

As If Revolution Was Possible: (Post)Neoliberalism and Metamodernism in Central American,
Mexican, and United-statesian Film and Literature

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Zachary N. Glassett

M.A., Brigham Young University, 2018

B.A., Southern Utah University, 2016

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Chair: Verónica Garibotto

Rafael Acosta Morales

Ignacio Carvajal Regidor

Stuart Day

Brent Metz

Date Defended: July 18, 2024

The dissertation committee for Zachary N. Glassett certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Chair: Verónica Garibotto

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Abstract

In *As If Revolution Was Possible: (Post)Neoliberalism and Metamodernism in Central American, Mexican, and United-statesian Film and Literature*, I argue that analyzing cultural production from Central America, Mexico, and the United States through a post-neoliberal and post-postmodern lens allows us to better understand (and, in some cases, anticipate) the material conditions and systems of (re)production of our current era. In my first chapter, I analyze how Julio Escoto's novel *Rey del albor: Madrugada* anticipates the post-neoliberal and post-postmodern moment we are currently living. My second chapter presents a reading of Javier Peña and Kate Macer as examples of a shift towards a metamodern reading of noir in response to the ever-changing War on Drugs; it is followed by an examination of the material reality of a postneoliberal Mexico expressed in *Antígona González* by the protagonist, Antígona. In my final chapter, I analyze the altered Marxian system that feeds on Indigenous peoples in the film *Sleep Dealer* and novel *Tikal futura* through a colonial and capitalist context before I study the acts of resistance throughout both works as material expressions of Emil Keme's conceptualization of Abiyala as a space made by and for Indigenous peoples in the colonial project that is the Americas. Through the study of these sources, I present a more cohesive comprehension of the post-neoliberal context of the works leads to a more concise and well-rounded understanding of the historical and economic factors underlying them, while post-postmodernism as an accompanying structure of feeling serves as a bridge between the socioeconomic contexts in which these works are produced and that are expressed therein.

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Introduction

A Brief Overview of Contemporary History in Central America and Mexico

In this dissertation I analyze Mexican, Central American, and U.S. literature and film from a post-neoliberal and metamodernist framework. My primary argument is that studying recent cultural productions from and about these regions through such framework allows us to better understand (and, in some cases, anticipate) the material conditions and systems of (re)production of the current era. But, before I outline these concepts and explain my underlying argument, I need to briefly explain the historical and sociopolitical context that led me to this topic.

In *The Last Day of Oppression and the First Day of the Same* (2017), Jeffrey R. Weber studies the establishment, progress, successes and perceived shortcomings of four Pink-Tide governments in Latin America – Bolivia, Chile, Ecuador, and Venezuela – alongside the political economy of the continent, past and current understandings of social consciousness, inequality, and the development of Leftist Revolutionary traditions ranging from Mariátegui in Perú to more contemporary studies of Evo Morales or Hugo Chávez. He pays special attention to the decline of some of these governments and the resurgence of a more extreme Right-Wing threat to democracy in the region. The goal of many of these governments (along with others not mentioned that would fall into the same ideological category) was to combat and refuse participation in a neoliberal global economic structure, which to some degree, bore with it anti-United-statesian and anti-US Empire sentiments. This is perhaps best remembered by Hugo Chavez’s 2006 speech at the United Nations, wherein he referred to George W. Bush, the then President of the United States, as “the Devil” (*Statement by H.E. Hugo Chavez Frias, President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela*) and heavily criticized the United States’ international politics and practices. The then Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa echoed this sentiment,

saying in an interview that to call Bush “the Devil” is an insult to the Devil: ““El diablo será malvado, pero aunque sea es inteligente. Bush es un presidente tremendamente torpe que ha hecho mucho daño a su país y al mundo” (“El izquierdista Correa, favorito para ser el nuevo presidente de Ecuador según una encuesta”), he further stated. This “Anti-American” sentiment (and by that I mean anti-United States) was prevalent in many of these movements and still exists to varying extents in post-Morales Bolivia and post-Chavez Venezuela.

While Weber only chronicled events of the Pink Wave in South America, Central America and Mexico were experiencing similar shifts in their respective sociopolitical spheres: Daniel Ortega was elected to a second set of terms as the Sandinista candidate in Nicaragua in 2007; Manuel Zelaya was elected as President of Honduras from the Partido Liberal in 2006; Álvaro Colom, from Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza (UNE) – at the time a social-democratic party but that has since shifted more to the center – was elected president in 2008, and El Salvador saw back to back presidents from the FMLN over 10 years, from 2009 to 2019, in Mauricio Funes and Salvador Cerén. Mexican politics, to the contrary, had the first presidential candidate wins in 2000 and 2006 that weren’t PRI – Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón, respectively – but from the Partido Acción Nacional, or PAN. But saw the emergence into the presidential spotlight of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) as the leading candidate for the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PDR) in the 2006 elections, which he lost but less than half a percentage point of votes. PDR was another social-democrat party, and AMLO ran as such in 2006 (although the veracity of his position as left-wing or left-wing adjacent has been challenged by other leftist groups). Take, for example, the criticism of the EZLN and Subcomandante Marcos after AMLO won the election in 2018:

Vamos a enfrentar, no vamos a permitir que pase aquí ese su proyecto de destrucción [economic development programs], no le tenemos miedo a su guardia nacional, que lo cambió de nombre para no decir ejército, que son los mismos, lo sabemos. [...] Solo porque la madre tierra no habla, si no se lo dijera ¡Chinga tu madre! Porque la tierra no habla, si fuera, ¡no, vete a la chingada! (“MEXICO”)

But the mere fact that Obrador came as close to the presidency as he did in 2006 (that he would later win in 2018, albeit under a different party) indicates that the trend to the left that resulted in multiple, near simultaneous presidencies across Central and South America was also present in Mexico.

However, as Weber and others like Thomas Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker predicted, immediately after this push towards the left, the pendulum swung aggressively back to the right. When the 2008/2009 Mortgage Crisis happened, many Pink Tide countries were forced to implement austerity measures and cut back the (largely successful) social programs they had begun early in their administrations. This forced them to bend to capital’s will, instead of undoing capitalist systems of (re)production in their countries, and thus brought about a right-wing resurgence that continues in some places today. In Latin America at large, in two countries where the Pink Wave have lasted longest (Bolivia and Venezuela), we have seen the Bolivian coup that ousted Evo Morales and his MAS party from office and installed Jeanine Áñez in 2019; Venezuela has been the subject of United-statesian interference and Juan Guaidó naming himself as Acting President of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela as contest to the disputed results of the 2018 presidential election.

Honduras has experienced severe sociopolitical unrest and instability. Manuel (Mel) Zelaya was deposed in 2009 by a coup that sent him to Costa Rica; the Partido Nacional (PN,

leading conservative party in the country), took over on an interim basis under Porfirio (Pepe) Lobo Sosa between 2010 and 2013 before electing Juan Orlando Hernandez (JOH) to the presidency in the 2013 elections, defeating Xiomara Castro de Zelaya, Manuel's wife, and the newly formed Partido LIBRE (Libertad y Refundación), which had split from the Partido Liberal in the years after the coup as the political arm of the Frente Nacional de Resistencia Popular (FNRP). Then Orlando Hernandez ran for a second term in 2017 (the constitutionality of which was highly suspect and questioned repeatedly, even though the constitution had been amended to allow for serving more than one term as president) against Salvador Nasralla and the Alianza de Oposición en Contra de la Dictadura, or Alianza. Originally considered an ally to the United States in Central America, the Organization of American States openly questioned the veracity and integrity of the 2017 elections, going so far as to suggest that there was corruption by the PN to alter results and install JOH for a second term. From the 2017 press release:

As previously reported by the EOM, the electoral process was characterized by irregularities and deficiencies, with very low technical quality and lacking integrity. Deliberate human intrusions in the computer system, intentional elimination of digital traces, the impossibility of knowing the number of opportunities in which the system was violated, pouches of votes open or lacking votes, the extreme statistical improbability with respect to participation levels within the same department, recently printed ballots and additional irregularities, added to the narrow difference of votes between the two most voted candidates, make it impossible to determine with the necessary certainty the winner. (OAS)

The counting of votes took over a week. It was inexplicably shut down and restarted multiple times (blamed on power outages) and resulted in an implausible swing in results after two-thirds

of the votes had been counted from having Alianza in the lead to JOH and the Partido Nacional win by a commanding margin. In their official analysis of the election for OAS, Dr. Irfan Nooruddin from Georgetown University wrote

Honduran national election of 2017 experienced a dramatic vote swing away from the opposition alliance and towards the incumbent national party. This analysis raises doubts about the plausibility of such a reversal of fortunes in its conclusion. If one believes the vote tallies to be accurate, it is plausible to have such a swing. But the pattern of votes, particularly in turnout rates, is suspicious. As documented above, there's a marked break in the data that is hard to explain as pure chance. On the basis of this analysis, I would reject the proposition that the National Party won the election legitimately. (Nooruddin)

Dr. Nooruddin goes so far as to say that the odds of these particular election results occurring legitimately would be less than 1 in 1000. For an organization that has been more than friendly to countries and administrations, OAS' doubt of the validity of election results is surprising, to say the least, as it goes against their unwritten established support of United-statesian allies.

Within the month of writing this introduction, Orlando Hernandez was found guilty on three counts, "including conspiring to import cocaine into the United States and to use machine guns and 'destructive devices'" (Desk) – ironic, considering he was lauded by President Trump that JOH helped stop "drugs at a level that has never happened" (NPR). As of this writing, he is awaiting sentencing, but minimum sentences for the three counts he was convicted of range from 10 years to life in prison (*Southern District of New York | Juan Orlando Hernandez, Former President Of Honduras, Convicted In Manhattan Federal Court Of Conspiring To Import Cocaine Into The United States And Related Firearms Offenses | United States Department of Justice*)

In 2022, Xiomara Castro was elected as the first woman president in the history of the country and Partido Libre. In the plan she released for her term, she noted that “Honduras ha transitado la mayor parte de los últimos 200 años por ciclos de autoritarismo prolongado, como el que se vive desde 2009, de espaldas al derecho ciudadano” (referring to the government administrations from the Partido Nacional and that in the last half century there have been at least five coups (“PLAN DE GOBIERNO XIOMARA”). Her goal during her four year term is “la construcción del socialismo democrático, con la fuerza inmarcesible de una voluntad ciudadana, popular, una Honduras libre” (“PLAN DE GOBIERNO XIOMARA”). Honduras, under Xiomara, is moving decidedly away from the path set by the Partido Nacional and working towards a participatory socialist democracy.

In 2008, the Guatemalan people elected Álvaro Colom to the presidency after one of the most violent years in the history of the country (Figueroa Ibarra 89). Running against General Otto Pérez Molina, a notorious military figure from the internal conflict, Colom was able to secure electoral victory after the second round of voting. An engineer by profession, he had served in public office during the Serrano Elías administration as the Vice Minister of Economy and was considered part of the “sector maquilero y de exportadores no tradicionales” (Figueroa Ibarra 82). He had some ties to the Mayan people and was seen as an ally to them and was well connected in the upper class of Guatemalan society. Colom was considered to be left-adjacent, but not as far left as other political leaders in the region like Evo Morales, Rafael Correa and Hugo Chávez (Figueroa Ibarra 136). His government, as judged by Carlos Figueroa Ibarra, “[estaba] claramente enmarcado en un proyecto de acumulación capitalista” (137) that would try to use neoliberal capitalism to sponsor social projects, but whose adherence to “los megaproyectos inscritos en la globalización neoliberal, lo [estaban] llevando a enfrentarse con

las resistencias sociales” that these projects generate. This was written and presented (at least in part) in 2008 and then published in 2010 (Figueroa Ibarra 73), one to three years into his term.

Colom left presidential office with a staggering 95.83% disapproval rating (*Álvaro Colom Dice Que Deja La Presidencia “con La Conciencia Tranquila” | Noticias | ElMundo.Es*). In 2018, he was arrested for defrauding the Guatemalan state during his presidency “al otorgar de manera ilegal y sin ningún aval 35 millones de dólares a la Asociación de Empresas de Autobuses Urbanos para implantar un sistema prepago en el Transurbano” (*Guatemala Arrests Ex-President, Oxfam Chairman in Graft Probe*). His successor, Otto Pérez Molina, was similarly implicated in a bribery case referred to as *La línea*, a bribery ring that allowed certain shipping containers to pay less in import tariffs in exchange for large bribes that were paid to the Superintendencia de Administración Tributaria (SAT) (*La Línea y El Manejo de Una Estructura*). Pérez Molina and his vice-president, Roxana Baldetti Elías, were allegedly paid up to fifty percent of all the bribe money (“*Eco*”: *Otto Pérez y Roxana Baldetti Recibían El 50 Por Ciento de Lo Cobrado Por Sobornos Aduanales | elPeriódico de Guatemala; Eco*). Pérez Molina resigned and was arrested in 2015. He was sentenced to eight years or could commute his sentence through payment, which he did in 2023 (*Former Guatemalan President Released on Bond; Leaves Prison for First Time since 2015 | AP News*).

Corruption defined much of Guatemala’s sociopolitical landscape during the 2010’s and early 20’s, with both Jimmy Morales and Alejandro Giammettei coming under fire for alleged corruption. Morales was investigated by the Comisión Internacional Contra la Impunidad en Guatemala (CICIG) for taking illegal donations from drug cartels, and he even attempted to throw the Chief of the Commission, Iván Velásquez, out of Guatemala (“Jimmy Morales’s War on Guatemala’s Graft-Busters”). This led to repeated calls for Morales’ arrest post-presidency.

Giammettei oversaw the signing of a 2020 bill that would raise the salary, stipends, and other expenses of lawmakers while cutting funding for education, human rights programs, the judiciary system, as well as 25 Million USD that was supposed to be used to “combat malnutrition” (*Guatemalans Demand Arrest of Outgoing President for Corruption | Corruption News | Al Jazeera*) during the increasingly devastating COVID-19 pandemic and after Hurricane Eta and Tropical Storm Iota razed parts of the country, causing landslides and at least 100 deaths (*Guatemalans Demand Arrest of Outgoing President for Corruption | Corruption News | Al Jazeera*). Ensuing protests lasted for days and protesters lit sections of the National Congress building on fire and erected a guillotine out in front of the same building (Cuffe; *Protesters Burn Part of Guatemala’s Congress Building - ABC News*). Giammettei was also responsible for suppression of Guatemalan press syndicate *El periódico* for suggesting that his administration was corrupt. He also led efforts for harsher prison sentences for mothers who have any abortion and would disallow medically necessary abortions. The same bill labeled LGBTQIA+ people as “grupos minoritarios incongruentes con la moral cristiana” (Maldonado). This largely unpopular bill was tabled indefinitely in March 2022, less than a week after it first passed (*Anti-Abortion, Anti-Homosexual Legislation Blocked in Guatemala – The Diplomatic Envoy*).

Things have shifted in Guatemala with the 2023 election of Bernardo Arévalo, son of Juan José Arévalo, socialist president of Guatemala between 1945-1951 but fled the country after the 1954 coup that saw Arévalo’s successor Jacobo Árbenz kicked out of office and the installment of a far-right military dictatorship. Since 2024, Bernardo has been in office as a member of the Movimiento Semilla, a political action group that was created in 2015 in response to the Perez Molina corruption case and its accompanying social unrest. The creation of Semilla, a leftist, social democracy coalition (*Movimiento Semilla*), was another chapter in “una notable

historia de resistencia y reivindicaciones populares que se han manifestado desde los diferentes pueblos del país en contra de la desigualdad y la discriminación y a favor de la democracia desde hace tiempo” (*Movimiento Semilla*). Their model for government, as outlined by their official documents and sources is to foster a participatory democracy that seeks inclusive and equitable development and advancement for all that reside in the plurinational and multiethnic state that is today called Guatemala (*Historia*), with careful consideration for the Indigenous communities in the country (Maya, Xinca, Garifuna) alongside the mestizo community. In their “Plan del Gobierno”, they outline three objectives for the 2024-2028 term:

Proponemos 3 objetivos estratégicos empezando por el urgente rescate del Estado ante la corrupción, siguiendo con realizar las acciones catalíticas que detonarán los cambios necesarios, y finalmente fundando los cimientos del desarrollo sostenible... Trabajaremos en la solución de los problemas urgentes y actuales, sin descuidar las acciones de mediano y largo plazo que encaminen al país por una ruta de más rápido desarrollo y mayor bienestar para la gente. (*PLAN DE GOBIERNO 2024-2028* 23)

Regardless of ideological labels, Semilla, much like LIBRE under Xiomara, is attempting to create a new era for their respective nations that is based on a collective exercising of democracy that is designed to benefit marginalized groups (Indigenous peoples, those affected by poverty, LGBTQIA+ people, etc.) in an equitable and inclusive manner while combating corruption in their governments.

I will delve more deeply into both Mexico and the United States’ context as it directly pertains to chapters 2 and 3, but I wanted to give overviews of both Honduras and Guatemala here since I will not do so in chapters 1 and 3. It is also important to consider the Central American countries that I will not include in my research at this point – Nicaragua, El Salvador,

Costa Rica, and Belize – whose histories are intertwined with the four countries I work with in this dissertation, and share many similarities with Honduras and Guatemala in regard to historical and sociopolitical context (notwithstanding Costa Rica’s current status in Central America in comparison with the other countries in the region).

