses.

A radical relational remapping of Afro-Latinx and Afro-Hispanic aesthetics, and by extension their histories, also transforms some of the more dominant tropes within Black studies, for which the central discourses often reside in African American or Anglo contexts. As Laó-Montes notes, "In the hegemonic Anglophone world there is a tendency to marginalize Afro-Latinos from the historical memory and cultural-political mappings of the African diaspora."[25] This remapping also challenges Latinx studies wherein tropes of mestizaje and ethnic/national belonging often circumvent critical discussions about Afro-Indigeneity and racialized Blackness. And finally, in Hispanic studies, the study of Hispanophone Africa is not usually discussed in relation to the Caribbean or Latin America.[26] Thus, the project of mapping Equatoguinean

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and Afro-Latinx Caribbean literary imaginaries is a critical cartographic practice that exemplifies what Glissant aptly named a "poetics of relation."

The long-established sociocultural ties between Latinx Caribbean and Black peoples in the United States requires a rearticulation of Black studies and Latinx studies.[27] Likewise, decolonial thought from Caribbean and extended Caribbean contexts must engage with the decolonial thought from Indigenous thinkers living and resisting in settler colonial contexts. In taking seriously this critical cartographic practice, one can then see a similar phenomenon in the context of the Equatoguinean exilic population in Spain. The literature of Equatoguineans necessarily speaks to preoccupations in sub-Saharan Africa as well as their lived experiences in the diaspora. These texts engage different kinds of African migration to Europe, and reveal distinct forms of domination and oppression faced within Equatorial Guinea under dictatorship, and anti-Black and anti-African racism in Europe.[28]

Decolonizing Diasporas is imbued with these politics, and while fleshing out each of these ties is beyond the scope of this book, I am clear about the stakes and limits of this project. Without bearing witness to these interrelated and overlapping histories and political imperatives, we risk playing into the dynamics of domination that seek to fracture peoples across axes of difference. I follow Alexander Weheliye's succinct endorsement of relationality: "Relationality provides a productive model for critical inquiry and political action because it reveals the global and systemic dimensions of racialized, sexualized, and gendered subjugation, while not losing sight of the many ways political violence has given rise to ongoing practices of freedom within various traditions of the oppressed." I take seriously Weheliye's call to "design novel assemblages of relation," a call that women of color and ethnic studies scholars have long practiced in their scholarship and activist work.[29]

Relating the Hispanophone Caribbean with Equatorial Guinea elucidates how colonial intervention, revolutionary actions, dictatorial rule, and first-world corporate interests are manifested within the lives and imaginaries of post/colonial Afro-Atlantic subjects. However, rather than solely building this work around erasures or absences, I am interested in what kinds of insurgent worldviews surface when we link diasporic Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa to the works of Black, Indigenous, and women of color thinkers, and see what they can offer to the realm of decolonial thought. Through this study I show how these poetics elucidate how, tucked in the periphery, Afro-Atlantic works indict the intimacy of dictatorship and occupation, engage in philosophies of witnessing which reject colonial politics of recognition, articulate new forms of finding homes amid a world circumscribed by destierro, reimagine reparations beyond positivism, and offer meditations on futurities or worlds/otherwise.

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Critical Cartographies of Racialization

The writers and artists I engage here offer ways to critically remap an often-unacknowledged set of Afro-Atlantic texts. I engage in a methodology of relationality born through my training in comparative ethnic studies. My methodological approach to this work further troubles the impression that Afro-diasporic peoples can be placed into stark comparisons. Keith Feldman argues, for example, that the genealogy of comparison offered by comparative ethnic studies "reveals the tension among the coalitional imaginaries of race radical insurgency, sociological approaches to minority difference, and the proliferating terms of inclusion on offer from the U.S. state and the academy."[30] I contend that Afro-Puerto Rican, Afro-Dominican, Afro-Cuban, and Equatoguinean peoples, who shoulder 500 years of distinct historical, colonial, and cultural contexts and lived experiences, cannot be put into a simple comparison or a framework of comparativity.

Thus, while *Decolonizing Diasporas* is a meditation on the relations between and contributions of diasporic Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone subjects, it also underscores their disparate material histories and distinct lived experiences under ongoing forms of colonialism, including coloniality and settler colonialism. I understand coloniality as the continuation of colonial practices, ideologies, and structures long after nations have undergone administrative decolonization—what Nelson Maldonado-Torres refers to as "long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations."[31] Lisa Lowe contends that settler colonialism is also an ongoing project. "What we might identify as residual within the histories of settler or colonial capitalism," she argues, "does not disappear. To the contrary, it persists and endures, even if less legible within the obfuscations of the new dominant."[32] Ongoing colonialism or coloniality is then a systematic process of racialized dispossession. Jodi Byrd acknowledges Glen Coulthard in noting that "colonialism endures . . . as 'a form of structured dispossession' of Indigenous peoples and lands that exists within the usury regimes that ensure financialization as the fulfillment of accumulation."[33] Thus, throughout *Decolonizing Diasporas* I critically link these histories of Black and Indigenous dispossession, especially as they pertain to diasporic politics in the United States. These politics are part of the decolonial turn, which Maldonado-Torres argues is "about making visible the invisible and about analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility," and "takes the colonized as . . . a source for inquiry into problems created by modernity and forms that may adequately respond to these problems."[34] While I engage in decolonial thought and theory, I agree with Barbara Christian that there is no monolithic theory for the "multiplicity of experiences," especially for Black peoples in the modern world.[35]

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Furthermore, I track other forms of material relations through the literary and cultural imagination, and through the vectors of Afro-descendancy and scripts of Blackness.[36] If, as Christina Sharpe argues, "anti-Blackness is total climate," then my meditation on the Afro-Atlantic begins with the fact that the vastly different racial and ethnic ideologies in the Latinx Caribbean and sub-Saharan Hispanophone Africa, and their diasporas, cannot be collapsed into simple racial classification systems.[37] The move to label all of these subjects as Black peoples, without a nuanced understanding of the stakes and limits of what that means in each of their homelands and diasporic contexts, would produce violent cartographies that flatten and distort their subjective experiences. While comparativity on the axis of racialized Blackness would be a more easily consumable project within certain binary racial frameworks, this project requires nuance and specificity. To reduce the complexity of Black life is to erase subjectivity and enact generic violence over and against multivalent forms of oppression and resistance. I have tried, to the best of my ability, to complicate facile notions of race, ethnic belonging, and racialization in my analyses.