It is difficult to adequately contextualize the complexity of Central American sociopolitical history without mentioning its geographical and cultural closeness to both South America and the Caribbean. For example, one cannot speak about the history of Honduras in the 19th and 20th centuries without needing to discuss filibusters, the unified (and shortlived) Central American Republic, the El Salvador-Honduras War, United-statesian Banana Republics and intervention, the United States’ use of the country as a launching point for their operations against the FSLN and FMLN, the Cold War status of Cuba as the leading antagonist against the United States in the Western Hemisphere and the perceived or real influence of Cuba and Castro in leftist movements in Continental Latin America, and more currently the so-called migrant caravans that have fled the northern triangle (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) due to economic and politic instability and cartel or gang related violence that threatens large portions of the populations. To deal with any country historically in isolation is near-impossible and shortsighted. While I cannot outline every contextual connection between these nation states over the course of my dissertation, I have tried to lay out relevant context wherever necessary and possible. That is not to say that I was successful, but this is my goal here.

A Brief Overview of Relevant Concepts

There are now various terms that I would like to define prior to my analysis. Terms like revolution, resistance, (post)colonialism, and (post)modernisms have been debated and defined to death, while the terms that are being assigned to our current era – an era after postmodernism,

after neoliberalism, after postcolonialism, after the end of History - are still being fleshed out and explored as we are living through them, making their definition a complicated but worthwhile endeavor.

Post-colonial Studies

I will start with (post)colonial studies. I depend heavily on the analysis of “LatinAmericanism” and postcolonial studies that is laid out by Santiago Castro-Gómez and Eduardo Mendieta. In the introduction to their edited volume *Teorías sin disciplina* (1998), they explain the conceptual origins of post-colonial studies as emerging from a tension between two problems. The first is the “procesos de ‘liberación nacional’ que se vivían en Asia y en Africa’ (Castro-Gómez and Mendieta 15) – as they draw on Spivak, Said, and Bhabha in their understanding of the topic – and the metropolitan and national-popular axes upon which these struggles occurred. They write:

Ambos ejes eran considerados antitéticos: mientras que el estado metropolitano era visto como agente del imperialismo y la explotación, el estado nacional-popular era tenido como agente de liberación y descolonización en el "tercer mundo". Naturalmente, esta perspectiva cambia en el momento en que el problema se piensa desde el interior de las "zonas de contacto", es decir, desde el momento en que los subalternos se encuentran atravesados por redes globales que los vinculan tanto a la metrópoli como a la periferia, así como por exclusiones de tipo económico, racial y sexual que operan más allá y más acá de la "nación". (Castro-Gómez and Mendieta 15)

These theoretical axes highlight the ever shrinking “glocal” world, and how we as academics then must re-form and re-structure our studies of these regions and, more importantly, the people that in them reside, else we commit the sin that Neil Larsen refers to as “Latin-Americanism without Latin America” (N. Larsen) – that is, writing about Latin America as a theoretical,

abstract construct and not concerning oneself with the material realities of Latin-American peoples as a whole.

This leads directly to the second “problem” that Castro-Gómez and Mendieta describe, or the role of the academic or literary critic in a colonial studies context:

Además, el asunto se complica cuando los académicos que teorizan estos problemas empiezan a ser conscientes de que están hablando desde una doble posición hegemónica: por un lado, la hegemonía frente a sus localidades de origen debido a su condición de personas que viven y trabajan en universidades elitistas del primer mundo; por el otro, la hegemonía que les garantiza el saber y la letra frente a los otros inmigrantes, la mayoría de los cuales luchan diariamente por sobrevivir en el sector de servicios. Tal situación obliga a revisar el papel que las narrativas anticolonialistas y tercermundistas habían asignado al "intelectual crítico" y a buscar nuevas formas de concebir la relación entre teoría y praxis. (Castro-Gómez and Mendieta 15)

This refers us back to Larsen’s “Latin-Americanism without Latin Americans.” By not acknowledging the obvious privilege held by (largely white, United-statesian) academics, we engage in further colonizing these peoples through our scholarship.

What postcolonialism certainly isn’t is the study of an era post-colonialism, or post-coloniality (or even post-empire). Galeano writes at length about the Spanish colonizers (and we could include any other European powers, and later the United States, in the discussion) began bleeding Latin America for its resources; likewise, Jeff Abbott states that “The colonization of Latin America never ended, it merely changed forms” (Abbott 41).

But to say that the Americas are a colonial project is too simple a characterization. Moraña, Dussel and Jáuregui began their edited volume by commenting that “the uninterrupted

practice of colonialism has marked Latin American history from its beginning” (Moraña et al. 10) – or, from 1492 until the present – and that

Latin America should not be conceptualized as the residue of colonialism but rather as a space where coloniality has been perpetrated and perpetuated as a function of capitalism, and where cultural, social, and political transformations have been taking place for centuries, in search of emancipation and sovereignty – an arena where multiple and conflictive struggles are being fought and where knowledge is not just appropriated and recycled but *produced* both in dominant and dominated languages and cultures. (Moraña et al. 16, accent added)

The colonial project that is the Americas is an Althusserian example of putting in place systems of production and reproduction of capitalism and the culture that accompanies the systems of political economy in the Western hemisphere.

So, for my purposes here, my use of the term postcoloniality refers not to an era post-colonial era or a reference to a time after colonialism – since it has never ended – but to the ongoing dialogue that deals with the material consequences and effects of more than 500 years of capitalist servitude in the Americas, and the evolving role of academics and scholars in this space.

As such, I would like to state my intentions in producing this academic work and what I hope to achieve herein. My overarching desire is to create space for de/anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and anti-capitalist discussion and praxis. In his short essay “Tomorrow Begins Today: Invitation to an Insurrection”, Zapatista Subcomandante Marcos proclaimed, “On the one side is neoliberalism with all its repressive power and all its machinery of death; on the other side is the human being” (from *We Are Everywhere*, 35). This short, yet profound, statement could just as

easily read “colonialism”, “imperialism” or “capitalism”, and it would still ring true. As someone who benefits from the privilege of being a white man in the United-statesian academic setting, I find myself negotiating the “very complicated positionality of the postcolonial critic who, on the one hand, declares [himself] to be on the side of social justice...but who, on the other hand, speaks from a position of the elite, the class against which the subaltern is defined” (Lakritz 7), the general conundrum that Spivak posed in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and that has been of specific interest in Latin American studies and testimonio (especially after the unwarranted and offensive questioning of Rigoberta Menchú’s narrative by United-statesian journalists). This is a pertinent concern here, as my dissertation will deal with material realities of people who could be considered “subaltern” throughout.

In consideration of that very problematic and privileged position, and in pursuit of decolonizing my own scholarship, I borrow from Andrew Lakritz and his commentary on James Agee and Walker Evan’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, written about sharecroppers in the United-statesian South during the Great Depression, and especially how Agee (as a writer for *Forbes* magazine) positions himself – consciously or not – as a person in the “elite” class against the subaltern subjects he is writing about:

The subaltern does not speak in Agee’s text...Agee has unlearned his privilege, to use Spivak’s formula, a privilege that demands he speak for them and through them. He refuses to speak for them. The book is foremost a book about Agee, about an encounter of the elite with the underprivileged...He is not writing *for* the farmers. To use Edward Said’s phrase, Agee does not give himself ‘permission to narrate’... (Lakritz 16, accent in original).

In a similar vein to Agee, I do not intend to speak for or on behalf of anyone; nor do I want my voice to drown out or shout over voices who speak from marginalized or oppressed positions. I am sharing my own analyses and readings of my primary sources and do not speak for anyone but myself.

Post-postmodernism and metamodernism

My first introduction to the idea that our society might be past a post-modern moment came at the hands of Mark Fisher's *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* (2009). Fisher, at length, argues that we have moved past whatever post-modernism was; or, at least we have moved further along the post-modern trail. Fisher plainly states that his ideas of a capitalist realism can easily be "subsumed under the rubric of postmodernism as theorized by Jameson" (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* 7) – that is to say, postmodernism as the cultural logic of late capitalism. Fisher judged Jameson's work in delineating connections "between postmodern culture and certain tendencies in consumer (or post-Fordist capitalism" (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* 7) to be a "convincing case" (7). Two factors led Fisher to further develop his analysis of the cultural logic in an era post-end of History; the first was the complicated, contested, and "unsettled" (7) definitions and meanings of what postmodernism is (or was). Second, and "more importantly", Fisher argues that "some of the processes which Jameson described and analyzed have now become so aggravated and chronic that they have gone through a change in kind" (7). If we aren't past a postmodern cultural logic, it has at least morphed into something more advanced – in other words, we have moved into something other than postmodernism so.

Fisher was not the first person to suggest this; almost a decade prior, Linda Hutcheon wrote, in the epilogue (titled "The Postmodern...In Retrospect") to the second edition of her book *The Politics of Postmodernism* (2002) that "[postmodernism is] over" (Hutcheon 166) and

suggests that, given the blurring of lines between “postmodernism” as an artistic phenomenon or general social conditions and the complications of intersecting fields of study – postcolonial studies or feminist and gender studies are used as examples (166-168) – that teasing out the distinctions between aesthetic postmodernity and social or political postmodernism “may be worth attempting, however artificially and provisionally, in order to get a clearer sense of developments and changes in the different realms over the last 15 years” (167). Hutcheon thought it obvious that the postmodern era was behind us, and others would follow her lead in years to come.

In fact, in 2010 Timotheus Vermuelen and Robin van den Akker cited Hutcheon in their essay “Notes on Metamodernism” as they establish their argument for metamodernism as a vein of post-postmodern thought. Key to their position is that postmodernism has in fact come to an end and that we are experiencing something new and beyond postmodernism. Quoting from their edited volume, that they published with Alison Gibbons in 2017, in which they state their reasoning for this thesis,

we feel that the postmodern discourses have lost their critical value when it comes to understanding contemporary arts, culture, aesthetics, and politics... Thus, what is needed is a new language to put into words this altogether weirder reality and its still stranger cultural landscape...

This book [their edited volume] is part of an ongoing research project in which we... seek to: (1) map today’s dominant cultural developments by way of the arts; (2) develop an adequate language to discuss these dominant ways of feeling, doing and thinking; and (3) relate these contemporary concepts, percepts and affects to recent

reconfigurations of Western capitalist societies. (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism* 3–4)

They follow a Jamesonian structure as they attempt to catalogue and describe the “dominant cultural logic” (4) that has emerged alongside the development of Western capitalism. While they agree that they are not the first people to use the term, they argue that it often differs from past applications and uses of the term. Metamodernism was not intended as a “solution to the problematic of postmodernism” but a structure of feeling “that emerges from, reacts to, the postmodern as much as it is a cultural logic that corresponds to today’s stage of global capitalism” (5).

A structure of feeling is “a sensibility, a sentiment that is so pervasive as to call it structural”, that Raymond Williams described as being “deeply embedded in our lives: it cannot be merely extracted and summarized; it is perhaps only in art – and this is the importance of art – that it can be realized, and communicated, as a whole experience” (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism* 7). A vague definition, yes, but defining a structure of *feeling*, a sensibility, or a sentiment is an exercise in vagary at its core. Williams understood this, as evidenced by his further explication in the differences between studying a past period compared to a moment we are living through. A past period, Williams puts forth, can be examined and analyzed as something self-contained, in which we can parse through separate aspects of the structure and look at them as they *were*. To understand the structure of feeling or sensibility of what *is* requires us to experience and codify them simultaneously, a task akin to seeing the air around us. We can see its effects on trees, grasses, and other objects, but we cannot see it. We can only describe what we see it doing.

Williams explains that we can examine past structures of feelings as if they were precipitants extracted from a solution – we can take individual particulates out of their solution and examine them as a part, not a whole. The present moment, in contrast, is similarly a solution (in this example) but one from which it is impossible to precipitate the solvent out of the solute (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism* 7). It must be considered in its wholeness and instantaneously.

Vermeulen and van den Akker use Scotch whiskey as an example; many whiskeys distilled along the coast or Scottish islands have a saline flavor but were not distilled with salt. No salt was added, yet they are somewhat salty. Like this whiskey, a structure of feeling is an element of culture that circumscribes it but nonetheless cannot be traced back to any one of its individual ingredients. It can be ascribed, instead, to the particular experience of time or place... ‘a particular quality of social experience...historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or of a period.’¹ It is present in movements and styles and other phenomena *without being reducible to any of them*. 8, accent added.

When one sips a whiskey and tries to describe the taste and sensation of the liquid, it is impossible to taste the separate notes individually; one can only experience them in the context of drinking the whiskey. Likewise, we can only analyze what we perceive to be metamodernism as we experience it in its entirety.

This new metamodern “shape, new *sens*,...new meaning and direction” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 4) is characterized by a “narrative of longing” that is structured and conditioned “on a belief...that was long repressed, for a possibility...that was long forgotten” (5). This is the

¹ See Williams 1977, 131.

sentiment that defines the generation that comes after the “End of History”; “inspired by...modern naivete yet informed by postmodern skepticism” (5). The metamodern pushes for and commits to the impossible possibility of change for a better future. There are three key aspects of metamodernism as a structure of feeling that Vermeulen and van den Akker outline in their initial expository essay on the topic in 2010: a new narrative of hope; “as-if” thinking; and a state of constant oscillation.

In their initial publication “Notes on Metamodernism”, Vermeulen and van den Akker categorize the attitudes that define the metamodern structure of feeling. They state the following:

CEOs and politicians, architects, and artists alike are formulating anew a narrative of longing structured by and conditioned on a belief (“yes we can”, “change we can believe in”) that was long repressed, for a possibility (a “better” future) that was long forgotten. Indeed, if simplistically put, the modern outlook vis-à-vis idealism and ideals could be characterized as fanatic and/or naïve, and the postmodern mindset as apathetic and/or skeptic, the current generation’s attitude – for it is, and very much so, an attitude tied to a generation-can be conceived of as a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism.

(Vermeulen and van den Akker 5)

“As-if” describes the purpose for moving forward – rather, to justify forward movement while an ultimate purpose is unknown (or unknowable). “Metamodernism moves for the sake of moving...in spite of its inevitable failure; it seeks forever for a truth that it never expects to find” (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism* 5). Vermeulen and van den Akker expand on this idea by comparing metamodernism to a donkey chasing a carrot it will never reach but will advance into ground it wouldn’t have reached otherwise, while the modern donkey ate its carrot, and the

postmodern donkey gave up a long time ago (5). The metamodern subject will move toward some end, knowing they likely will never reach it.

Lastly, oscillation – the state of constant movement between “the modern and the postmodern” (5). Like a pendulum, it swings between “innumerable poles”, always being kept from getting too far into one point or another in constant negotiation “between the modern and the postmodern”. In this way, metamodernism is always between postmodernism and modernism – it is both of them and neither of them at once. It can never be pulled too far into modernist hope before gravity pulls it into postmodern melancholy, between “empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation...” (6). As a structure of feeling, metamodernism is meant to be an attempt at understanding “cultural sensibility” and tension between “the modern desire for *sens* and a postmodern doubt about the sense of it all” (6).

Vermeulen, van den Akker, and Alison Gibbons structured their book around Historicity, Affect, and Depth; Gibbons writes that for Jameson, these three characteristics are “interrelated”. She explains, “we might interpret what Jameson calls the ‘waning of affect’ as a human response to the disintegration of history, the superficiality of postmodern representation, and the free floating signs or intensities of a mediatised consumer bubble” (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism* 83).² The thesis in *Metamodernism* is that we are seeing a paradigmatic shift across these three topics and they are created by dialoguing with, borrowing from, and pushing past (post)modernism.

In a postmodern context, “meaningful emotion becomes a...fallacy since the unified modernist self, experiencing internal emotions in response to the external world, is dissolved” (84), resultant of the lack of depth and historicity implicit in Jameson’s understanding of the

² We will delve into historicity in chapter 1 of this dissertation, so I will discuss affect and depth here briefly.

postmodern condition. Jameson's explanation of the waning of affect is aligned with the "pre-personal, a-signifying, non-subjective intensity of affect in Affect Theory, but only insofar as these intensities are...not yet...processed into meaningful emotional response" (85). The metamodern turn, as described by Gibbons, is a subject that (in response to increased depth and a reintroduction of historicity) can "process intensities so that we can articulate meaningful emotional reactions or cognitive responses" to the contemporary society in which we live.

Likewise, a reintroduction of depth is part of this post-postmodern landscape. Van den Akker references Jameson's discussion and comparison between Van Gogh's *A Pair of Boots* and Warhol's *Diamond Dust Shoes* as illustration of (post)modern depth. Van Gogh's work boots elucidate thoughts and feelings as to the state of the laborer, their agricultural reality, and "intimates a lived context outside the painting" (147). Warhol's shoes are just that – shoes. There is nothing to explore or imagine, no "[pulling] the viewer into the world it depicts, [extending] our gaze beyond the paint, behind the canvas" (148) like in Van Gogh's artistic expression of boots. What is suggested by the authors in the "Depth" section is that

"contemporary artists, activists and writers feel that appearances may well inspire sensations of an outside, of an elsewhere...You could also say: the modernists excavated depth from the surface, the postmodernists flattened it by means of the surface, the metamodernists apply depth onto the surface. (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism* 149)

They are not arguing for a return to the modernist, hermeneutic excavations of depth; van den Akker explains that this new sensibility and 'new depthiness', a neologism of Jameson's term depthlessness and comedian Stephen Colbert's 'truthiness', "a term that connotes a sense of truth established not through empirical research or rational reasoning but through the affective register

of the ‘gut’” (149). Whether the fact is demonstrably true is not as important as if it *feels* true. If it feels true to you, it might as well be true. Depthiness, the establishment of depth, is thus not a “shared epistemological reality but as one among many personally performed (im)possibilities” (149) that aren’t necessarily shared amongst others (not that it can’t be shared). If it feels like there is depth, or truth, or sincerity, then there is – at least to the one who feels it.