In *Decolonizing Diasporas*, I outline and pay close attention to what I am calling critical cartographies of racialization. Following Katherine McKittrick's contention that "human geography needs some philosophical attention," the concept of critical cartographies of racialization helps us to hold space for different ways that anti-Blackness and the colonial difference imbue former colonies and contemporary metropoles.[38] This relational cartography of racialization for Afro-diasporic and exilic peoples outlines the unfixed racial and ethnic ontological and phenomenological experiences that emerge when moving across spatial and temporal locales. While these practices of racialization manifest differently for Black Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, and for Equatoguineans, it is precisely in thinking about the ways that they diverge and overlap that we better understand the forms of anti-Blackness endemic to modernity. Anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity are critically intertwined and are central conceits of the colonial difference, of coloniality, and of ongoing settler colonial projects. Understanding the complexity of these discourses and their material impacts across the Afro-Atlantic is central to understanding what Fanon calls the "lived experience of the black."[39]

Critical cartographies of racialization help us to unpack and understand how Afro-descendant peoples are racialized in divergent ways, depending on their ethnic or national citizenship, location and ability to move or travel, class status, phenotype, and other factors. In tracking what Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Katherine McKittrick each call "cartographies of struggle," the concept of critical cartographies of racialization simultaneously attends to shifting subjective experiences and the seeming permanence of racism and anti-Blackness endemic to the modern world.[40] These shifting rules of race and racialization, often concealed or unspoken, surface in the experiences of

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Caribbean and extended Caribbean contexts. In Latinx Caribbean frameworks, we see an adherence to centuries-old ideologies of mestizaje that underscore the importance of mixed-race ethnicity underpinning cultural nationalism.[41] Such ideologies, championed through centuries of Spanish colonial rule, casta systems, and sociopolitical codes, have been robustly internalized. The concept of mestizaje, however, relegates both Blackness and Indigeneity to backwards moves within national imaginaries and nation-building projects that seek to move towards whiteness.

Therefore, the insistence on Latinidad as mestizaje, a triumphant and vigorous mixing of "three races" to produce a unifying ethnicity in which we are "all mixed"—café con leche, unos más café, otros más leche—holds the same underlying structures of anti-Blackness and anti-Indigeneity as Anglo and U.S. racial hierarchies based on hypodescent. Latinx Caribbean peoples in diaspora exist within a violent set of demands stemming from competing forces of racialization. Within the national imaginary of the Latinx Caribbean—and perhaps within one's own kinship network and community—being Puerto Rican or Cuban or Dominican might eclipse racial categories, even as this ethnic and national identification enables covert and overt forms of anti-Blackness.[42] While in the Hispanophone Caribbean, race is not based on binaries but rather on "different color spectrums," Afro-Latinx Caribbean peoples living in diaspora in the United States find themselves racialized according to ever-shifting rules and regulations.[43] Often this means negotiating between Spanish and Anglo colonial notions of race: scripts that demand "bettering the race" or those that quantify race through vectors of blood quantum or hypodescent, better known as the "one-drop rule."

While one drop of "Black" blood can mean that an Afro-Dominican is categorized as Black in the United States, this is not necessarily the case in the Caribbean, where there exists a plethora of racial categories that create distance between Afro-descendants and binary ideologies of Blackness.[44] Even within these acutely narrow social structures, there exist choices in self-identification and self-naming. For example, "Afro-Latinidad" has become an important political term and cultural framework throughout Latin America, the Caribbean, and the United States and has historically and contemporarily given space for Latinx peoples of African descent to identify and organize politically as such.[45] Both Anglo and Latinx ideologies of race and racialization continue to demarcate social, economic, and political stratification for Black populations across the Americas and the Caribbean. However, my engagement with these literary corpora offers me a discursive space to reflect on the constant negotiation of race and the subjective experience of Blackness. The texts discussed in this book become sites that document and destabilize processes of racialization that attempt to circumscribe Afro-Latinx subjects into disparate—but equally anti-Black and anti-Indigenous—matrices of race.

These racializing categories are further complicated by gender and sex. Angela Jorge's foundational 1979 essay, "The Black Puerto Rican Woman

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in Contemporary Society," argues that there are critical distinctions among Black Puerto Rican women on the island and the first, second, and third generations in diaspora in the United States. These differences "are the result of their ability or inability to cope with the racism that confronts them."[46] Jorge contends that Afro-Puerto Rican women's choices with respect to marriage—for example, having an African American partner—can in effect exclude them from Puerto Ricanness or acceptable forms of belonging.[47] This example reveals both anti-Blackness across diasporic contexts as well as the tenuousness of belonging for Afro-Puerto Rican women in the diaspora. Jorge underscores that a series of factors including partnerships, physical appearance, and so on can shape how race, racialization, and belonging impact Afro-Latinx subjects, especially women, femmes, and those living in diaspora.

For Equatoguineans, the realities of anti-Blackness, particularly for those living or exiled in Spain, are salient. Remei Sipi Mayo's *Inmigración y género* examines these racialized experiences through an intersectional methodology.[48] Sipi Mayo outlines the distinct experiences that propel women from the African continent to Spain, and underscores the kinds of racialization and "quotidian violence" experienced by Black women and femmes in diaspora and exile. She explains that "La Mirada," the reductive "gaze" through which immigrant women are often seen, is a kind of quotidian violence that often circumscribes their experiences:

> Es aquella que surge del exterior o sea de la sociedad receptora, de aquellas miradas que ante mujeres procedentes de escenarios humanos diferentes tienden o pretenden encasillarnos, reduciendonos a estereotipos y aplicándonos prejuicios como, por ejemplo, los referidos a considerar que por ser de un determinado origen, somos prostitutas, trabajadoras del servicio doméstico y un largo, en ocasiones, etc. Intentando borrar saberes y riquezas que algunas trajimos y los que aprendimos aquí como maestras, escritoras, dinamizadoras de grupos, mediadoras interculturales, etc.[49]
>
> It is that [look] which emerges from the outside or from the receiving society, those views that tend or portend to frame us, women from different human scenarios, reducing us to stereotypes and applying prejudices such as, for example, [considering] that by being of a certain origin, we are prostitutes, domestic workers and so on, sometimes, etc. Trying to erase the knowledge and wealth that we brought with us and learned here as teachers, writers, group promoters, intercultural mediators, etc.

For Sipi Mayo, the violence of La Mirada is a way to categorize or reduce African and Afro-descended women to stereotypes, and subject them to

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prejudice and discrimination. Under this mirada, Black women from Equatorial Guinea and the Caribbean are seen as prostitutes or domestic workers, while the kinds of rich knowledges and skills they bring from their homelands, or even the resources or education they acquired in exile or diaspora, are minimized or rendered invisible.

Similarly, Michael Ugarte's *Africans in Europe* maps how racial otherness, exemplified by Black skin, is a marker of outsider status in Spain. In recounting the experiences of the Equatoguinean author and critic Donato Ndongo Bidyogo, Ugarte recalls that Donato's career as a journalist was marked by his Black skin without regard to his skill, his subjective experience as a Spanish colonial subject, his language, or his ethnicity.[50] In Wynterian terms, the history of Equatoguinean colonial subjecthood does not successfully select Afro-Hispanics into the world of Man.[51] As inhabitants of a former Spanish colony with a longer history of overlapping colonialisms, Equatoguineans have "internal and external obstacles related to ethnicity, identity, place and displacement, dislocation and migration, language, violence, and politics." Lewis argues that these dynamics are "better understood when discussed in relation to Equatorial Guinea's colonial past."[52]

Paying close attention to the critical cartographies of racialization allows us to bear witness to both anti-Black racism in Spain and different forms of racialization at play in Equatorial Guinea. A closer study of history shows that ethnicity and belonging in Equatorial Guinea are circumscribed by hierarchy and political exclusion. The aftermath of independence saw the rise of dictatorial regimes, first that of Francisco Macías Nguema (1968–79) and later of Teodoro Obiang Mbasogo (1979–present), which accelerated social and political upheavals that led to the killing, incarceration, or exile of over one-third of the Equatoguinean population. Equatorial Guinea is comprised of several Bantu ethnic groups, including Fang, Bubi, Combe, Bujebas, and Ndowe, as well as Annoboneses and Fernandinos. Contemporary Indigenous writers represent and write about different islands and regions within Equatorial Guinea, such as Annobón, Corisco, Bioko, and Río Muni, and while they are "unified politically on the surface under Spanish colonialism and becoming one 'nation' with independence, most of the writers still maintain their unique ethnic identities and interrogate what it means to be Equatorial Guinean."[53] Thus, inter-ethnic divisions become a primary site of identification within Equatorial Guinea and cannot be summarily transferred to facile notions of Blackness or racialization.

While these groups can arguably all be categorized as "Black," especially within diasporic locales, these ethnic differences, as well as their perceived and real proximity to political power in Equatorial Guinea, engender oppression, suppression, and exploitation within and among citizens of the same nation-state. For example, in the twentieth century there was and continues to be a demonstrable struggle between ethnic groups in Equatorial Guinea. The historian Marvin Lewis notes that "the tension between the Bubi and the

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dominant Fang, viewed as occupiers of Bioko by the Bubi, is palpable." Lewis contends that this tension is also seen in the Annobónese and the Playero cultures, which see the legacy of the Spanish empire in the ethnic hierarchies that remain in Equatorial Guinea after administrative decolonization because it was the "colonizers who enforced Fang hegemony over the other ethnic groups and perpetrated divisions that remain evident today."[54] Furthermore, there are other dynamics at play, including multiple and overlapping colonialisms (Portuguese, British, Spanish), dictatorial regimes (Macías Nguema and Obiang Mbasogo), and a form of inter-ethnic settler colonialism that took hold in the aftermath of independence. The primacy of the Fang ethnic group, to which the two successive dictators belong, has led to a social, economic, and political reality that thrives on exploitation, neglect, and inequality. As Donato Ndongo argues, the most intimate parts of peoples' lives are affected by this kind of ethnic politicization. Igor Cusack, for example, contends that "the Fang are made up of various close-knit clans and since independence the country has been ruled by one such clan from a 'locality' called Mongomo." This is suggestive of Ndongo's claim that those who have any economic, social, or political opportunities in Equatorial Guinea are "appointed by the finger of the dictator" or rather, are selected within a select network of family, loyalists, or political allies.[55]

Critical cartographies of racialization can help us track how racialization shifts from Equatorial Guinea to Spain and underscores how these forms of racialization are related and yet distinct from Afro-Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Dominican peoples' experiences of race and ethnicity, both in their homelands and in diaspora. And while Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba are intimately tied historically, linguistically, and regionally, they too are marked by distinct yet related histories of occupation, colonialism, revolution, and diaspora.

Finally, critical cartographies of racialization can also hold space for differences across the Afro-Atlantic and its diasporas, thereby expanding how we conceive of both the Afro-Atlantic and Afro-diasporas, writ large. Equatorial Guinea, for example, has a long history of Portuguese, British, and Spanish colonization that includes Nigerian coolie labor, Spanish fascism, successive dictatorships, and mass exile. The linguistic practices in Equatorial Guinea are also dynamically different than those of the Latinx Caribbean; Equatoguineans speak a variety of Indigenous and creole languages, and while the lingua franca is Spanish, other official languages include French and Portuguese. In engaging different sets of literatures throughout each chapter, I complicate the idea that Afro-Puerto Rican, Cuban, and Dominican literature can be easily put into relation without accounting for differing forms of racialization. I also contend that the literature of Equatorial Guinea cannot be read as a homogenous corpus, because that would elide the sociocultural rifts within and beyond the borders of that nation. Thus, *Decolonizing Diasporas* enacts a relational decolonial feminist mapping along axes of racialization and difference.

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In this way, the histories of the Latinx Caribbean, Equatorial Guinea, and their diasporas are necessarily tied to so many other intersecting histories of colonization, migration, and radical liberatory movements. It is in this spirit of a critical and decolonial ethnic studies which seeks to put in relation the histories, lived experiences, and philosophies of peoples who resist white supremacy, cis heteropatriarchy, and capitalist accumulation that I usher in this project of mapping the contributions of Afro-Latinx and Afro-Hispanic Atlantic literatures. Rather than a project that uses the lens of decolonial theory to interpret or analyze the texts, I aim to see what these texts offer to decolonial thought and to track how they propel our decolonizing politics toward more radical and liberatory futures. If we take these works seriously and approach them through critical methodologies and an ethical praxis, we bear witness to how these diasporas are necessarily decolonizing forces that provide new and creative forms with which to resist coloniality and domination.