This is certainly not an exhaustive explanation on the intricacies of the metamodern structure of feeling. This just starts to scratch the surface and, as a whole, metamodernism as a variant of post-postmodernism is continuing to develop. The primary sources and cultural productions that I work with in this dissertation exhibit the “feel” of metamodernity; there is a ‘depthiness’ to them that can be read as exhibiting or possessing metamodern qualities and characteristics.

If we indeed believe that we have moved past an era of postmodernism, then logically we can proceed under the operating assumption that perhaps we have moved past the economic and political context to which postmodernism was reacting to and within which it operated. That would imply that, if this is true, we have advanced past late-stage capitalism (or neoliberalism). Mark Fisher situates capitalist realism under the umbrella of postmodernism but as being intensified and accelerated. The same argument that Fisher makes that capitalist realism is subsumed under postmodernism could also be used to support this version of realism as a post-neoliberal system as much as it is (post)postmodern.

(Post)Neoliberalism

As with metamodernism and post-postmodernism, there are multiple ways of interpreting what comes after (and if there is anything after) neoliberalism. Fisher’s reproduction of

Thatcher's famous quote that 'there is no alternative' to neoliberalism, and subsequent questioning of Thatcher's stance – is there no alternative? – opens up the door to wonder if we are sure that there are no alternatives. Not only have we seen what can ostensibly be called the failure of neoliberalism in the 2008-2009 United-statesian mortgage crisis, but there are lasting examples of movements and societies that – in their own way – have created an alternative to capitalism. The anti-colonialist and anti-neoliberal Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN or Zapatistas) have lasted since 1994 and the inception of NAFTA and its successor, the USMCA, and their communities still are functioning outside the realms of neoliberal Mexico twenty years later. Cuba has maintained (by some of their own volition, and out of necessity due to U.S. supported embargoes) independence outside of the colonial and capitalist west, and some countries like Bolivia and Venezuela have maintained their anti-capitalist revolutionary movements, under MAS and Chavismo, respectively, since the early 2000's (see Weber, First day of...). But in large part, and for "most people under twenty in Europe and North America, the lack of alternatives to capitalism is no longer even an issue. Capitalism seamlessly occupies the horizons of the thinkable" (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* 8). Yet, to understand what can come after neoliberalism, as Fisher (and others) suggest, I will offer a working definition of neoliberal capitalism to operate from.

David Harvey explains that neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (Harvey 2)

The state has a paradoxical role in this process; they are to guarantee the creation, of markets, legal and executive systems to secure the function and proliferation of these markets, and preserve them at all cost, “but beyond these tasks the state should not venture” (2). Like a child, the state should be neither seen nor heard in the marketplace, notwithstanding its priority of creation and maintenance of said markets.

The 1970’s, according to Harvey, were the boom-era for neoliberal practices, with its rallying cry of “deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision” (2-3). With the CIA backed coup of Chile in 1973 and the successful installment of dictator Augusto Pinochet, Milton Friedman and his “Chicago Boys” were key in the establishment of a new neoliberal state in the Southern Cone that would serve as a “standard of excellence” of the neoliberal model.

What Friedman promised was that the

Economía de mercado elevaría la productividad que se encontraba atada por el estatalismo y asistencialismo del Estado del bienestar; la elevación de productividad ocasionaría que la riqueza se derramase para el conjunto de la sociedad y por lo tanto se resolverían las carencias sociales; finalmente, en el contexto de una economía de mercado, la democracia se convertiría en algo indispensable si no es que inevitable.

(Figuroa Ibarra 12)

A lax state would result in an increase in productivity that would benefit all; Reaganomics and Thatcherism were the gold standard of trickle down political-economy during the 1980’s, and Fukuyama would later write that humanity had achieved its peak and arrived at the end of History by way of western liberal democracy, which I read here as Fukuyama’s name for

neoliberalism (even though Fukuyama argues that western liberal democracy has nothing to do with socio-economics (Fukuyama).

But in the late 1990's and early 2000's, cracks began to form in Latin America's neoliberal scaffolding. After Mexico's credit crashed in the early 1980's, Brazil saw the "Samba Effect" drop the value of the Real by 35%, and Argentina became the first modern nation to default on its loans in 2001. These foreshadowed the Mortgage Crisis in 2008-09 in the United States, the economic fallout of which would hardly leave a corner of the world untouched. Fisher noted that when the banks and big companies began to fail in the United States – victims of the neoliberal gladiatorial arena they [the private sector of the market] had created – the same companies that sought the freedom to run the market turned back to the State to "shore up the banking system" (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism 2*) and bail out neoliberalism.

If we consider the definition provided us by David Harvey, then these bailouts marked the end of neoliberalism. The State intruded past where they were originally welcome, and the truly capitalist thing to do would have been to let these businesses fail. Not only had it failed as an economic system, but given that it had established itself as "una concepción del mundo, la última que presenciaria la humanidad" (Figuerola Ibarra 13), it has likewise failed. With that failure we are left to question if "¿...nos encontramos en el umbral des posneoliberalismo?" (12).

Vermeulen and van den Akker ask a similar question and propose that we have moved past Capitalism 3.0 (neoliberalism) and into a fourth "update", as it were, a Capitalism 4.0. They refer to neoliberalism as a "variegated form of regulatory restructuring" (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism 15*) that aims to prioritize the "highest income brackets, capitalist owners, and the upper fractions of management" (16). Citing Brenner, Peck, and Theodore in 'Neoliberalism Resurgent', there is a resurgence of neoliberalism occurring post 2008 crisis, but that doesn't *not*

mean we are witnessing a shift to Capitalism 4.0 - just a further "regulatory restructuring" of neoliberalism that will continue to concentrate wealth at the "top 1 per cent of the pyramid, while rising sea levels and super storms crumble its base, where the rest of us reside in highly precarious conditions" (17). The second part of this statement, about the rest of us, is of particular importance for my dissertation. The "highly precarious conditions" are the material conditions of the subjects of my chapters in Central America, Mexico, and the United States, and make up the cultural, political, social, and economic contexts from which the works emerge, that are portrayed in these primary sources as sources of story and narrative, and representations of material realities of real peoples who exist in marginalized spaces.

Overview of chapters

I will now give a brief overview of my chapters and reasoning for their organization. My argument is that the works that I have chosen display post-postmodern and postneoliberal characteristics from our current structure of feeling and cultural logic (*Sicario*, *Narcos*, and *Antígona Gonzalez*); they anticipate our current condition (*Rey del Albor: Madrugada*); or they predict what will likely occur in coming decades and/or centuries, given what we understand about the histories of our region up to today (*Sleep Dealer* and *Tikal futura...*). Much like an ice core that scientists extract from Antarctic ice shelves can aid researchers in determining historical climate trends, our current climactic difficulties and emergencies, and prognosticate patterns (and perhaps warnings) for what may come in the future, all the primary source materials I have chosen fit into this same sort of model.

In my first chapter, *Metamodern Historicity in Escoto's Madrugada: Rey del albor*, I analyze Julio Escoto's work of historical fiction that tells the story of Quentin Jones, a black United-statesian scholar who is contracted by USAID and the Honduran Government to write a

new, more United-statesian friendly history of Honduras for the Honduran populace. What he uncovers is a U.S. plot that aims to take over the entire Western Hemisphere and create a series of formally recognized territories (like Puerto Rico) over both continents. By analyzing Escoto's novel through the lens of Thomas Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's development of metamodernism, and the social and economic conditions that constitute it, we see how their proposal of metamodernism and their historicizing of the 2000's as a transition period on a global scale follows the world that the United States designed in the plan *Madrugada* in *Madrugada* that Jones finds and decrypts.

The society that is conceived of and built towards in the *Madrugada* plan that Jones uncovers is strikingly similar to how the United States has continued its imperial and colonial efforts in the late 20th and early 21st century. The continued economic and sociopolitical domination that the United States exerts over its Central American neighbors since they collectively gained independence from Spain in 1821 is a chain of capitalist exploitation that has only intensified and accelerated as history has progressed, and Escoto's novel – set in the late 1980's – anticipates our current 2024 society, its political economy and accompanying structures of feeling. For Vermeulen and van den Akker, whatever comes after post-modernism (and by default, then, neoliberalism), is because for the last two to three decades we have been advancing down the neoliberal path towards a “clusterfuck of world-historical proportions” (17). Published in 2017, that puts the two to three decades between 1987-1997 – precisely the era in which *Madrugada* is set.

It feels eerie to read how the 2000's are characterized in *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect and Depth After Postmodernism* and then look at the *Madrugada* plan with all their similarities; for that reason, this chapter serves as the ice core drilled out of the glacier. It is a cultural product

that can be examined in its context, properly historicized, and analyzed from historical distance, but from which connections to our current “climate” (political economy and structures of feeling) can be investigated and from which we can extrapolate further. That being said, we still need to “take the temperature”, as it were, of today’s climate, which leads us to my next chapter, titled “No Law, No Order: Metamodernism and Postneoliberalism in Border and Narco-noir Literature *Sicario*, *Narcos*, and *Antígona Gonzalez*.”

This chapter has two axes of argument that build on each other and from both post-postmodern and postneoliberal frameworks. In *Sicario* and *Narcos*, we will be focusing on the narco-noir protagonists Kate Macer and Javier Peña. As non-traditional noir subjects, both display characteristics that align with a metamodern structure of feeling and show signs of a changing attitude towards and perspective on the War on Drugs in both Kate’s and Javier’s actions and sentiments. The “Yes we can”, naively idealistic attitudes displayed by both in their efforts to establish order via the application of law while the world around them (other law enforcement and politicians) grow increasingly more cynical and apathetic towards the situations they find themselves in.

Noir is characterized by a man (by tradition) who operates outside the law to solve a mystery or accomplish a task, but they get in too deep and find themselves emotionally attached, unable to avoid their fate as it spirals towards their likely or inescapable demise. More often than not, they are private detectives or investigators that are frequently at odds with law enforcement or are themselves perpetrators of crimes. Contrary to these typical, classic noir examples, both Kate and Javier are law enforcement officers and are characterized by their desire to work within the bounds of the law to establish and enforce order. But the other tropes – the man who knows too much, who gets in over their head, who finds themselves at odds with a system that is

actively working against them wherein there is no hope for a peaceful resolution and the likely death of the noir subject – fit Kate and Javier.

The distinction comes in that as law enforcement, they are the ones who are supposed to solve these problems, and what both characters learn is that their higher ups - commanding officers, politicians, heads of state – are just as guilty (if not more so) than the cartel members and leaders that both Javier and Kate are hunting. They (State governments, the CIA, FBI, and DEA, among other actors) enable and guide the actions of the cartels into avenues that they judge to be of least harm to the general public behind their backs while maintaining a façade of control that they project to civilians, and to Javier and Kate – at least until they see behind the curtain and learn just how lost their War on Drugs was. This is where the metamodern sentiment comes into play – that up until they learn that the proverbial match was fixed and the war lost, and to an extent even afterwards, they believed and acted *as if* they could win, they could solve the problems and make a difference.

One important aspect to note is that the season of *Narcos* that I will be analyzing is set in the 1980's but produced in the late 2010's. *Sicario* is set and produced in the mid 2010's, making it chronologically much later and in a completely different historical moment and structures of feeling. However, what is of particular note is the similarities in the metamodern tendencies and *sens* that the main characters display. As I mentioned earlier, the way that metamodern traits are observed and analyzed is largely phenomenological, interpreting and analyzing what is seen and felt in a moment. From the writing and production, it can be argued that there is a narrative that is critical of the behavior of the governmental agencies represented in the series and season that comes from a 21st century understanding of the issues at hand – the Cold War, the emerging Cartels, or the setting of the stage for the coming War on Drugs, for example. Much like noir

(and I will explain this more in depth in the chapter), metamodernism is felt, and Javier Peña *feels* like a metamodern noir protagonist.

In *Antígona Gonzalez*, by Sara Uribe, the main plot of the story is the protagonist's search for her brother, Tadeo, after his disappearance in Tamaulipas. With the likelihood that he was abducted or killed by cartel members, she goes to the state and federal offices for assistance in finding her brother and getting justice for his probable death. However, her search meets a dead end, and she is unable to make any progress in her goal. Interspersed with the events of Antígona's search are clippings and sections from newspapers and journalists surrounding the events of Tadeo's (and others) disappearance alongside other chronicling of cartel violence in northern Mexico.

At its core, *Antígona* is an expression of the grief that she experiences and the routine monotony of life after loss. My focus, though, is on the ways that her daily life brings her into contact with state and federal organizations and how her material existence is determined by both governmental and non-governmental organizations (i.e. cartels). Paired alongside Figueroa Ibarra's thesis about post-neoliberal government's austerity measures leaving voids that non-governmental organizations fill and operate from and Oswaldo Zavala's argument that cartels do not exist, my argument is that the cartel in Mexico operates as an equal (if not stronger) partner in the lives of Mexican citizens. Their ability to use violence with no regard to its legal or justifiable application and the fact that the state cannot – or chooses not to – hold them accountable for their actions means that they occupy a larger, more immediate place of threat and exert more control over the lives of the Mexican public.

To follow the ice core comparison, these three sources are akin to the thermometer on the wall of a meteorological observatory where the ice core (*Madrugada*) is being analyzed. The

same cycles and tendencies that can be seen through the study of historical trends from the 80's and 90's are still present in the late 00's and 2010's, but in an advanced and intensified state. What we will address next are the extrapolations into the future – predictions and prognostications about what will come if humanity, in its current circumstances, are allowed to continue down the same path, as van den Akker and Vermeulen propose is occurring with the onset of Capitalism 4.0.

My final chapter, titled “Hechos de maíz: Indigenous Resistance to the Capitalist Realisms of *Tikal Futura* and *Sleep Dealer*” looks at the film *Sleep Dealer* and the novel *Tikal futura: memorias para un futuro incierto (novelita futurista)* by Franz Galich. Both are dystopic, near future science fiction narratives that are set in Mexico and the United States, and Guatemala, respectively. My analysis is set in two steps; the first is a Marxian analysis of how the Indigenous peoples in the two works are not only the instruments of labor that are used to process raw materials to create commodities, as has been the case in nearly all Latin America's colonial history. As represented in the narratives, they are both the instrument of labor *and* raw materials, and their life force/labor power is the commodity that is being extracted. This, analyzed with Mark Fisher's thesis on Capitalist Realisms and Aníbal Quijano's (and others') writings on postcolonialism and the Americas as a colonial project, presents a vision of the Americas that is as bloodthirsty and dead set on consumption as it is hell bent on its own preservation at all costs. This first section focuses on the oppression and subjugation of native peoples under the capitalist framework of the Americas.

I juxtapose this against Emil Keme's essay (and call to action?) in “Arech kak'asi'k le Abiyala rajawaxik ne kakam le Americas: Utzukuxik jun ajwaralikil winaq chi kab'e chi naj” or “For Abiyala to Live, the Americas Must Die: Toward a Transhemispheric Indigeneity”

published in 2018. Borrowing Keme's argument that Indigenous peoples' creation of space for Abiyala to exist and serve as a focal point for Indigenous organization, advocacy, and existence and his ontological reframing of Abiyala as a primarily Indigenous space that the Americas have colonized, I look at what I classify as acts of resistance throughout as material, concrete iterations of Keme's conceptualization of Abiyala. I include both violent and non-violent resistance from both the film and the novel, and the thread that connects them is the establishment of a "locus of enunciation" where Indigeneity and Indigenous subjectivities are prioritized and where they can starve the Americas of Indigenous life force and labor power that it needs to survive.

With the analyses of these cultural productions, set in a (somewhat) chronological order, my goal is to provide an understanding of how we arrived at this moment, an idea of how to comprehend the structure(s) of feeling in which we reside and the material realities that accompany them, and a glimpse of where we are headed if we continue down the path of intensified, advanced neoliberalism. By so doing, my hope is that we see a greater need for resistance – anticapitalist, anti-imperialist, decolonial resistance – and that we ask what sort of revolution we are capable of, lest we are consumed by the shape-shifting monster that is Capitalism.

Chapter 1: Metamodern Historicity in Escoto's *Madrugada: Rey del albor*

The palimpsest is a written artifact that has been used and reused. Palimpsests were often made of more durable animal skins in place of papyrus or parchment and kept for decades, with people writing, and erasing, and writing on them again and again. After time, they would bear the marks and faint traces of past records underneath the most recent writing, serving as a repository of the past in the present – multiple temporalities existing on the same plane. Like peeling layers of paint off of an old building, History as material experience is written on top of the erased or fading script that preceded it, leaving us a text rife with information to be decoded, discovered, and brought back to the forefront of our understanding (Alcocer 2011).