Crossing Again: Women of Color Feminisms and Decolonial Thought

Decolonial and women of color feminist thought offer us a methodology of relationality through which to engage these works. The project of women of color feminisms, as articulated by the Combahee River Collective, Audre Lorde, Wendy Rose, Barbara Smith, Aurora Levins Morales, Gloria Anzaldúa, Cherríe Moraga, M. Jacqui Alexander, Michelle Cliff, and others is one in which relations across difference and complex coalition-building are the stepping-stones to fashioning new futures that do not rely on hierarchies of domination. In their 1977 statement, the Combahee River Collective declared that they not only understood oppression to be interlocking, but also that Black feminist thought and organizing could combat the oppressions which women of color faced:

> [We] are actively committed to struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression, and see as our particular task the development of integrated analysis and practice based upon the fact that the major systems of oppression are interlocking. . . . As Black women we see Black feminism as the logical political movement to combat the manifold and simultaneous oppressions that all women of color face.[56]

This collective of visionary African American and Afro-Caribbean lesbian feminists articulated a politics of relationality that has resounded in the work and organizing of women of color feminists in the decades since it was published.

This labor of relationality is difficult and requires a praxis of witnessing fueled by love and fury. In "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference," Audre Lorde tells us that "the Future of our earth may depend upon

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the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference." She argues that "we have no patterns for relating across our human differences as equals," and because of this we stand to be fractured from one another and ourselves. This project of relations is a "lifetime pursuit," one that women of color feminists have kept alive as a politics and praxis.[57] It is a methodology of complex coalition-building, of learning each other's histories, of understanding why difference fragments communities in search of liberation. As Chandra Mohanty argues, "It is not color or sex that constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather it is the way we think about race, class, gender—the political links we choose to make among and between struggles."[58]

Aurora Levins Morales posits that "like it or not, our liberation is bound up with that of every other being on the planet," and anything else "is unaffordable."[59] Thus, the critical work of decolonial and women of color feminists fuels this project. Angelique Nixon, for example, argues that Michelle Cliff's literary poetics "critique racist, patriarchal, and homophobic structures while also making readers recognize the ways in which we participate in these structures." For Nixon, Cliff's work exemplifies "revolutionary and feminist" ethics because "it is passionate in its embrace of difference and (re)writing of Caribbean histories grounded in Caribbean women's experiences."[60] It is in this spirit of complex coalition-building, across often incommensurable differences and grounded in silenced and overlooked experiences, histories, and subjectivities of women of color, that I craft this project which meditates on literary poetics and cultural productions. For, as Lorde reminds us, "the literatures of all women of Color recreate the textures of our lives."[61]

Decolonial thought is suggestive as a framework, as a body of work, and as a political practice that looks to arts, poetics, and musical inspiration for its resistance and liberation work. The genealogy of decolonial thought to which I am referring is particularly generative because it finds its *longue durée* in the modern colonial project beginning in the late Middle Ages. Because I work across locales in the Caribbean and Africa, this temporality is key. This temporal framework offers an important perspective that is often overlooked in our quests to problematize categories which attempt to suffocate and limit our lives. Taking the fifteenth century's imperial/colonial project into account as a foundational violence, along with historical and spatial specificity, makes the ideological and structural reach of colonialism and coloniality visible. This then illuminates the dimensions of what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o deftly refers to as the "cultural bomb."[62] In locating modernity, colonialism (in its myriad forms), and coloniality as the problem, decoloniality bears witness to the humanity of the *damné* (condemned) and the value of their epistemologies, cosmologies, and lived experiences.

Following Laura E. Pérez's contention that "a decolonizing politics must introduce, engage, and circulate previously unseen marginalized and stigmatized notions of 'spirituality,' 'philosophy,' 'gender,' 'sexuality,' 'art,' or

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any other category of knowledge and existence," I aim to relate the literary corpora of often-overlooked Afro-Atlantic diasporic peoples, and trace both the preoccupations and the liberatory practices that dot the horizons of their decolonial imaginaries.[63] This decolonial feminist imperative rejects the dehumanization endemic to the colonial project that emerged in the long sixteenth century. Furthermore, decolonial feminist approaches rebut the colonial difference, or the creation of systems that categorize difference into hierarchies of humanity and nonhumanity.[64] Instead, decolonial and women of color feminists, such as María Lugones and Xhercis Méndez, have offered new ways of reimagining the human and a new ethics for relationships across difference.[65]

Thus if, as Maldonado-Torres argues, decolonization encompasses a "process of undoing colonial reality and its multiple hierarchies of power as a whole," then decolonization is necessarily both an embodied practice and a radical political project.[66] For example, Maldonado-Torres says that decolonizing projects are "grounded on the histories, lived experiences, and ethico-political imperatives of colonized peoples, as well as on their desires for open human interrelationality at the intimate erotic and public levels."[67] Centering the ways in which these diasporic subjects subvert and resist modernity and coloniality through their poetics and cultural productions is part of the aesthetic inquiry of the decolonial turn, or "an epistemic, practical, aesthetic, emotional, and oftentimes spiritual repositioning of the modern/colonial subject by virtue of which modernity, and not the colonized subject . . . appears as a problem."[68] *Decolonizing Diasporas* argues that these Afro-Atlantic writers offer ways of imagining new worldviews that unsettle and dismantle the logics of modernity/coloniality.

One fundamental aspect of this project is what Maldonado-Torres has called the "decolonial attitude," or a subjective disposition towards knowledge which demands an ethics that takes seriously the contributions, practices, knowledges, and experiences of those who have been systematically oppressed, disenfranchised, and silenced.[69] If, as Juan Flores argues, "Diasporic experiences—African in the Caribbean, and Caribbean in the imperial metropoles—have the effect of relativizing and de-essentializing, and of course de-territorializing, the traditional national construct and its hegemonies," then centering these works allows for a close examination of how the shared experiences and critical differences of Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone subjects can help us map resistance to the unfinished project of Western modernity and coloniality.[70]

Decolonizing Diasporas contributes to decolonial Caribbean discourses, and is in dialogue with African decolonial discourses that take into account the *longue durée* of the colonial project, understand colonial intervention as foundational violence and settler colonialism as an ongoing project, and name the contemporary effects of coloniality on the lived experiences of peoples resisting on its underside.[71] In addition, I see this project as the result of having engaged the work of scholars who have written about the Caribbean

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and its contributions to thinking about modernity and decolonization; scholars such as Sylvia Wynter, Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, Audre Lorde, Aimé Césaire, Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, Frantz Fanon, Xhercis Méndez, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Édouard Glissant, Ramón Grosfoguel, Lorgia García-Peña, Jessica Marie Johnson, Tacuma Peters, Antonio Benítez-Rojo, Vanessa Valdés, and M. Jacqui Alexander (to name a few).