Much of Latin American history has been theorized and conceptualized in a similar manner – that is, an understanding of Latin America as a palimpsest, a cultural record upon which many histories are written and exist together. Canclini's *Culturas Híbridas* (1990) situates Latin American peoples in various states of modernity and democracy all at the same time, somewhere between tradition and “modernization”. Rama argues in *La ciudad letrada* (1998) that a multitude of epistemologies exist(ed) concurrently as hegemonic powers shaped cultural practices surrounding literacy and education. The metaphor of the palimpsest has been used to describe the intersections of cultures and peoples in the Caribbean; Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* (2003) outlines an understanding of Black Atlantic culture as the intercalation and expression of various identities and fields of study, while Benítez Rojo's *La isla que se repite* (2010) illustrates for us the “conjunto discontinuo” of the Caribbean that allows us to see patterns and regular occurrences emerge through the chaos and disordered nature of the region (Benítez Rojo and Molinero iii). More recently, Emil Keme's article “For Abiyala to Live, the America's Must Die: Toward a Transhemispheric Indigeneity” (which I discuss in chapter 3)

proposes a continent composed of multiple ontological frameworks, the colonizers' America and the Indigenous Abiyala. He goes on to recognize multiple already existing Indigenous ontological framings from within Abiyala, such as "Turtle Island, Anahuac, Tawantinsuyu, or Pindorama" (Keme and Coon 48), as he explicates the nuances in his proposal of Abiyala as a center for Indigenous enunciation while still accepting and holding space for different frameworks within his own.

In 1993, Julio Escoto published *Rey del albor: Madrugada*, the first of a two novel series featuring Professor Quentin Jones. Jones, a history professor from Cornell University, is tasked by the Honduran Government and the United States Embassy in Tegucigalpa with the writing of a history that paints Honduras' government in a positive light and omits negative mention of United-statesian intervention. As he begins to seriously research, Jones uncovers a secret document on his computer named "Madrugada", full of classified information from the US Embassy. Jones is put in contact with a leftist revolutionary group and informs them of the archive and its contents, a grand plan to unite all Latin America under an imperialist project headed by the United States by the year 2000 and forcefully assimilate all people into one megacountry. However, he soon finds out that Israeli special forces and CIA agents in Honduras know about him and is forced to flee the country, barely escaping an ambush by Contra soldiers on his way out of the country.

The narrative that focuses on Jones is interspersed with separate, stand-alone chapters that are comprised of various narrators, characters, and set in different moments from the past. It provides a historical context that coexists with the Jones narration that dominates the novel, much like a palimpsest bears markings and information from the past that can be read in the present, and any information written on it will be visible in the future as a trace and remnant.

These three temporalities are in constant mediation and negotiation with one another and with whoever is reading or altering the repository – or, put in different terms, all three temporalities co-exist in one space and at one time.

With that said, the question of what is included in these records and how we interpret and unravel these threads of time that have been woven together is at the heart of this discussion and chapter. In *Rey del Albor: Madrugada*, the text serves as a sort of palimpsest in which different models of historicity and structures of feelings (modernisms) coexist and are in constant negotiation with each other.

End of Postmodernism and emergence of a *New Sens*

In 2002, Linda Hutcheon proclaimed the following about Postmodernism in the epilogue to the second edition of her book *The Politics of Postmodernism*: “Let’s just say it: it’s over” (Hutcheon 166). She reasons that for the decade prior to her publication, various critics and academics – like Terry Eagleton and Christopher Norris – had already discussed it as “finished, passé...a failure, an illusion” (166). She continues her discussion by posing a question and setting groundwork for the next steps in deciphering the cultural moment that would follow, essentially asking “What comes next?” She issues the following challenge with that question:

The postmodern moment has passed, even if its discursive strategies and ideological critique continue to live on...in our contemporary twenty-first century world...Post-postmodernism needs a new label of its own, and I conclude, therefore, with this challenge to readers to find it – and name it for the twenty-first century. (181)

The first edition of this publication (sans epilogue), published in 1989, came in stride with the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of reasonable alternatives to neoliberal capitalism (discussed in chapter 3), and the so-called end of History. The world at large was working through the

paradigmatic shifts that came with those events and transitioning into the post-USSR era. Her call to action is a forward, future-oriented view that asks us to look into what is and what will be.

This gaze oriented to the future is precisely what I wish to address in this analysis of *Madrugada*; specifically, how *Rey del albor: Madrugada* anticipates a post-neoliberal capitalist framework and an accompanying post-postmodern structure of feeling. This is in two parts; the first follows Thomas Vermeulen and Robin van den Akker's understanding of post-(post)modern historicity from their edited volume *Metamodernism: History, Affect and Depth After Post-Modernism* and how those different historicities are expressed and illustrated in *Madrugada* as attitudes of characters and organizations as well as the organization of the book as a whole. The second focuses on how the novel's narrative reflects historical capitalist tendencies. History, in *Madrugada*, is cyclical and repetitive; this allows us to see how the novel anticipates the shift from a third iteration (or late stage) to what Vermeulen and van den Akker refer to as Capitalism 4.0, an intensified and accelerated version of the novel's present (early 1990's) and historical context.

As we discussed in the introduction, distancing ourselves from a sociocultural moment allows us to examine a historical context in its totality. Being removed from the moment in which *Madrugada* was published, we cannot experience that reality as it occurred. We have the benefit of looking back at a representation of the era when *Madrugada* is set while knowing the circumstances, both globally and locally, in which it is portrayed. Helen Umaña, in her chapter "Un corte transversal de la historia en *Rey del Albor: Madrugada*", observes that "Escoto traza un espectro muy amplio de la problemática sociopolítica del país, especialmente en los aspectos más neurálgicos de la década del 80" (Umaña 181). Umaña lists a series of events that include neocolonialism, Reaganomics and Reagan's Central American politics, Honduras' participation

in various anti-Communist invasions into surrounding nations, growing extreme right-wing sentiment, the Moonies, the FSLN, Contra, Honduran agrarian reform, the 1963 golpe de estado, USAID and their control over the Western hemisphere, as well as evangelical Protestantism that was driven by ideological, anti-communist agendas. Jones picks up a newspaper and is dismayed to see that it features an article about Oliver North, one of the responsible parties of the sale of weapons to Iran in the Iran-Contra Scandal (182). *Madrugada* fits into this historic moment as a snapshot of the cultural anxieties during that time.

Umaña continues: “A este nivel, el autor no ha inventado nada. Ha tomado el dato concreto y lo ha insertado dentro de una trama novelística. Y su objetivo ha sido exhaustivo. El resultado es una obra sumamente prolija y documentada, un archivo completo de la política nacional e internacional...de la década [de los 80]” (182). To read the novel is to be “frente a un trozo de vida, a un espejo de la realidad” (183). That is where Quentin Jones, the protagonist, comes into play. He is a stand in for the reader, giving us experiences through his perspective and point of view, and it is through that lens that we are able to examine structure of feeling (and material conditions) in and with which he interacts and exists.

What constitutes metamodern historicity?

The first argument I make in this chapter is that *Madrugada* pre-emptively displays what constitutes a metamodern historicity may look like. In the introductory chapter to their book’s section on metamodern historicity, Robin van den Akker writes that a “new metamodern regime of historicity” has appeared during the emergence of a metamodern structure of feeling and Capitalism 4.0 (“a fourth reconfiguration of Western capitalist societies and global capitalism” (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism* 22)). The defining feature of metamodern historicity is “that its present opens into – in an attempt to bring within its fold – past possibilities and possible

futures (defined as being *with* or *among* residual and emergent structures of feeling). This regime can perhaps best be characterized as multi-tensed...” (22). In other words, no regime of historicity exists by itself; we are constantly navigating a plurality of these regimes in our present. They offer an interesting metaphor for understanding their position:

Put simply: the moderns determinedly walked through a front door that opened onto a future *Ville Radieuse*; the postmoderns looked out a back window into a glossy past while doing some interior decoration (Hamilton’s ‘Just What it is...’ (1956) comes to mind, here) and the metamoderns open a back door while walking through a front door as if re-enacting an M.C. Escher drawing. (*Metamodernism* 22–23)

Like a palimpsest, metamodernism can be considered a reality where multiple temporalities and historicities exist simultaneously but can be identified and between which differentiations and distinctions can be made. Thus, we will unpack the comparisons that van den Akker employs to illustrate the stages of modernities and their approaches to historicity at large – or, our understanding of their regimes of history: the *Ville Radieuse*, Hamilton’s “Just what is it...”, and the artwork of M.C. Escher.

The *Ville Radieuse* was an undeveloped concept for modernist urban city spaces created by Le Corbusier (born Charles-Édouard Jeanneret) in 1930. French for ‘Radiant City’, Le Corbusier’s design (which he elaborates on in his *Athens Charter* (1973), this ultra-utopian plan is based on the idea that cities are an “element within an economic, social, and political complex” in a given region (Le Corbusier 43). These values (economic, social, political) are “of a physiological and psychological origin which are bound up in the human person and which introduce concerns of both an individual and collective order into the discussion” (44). For life to flourish, the two contradictory principles that “govern human personality: the individual and

collective” (44) have to agree, and cities are a vital place where these two human elements intersect with human values. Le Corbusier taught that the effective and purposeful development and planning of a city was key to making sure that the human experience – both individual and collective – could be the best possible for those who dwell within its limits.

The chaos of most cities, as judged by Le Corbusier, was detrimental to both the collective and individual quality of life. In his opinion, the purpose of the city is to “satisfy the primordial biological and psychological needs of their populations” (93). They are key to success on both the “spiritual and material planes” of their inhabitants, and the ruler by which the success of a city should be measured is the “human scale”; by the happiness and wellbeing of the people living in the city contrived from the balance of housing, work, recreation, and traffic that fulfill key functions of humans – inhabiting, working, and recreating (97–98). The *Ville Radieuse* was *this* city; an organized, intentional space that places collective good above private interest and is built around the material needs of humans. It was the city of the future that was the embodiment of progress and humanity, and the bright future that the modernist saw when he stepped off his porch in the morning.

The same variety of utopian spirit that the ville embodies is found in the speech from the early pages of the novel. In a public speech prior to when the President contacts Dr. Jones, a respected government official named Dr. Rodolfo Perdomo, a staunch critic of the administration in power, gives a speech in which he suggests a new direction for the nation to take as they advance into the 20th century. Perdomo, referencing Rafael Heliodoro Valle, a very influential Honduran writer, “afirmó [referencing Heliodoro Valle, to whom the quote is attributed] que la historia de Honduras podía ser escrita en una lágrima”, (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 11) seemingly agreeing with the latter’s declaration of the sadness in Honduras’ history. But he

continues, stating that Valle never got to know the “más actualizada biografía de Honduras...La vida reciente de Honduras...podría ser escrita sobre el mármol de la iniquidad con sólo siete letras: ¡Cinismo!, ¡cinismo estatal, cinismo oficial y cinismo internacional!” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 11). *Cinismo* translates into either brazenness and shamelessness or cynicism. Perhaps this double play of words is intentional by the author, but I will focus on cynicism here. Various synonyms of cynicism are used as descriptors of postmodern tendencies. Postmodern irony, as summarized by Jos de Mul, is characterized by its “nihilism, sarcasm, and distrust and deconstruction of grand narratives” (Vermeulen and van den Akker 4). After some applause, Perdomo continues “¡y he allí también el inicio de la lucha en que estamos empeñados...el reto irrenunciable de la paz! (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 11).

Perdomo’s speech starts with this call for an end to the cynicism and, simultaneously, the beginning of a fight for Peace – a more modernist, grand narrative stance. The President of the Republic, sitting in the audience, reacts by calling the proclamation “Bullshit!” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 11), echoed by his aid. Perdomo continues in his denouncement of the current president and administration, specifically mentioning that the people “se rebela y dice ¡basta! A la ignominia oficial...la barbarie institucionalizada...[y] al intervencionismo protocolizado de la ideología de la seguridad nacional puesta en práctica por esta administración” (*Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 12). Regarding the latter, he cites how Honduras had been an accomplice to the CIA in the 1954 coup to unseat Arbenz, against Cuba in 1961 (a reference to the failed Bay of Pigs invasion) by allowing the CIA to install radio towers on the Isla del Cisne to transmit anti-Cuban propaganda into the country.

He follows this by mentioning the role Honduras played in the downfall of Francisco Caamaño and involvement with the InterAmerican Peace Force (ran by the Organization of

American States or OAS) that invaded the Dominican Republic in 1965 (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 12). These examples play to his larger goal: “¡No a la intervención!” (13), describing interventionism as “canibalismo bélico contra nuestros hermanos latinoamericanos” (12). Not only did they play latchkey to the US and CIA’s interests, they cut off relations with Cuba to satisfy the United States and turned a blind eye to the 1973 US backed coup of Salvador Allende or the Dirty War in Argentina. Forced to pause by the uproar of the 900-odd spectators, some standing and some sitting, he continues expounding on how Honduras has served as “hombres de paja en la Guerra sucia del imperio contra Nicaragua” (14).

After an ovation, he concludes by summarizing his perspective on how the last 8 years of Honduran history have been defined by the “ultraderechización de centroamericanos de la política Reagan” as they have been simultaneously submitted to “la más feroz campana de desinformación y al abuso de su ausencia de escuela crítica y de alfabeto” (14). Not only that, but their country has become a staging ground and home base for the CIA and bends to the will of foreign powers (15). However, Perdomo assures the public that there is more that the Honduran public is not aware of, and that Perdomo himself will reveal it to them that very night.

Perdomo’s characterization of the Honduran government and how it has been a puppet to the United States follows closely Jameson’s analysis of postmodern culture, in that it is “the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror” (Jameson 5). The president is trying to hide the influence and imperialism of the United States and portray it in a newer, more positive light, hoping that by improving the public sentiment towards the U.S., he can ride the coattails of that

positivity into more firmly establishing his own administration and pull Honduras into a more modern (as in contemporary, up-to-date) age.

Perdomo's speech, which comes from the opposite perspective, demonstrates a desire to close one chapter and begin another; he sees that there is a chance to change the direction the country is headed and push back against United-statesian imperialism in one action. The President's aide marvels at the announcement [that Perdomo has formerly secret information to share], exclaiming "¡Imposible...No pueden poseer esa información!" (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 15), indicating to us that said information does in fact exist and that they have access to it. Growing increasingly frustrated and annoyed at the situation, the president tells a security guard to have his public relations department deny everything when they are inevitably asked about the speech the next morning. The guard returns to tell him that a radio station nearby has been transmitting the event live, and he asks how they can shut it down.

Throughout the growing commotion stirring amongst the audience, Dr. Perdomo has continues his speech, where he reassures the public that they are no more responsible for what happens behind their backs than what happened in Nazi Germany without the public's knowledge, or the United-statesians who are incapable of stopping the virus-like spread of Reaganomics and imperialism. What the Honduran populace is guilty if, in his view, is "de reaccionar tan lentos y de no exigir explicaciones. Somos culpables solamente de nuestra incultura y nuestra escasa formación cívica y nuestra pobreza democrática" (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 16–17). Perdomo seeks to distance themselves from the United States' influence and set forth a new, more sovereign direction for their nation.

Perdomo is adamant in his demand that the truth be known. He categorizes Honduran history as having a secret and official version. This is confirmed by the surprised exclamation of

the presidential aide *and* through the misinformation campaign suggested by the hiring of Jones – the official version has to be maintained in order to save face and maintain control. One of the major characteristics that separates postmodernism from modernism is the attitude towards Truth and Grand Narratives (or metanarratives). Lyotard posits that the grand metanarratives that were common in modernist circumstances were no longer applicable in a postmodern condition, but instead had been replaced by “smaller and multiple narratives which seek no universalizing stabilization or legitimation” (Hutcheon 24). Honduras’ history was fractured, splintered into multiple versions. Perdomo’s desire to reveal the secret history is not just to set the record straight, he hopes that in so doing they can effect changes to better Honduras future. As we have discussed here, metamodernism is characterized by its dialogue with (post)modernism.

We see here, in what Perdomo states as the end goals, something related to the “new *sens*” of which Vermeulen and van den Akker speak when they define metamodern sensibility but metered through a (in Perdomo’s case) modernist filter. His calls to action; “¡Basta! A la ignominia oficial...a la barbarie institucionalizada...al intervencionismo protocolizado...” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 12), “¡Nunca más! ... ¡No a la intervención! ... ¡No más agresión!” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 13); his platforms and what he sees as an “obligación de reescribir esa historia”; and the “imperative categórico del devenir de la conciencia de nuestra identidad...de la pobreza y el intervencionismo. ¡No más Guatemalas para nuestra responsabilidad! ... ¡No más Repúblicas Dominicanas! ¡No más Nicaraguas!” (16) are met with scorn and derision. The utopian, modernist zeal with which Perdomo pleases is one swing of the pendulum, but gravity soon pulls it back to postmodern cynicism and apathy.

Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing? is a 1956 work of collage by Richard Hamilton. He took cutouts of many American illustrated magazines and created what John-Paul Stonard calls “an emblem of the Age of Boom, the post-War consumer culture of the late 1950’s” (Stonard 607). Inspired in part by Hamilton's obsession with the United-statesian publication *MAD*, which “was unique in offering a critical position on 1950s consumerism, exposing techniques of manipulation, often with the most biting parodies of advertising methods and media outlets” (Stonard 612), *Just what is it...?* uses advertising and marketing print media to create a living room setting. The collage features a man and a woman in a living room, adorned with a couch, recorder, television set, lamp, portrait, and poster; through a window, we see a billboard for a performance of Al Jolson in *The Jazz Singer*. The man, a bodybuilder by the name of Irwin Koszewski – who holds a giant Tootsie-Roll Pop – stands opposite Jo Baer, an artist, posed as a pinup girl in the photograph. Referenced as “the starting point of planetary Pop Art” and the “perfect Pop work” (Stonard 607) an exemplary piece of British Pop art, it uses images of and from “comic books, tinned food and burlesque nudes that formed the iconography of Pop art, and of the widespread use by artists of the metonymic language of advertising” (Stonard 607).

In using tools of consumer marketing (cut outs taken from advertisements), Hamilton creates “a set of anachronisms, a museum, with lingering residues of decorative styles that an inhabited space collects” (Stonard 620). Jameson writes that the aesthetics of postmodernism had become

fascinated...by this whole ‘degraded’ landscape of schlock and kitsch, of TV series and *Reader’s Digest* culture, of advertising and motels, of the late show and the grade-B

Hollywood film...materials they no longer simply 'quote,' as a Joyce or a Mahler might have done, but incorporate into their very substance. (Jameson 2–3)

The postmodern subject represented by Hamilton's collage, as suggested by van den Akker, is a subjectivity built on cheap, artificial, and trashy replicas (schlock and kitsch) that are part of who they are as a consumer. The collage is constructed with visual reproductions of real objects (what Jameson would say are a "set of texts or simulacra" (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism* 9) that, much like Jameson writes on commodification and Warhol's work, "explicitly foreground the commodity fetishism of a transition to late capital" (9). There is no depth nor historicity (as van den Akker and their co-authors address in their edited volume), only cheap copies whose provenance is unclear and that are accumulated through continual consumption.

Perdomo's speech (and the events of the novel) takes place in 1990s, at least forty-five years removed from the events that both he and the president reference. The cynicism with which the president speaks is compounded by the condensing of history in a very postmodern fashion. Jameson writes about how spatial logic of simulacra greatly influences and effects historical time, insomuch that the

past is thereby itself modified: what was once, in the historical novel as Lukacs defines it, the organic genealogy of the bourgeois collective project...has meanwhile itself become a vast collection of images...In faithful conformity to poststructuralist linguistic theory, the past as 'referent' find itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts. (Jameson 18)

The president is bringing these events from the 1930's, 40's, and 70's, into the present moment as if they are photos from an album, leaving behind the historical context (Jameson's call to "Always historicize!" is suddenly ringing out), and using the events to fit a narrative that

supports the president's perspective; not only that, but in taking credit for these actions, the president is further ignoring the need to historicize and condensing Honduras' history into a flat circle. When we erase history, we are left with nothing more than simple objects lacking depth and historicity. Like Hamilton's collage, there is no historicity applied, and each event is treated on equal historic footing, as if they occurred both in a vacuum and simultaneously.

Disconnecting these events from their historic context is exactly the point for the president. To get ahead of and minimize the fallout from Perdomo's revelation, and set the Honduran people on the march to self-determination and autonomy, the president commissions the creation of a new historical narrative that is devoid of context, that Jones write "una fábula, una narración llana, el gran relato de cómo surgió la identidad hondureña, la forma en que nació, se gestó y se formó la nación" (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 30). Not only will this be a way to quiet his opposition who seek to destabilize him, it will also function as a new curriculum to be taught in schools so as to inform the new generations of who they are.

For this to work, they need the "mejor historiador que haya disponible", and for that reason they turn to Dr. Quentin Jones. Jones is a professor at Cornell, a Fulbright Scholar, received an Endowment for the Arts, wrote two books on the history of Latin America, and belongs to several distinguished professional organizations. He was recommended by USAID and approved by the President of the Republic to write this History of Honduras.

However, as soon as Jones arrives, he does not greet the idea with enthusiasm. The project, as proposed to Jones, is a half-truth: he learns the purpose of the project but not its true motives. As he recounts his interaction with the president in a meeting the the U.S. Ambassador and USAID representatives, they concur with the president, adding that even more important is that Jones will "integrar todo el esfuerzo que estamos realizando por incorporar a Honduras

dentro de la civilización occidental, ¿comprende?” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 29). Jones’ own interpretation to all this is that the President wants him to invent history, an interpretation which the ambassador corrects, clarifying that it is not inventing history, just choosing which version of history to present in order to give “continuidad uniforme a la masa de caos que ha sido la vida del país en los últimos ciento cincuenta años. *Solamente es aplicar más peso en unas cosas que en otras*” (29 emphasis added). Again, Jones refuses, stating that the “mission del historiador es interpretar la realidad, no manipularla” (29) and he doubles down on his responsibility to tell a complete history.

In this meeting with USAID, he again expresses his reticence towards the project as it has been described to him. The president was concerned that too many histories written recently had been produced by popular political parties, the Partido Liberal or Partido Nacional, who included only the aspects of historical narratives that best served their own ends; therefore, they were incomplete and colored by biases that could not be ignored. In his discussion with the US ambassador, he restates what he told the president and his aides:

- La historia es la historia...no se puede hablar de los hombres sin recordar las ideas que los motivaron.
- Si, Jones, de acuerdo, pero en este caso habrá que hacer una excepción.
- ¿Una excepción, embajador?
- Una excepción de profundidad nada más. 30

The president’s aid had recommended something similar: “Usted puede tratar todos los temas...solo que tendrá que dosificarlos, saber dónde insistir en el ejemplo, dónde pasar por alto o de lado una situación” (30). This lack of depth is accompanied by a lack of historicity, both of which Jones wants to introduce into the narrative once again.

A lack of depth and historicity characterized much of the cultural productions created in the era of postmodernity (Jameson), where the past becomes nothing more than bracketed, historical references that are free floating and disconnected, resurrected for purely aesthetical purposes (Fisher 2009). In this same conversation with the Ambassador, it is revealed to Dr. Jones that the United States is less a “partner” to Honduras and more a puppeteer that lets the Hondurans believe they stand on (more or less) equal ground. In describing how the Hondurans have come to depend on the United States aid, Jones observes “Estamos metidos bien adentro ¿verdad?...Pienso que por aquí se nos ha de necesitar para todo” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 33). The implication that Jones is making is that the United States is in too deep in Honduras, that the country could not extricate itself easily from the situation in which it finds itself in the country. The ambassador, after flippantly remarking that they were more needed in El Salvador (given the ongoing civil war that the United States was helping wage in the country), adds that they help where they can.

Another member of the ambassadorial team asks Quentin what he means by his statement and poses a question to him – “¿Cuál es el limite, hasta dónde deberíamos llegar? *No es culpa nuestra que los hondureños se hayan acostumbrado tanto a depender económicamente de nosotros...Ellos vienen y piden y prestan y solicitan sin cesar*” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 34, emphasis added). This ridiculous claim by the staff member, that it isn’t our fault that the Hondurans have become so accustomed to depend on us economically, gives us all we need to know about the United States’ view and perspective on Honduras and other countries considered “3rd world” or located in the Global South. It is a statement, like Jameson describes, that is bracketed and free floating, with no understanding of the United States’ past (or present of the narrative’s setting) in the region. Seen from another angle, the United States is funding the

Honduran historical project and banking on a return on their investment, a further cementing of their place in Central America and increased dependence on the US.

By asking Dr. Jones to write a history that paints United-statesian intervention in a more positive light, the Honduran government serves the US purposes of continuing the process of establishing economic domination (in Jameson's words), meaning they don't need to resort to military intervention or bloodshed (as they did or were doing in Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala). But to say that it is not the United States' fault or that the United States had no hand in creating the material conditions that necessitate dependence on the US is categorically false and manipulative. The ambassador goes so far as to claim that the United States has created a self-imposed "mission civilizadora que nadie nos pidió, a la que nadie nos mandó llamar, y ahora estamos en un verdadero atolladero: o la terminamos nosotros o la continúan las izquierdistas" (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 34)). Again, we see the historicity being extracted from the context. In a Cold War context (which was in part created by the United States), from which the embassy is operating (even though at this time the Berlin Wall had fallen in relation to the narrative), the United States was not called on nor asked to embark on this civilizing mission against the USSR and Leftist politics; they commissioned it themselves. So, while technically correct, by narrativizing it in such a way that it appears that the United States is only doing the work that nobody else asked them to do for everyone else's benefit, they erase all of the convoluted and torturous history of class conflict and warfare that is the basis of the United States' model since its conception and during its own colonial era.

When Jones points out to the president that history as a "catecismo moral ya pasó de moda" – in other words, a history book is not an instruction guide for life, a very modernist viewpoint that sets history as an objective truth that is good – the president says that a

developing country like Honduras needs education, and history can provide that. He continues, invoking Cervantes in his rebuttal to Jones.

¡Ah! Profesor...se ve que usted no conoce Honduras. Aquí estamos aún en la época de Cervantes, cuando la gente creía que era cierto todo lo que estaba escrito en letra de molde...Se trata de poner en manos de una población ignorante y analfabeta *la verdad, aquello en que debe creer*. Está usted a punto de iniciar un acto de fe...lo que esto es en realidad es un maravilloso acto de fe...

Mis padres son españoles, ¿sabe?...pero después de haber vivido en Honduras toda mi vida comprendo que el futuro es anglo-sajón. No hay que equivocarse...La tecnología, la ciencia, la política y el saber nos inclinan cada vez más hacia los pueblos que dominan el mundo y esos son los sajones. Yo lo que deseo es dar un salto y evitarnos el rodeo: *si un día vamos a formar parte de una gran nación americana hay que comenzar a educarse para ello*. (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 31, emphasis added)

The mention of Cervantes and believing anything written in print as the basis for the Spanish Colonial culture in Honduras (the past) is used here in contrast to the Anglo-saxon future.

We should also remember that at this point in the novel, neither the reader nor Jones has any idea about the Madrugada Plan. But what the ambassador says next to Jones (after his “romanticismos castellanos” comment) shows us how the United States views the progress in this plan:

Sólo se trata de suavizar lo que aún conserven del espíritu castellano y dar paso poco a poco a una nueva mentalidad, a la conciencia de la edad tecnológica que poseemos en Estados Unidos, al desarrollo industrial. Entre más preparados estén los nacionales para

ese trance, lo pasarán con menos trauma y con menos dolor...(Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 31–32)

The United States would like to avoid turning the situation in Honduras into a Military Occupation (as we will see outlined in the plan later), and it seems that both the President and the ambassador are pushing for annexation as quickly as possible.

The Ambassador again mentions the Spanish cultural basis of the Honduran people. It seems he is not intent on changing the Spanish spirit that possesses Hondurans, but to soften or remold it to fit a more advanced (United-statesian) age. There is no mention of changing the attitude of believing all that they read, but to put the correct text into their hands. They don't want to develop a population that thinks critically about their material and cultural reality. They want to spoon feed Hondurans a new reality and a new colonial master in the United States.

This collage of history is supposed to be easily digestible and requires the learner/citizen to go and research each of the events on their own if they want to know where they come from and how they fit into a larger view of human history, just as various art critics have done with the different items displayed in Hamilton's collage (Stonard; Moffat). What Jones wants to do instead of this is display a Honduran history that includes all of the context, the historical connections, the human motivation and messiness that comes with the history, and present that for each reader to come to their own conclusions and interpret it for what it is; less of a collage, and more of a variety of optical illusion.

The last subject – the metamodern one – opens a back door while walking through a front door like in an Escher painting. M.C. Escher was a Dutch graphic and visual artist who worked in myriad mediums and is perhaps most well-known for his Impossible Constructions. Many of his pieces were mathematically based (such as his tessellations and infinite geometries) or optical

illusions – in some cases, both – that bend perspective and play with perception. Van den Akker does not mention a specific Escher print, but it seems likely that any of the Impossible constructions could serve as the inspiration for the comparison. Their subject, by moving through both doorways, is exiting and entering a dwelling from different doors at the same time. If it were the same door, he would only be exiting *or* entering – it is impossible to go in a back and out a front door at the exact same moment.

Escher's works *Convex and Concave*, *Up and Down*, or *Ascending and Descending*, present optical illusions that the images are both but neither what the title says, a trait that van den Akker and Vermeulen in their 2010 essay "Notes on Metamodernism" (2010) is a key component of metamodernism's oscillatory nature. As an epistemology and ontology, metamodernism "should be conceived as a 'both-neither' dynamic. They [metamodernism's epistemology and ontology] are each at once modern *and* postmodern and neither of them" (Vermeulen and van den Akker 6). Escher's *Ascending* gives the appearance of both ascending and descending, but neither ascending nor descending; in much the same way, the metamodern subject is *neither* entering nor exiting and *both* exiting and entering.

Is there a stand-in for a metamodern subject in *Rey del Albor*? It is not Jones. While there may be some parallelism in how we see (post)modernism embodied in aspects of Dr. Perdomo, the President, or the U.S. Ambassador, and while Jones may represent an aspect of pushback to the postmodern tendencies displayed by others, I don't think he is necessarily a metamodern subject. A precursor to a metamodern subject that exhibits metamodern tendencies, perhaps, but the text seems to be more likely for the "role" of a metamodern subject, because of the navigation between the historical vignettes and the Jones storyline. Helen Umaña comments that just because a fiction claims to be "historical" doesn't guarantee that it is. Referencing Luckács',

she comments that works of historical fiction can be ““históricas solo por su temática puramente externa, por su apariencia”” (Umaña 196) when in reality “son obras antihistóricas o pseudohistóricas” (196). What matters is to see ““lo específico de una época desde un ángulo histórico”; ‘demostrar con medios poéticos la existencia, el ‘ser así’ de las circunstancias históricas y sus personajes”” (196). This is precisely what Escoto does, according to Umaña – Escoto “busca el ‘ángulo histórico’ preciso, el que, en los diversos relatos que va hilvanando, deje ver el juego de contradicciones al interior de la sociedad” (196). It is as much a work of history as it is of historical fiction.

. The book is comprised of eighteen chapters (1-8, 10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 20, 22, 24-26) that focus on the storyline surrounding protagonist Dr. Quentin Jones and the construction of the new history that the President and USAID have assigned to him. Over the course of the novel, he becomes involved with a revolutionary (leftist) Priest named Miqui and a cell of revolutionary guerrilleros that are connected to the Comité por la Paz that includes Dr. Perdomo; uncovers the *Plan Madrugada* (that we discussed prior) and is attacked in a shootout by Contra operatives; taken captive by Israeli Mossad agents and reported to the US Embassy; and sent back to the United States.

The other nine chapters (9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, 21, 23, 27) are vignettes that Escoto has woven into and between the Jones’ narrative. They are set in various historical moments and narrated by a multitude of voices. The first takes place in 1974 and reverses chronologically as the book progresses, returning to the past and arriving in 1495 in the final chapter in the book. These range in content from the assassination of a Catholic priest who the right-wing state apparatus judges as having ties to guerilla groups; a journalistic style recounting of events a la *Operación massacre* (1957) or *La noche de Tlatelolco* (1971) of the second Honduran Civil War

in 1924; An enslaved man named Mateu Casanga from Portuguese speaking Africa narrating the middle passage on his way to the new world; and the moment that Indigenous people witnessed colonizing Spanish forces landing on what would become Honduras.

Escoto confirmed that he approached the writing of this novel from every possible historical angle that he could in correspondence with the author. In response to a question about the historical chapters and how history is woven into the publication of the novel and the connections between the historical vignettes and the Jones storyline, Escoto described his research and writing process for *Madrugada*:

La escritura de la novela tomó 12 años, la más larga en mis libros. Esto sucedió porque cada vez que deseaba yo escribir un capítulo histórico tenía que ir a leer uno o cinco libros de historia y eso lleva tiempo. Por ejemplo, hay un capítulo donde vienen unos piratas a la playa caribeña de Omoa a visitar un pirata retirado y cuando yo lo estaba escribiendo me pregunté: ¿en qué tipo de barco iban? Fui a estudiar barcos de esa época, creo que 1650. No podía ser una carabela, desaparecida hacia 1500. No nao, por lo mismo. No Galeón o trirreme, peor. Entonces ¿en que (*sic*) van? Dale a leer libros y hallar la respuesta, Pasaron entonces varios meses. Y cuando ellos van a tierra, a la playa, en qué vehículo lo hacen. No en un yate, no existen. No en una canoa, que es para río y no para mar. Quizás en un esquife si el trayecto es corto. Pero mejor en un pipante misquito, que permite ambas aguas.

Y cuando desean saber qué hora es, ¿dónde lo averiguan? Fui a Guatemala a comprar un libro sobre relojes. Allí ví que en esa época no existían los relojes de puño pero que también habían desaparecido ya las clepsidras o relojes de arena. No había aún

relojes de bolsillo, por lo tanto debí estudiar cómo averiguaban ellos la hora. Y así en toda la novela a fin de no cometer errores históricos. (Escoto, *Personal Correspondence*)

The tireless work by the author to precisely *and* accurately represent historical events as they would have happened is nothing short of a herculean literary undertaking and is a wonder in and of itself. He jumps between eras and epochs, between races and civilizations, even between languages, and even includes “dato[s] cotidiano[s]” that feel as if he observed them firsthand.