By contributing to the study of both Caribbean and African decolonial poetics, this project frames decolonial politics and relational praxes as important lenses through which to understand Afro-Atlantic diasporas. *Decolonizing Diasporas* develops a decolonial feminist analysis that illuminates what these literary and sonic/visual works can offer to the theorization, politics, and practices of decoloniality. Furthermore, the discursive possibilities enabled by the disciplines of ethnic studies and decolonial and women of color feminist thought have facilitated the discursive moves undertaken in *Decolonizing Diasporas*. In fact, without such epistemological foundations, this project would not be possible.

Decolonizing Diasporas also recognizes the challenges and contributions brought to the fore by Indigenous, Native American, and First Nations feminist activists, scholars, and thinkers' decolonizing and resurgence projects, including Leanne Simpson, Kim Anderson, Cheryl Suzack, Dory Nason, and Danika Seltzman-Medak. Thus, *Decolonizing Diasporas* exists within the unyielding matrices of chattel slavery and Indigenous dispossession, across Abya Yala and Turtle Island. Disabused of objectivity, this text is articulated from the position of an Afro-Puerto Rican colonial subject thrust into diaspora onto settled, contested, and unceded territories. In this way, the overlapping histories of dispossession, destierro, and diaspora are rendered visible, and can speak to one another in relation to each other, rather than solely in relation to structures of domination.

Such a project would create the scaffolding for complex coalition-building, a practice that women of color and decolonial feminist thinkers have long practiced.[72] In focusing on literary poetics, I take up the mission that Sylvia Wynter has laid before us in "The Ceremony Must Be Found after Humanism." Wynter posits that it is the "literary humanities which should be the umbrella site for the transdisciplinary realization of a science of human systems."[73] Thus, literature, poetics, and the *studia humanitatis* are at the forefront of the project of radically remapping the human. *Decolonizing Diasporas* is both a signifier and a verb, and looks to the imaginary as a source of possibility.

On the Archipelago

Throughout *Decolonizing Diasporas*, I mark some of the relational preoccupations, thematics, and frameworks that dot the horizons of the Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone archipelago. I mobilize the term "archipelago" strategically

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in relation to what I see as an archipelagic turn in Latinx studies and the attention to islands in African studies. As Sampedro Vizcaya notes, "The recognition of islands as discursive spaces of textual production, and as privileged spaces for the articulation of a critical perspective, continues to be very limited in contemporary approaches to empire and imperial violence."[74] In the case of this project, thinking in and across island terms is crucial. Equatorial Guinea is comprised of five islands and a small continental swathe, while Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic are all islands that are part of the Caribbean meta-archipelago (and each island is made up of their own archipelagos, i.e., several island formations). They also symbolize a larger Caribbean imaginary in which the migrations to metropolitan locations such as New York, Orlando, Chicago, and Miami represent an extended Caribbean. My focus on the archipelago is not only about the islands themselves, but also about the sea. In the context of Oceania, Epeli Hau'ofa challenges colonial cartographies that see the Pacific archipelago as "islands in the sea" through an oceanic epistemology which sees the archipelago as a "sea of islands," thereby centering the sea as part of Pacific identity formation.[75] Latinx studies, and in particular the study of Latinx Caribbean poetics, has long imagined the diaspora in the United States—especially locations such as New York City, Chicago, and Miami—as archipelagic extensions of the Caribbean.[76] As Rebeca Hey-Colón argues, "For many, New York City has become a member of the extended diasporic family, but we must not forget that this place in the north is also an island; the Hudson laps at its shores."[77] In the context of Latinx Caribbean cultural studies, Hey-Colón notes that "the protean sea has the capacity to surpass physical boundaries, promoting the fashioning of a regional identity rather than a national one. . . . Latino/a writers that incorporate the sea into their work fashion new spaces for identity and relation(ships) to emerge, and the possibilities are as limitless as they are abundant."[78]

One example of this is Joshua Jelly-Schapiro and Rebecca Solnit's book *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas*, which offers dozens of alternative cartographies of New York City that challenge the reader to see and understand the southern islands of New York State in novel ways. The chapter titled "Archipelago: The Caribbean's Far North" includes a map by the cartographer Molly Roy, designed by Lia Tjandra, and an essay by Gaiutra Bahadur called "Of Islands and Other Mothers," which overlays the Caribbean islands and New York City's islands as one archipelago (see figure 5). In reflecting on her cartographic rendering, Bahadur asks, "Had maternal fierceness somehow forged a chain to connect us across the divisive waters of race and religion and history? Was this then, at last, our Caribbean archipelago?"[79] Bahadur's archipelago is anchored by kinship ties and bound by discourses, histories, religion, and race. McKittrick argues that "geography, then, materially and discursively extends to cover three-dimensional spaces and place, the physical landscape and infrastructures, geographic imaginations, the practice

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of mapping, exploring, and seeing, and social relations in and across space."[80] This radical reimagining of the material and geographic through a consideration of affective ties to space dovetails with diasporic patterns, and offers us a new way to map human geography that is both tangible and ephemeral. This discursive movida, or heretical move, challenges us to see the effects of insularity, the limits of thinking from a continental perspective, and at the very least offers us a visual mapping of the impact of Caribbean migrations to New York.

Martínez-San Miguel and Michelle Stephens have argued that archipelagic thinking necessarily "interrogate[s] epistemologies, ways of reading and thinking and methodologies, informed implicitly or explicitly by more continental paradigms and perspectives."[81] While Archipelagic studies has long-established discourses in Oceania and Pacific Island studies, thinking about Archipelagic American studies is a recent turn. This is reflected in both the journal *American Quarterly*'s 2015 special issue on "Pacific Currents," and in the publication of the 2017 collection *Archipelagic American Studies*, edited by Brian Russell Roberts and Michelle Ann Stephens.[82] Both of these generative and timely collections help to expand how we conceive of archipelagic formations, extended archipelagos, and what Craig Santos Perez calls "imperial terripelagos."[83]

Central to *Decolonizing Diasporas* are the ways in which discourses from the periphery, from small places, from islands and their diasporas, offer transformative approaches to thinking about modernity and its discontents. Those who stand to witness the machinations of power and domination from afar have much to offer us and our collective liberation. In this book, I trace relations by hailing distant and recent crossings. I propose a radical mapping of new diasporic relations linked through material and cultural productions, through historical crossings, through archives of the sea, and through archipelagic thinking. This methodology sees Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone islands as always already and necessarily related and in relation. Studying these nations and nation-states from archipelagic and diasporic perspectives shifts dominant continental discourses towards the potentiality within the Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone archipelago. In doing so, I read these historical crossings as palimpsests that engage the influences of the Spanish Empire as well as relationships to the British Empire and U.S. imperialism. I also consider the impact of relations with Francophone, Lusophone, and Anglophone nations and nation-states, which is particularly salient for the Dominican Republic and Equatorial Guinea, as well as contemporary ties to the United States.