To that point, Umaña states that Escoto transforms the history he includes into “signo de carácter estético” and it thus becomes part of the fictitious world he creates. And, “como ficción, como texto que tiene que soportar la exigente literariedad, quizás sea la obra más ambiciosa del narrador hondureño” (Umaña 196–97). Umaña lists Escoto’s dominant display of the following characteristics as evidence of the impressive literary work that is *Madrugada*:

“oltura en el manejo de los recursos técnicos del código narrativo y el dominio de los mecanismos expresivos de la lengua...fluidez en la prosa; dinamicidad en los diálogos; equilibrio entre los diversos modos del relato...; ágil ritmo en el sucederse de los hechos...; versatilidad en el estilo según sea el narrador supuesto de cada historia...y la depurada caracterización de los personajes. 197

The stories that Escoto weaves together and the way that he weaves them together show how “en la novela la historia es como un tejido, una alfombra, un manto, donde los hilos son unos del pasado y otros del presente” (Escoto, *Personal Correspondence*).

Regardless of content, what all these chapters have in common is how they “revelan la intención totalizadora de recoger la historia complete de América” (Umaña 188) as Helen Umaña theorizes. “Cada relato sintetiza elementos fundacionales que llevaron a la constitución, tanto de la nación hondureña como de la América mestiza” (188). The fragments and stories that

are interspersed with the protagonist's narrative tell the story of how Honduras – and the Americas at large – were built. Escoto commented to me that “[l]a novela está trabajada desde dos perspectivas que se confrontan, el presente y el pasado, lo que busca mostrar que se siguen repitiendo los mismos o similares errores hoy como ayer, o bien que se van superando...” (Escoto, *Personal Correspondence*). In every sense, what *Madrugada* is arguing as a whole and illustrated in every chapter by showing similar problems of oppression and exploitation is that “aunque varíe el fenómeno (la anécdota), la esencia de injusticia sigue viva. El doble hilo – opresión y rebeldía – no se ha roto” (Umaña 189). This never-ending chain of exploitative systems lives on with variations as history continues to imitate itself.

Umaña points to the text to further elucidate on how the proximity to its own history is a stumbling block to the “present” lived moment of the text. As he continues to pry the *Madrugada* file open, his anticipation for finding some document or artifact that could potentially change the future or alter existing beliefs or theories about the past. He soon comes to recognize that, like Latin America, he was “reviviendo su más próximo pasado. *Ese era precisamente el problema de Latinoamérica*, concluyó, todos los pasados estaban demasiado cercanos no había nada lejano. Bolívar continuaba cabalgando en cualquier aprendiz de revolucionario...” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 108). Umaña cites the latter in a footnote, but the quote continues and further establishes a panAmerican sentiment and connection between Latin American peoples and revolutions.

...los frentes rebeldes se bautizaban con los apellidos de caudillos que nunca se habían extinguido del todo: Sandino, Tupac Amaru, Morazán, Farabundo Martí, los dictadores modernos exiliaban y torturaban idénticamente a como lo había hecho Melgarejo [brutal Bolivian dictator in power between 1864-1871] y los indios continuaban retando con la

misma mirada hosca y torva con que habían resentido a los conquistadores...Estas tierras, esos aires, estas gentes, ¿es que se dirigían al pasado o retornaban del porvenir? (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 108–09)

Jones' final query here is a key question to understanding how *Madrugada* leads us to understand Time and History in Latin America.

In English, we could translate this question as “Did they go to the past or return from the future?” The implication of movement between times and “present” as fluid is reflected in how the reader is constantly “going to the past” to the nine vignette chapters or [from the perspective of the past] “returning from the future.” If the present of the novel is in constant dialogue and oscillation between the past, the present, and what will be the future – and if we consider the historical narrative that is constructed as representative of a narrative of Honduras (and Latin America) – because we know what was, we know what *is* and what *will be* while in the present. The past's proximity to the present (and its constant presence) shapes the present – and thus, the future – in a cyclical pattern, one that likely resembles an M.C. Escher print.

Chapter 9, the first of the historical vignettes, is a perfect example of how these temporalities are interwoven. Set early on a Sunday morning, Padre McKenzie, a priest in Juticalpa, Olancho – a largely rural department in the eastern part of Honduras – meets with the Bishop of the Diocese of Juticalpa, who informs him that he is going to be transferred to a different parish for his protection. He leaves the Diocese for his church to perform his Sunday morning mass, and while in the sacristy he sees the sacristan's eyes full of tears. Suspicious that the sacristan knows something, he asks “¿Quién te lo dijo...Qué me echan, que me sacan de aquí?” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 121), referring to his being transferred.

“No es eso...Eso no se sabe”

“¿Qué es lo que se sabe, entonces?” El sacristán titubeó.

“Qué lo van a matar” respondió al rato.

McKenzie swallows, responds that “Nadie mata a un sacerdote” (121), and turns to leave. Yet by the end of the chapter, McKenzie will indeed be dead.

Why? Why is Father McKenzie being targeted? What did the Priest from Iowa (122) do to deserve a bounty on his head? His own meditations on the situation inform us of the precarious situation he finds himself in. First, he wonders if the bishop heard something about his extra-curricular activities that are not church related:

...“¿Sabría algo el Obispo sobre las reuniones de la Junta? ¿Alguno de los dirigentes habría hablado en lugar público o en voto de confesión sobre la sociedad que apuñaría a todos los sindicatos y a las ligas agrarias, a los grupos de aparceros, ejidatarios y jornaleros bajo un solo mando confederado, pulso de fuerza con los ganaderos y los terratenientes, poder unitario de los hambrientos, el primer asomo cristiano de la rebelión...?” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 120)

McKenzie wonders if the Bishop heard someone in confession or from some other source about an executive board that looked to unite marginalized and underrepresented peoples, mainly from agrarian and union backgrounds, into a single organization, something that would have been likely tied into Liberation Theology (given his being a priest) and somewhat similar to the Comité de Unidad Campesina (CUC) that Rigoberta Menchú details in her testimonio (Menchú and Burgos-Debray 121–44).

McKenzie describes his own work as

dos años organizando sindicatos, comunidades agrarias, cooperativas agrícolas, empresas asociativas, entre la amenaza de los grandes [presumably a company like United Fruit] y la debilidad de los pequeños [the sharecroppers, common land holders and daylaborers]...

...¿Habría sido todo en vano? ¿Fundar escuelas, propagar catecismos, sembrar un poco de rebeldía acá, despejar testas a la claridad del conocimiento, ver que los hombres vieran su propia realidad, eso, había sido solamente cosa, palabra al viento, semilla al aire, ilusión? (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 120, 122)

While not outright declaring a connection to any particular leftist, left-adjacent, or revolutionary groups, if we go back to Menchú's accounting of her family's involvement in the groundwork of the CUC we see that members of these organizations were considered subversives, communists, and like Menchú's father, many were taken captive as political prisoners (Menchú and Burgos-Debray 136).

As mass begins, Father McKenzie starts to contemplate what he describes as "las emociones de suplicio del cordero pascual" (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 123) during the ceremony. He finishes the Offertory chant and reaches for the missal, a man who the reader knows as Meregildo pull out a rifle and shoot Father McKenzie from the pews. As the bullet makes impact, McKenzie "sintió un viento cálido, proveniente de la montaña y que penetraba por las naves" (124) as he falls backwards, and his arms raise into the air.

It is possible that Father McKenzie is in fact recurring to Liberation Theology in his ministry as it had already emerged. Gustavo Gutierrez published *Teología de la liberación: Perspectivas* in 1971; Camilo Torres Restrepo held as a martyr after his 1966 death while fighting with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional in his native Colombia. Menchú was Catholic, working as a catechist (Menchú and Burgos-Debray 99–100), involved with groups like Catholic

Action (94), and believed that the Bible contained examples of justified resistance and use of violence against repression (Judith chopping of the head of Holofernes, Moses leading his people out of Egypt and transgressing rule of law, and David as a young boy killing Goliath) that they modeled their own Indigenous struggle on (xix, 157-160). Rigoberta is also quoted by de Burgos in saying that “The Bible is written, and that gives us one more weapon” (xix). Liberation Theology was a present, known manner of thinking that was seen as a threat to the right-wing, authoritarian regimes that dominated Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua, as well as the United States, who saw it as a breeding ground for Communism and anti-Capitalist resistance during the height of the Cold War.

As further evidence that these cycles and patterns repeat themselves in Latin America, in just six years after the events of chapter 9 are set, Archbishop Oscar Romero would be murdered during Mass on March 24, 1980, in similar circumstances to Meregildo’s murder of Father McKenzie. A sharpshooter with a .22 caliber rifle would fire on him from a red car while he officiated Mass. Then there is Miki, the priest, who “es progresista (quiero decir de izquierda) como lo fue el sacerdote” Father McKenzie (Escoto, *Personal Correspondence*). Miki³ is McKenzie is Romero is Torres; the snapshot of history that chapter nine affords us is decades of history, repeated over and over, told over the span of a few hours in a small town in rural Juticalpa, Olancho, Honduras.

Plan MADRUGADA and United-statesian Interventionism

We now turn to the MADRUGADA plan in the novel demonstrates how *Madrugada* anticipates our current structure of feeling, we must set up the historical context out of which the

³ In the book, it is spelled Miqui, but Escoto wrote it Miki in his emails with me.

events of the novel take place. This will give us a basis to show how exactly history has and will repeat itself moving forward.

Jones has found a file named MADRUGADA on his computer that is encrypted. He attempts various times to crack the encryption and gain access but no to avail. Then, one night with Miqui, a priest who works with a revolutionary cell that befriends Jones. Miqui takes Jones to an underground meeting of this guerrilla group who have chosen to work with him to expose a United-statesian plan they have heard of. Central to this group is Dr. Perdomo, the same academic who found himself at odds with president. From information “que [han] conseguido y recogido entre [sus] amigos europeos,” they warn him of

la más grande conspiración que puede haberse fraguado para hacer de Centroamérica un vasto centro colonial de los Estados Unidos...un insólito proyecto norteamericano para volver a nuestro país su periferia satélite, aún más, coincidiendo con la celebración de los quinientos años del descubrimiento de América en 1992... (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 332)

The CIA designed plan, as they describe it, has various stages, availing itself of the educational system, religious organizations and churches, and cable television programs broadcast to influence the general public as well as providing strategic loans alongside military aid to the government to create the conditions that would lead to this colonization. Then, the CIA, alongside other U.S. organizations, want to suffocate the Honduran economy and force them into bankruptcy, forcing them to turn to the United States for aid, or, as one of the members group, Jorge, states, “Hacer que le [pidan] al verdugo que termine el sufrimiento” (335). Jones, by their judgement, is the one that can help expose this plan and who will be taken seriously enough that the world will intervene.

Immediately upon leaving this meeting, Jones goes with Miqui to try decoding the file one more time, which they ultimately achieve. When they do so, they find two topics mentioned that establish the basis of reasoning for intervention. The first is the “clímax [of Cold War Tensions] sospechado desde la década de 1940” and Honduras’ place in the geopolitical setting that was Central America in the era; the second is the “convenios de Bretton Wood” and, subsequently, the establishment of the IMF and financing of foreign investment by United States banking institutions. The 1940s in Central America were a tumultuous and repressive period characterized by U.S. anti-communist tendencies, connections to multinationals like United Fruit Company (UFC), and Roosevelt’s “Good Neighbor Doctrine” (LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions* 71). We will visit each of the countries of the region (with the exception of Costa Rica) in turn. As I mentioned in the introduction, it is difficult to adequately grasp the scope of the United States’ intervention in one country without understanding its actions in the surrounding nations.

Guatemala was coming to the end of Jorge Ubico’s dictatorship by resignation in 1944 due to his largely “repressive government characterized by farcical elections, disregard of the constitution” (LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions* 113), and negligence of social and economic legislation. In the subsequent elections, Juan José Arévalo took office, a self-titled “spiritual socialist” whose confusing record of disavowing Marxism *and* individualistic capitalism led to agrarian and labor reforms that skewed further and further to the left. These advances, although popular in Guatemala, caused J. Edgar Hoover to express concern over the state of the country and its Communist tendencies, even though (in what can only be considered highly ironic) Arévalo himself had outlawed the Communist Party in the country. The U.S. would later intervene after Arévalo’s presidency on behalf of UFC.

El Salvador was also fraught with political conflict, influenced by U.S. policy and influence. Augustín Farabundo Martí emerged as a Socialist and Communist leader and organizer, although those movements would ultimately have poor luck. Vice-President and General Maximiliano Hernández Martínez led a coup to depose Arturo Araujo from office and then took his place in 1931. Although the United States refused to recognize him as president based on the 1923 treaty arrangement (DEFINE IIN FOOTNOTE), they reconsidered their position and welcomed him after the 1932 Communist Massacre or Matanza. Armed Forces annihilated upwards of 30,000 campesinos. By 1934, Roosevelt had recognized Martínez as President of El Salvador (LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions* 71–73).

Nicaragua was a similar case. The U.S. had exercised more influence in Nicaragua during the late 19th and early 20th century. William Walker, the United-statesian filibuster, declared himself President of the nation in 1856 (and was recognized as such by the United States). He was forced out of office in 1857 and left the region, only to return a few years later, be captured, and executed by firing squad in Honduras. The United States stayed active in the region, sending marines into Nicaragua frequently over the next few decades. In the early 20th century, the United States waged war against Augusto Sandino, but when he disappeared into hiding, the United States decided to reinforce the National Guard (Nicaraguan police force) as a governing force above politics (something that would backfire in later years) instead of constantly intervening. The Guard, helped by the U.S., hunted Sandino unsuccessfully for years, until the U.S. finally gave up and left the country.

Upon doing so, Sandino came out of hiding to negotiate but was captured and shot under orders by Anastasio Somoza, the commanding officer of the National Guard. Somoza took power after the Civil War in May 1836, and “for forty-three years he and his two sons ruled the

country as a private fiefdom” (LaFeber 71). Somoza received a large line of credit from U.S. banks that he would use to boost his government, calling upon United-statesian agencies to help him run his banks, railroads, and the like, all for his own profit. It would stay this way until the Sandinista-Contra conflict towards the end of the 20th century.

Lastly, 1940’s Honduras. For 9 years of the decade, Tiburcio Carías Andino led the country as a dictator. Having been elected in 1932, he broke constitutional decree (which dictated a four-year term and no re-election) and became the longest ruling political leader in the country’s history, from 1932 until 1949 (Argueta 125). The Asamblea Nacional Constituyente he convened in 1936 changed the law to allow him to stay in power indefinitely. Characterized by historians as a peaceful period in which he put an end to civil wars and unrest, “la ‘paz’ resultante fue producto del terror que en todo el país ejercían los comandantes de armas” who used “métodos violentos que incluyeron exilio y destierro” (Argueta 125) to foster the so-called peace. Furthermore, Honduras was severely affected by the global depression from 1929 until the start of WWII. After a banner year in 1930, marking the highest ever export numbers for the banana industry, they (and all other industries) would see an overall stagnation or decline from 1930-1945 (126); likewise, salaries shrunk, and the most severely affected were the poorest classes of Honduran society.

With the end of WWII, there began to be unrest and pushback against the Carías Andino dictatorship (as well as the Ubico and Hernández Martínez regimes), and for the United States “resultaba cada vez más embarazoso el apoyar a regimens cada vez más dictatoriales” (Argueta 127), which leads them to ‘suggest’ that Carías step down after holding democratic elections. He did, and in 1948 Juan Manuel Galvez (who was essentially handpicked by Carías himself) was elected.

The one aspect that distinguishes Honduras during the 1940s (and 1930's, especially given Carías' rule for the majority of the two decades) was the relative peace (emphasis on relative) and scarcity of serious political unrest. While all of the countries surrounding Honduras were experiencing serious social movements or outright civil war, Carías turned Honduras into an aircraft carrier in the stormy and tempestuous geopolitical seas of Central America upon which the United States could land and base itself for coming decades, earning the country the nickname "U.S.S. Honduras" in the years following (Chomsky 70). Carías' most telling fault was his fealty to the United States. "sin en algo pecó Carías, fue en ser demasiado leal a los intereses norteamericanos" (Argueta 127), dijo Juan Manuel Amador. If the United States came to see itself as a savior against the red evils of communism, Carías' Honduras was Central America's John the Baptist, preparing the way for the United-statesian White Savior intervention and acquiescence to U.S. prerogatives and policies.

This takes us to the Bretton Wood system. The Bretton Woods Conference took place in July 1944 in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire. 45 countries met and agreed to "a framework for international economic cooperation...They [the participants] believed that such a framework was necessary to avoid a repetition of the disastrous economic policies that had contributed to the Great Depression" (*About the IMF: History: Cooperation and Reconstruction (1944-71)*). This included the creation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which began operations in 1947, following the conclusion of World War II. The system operated on the premise of maintaining currency exchange rates between these separate countries tied to each other and based on the Gold Standard; these rates "could be adjusted only to correct a 'fundamental disequilibrium'...and only with the IMF's agreement". In other words, the US Dollar was the ruler by which all other currencies' values were measured. This system functioned until 1971

when the United States, in response to the inflation and economic crisis of the early 1970's, uncoupled the Dollar from gold, ending the Gold Standard.

The IMF, working hand in hand with organizations like the World Bank and the Agency for International Development (AID), were used by the United States as “foreign policy instruments” (O’Brien 107) to “frustrate perceived threats to their [U.S.] policies which ranged from Marxist political movements to protectionist economic policies” (O’Brien 107). In his book *The Century of U.S. Capitalism in Latin America*, Thomas O’Brien details how the U.S. used the CIA to funnel money through the American Federation of Labor (AFL) to create labor groups that were sympathetic to United-statesian business (107). Specifically in Mexico, they helped create labor unions that were “focused on economic issues...and avoid more radical demands for worker control of industry” (107). Visualized in Marxist terms, they were leading workers to be more focused on questions of commodity and markets than they were concerned about seizing the means of production.

These policies from the 30's would shift after WWII, when “an alliance of business, government, foundations, and organized labor pursued policies designed to defend and expand U.S. corporate interests in Latin America” (O’Brien 108). The IMF, World Bank, and AID were mere puppets that the U.S. controlled to keep other countries in line. This is reflected in *Madrugada* when Jones is meeting with Mahoney, the administrator for AID in Honduras, who was the one who hired Jones in the first place, and it is likely that he is being paid by an IMF loan to the Honduran government. To paint a broad picture of the situation, we have a United-statesian academic and author, from a well-respected United-statesian university, is hired by USAID for the Honduran government, likely paid with money lent to the Honduran government by the IMF, backed by the C.I.A. and the U.S. State Department, who is writing a history of

Honduras that is favorable to the United States and tries to create distance between the Honduran people and the Spanish colonial cultural inclinations. This is not a puppeteer [the U.S.] and their marionette [Honduras] – the United States might as well be wearing the Honduran government as a hand puppet, using it like a ventriloquist doll so that their own voice comes out of a *catracho* mouth.

Going back to the MADRUGADA report, the United States is interested in using their economic and political tools – IMF, USAID, CIA, World Bank, etc. – to maintain a stranglehold on Central American sociopolitical, economic, and geopolitical circumstances in order to preserve profitable investments that US companies and banks and set the stage for a more intense capitalist and colonial process that will further subjugate Honduras under the heel of the United States' boot in their all-consuming quest to maintain world domination in the face of increased Japanese economic power and interests.

There are several economic events in Latin America that lead into the events of *Madrugada's* narrative. From the end of WWII until the 1982 debt crisis, Washington offered investment guarantees to companies who sought to invest in Latin America, allowing these companies insurance against revolution or expropriation in developing countries (O'Brien 139). This would mean support for private companies in the face of efforts to nationalize various industries during the 1960's and 1970's (as happened in the earlier example with ITT, for example). Private investment would increase through the era, and US aid to Latin American nations was contingent on the continued support and prioritization of US based investments. In the context of the Cold War, military aid and support was offered to (and frequently abused) to continue the guarantee of a return on these investments.

US banks searched for profitable investments through the 20th century, investing “huge amounts of capital” into various Latin American countries where they had lost money during the Great Depression (O’Brien 162). Then in 1982, as O’Brien puts it, “The day of reckoning arrived” (162). Lenders like Citibank, Bank of America, Chase Manhattan, and Morgan Guaranty had lent a total of \$26 billion to Mexico and Brazil alone. In August of 1982, the Mexican finance minister informed the Secretary of the Treasury that Mexico would be unable to continue paying back its debt and that the debt accrued had exceeded earning power. If Mexico was unable to pay back its debt, it would topple Citibank and set off the largest domino effect since the Great Depression (163). The US was quick to help, understanding the stakes at play, and the austerity measures the IMF would insist on implementing would lay the groundwork for the spread of neoliberal politico-economic practices in Latin America post-economic crisis of 1982 (162-164). This is the stage that is set for the events of *Madrugada*. The United States was doing everything they could to be in full control of the hemisphere, operating through many different arms and organizations both publicly and privately to exert undue influence on neighboring countries.

The Banana Republic era of Central American and United-statesian history illustrates a larger trend in Honduran (and Latin American) history: that, as Galeano wrote, the history of Latin America’s underdevelopment is, as someone has said, an integral part of the history of world capitalism’s development...the well-being of our dominating classes—dominating inwardly, dominated from outside—is the curse of our multitudes condemned to exist as beasts of burden.” (Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America* 2–3)

He also aptly notes that “the strength of the imperialist system as a whole rests on the necessary inequality of its parts (3), and that an ever-growing breach between classes is not only a natural

consequence but necessary if this system is to be maintained. The U.S. is at the head of the food chain – Honduras steps beneath. If the Honduran President thinks he can shed the yoke of his imperial overlords, he is mistaken.

With the vast majority of Spanish-speaking Latin America gaining independence in the early 19th century, the United States stepped in and began establishing strong mercantile relationships that “evolved into growing direct investment in the region, and eventually gave way to massive undertakings by huge American corporations” (O’Brien 4). This dynamic, although having shifted and evolved, remains today, benefitting the U.S. at the expense of Latin Americans. As evidenced by the involvement of USAID and the U.S. Embassy in *Madrugada*, it is clear that they are dead set on maintaining their position of imperial privilege, notwithstanding the President’s best efforts and intentions.

We can compare the portrayal of the United States’ mission in *Madrugada* with the established pattern that the United States employed in Latin America (in varying intensities and with different degrees of “success”) over the latter end of the 20th century and into the 21st century, specifically regarding the economic dependence on the United States’ that it fostered amongst countries in the region. In the early stages of his investigation and research, Dr. Jones finds a file server on his computer that is connected to his project and labeled MADRUGADA. “JONES, Q.H.=PLH126PROY—REF= ‘MADRUGADA’” (54). When he tries to search within the information for the folder, he is met with a chirping alarm and the computer notifies him that what he is trying to access is “MATERIAL CLASIFICADO. INGRESE EL CÓDIGO” is the command that he is given. After two failed attempts, and in an attempt to not set off alarms on the shared server that is connected to US intelligence services, he finds a workaround and is able to at least see what files the computer contains, but not open and read them. Soon, they find what

they are looking for in the Madrugada folder and find two files, MADRUGADA 1 and MADRUGADA 2 (60). The former contains a series of data inputs that contain information on the Madrugada Project itself, or as Quentin puts it, “una breve descripción burocrática de lo que hacemos” (61) referring to the description of the project and the role of its sponsors, the Government of Honduras and USAID.

They are unable to open the second file at that time, using every iteration or synonym of the word “madrugada” that they can think of, but to no avail. It isn’t until later, after Jones has met the Guerrilla/Revolutionary Cell, that he and a Catholic Priest named Miqui are able to finally break the code and access the file. They begin by trying the names of the 18 Maya rulers that lived in Copán prior to its fall, the most recent of them being Madrugada. Miqui explains that Madrugada probably began his reign in 800 CE, and was “un rey particular...fu eel primero en asignar fecha a los templos y los monumentos y al contrario de sus antecesores mantuvo intacto muchos edificios del pasado.” Most Mayan kings destroyed the remains of the prior ruler, but not Madrugada. He had, as Miqui states, “un extraño sentido de permanencia. Fue quizás el primer rey que entendió a fondo lo que era la tradición” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 403). As they try different names, Miqui remembers Altar Q, a monolith that had been constructed during the reign of Madrugada; upon its four faces “se reconcilian por fin el presente y el pasado” (406). Miqui is sure that if there is a key to all of this, it is in Copan, and if it is in Copan, it has to be on the Altar. Typing Altar Q didn’t work, but when combined with the name of a king, they are finally able to break the code and decrypt the file.

Inside the file, they find an incredibly detailed and comprehensive plan that outlines how the United States plans on annexing, subjugating, and exploiting Central America (and all of Latin America) to cement the United States’ place as a global power in the face of Japanese and

Middle Eastern advancements in the global markets. It is a report made for the CIA that is marked as “Eyes only” and begins with a summarization of the current sociopolitical climate as justification for intervention in the region.

La situación centroamericana está llegando al clímax sospechado desde la década de 1940, cuando el gobierno de Estados Unidos [en adelante EU] decidió activar los convenios de Bretton Wood para el otorgamiento de préstamos con fondos nacionales y acreditó a los bancos privados y organismos financieros la capacidad para negociar operaciones crediticias con las naciones de la región. (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 456)

Before we analyze and interpret the paragraph, it is key here to take note of how historicity is purposefully employed in some instances and withheld or foregone in others. Dr. Jones’ history is of utmost importance to this project, as it skews perspectives in Honduras to be favorable to the United States and to leave the Spanish colonial influence behind. It is named *Madrugada* after the last king of Copán that died in 992 because “el señor Presidente desea enlazar aquella historia interrumpida con la actual” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 32). On the one hand, the president asks him to use this new history to connect the past, present, and future of the country; on the other, he is purposefully instructed to leave out anything that would cast a negative light on the United States and its consistent interventions and undue influence in the region. In other words, not properly historicizing the events leading up to the current moment. In his conversations with the US Ambassador, the Ambassador says that he doesn’t know why Honduras is so dependent on the United States and that the United States had no hand in creating the material conditions that fostered the dependence. Again, this is a purposeful omission of historicity, as we see in the *Madrugada* report that the United States *does in fact* understand the

consequences of the socioeconomic conditions that they created and exported to Honduras as the source of the dependence.

Madrugada details how the United States government was hoping to economically choke out all the countries between Mexico and Panama. The report reads that the high levels of accumulated debt and United-statesian investment in the region was a cover to justify their bureaucratic goals, the goal of which being that these countries would be in enough debt that they would see no choice but to agree to any new trade agreements that the U.S. would bring to the table – and that would obviously be favorable to the United States. The report stated that all the U.S. had to do was wait until “*los países de la region ahonden su endeudamiento y alcancen el pico máximo de crisis (banarrota global concatenada) en cualquier momento. Esto tienen visos de ocurrir máximo entre 1999 y 2002*” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 457), accent in original). They chose Central America specifically because it was the weakest region of all Latin America and most likely needed (and thus, would accept) conditional assistance (457).

At the root of the United States’ plan is xenophobia – the report lists Japan as the biggest threat to the rest of the world; by 2016, the report estimates, the U.S. will be the biggest debtor to the Asian nation. This will drain the United States of its capital and end with most business and economic power in the country being sold or used to pay off debts to the Japanese specifically. To counteract this, the U.S. is seeking to keep Japan from doing business or commercial enterprises in the western hemisphere – as a sort of new Monroe Doctrine – and further solidify U.S. imperial presence by continuing to exploit Latin America to pay our debts, essentially passing the buck to Latin America. To dethrone Japan, they will have to convert Central America into their own private piggy bank.

The United States discloses in the brief that they see themselves as an empire in decline. Their standing with Japan is one aspect of that; part of it also comes from the xenophobic reasoning that there are simply too many immigrants that have failed to assimilate properly. To reverse this would only be possible by forceful, violent means, and that would be bad for their image. They predict that by 2020 the United States' population would be largely immigrants and that white people would be the minority and “[perder] el control de su dominio blanco (‘blanco’ en términos ideológicos culturales)” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 458). To combat this and regain control (restore control to the white majority) they plan on creating an “América Unida” or AU.

This “United Americas” is the plan to push back against other powers getting in the U.S.’s way. “Ante la voracidad de Asia, la CEE, la URSS y un futuro poder islámico, Estados Unidos debe proceder de inmediato a cercar Latinoamérica como su camp exclusivo de caza” (468). The development of this plan will “garantizar [la] seguridad permanente” of the United States. Technically, this plan had already been set in motion and had been functioning for 77 years. It began with the “conquista de Panamá” in 1903 and entered into a formative phase between 1950 and 1989; then, by 1992 it would arrive at the peak of its operation and would end in 2002 with the appropriation of the isthmus.

The following steps are outlined in the report: *Expansión de EU hacia los límites de su periferia natural...Aseguramiento o debilitamiento de los centros locales de poder según nuestros intereses...Presencia in situ...Incitación sustantiva a la anexión...Generación de la Revolución Dependientista...La anexión concertada*, (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 469–72), accentin original) with this last step having various subdivisions, into how the annexations would be carried out. These nations that are assimilated into the AU would be

“*Protectorados...Estados Asociados...Estados Integrales...Ocupación Militar*” (472-473). The cooperation of the nation states in question would determine how they are blended into the AU, which will result in the

formación de un SupraEstado continental denominado América Unida, en el que los EU “accederán” a modificar su estructura para absorber a esos otros Estados, cambiar su nombre oficial, expandir los beneficios de su desarrollo, multiplicar sus lenguas oficiales, compartir su tecnología, desarrollar los recursos abandonados por la inercia y la pobreza de las comunidades anexadas, y contribuir soberbiamente a su desarrollo nacional y regional. 473

The United States’ plan is to filibuster its way into the rest of the continent and fulfill what Jameson wrote about the goal of postmodern culture (as cited at the beginning of this chapter): “a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world” (Jameson 5).

This is where Jones’ expertise and work come into play; he (and the history he has been commissioned to write) are part of steps 4 and 5 of the *Madrugada* report – la Revolución Dependientista and anexión concertada. It is listed in the report that some 30% of the population is said to be opposed to annexation and incorporation of Honduras by the United States, characterized as “en su mayoría de grupos intelectuales nacionalistas y de izquierda” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 471) who will try to use their influence (and any means they deem necessary) to halt the process of annexation. There will be no hesitation to suppress these contrarian forces, but this revolution hinges on that it “surja de la base de los estratos populares, no de las oligarquías privilegiadas” (471), which necessitates an immense coordination effort between religious organizations, social organizations, news and media outlets, and political

movements. These behind-the-scenes endeavors will be catalyzed by the consequences of “constricción financiera a que [habrán] sometido a los países de la region en los años previos”, launching this dependence into a full-blown revolution towards dependence, with military aid available to suppress conflicts that the United States itself provokes.

If we go back to Jones’ meeting with the president there are certain aspects of this conversation that hint at the implementation of this 4th step already. The president justifies his request for this new written history because too many of the already existing histories have been written by people who had a clear agenda – such as members of the Nacional and Liberal political parties – or by, as the US Ambassador tells him, Marxists “con sus tintes más gruesos sobre la mala actuación de los presidents, *sobre el intervencionismo de las potencias* y en sus ataques al sistema y el Estado. ¡Nuestra obligación es quitarles esa bandera y decir la verdad!” (29, emphasis added). Furthermore, as the president explains, Dr. Jones is told “apaciente mi [the president’s] rebaño... Tranquilícele la conciencia...” (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 29). The general public, as described by the president, feels “como si nos hubieran estado engañando desde que aparecimos en el mundo y *usted se va a encargar de mostrarles la verdad*. Su libro va a hacer retoñar un país nuevo...” (29). He continues:

...lo que deseo es que pongamos el énfasis en lo constructivo, en el amor y en la bondad...¿Sabe?, los centroamericanos nos encontramos en una encrucijada. Lo que formemos en los jóvenes y los adolescentes será el fruto del futuro. *Si les enseñamos a odiar el pasado de su país jamás tendrán fuerza para encarar el futuro*. Lo que pretendemos es mostrar el ejemplo del sacrificio de los héroes y de nuestros paladines, y si para ello es necesario podarle un poco de paja política al asunto, lo vamos a hacer. (29-30, accent added)

The ambassador considers this job of utmost importance, saying to Jones that “Ningún técnico ha tenido una misión tan trascendental como la suya...” (30). As the ambassador expounds on the importance of the new history, he gestures to the city below him. They are at a residence on the same large hill as Parque El Picacho, a park that sits on the Northernmost boundary of Tegucigalpa. A 65-foot Christus statue gazes out over the city, and from that hill one can see downtown below them as the southward sprawl of the city extends into the horizon. The ambassador paraphrases the plan in a single paragraph to Jones, as follows:

Usted ve esa ciudad allá abajo...y es bella y delicada...Pero allí también hay fuerzas que conspiran contra nosotros, Jones, y que se preparan para echarse sobre nosotros. Lo que estamos haciendo nos va a beneficiar, es cierto, pero también beneficiará a Honduras. Y la guerra la vamos a ganar nosotros solamente si logramos definirle una nueva personalidad al hondureño, si podemos inspirarle nuevos valores, valores occidentales, pragmáticos e industrioses. Nada de romanticismos castellanos, ¡ja!, eso es lo que siempre ha jodido a este país. (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 31)

With this, we know that this is more than a hint that the United States is in the fourth step of their plan, but a confirmation that they are moving rapidly into step five. If they can root out the pre-existing affinity with Spanish colonial influences, they will have no resistance as they advance into the 21st century with their plan.

This plan is not a new plan. It is not a novel idea that has sprung up because it was the best option. At best, it is a recycled plan from the colonial and imperial playbook that the United States has used for hundreds of years. Filibustering, Manifest Destiny, The Monroe Doctrine, Plan Condor, The Washington Consensus, Plan Colombia, Mérida Initiative, invasions of Granada and Panamá, annexations of Puerto Rico, Guam, U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa,

etc., the Iran-Contra Scandal, the Chicago Boys, the School of the Americas and the Organization of American States (OAS) are some of the more well known and studied examples. All involve the United States exercising undue influence in geopolitical territories that do not belong to them (whether directly or indirectly) in an effort to protect United-statesian private business and investments and guarantee a return for U.S. banks to make sure they don't fail and send the U.S. economy into a spiral.