This context notwithstanding, I also attend to diasporas springing forth from these islands, which punctuate this cartography like so many waves on the sea. Read as a palimpsest, these movements allow us to bear witness to traces of earlier movements and experiences, to the long legacies of the sea, of the Crossing; to mark relations between difference; and to weave stories pried from survival. Vanessa Pérez-Rosario argues that

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Fig. 5. "Archipelago" by Joshua Jelly-Schapiro and Rebecca Solnit, from *Nonstop Metropolis: A New York City Atlas* (University of California Press, 2016); cartography by Molly Roy, design by Lia Tjandra. Reproduced by permission of Joshua Jelly-Schapiro.

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"foregrounding the sea decenters cities such as Miami and New York and resituates them as extensions of the Caribbean archipelago. Contemporary Latino writers and artists use the image of the sea to illustrate the fragility and fluidity of identity constructs in transnational relations."[84] The sea is present and prescient in each chapter of this book, hailing relations and possibilities as well as marking distance and impossibilities. It is for this reason that I end this book with a meditation on the sea as material and immaterial history. Hey-Colón asserts that "the sea's propensity to exalt the sensorial aspects of literature [creates] an amorphous link to healing, trauma, and ultimately transformation."[85] *Decolonizing Diasporas* hails longer forms of archipelagic and diasporic relations, including the transatlantic slave trade, emancipation, and anticolonial struggles, and makes possible a linking of contemporary archipelagic and decolonizing imaginaries.

On Ethics and Methodologies

While *Decolonizing Diasporas* focuses on a small aspect of Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone and diasporic thought and politics, it prods at larger questions of national and ethnic belonging, and racialization and resistance. Global Hispanophone scholars are continually remapping the field of Hispanic studies in light of colonial legacies and Spanish-language practices, and are in many ways refashioning the Hispanist archive to include African, Filipino, and Asian literatures.[86] Outside of Hispanic studies, however, there is rarely sustained engagement with Equatoguinean literature. This project, then, is an attempt to engage and relate across these fields from the position of ethnic studies, and to see what these works can offer decolonial thought. This engagement with and practice of relationality also requires contending with my position as a subject of the world's oldest colony, and a subject who, through the systematic dispossession of ancestral lands and overlapping diasporic processes, directly and indirectly participates in the ongoing settler colonial projects of the United States.

While anchored in relationality and shared peripherality, this project is also deeply invested in recognizing and attending to the irreconcilable differences of the Afro-Latinx Caribbean and Equatoguinean diasporas. Taking these differences seriously is central to both the project of decoloniality and to women of color theorizing. However, there must be critical care in relational projects of this type. Thus, I make space for what is incommensurable across the experiences of Afro-Latinx Caribbean and Equatoguinean diasporic subjects. This is crucial since race and Indigeneity, modes of racialization and ethnicity, or forms of colonization and resistance are not reducible to one another. Sampedro Vizcaya references Ian Baucom to note: "Incommensurability can be both daunting and paralyzing. The task would rather be to 'attend to a series of moments in which an array of African, Caribbean,

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North American, South American, or West European cultural, narrative, literary, historical, and ideological practices converge.' "[87] Following Keith Feldman, I contend that the practice of being in relation in Afro-Atlantic worlds and world-making processes is "both an ethics and the fashioning of a phenomenology." As such, "the conditions of possibility for relation are the foundational worldings that are made in conquest and enslavement."[88] If these heterogeneous, overlapping, and irreconcilable diasporas are understood as somehow in relation, as vectors of knowledge for one another, then we are engaging in decolonial acts, traversing centuries, unrooting colonial structures and attitudes, and creating a constellation of radical hope and creativity that can fashion our futures.

Such a project, if taken seriously, would not only trouble tightly circumscribed narratives of Blackness, but would also bear witness to how Indigenous knowledges and practices continually unsettle and resist settler colonialism and coloniality. *Decolonizing Diasporas* must put its own title into practice. It must recognize the kinds of coloniality afoot within Indigenous African contexts and their diasporas, while also contending with the fact that Afro-Caribbean Latinx peoples in diaspora are often colonial or postcolonial subjects living on lands marred by Indigenous dispossession, the afterlives of slavery, and differing forms of racialization, sociopolitical exclusion, domination, and racism—what Ruth Wilson Gilmore defines as the "state-sanctioned or extralegal production and exploitation of a group-differentiated vulnerability to premature death."[89]

These tense and tender relations evoke Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's assertion that the incommensurability of these realities, under differing yet overlapping forms of colonial subjugation, can lead to distinct liberatory projects.[90] However, rather than turn decolonization into an "empty signifier to be filled with any track towards liberation," *Decolonizing Diasporas* points towards practices, politics, and reflections of liberation as articulated and imagined by these diasporic Afro-Atlantic authors.[91] In particular, the emphasized preoccupations reflect divergent approaches and histories to similar circumstances of oppression and domination—specifically processes of dispossession and domination that expel Afro-Hispanophone subjects into diaspora and exile. Thus, this is an examination of the varied liberatory strivings that rip the seams of foundational histories, and of the practices and fashioning of radical futures that do not rely on assimilation, dispossession, or coloniality.

Rather than a neatly corseted study of the links between Afro-Cuban, Afro-Puerto Rican, Afro-Dominican, and Equatoguinean writers and thinkers, *Decolonizing Diasporas* marks some of the preoccupations that emerge in these texts, and reads them against the grain of coloniality and towards a decolonizing politic, with a decolonial attitude.[92] I take on a decolonial attitude and engage in a methodological and political practice that illuminates what these diasporic and exilic authors and texts offer and disrupt within

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colonial and decolonial imaginaries, even as it is often difficult, dangerous, or deadly to do so.

My transdisciplinary training in ethnic studies enables me to take an approach that prioritizes the contributions of literary and historical studies, women of color feminisms and feminist philosophy, and decolonial and critical theory. Thus, while *Decolonizing Diasporas* focuses on literary, sonic, and visual cultural productions, I utilize an ethnic studies methodology to see how sociopolitical, cultural, philosophical, and theoretical issues are taken up and expanded within the works. The literatures of people of color and women are a prime site of analysis for radical and decolonizing work. As Barbara Christian famously declared, "People of color have always theorized," and this theorizing is "often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, because dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking." I heed Christian's advice and center the ways that literature is "not an occasion for discourse among critics," but rather a "necessary nourishment for their people and one way by which they come to understand their lives better."[93] In *Decolonizing Diasporas*, I follow the concepts and language that the works themselves offer and, by remaining "open to the intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race, and gender in their literature," have, in the words of Christian, "discover(ed) what language I might use."[94] Thus in each chapter of *Decolonizing Diasporas* I develop a central theme from within the literatures studied in that chapter; by following these works, I conceptualize how each novel engages with each theme and I analyze the distinct ways that each preoccupation is approached within these literary traditions.

Decolonizing Diasporas meditates on literary and cultural works articulated from different parts of the Afro-Atlantic world, representing unfixed and ever-shifting loci of enunciation. I argue that this condition of destierro, of being ripped forcibly from the earth, exiled, or dispersed, is a precondition of modern/colonial and settler colonial projects, which have made diaspora and exile a living reality for billions of people. In light of these long histories of domination, literary poetics and art become forces that challenge structures of power, and challenge us to imagine different modalities of being. Nancy Morejón argues that Caribbean poetics are a cultural and political tool. "The poetry of the Caribbean or, better yet, its poetics," she writes, "multilingual and plural, multiple and one, challenges us by being faithful to the origins that created it."[95] Afro-Caribbean poetics traverse regional, linguistic, and generic boundaries, speak of home, destierro, and other impossible spaces while carrying within them un/traced, un/spoken, and intersecting histories.

Afro-Latinx and Afro-Hispanic cultural productions emerge from unfixed loci of enunciation and across ontological modes of non-being and non-belonging. This begs the question, where does the study of these Afrodescendants belong? *Decolonizing Diasporas* proposes that a meditation on

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these peripheralized Afro-Atlantic texts calls for a rearticulation of Latinx studies, Hispanophone studies, and Black and diaspora studies. This project engages in a dialectical practice of reading these texts with a decolonial attitude, while recognizing and articulating what new tools they offer to the study of Afro-diasporas, the field of decoloniality, and projects that envision liberatory futures.

This practice of traversing borders and boundaries which have been built through modernity and its violent processes is necessarily fraught with tensions, and compels us to recall Gloria Anzaldúa's conjured image of the U.S.–Mexican border as "*una herida abierta* [an open wound] where the Third World grates against the first and bleeds." Anzaldúa tells us: "Before a scab forms it hemorrhages again, the lifeblood of two worlds merges to form a third country—a border culture."[96] We can think of the sea as a vast and fluid border, as a site of "colonial convergence" and resistance.[97] The sea appears, and while it is both seen and unseen in each chapter, its presence makes possible these works and this meditation. In the contexts of the literatures outlined in this text, I pose that the lifeblood of these worlds takes the shape of decolonizing diasporas—radical Afro-diasporic imaginaries that subvert coloniality and usher in new ways of knowing and being, and interrogate and excavate location and dislocation.

Each of the chapters in this book represents a love letter to the imaginations of the Hispanophone Afro-Atlantic. In each chapter I read a collection of literary texts and cultural productions linked by a thematic relation. The book develops in the form of a sequence, with each chapter building on the previous one, and each chapter underscoring a particular theme undertaken by the authors and artists in distinct ways. I take seriously Christian's call for literary criticism that is "promotion as well as understanding, a response to the writer to whom there is often no response, to folk who need the writing as much as they need anything."[98] Thus, the chapters of *Decolonizing Diasporas* continually accentuate the potentiality of these literary poetics to radically change our liberation practices and ourselves.

Routes: Chapter Breakdown

In chapter 1, "Intimacies," I examine how experiences of dictatorship, military occupation, and the coloniality of gender, respectively, impact intimate, kinship, and communal relations in Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's *By Night the Mountain Burns* (*Arde el monte de noche*), Trifonia Melibea Obono's *La bastarda*, and Nelly Rosario's *Song of the Water Saints*. I develop the concept of the intimacies of coloniality in order to trace how these novels reveal the ways that structural domination shapes everyday intimate practices, including access to sustenance, sociality, and sexual desire. While erotic desire is central to thinking about intimacy, I attempt to expand the intimacies of

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coloniality to include kinship ties, everyday needs, and communal violence. In turning from the more dominant analyses of dictatorial regimes, which often narrate power from a bird's-eye view, I instead look at the ways that autocratic power, sexual exploitation, and varying degrees of sociopolitical neglect likewise intimately impact the lives of those living under postcolonial and dictatorial regimes.

Analyzing the often-invisible impact that dictatorship has on reproductive labor, food insecurity, sexual economies, and the psyche underscores the insidiousness and intergenerational effects of domination. I contend that the three novels offer a distinct perspective on the intimacies of coloniality and center the oft-obscured subjectivities of Afro-femmes and lesbians, showing how erotic freedoms emerge and travel in relation to, against, and outside of social and political domination. While these erotic and corporeal freedoms are often severely punished, the authors frame what historian Jessica Marie Johnson calls "Black femme freedom" and what Nadia Celis Salgado argues is "conciencia corporal" (corporeal consciousness) as central to surviving within oppressive regimes. For example, in two of the novels, *Song of the Water Saints* and *La bastarda*, both authored by women writers, petit and grand marronage emerge as sites of freedom for Black women and femmes, even as they come up against systems of domination for which their gendered and racialized bodies are prime sites for regulation and control. In *By Night the Mountain Burns* we see the intimate and community-wide impacts of isolation, hunger, and foreign resource exploitation as experienced on the island of Annobón, the most remote island of Equatorial Guinea. I end the chapter by arguing that these texts demand a particular labor from the reader, which is to bear witness to the interstitial effects of domination, and to take note of how erotic freedoms emerging from Afro-femme subjects challenge the intimacies of coloniality. In this way, "Intimacies" opens a discursive space to engage the following questions: If these literatures demand witnesses, who has seen this? How can we be faithful witnesses to the visible and invisible effects of coloniality? These critical questions are the arc of chapter 2.

Chapter 2, "Witnessing," utilizes decolonial feminist philosopher María Lugones's concept of "faithful witnessing" as a point of departure to think about the ethics, possibilities, and limits of recognition. For Lugones, faithful witnessing is an act of aligning oneself with oppressed peoples against the grain of power. This act is one not only of seeing, but also supporting, the narratives of peoples, recognizing their lives and stories to be true despite their lack of institutional endorsement. I propose that faithful witnessing—bearing witness to the known and unknowable effects of colonialism, coloniality, and domination—is a critical element of the decolonial attitude. Through a close reading of Donato Ndongo's *Shadows of Your Black Memory* (*Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*) and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, I build on the concept of faithful witnessing as a decolonial alternative to Eurocentric philosophical notions of recognition. This chapter opens a

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space to think about the ethics of bearing witness, and examines how faithful witnessing reveals the machinations of coloniality and gendered violence. I propose that faithful witnessing is what happens when one does not collude with oppressive structures, and I argue that one of the most critical phenomena to which we must be faithful witnesses is the condition of destierro—the kinds of dispossession endemic to colonial/modernity that are expanded upon in chapter 3.

Chapter 3, "Destierro," is a meditation on exile and memory. Here, I develop the concept of destierro, the phenomenon of being ripped forcefully from the earth, as a violent precondition of modernity, colonialism, and settler colonialism. This chapter offers decolonial feminist readings of *El dictador de Corisco* by Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel and Loida Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home*. These texts engender critical discourses on destierro related to the suppression of memories and cosmologies, and the political and metaphysical realities of alienation. I argue that destierro is a violent act that is likewise a site for resistance. This form of exile is endemic to modernity's unquenchable hunger to consume and exploit, and thus compels Black, Indigenous, and Afro-Indigenous peoples to rise and make claims against it. I trouble the permanence of destierro, and open a discursive space to reimagine reparations outside of modern capitalist frameworks. I continue this line of thinking in the following chapter where destierro is taken up as a potential space to develop practices of decolonial love and a reparation of the imagination.

Chapter 4, "Reparations," examines how these narratives imagine reparations beyond the material. I begin by historicizing reparations as the concept pertains to radical Black thinkers in U.S. and Caribbean contexts. Using the work of Christina Olivares, Robin Kelley, and Chela Sandoval, I read Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams*, Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and Joaquín Mbomío Bacheng's *Matinga, sangre en la selva*. I argue that within these works, decolonial love is part of imagining nonmaterial reparations. These works bring forth and demand what I call a "reparation of the imagination." I understand this type of reparation as being sustained by remembering practices; grafting and culling our pasts and conjuring radical futures. I conclude by considering the kinds of radical futurities that a reparation of the imagination makes possible.

Chapter 5, "Apocalypso," examines the futurities that emerge from the Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone diaspora by tracing how decolonial love and resistance are conjured through the imagining of possible futures. Because the science of transforming the human is not only about historicizing how Man has come to overrepresent himself as the human, but also about mapping and imagining new ways of being human in the present and the future, the preoccupation with futurities and imagining other possibilities beyond coloniality is central to decolonial poetics, practices, and politics.[99] This chapter uses Michelle Cliff's treatise on apocalypso as a point of departure to examine

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how Afro-Atlantic authors and artists trouble tropes of racialized Blackness, conjure apocalyptic worlds, and center Santería and Lucumí as Afro-Atlantic religious syncretisms which represent acts of decolonial love and make space for the present-past and for Black futures.

The chapter examines the eponymous debut album and video images of the Afro-Cuban French singers Ibeyi, and Daniel José Older's novel *Shadowshaper*. I argue that these works trouble colonial notions of temporality, cosmology, and spirituality, and underscore the ways that the past and present are likewise the stuff of futurities. I then analyze Junot Díaz's short story "Monstro" and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's futuristic novel *Panga Rilene*, elucidating how these texts conjure apocalyptic worlds and further Afro-futurist discourses. Rather than imagine utopian liberation or dystopian futures, the writers that I study in this chapter imagine apocalypsos and what I am calling "worlds/otherwise" taking root in the ruptures between modernity and coloniality, and being forged by the collision of domination and resistance. Thus, the chapter maps how diasporic Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone writers and artists create worlds/otherwise. Many of these futurities rely on intimacies and transgenerational kinship ties, thus recalling the book's first chapter on intimacies and likewise shifting toward the book's coda which is a necessary meditation on the sea, the Atlantic, and waters beyond.

The coda, "Sea," acts as a conclusion for *Decolonizing Diasporas*. It is a brief reflection on how decoloniality and radical relationality in diasporic contexts open a space for further relational, archipelagic, and transatlantic projects. I conclude with a meditation on the sea, and examine how writers and artists imagine possibilities for racialized subjects in destierro. I discuss Raquel Ilombe del Pozo Epita's poetry in *Ceiba II* and undertake an analysis of Aracelis Girmay's *The Black Maria* and María Magdalena Campos-Pons's image, "De las dos aguas." The coda traces how Afro-Hispanic and Afro-Latinx literary poetics and art remap geographies of the human by offering alternative ways to consider the intimacy of violence, the act of witnessing faithfully, the impossibility of destierro, reparations as decolonial love, and present futurities. I offer methodological interventions at the intersections of Black, Latinx, and Hispanic studies, with radical women of color and decolonial feminist thought at the fore.

In engaging these topics, *Decolonizing Diasporas* addresses the following questions: What are the critical perspectives and challenges offered by peripheralized Black literature? How can we map beyond geographical and material locations/dislocations and towards a mapping of the imaginary? What if relations across difference in Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone diasporas became additional vectors of analyses that help us complicate and interrogate contemporary discourses on race, sex, gender, sexuality, diaspora, belonging, decoloniality, and liberation?

This project, then, offers a lens through which to read peripheralized Afrodiasporas in a different way, not only from the perspective of the underside,

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but from an approach that sees difference as consequential, and the Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone diaspora as a palimpsest, as an archive of overlapping histories and incommensurable differences. *Decolonizing Diasporas* marks the literary and cultural preoccupations of Afro-Atlantic Hispanophone subjects who produce within and far from their homelands. These writers and artists speak across spatial, temporal, and linguistic planes to indict and recite the weight of five centuries of resistance to domination. These voices, too often silenced, too often siloed, are read alongside each other throughout this text, a methodology that offers another layer to the palimpsest of the Afro-Atlantic.

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