United Fruit Co. Blueprint

The Madrugada Plan has shades of all these imperialist projects and initiatives and while it resembles the Banana Republics in its scope and optics, Madrugada is certainly an intensified iteration of the Banana Republic period in Central America. In the National Planning Association (NPA) series of case studies on United States Business Performance Abroad from the 1950's, Stacy May and Galo Plaza published *The United Fruit Company in Latin America* (1954), in which they detail the emergence of UFC and its business practices, as well as how UCF (and the NPA. Because they were often the catalyst behind the development of infrastructure – railroads, communication, and shipping lines (May and Plaza Lasso 6–11) – to support their banana production and exports, they had special contracts to build “railways, wharves, electric plants, radio stations, and other works of a similar character” (21). Alongside this was the need for constant “collaboration” (meaning immediate deference to United-statesian interest and dictate) with local and national governments given the need to operate in remote, underdeveloped jungle areas (21).

In discussing these governmental relations more in depth, they explain that in Honduras, Costa Rica, and Guatemala, UCF was the largest single landowner, business, and employer in the countries. In Panamá, Colombia, and Ecuador, it was not the largest, but was still large enough to

be noticeable (May and Plaza Lasso 214). Its business was large enough – or had enough leverage over local economies and public relations – that they had “obtained concessions very favorable to itself from governments” (214). This did not make them exempt from having problems: political pressure, labor movements, national and private businesses. But, as the authors categorize it, UCF was able to “take care of itself...with the occasional moral support of the U.S. State Department” (215), which is not the most problematic characterization the authors make just a few years removed from the events they cover (and which I will revisit shortly).

The largest single issue listed in the NPA report was during the “communist-influenced regime of President of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman” (215), which they summarize in the following manner: that after a decade of disagreements between UCF and Arbenz’s democratically elected government over UCF’s failure to pay taxes on land UCF owned, the Guatemalan’s expropriated the land and set a 25-year bond to pay \$252,000 for the 178,000 acres, the amount at which UCF had valued the lands on tax records. UCF refuted this price, claiming the land was worth some \$15 million. Guatemala’s response was to ask UCF why they weren’t paying the appropriate tax amount correspondent to the \$15 million instead of the \$252,000 they had classified it under, a response which “studiously ignored any reference to the prevailing pattern of property tax valuation appraisals” as evaluated by May and Plaza.

As an organization, the NPA was formed in 1934 but has been defunct since 2003 (as evidenced by their tax documents (*National Planning Association / ArchivesSpace at GSU Library*). Its purpose was to engage in research in policy formation for the United States private sector, specifically in how the private sector could influence the public sector. This stance is reflected in their analysis of the importance of public relations and how UFC is portrayed in relation to the facts at hand. They state that it is essential that “United Fruit Company’s side of

the story be heard if it is to continue to carry on its production in a harmonious fashion in the host countries” (May and Plaza Lasso 213)); suspiciously (or perhaps not suspiciously), the attitude displayed by the NPA is similar to how *Madrugada* portrays the USAID and State Department's goal of improving the perception of the United States by the Honduran public with Jones' new history.

Two specific citations illustrate this similarity with stark clarity. The first comes as an apologetic to UCF's alleged involvement in the coup that ousted Árbenz:

It has been widely rumored, throughout Latin America, that the United Fruit Company played an important part in organizing and financing Castillo's overthrow of the Arbenz [*sic*] regime. The available evidence indicates that it had no part in it. The company had its hands full in other affairs, and the attribution to it of the conception, financing, and management of such a plot is perhaps paying the United Fruit Company too high a compliment. However, the chain of events in Guatemala illustrates the sort of political problems United Fruit must be prepared to handle. (May and Plaza Lasso 215)

Their staunch denial of UFC exercising any sort of political influence in Guatemala in this particular instance has been categorically refuted and corrected in later years. Now declassified Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) documents outline Operation PBFortune and PBSuccess, the plan to oust Arévalo (and later Árbenz) and install Carlos Castillo Armas as a friendly (read: subservient) president in Guatemala. Schlesinger and Kinzer write that in 1951, the year that Árbenz took office, representatives from United Fruit went to Guatemala demanding their labor contracts be extended.

When Árbenz did not acquiesce to their liking, which “based on decades of experience under dictators from Estrada Cabrera to Ubico” meant that UFC was used to “dictate terms as it

pleased” (Schlesinger and Kinzer 74) to governments where it owned property, they became irritated and considered Árbenz’s position (that they pay higher taxes, pay export duties, pay for compensation of exhausted land, among other improvements to infrastructure) a “frontal attack on its privileged position” (74). Top U.S. State Department officials, like Secretary of State Allen Dulles, his brother and CIA director John Foster Dulles, and Massachusetts Senator Henry Cabot Lodge – whose family owned shares of United Fruit – began pressuring the Foreign Ministry in Guatemala to accept the terms. When all this failed and United Fruit saw the problems that lay ahead, they began “working quietly...to convince the American Government that Arbenz was a threat to freedom and must be deposed (77), hiring PR firms and lobbyists to sway the U.S. Government to their cause.

Of particular note is the John A. Clements Associates 1952 *Report on Guatemala*, a report paid for by UFC to evaluate the state of Guatemala. It contained largely exaggerated information (Schlesinger and Kinzer 95) on how the entire country, its labor union federation, foreign ministries, and especially President Árbenz, were under Communist control and that the Soviet’s had infiltrated the country to a “phenomenal degree of success” (*Report on Guatemala* 5). They wrote that the government weaponized tax law and agrarian reform to target “U.S. private capital” (194) and specifically United Fruit in their efforts to “harass or destroy the foreign-owned companies at their leisure” (198).

We also know from declassified CIA documents, as well as analyses of these documents, like Nick Cullather’s *Secret History: The CIA’s Classified Account of its Operations in Guatemala, 1952-1954* (Cullather 2006), that what United Fruit was able to do was use its sway with(in) the U.S. Government to prompt action against perceived “Communist” threats in Guatemala in an effort to maintain their power and control in the country. We know from these

documents and Cullather's timeline of events that, for example, Thomas Mann – the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs – and Deputy Director of Plans (DDP) Allen Dulles met with the State Department (which was under the direction of Dean Acheson, who had a hand in designing both the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan) to get approval for a plan to oust Arbenz, PBFortune. Later, the “Statement of Policy by the National Security Council” NSC144/1 from March of 1953 warned of a “trend in Latin America toward nationalistic regimes maintained in large part by appeals to the masses of the population”, the growth of which “is facilitated by historic anti-U.S. prejudices and exploited by Communists” (*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The American Republics, Volume IV - Office of the Historian*). They go on to list the objectives and courses of action that they see fit in countries that display these concerning characteristics. Two of these objectives were “*d. The reduction and elimination of the menace of internal Communist or other anti-U.S. subversion; e. Adequate production in Latin America of, and access by the United States to, raw materials essential to U.S. security*” (*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952–1954, The American Republics, Volume IV - Office of the Historian*), accent added). These two conditions were used by the U.S. in PBFortune (and, it seems, in *Madrugada*) as justification to use a carte blanche approach to their tactics in Guatemala, or Honduras, in the case of *Madrugada*.

Furthermore, there were familial ties (literally and figuratively) between the U.S. Government and UFC. Both John Foster Dulles (Secretary of State) and Allen Dulles had represented United Fruit or had been on their payroll as legal counsel (Cohen, loc.3136); Henry Cabot Lodge, who has already been mentioned as a US Senator and stockholder in United Fruit, was also the United States ambassador to the UN; Ed Whitman, the UFC PR wizard, was

married to Eisenhower's personal secretary (loc.3136). As Rich Cohen writes in his biography of Sam Zemurray, then CEO of UFC,

Where did the interest of United Fruit end and the interest of the United States begin? It was impossible to tell. That was the point of all Sam's hires: If I can perfectly align the interests of my company with the interests of top officials in the U.S. government—not the interests of the country, but the interests of the people in charge of the country—then the United States will secure my needs. (loc.3136)

Zemurray knew which buttons to push and how to play the interests of the United States in his favor. To this end, he hired Edward Bernays, a renowned publicist whose clients included General Electric, General Motors, and the entire country of India (Cohen, loc.3200).

Bernays consistently employed his "grand strategy" of indirection to accomplish his client's goals. Instead of short-term sales goals, he looked to change the paradigm that his client was working in. When tasked with selling consumers on the Thunderbird, he didn't tell them how fast it went from 0-60; he "would lobby Congress for higher speed limits, making it more fun to own a Thunderbird" (loc.3200). To sell more books, he didn't approach homeowners and libraries; he went to architects and building contractors to convince them that homes needed more bookshelves if they were to be considered modern (locs.3200-3210). At United Fruit Company, his modus operandi stayed consistent: he knew that UFC wanted to keep Arbenz from expropriating more of their land, that Guatemala and Arbenz likely had Communist sympathies, and that the United States was locked in an Ideological war with the USSR and Communism. To that end, if he could

convince the American people of the Communist presence in Guatemala; convince members of Congress the issue is a winner; convince the CIA, which can actually do

something on the ground, it's time to act. Bernays wouldn't make the world better for bananas, he would make the world better for American politicians, who would make the world better for the CIA, which would make the world better for bananas. (Cohen, locs.3237–3246)

We know from the CIA documents and the ensuing 40+ years of internal conflict, genocide of Indigenous peoples, and consistent anti-Communist policies in Guatemala that Bernays and UFC were largely successful.

What Comes After

We know from the plan that Jones and Miqui uncovered that the US Government employed (or planned on employing) largely the same tactics that they did during the Banana Republic years and the Cold War during the late 20th and 21st century. The President is likewise referencing history books of his own and mimicking the very strategy employed by UFC; playing off the United States' geopolitical interests to achieve his own goals. He is very unsatisfied with USAID's decision to bring Dr. Jones to write the new history he has commissioned. He is too young, too unproven, in the eyes of the President, and there seems to be a racial bias as well (Escoto, *Madrugada: Rey Del Albor* 21). Not only did Mahoney pick Jones, but he used money that AID had loaned to Honduras for their education initiatives (20) that technically should have belonged to the Honduran government.

We are privy to the internal dialogue of the President as he waits for his aid to bring Jones into his office; assign Jones' project to an undersecretary (so as to never have to see him or entertain his presence again), instruct him exactly how he needed this new history to be composed and what was to be included therein – “reescribir la historia, sacar del armario todas las desverguenzas de que se estaba valiendo el Comité por la Paz para atacarlo y para

desestabilizar las instituciones públicas, y echarlas a la basura” (20-21) before sending him packing back to the United States. Jones was the bitter cup of which he would have to partake before he could resurrect Honduran society in the manner that best suited his (and his party’s) interests.

He wanted to provide Jones with very strict parameters that would lead him to create “la Otra Historia” that would only show the positive side of North American intervention in the country that would include “nada de montoneras...y su cadena de matanzas entre revolucionarios y constitucionalistas” (21). Out of this new history “debía emerger una imagen renovada del hombre hondureño: la de un ente de paz, la de una sociedad incapaz para la rebelión o la guerra, la de un continuo deslizamiento sin sobresaltos ni violencias hacia la tranquilidad y el orden, que era como debería escribirse siempre la historia” (21). His end goal – which he estimated would take two generations to achieve – was to make the Honduran people forget their “pasado trágico infestado de violencia...de gobiernos bastardos y rebeliones...” (21) and pave the way for the construction of a “sociedad nueva partiendo de cero”. Two generations would be enough time to erase the collective memory and believe that Honduras was “siempre...un oasis de paz” and let this new peaceful identity put down roots to displace resentment towards government (national or foreign) because “el rencor mata...pero el rencor recordado era peor: alimentaba la revolución” (21). He needed people to forget the past to rebuild the future.

Project Madrugada is certainly beneficial to the United States – if it were not, they would not invest in the project, much less bring in a distinguished scholar from the U.S. to assist in the process – but the Hondurans have ulterior motives. Being a peaceful (read: subservient) nation makes Honduras more attractive as a destination for foreign investors as well as more stable for its own populace, and more stability means less chance of revolt and rebellion and an easier time

for the government. The President knows this, and so is trying to play off the interests expressed by the United States to get access to their resources and money to make all of this happen.

Conclusion

Madrugada: Rey del Albor is a complex tapestry of historical narrative. Intercalating temporalities, realities, and literary genre, it shows us the convoluted, M.C. Escher-esque nature of Latin American history, with the reader transitioning between eras and epochs from one chapter to the next. Like the water in *Ascending and Descending*, Honduras – and much of Latin America – is seemingly trapped in a cyclical pattern of oppression, subjugation, and exploitation at the hands of colonial and imperial powers. The material realities represented in the novel, the constant struggles for power and self-determination, the ironic and somewhat apathetic attitudes towards change, and the hopeful sense of advancement that are characterized in *Madrugada* exemplify the ever-present nature of our past and the looming clouds that could be our future.

Chapter 2: No Law, No Order: Metamodernism and Postneoliberalism in Border and Narco-noir
Literature *Sicario*, *Narcos*, and *Antígona Gonzalez*

Narco culture is on the rise and has been for some time. Within the last 10 years, documentaries like *The 43*, *Narcocultura* and *Cartel Land*, films like *End of Watch*, *American Made*, *Cartel War*, and even television series based in the United States, like *Justified* or *Breaking Bad*, use the Drug War as a cultural backdrop and common theme to drive events and action throughout. This very short list, while not comprehensive, represents the most recent of a series of movies and programs focused on narco-trafficking and drug culture. In many of these examples (and myriad others), cartels and drug trafficking are represented as dangerous forces that must be rooted out by any means necessary. On the one hand, many depict law enforcement officials as fighting a constant losing battle against the cartels, which the officials use as justification of a “by any means necessary” approach to winning the war on drugs, like Villeneuve’s 2015 narco-noir *Sicario* (2015) or the third season of the Netflix series *Narcos* (2017). On the other hand, Sara Uribe’s written work *Antígona Gonzalez* portrays the aftermath of the violence from both law enforcement and the drug cartels grounded in the point of view of those who are caught in the crossfire and left to pick up the pieces, the general populace – a perspective oft overlooked or ignored in some of the other narratives. In order to better understand how these narratives portray these perspectives, I turn to metamodernism, with its accompanying structure of feeling and literary techniques.

Sicario’s protagonist Kate Macer stands in as a representation of metamodern structures of feeling and “informed naivety” towards the future of the drug war and a hope for law and order amongst her colleagues who are largely apathetic and view the “War on Drugs” as an ironic event that has long since been lost. Uribe’s *Antígona Gonzalez* is exemplary of how

metamodern “upcycling” can take a literary form, story, or narrative, and add new meaning and significance to it; in this case, an understanding of the Mexican State and War on Drugs as a postneoliberal present and future in which the State no longer exerts control over private business entities. In true postneoliberal sense, the cartels operate as a private entity not subject to government regulation and take on a paragovernmental role in shaping Antigone’s agency and power (or lack thereof) in the search for her brother.

We have, then, an example of metamodernism’s structure of feeling in Peña and Macer’s desires to employ the law to establish order that are “structured by and conditioned on a belief...that was long repressed, for a possibility...that was long forgotten”(Vermeulen and van den Akker 5) one of the base tenets of metamodernism as established by Vermeulen and van den Akker, and the contrast between their informed naivety and hope for change against the pragmatic nihilism of the noir worlds the protagonists inhabit in *Narcos* and *Sicario*. Uribe’s text, meanwhile, is a prime example of the literary techniques employed in works exhibiting metamodern tendencies, a practice that van den Akker and Vermeulen have dubbed “upcycling”; similar to the pastiche or parody of postmodernism, artists “recycle the scrapheap of history” (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism*) while adding significance that moves beyond the tired tropes of postmodernism while “incorporating and pointing them towards new positions and horizons...” (*Metamodernism* 10). In other words, we are still using the old masks, but there is now substance underneath.

These works that exhibit metamodern tendencies both in structure of feeling and literary tendencies, then, become a key marker that signals to us the beginnings of a shift in how the narratives surrounding the “War on Drugs” – such as state roles in maintaining law and order and the justification of state violence, debates of legality vs morality, human rights issues,

immigration, etc. -- topics related to it are portrayed in a post-postmodern and post-neoliberal context.

The Man (and Woman) Who Knew Too Little, Too Late: Metamodern Shifts in Narcos-noirs *Sicario* and *Narcos*

Sicario tells the story of an FBI agent, Kate Macer, who tags along on operations with the DEA and CIA in their fight against the Juarez cartel, but soon learns that both organizations have realized that there is no fighting against drugs and instead become complicit in their trafficking. Instead of working with and benefitting from the trade, like is implicated of the Mexican government in *Narcos: Mexico* or the Colombian government in *Narcos*, they justify their violence in combating the cartels by essentially becoming one, guiding the trafficking pathways and distribution of the products as they arrive in the United States.

In the third season of *Narcos*, Escobar is dead and Agent Javier Peña is on his way back to Colombia. At the end of the second season, he had been involved with an anti-Escobar group, los Pepes, a CIA-backed paramilitary group allied with the Cali Cartel and had helped them murder various members of Pablo's Medellin Cartel. Expecting to be punished for his actions when he is sent back to the United States, he is surprised when the Drug Enforcement Agency wants to send him back and use his knowledge of the Cali Cartel to take them down. In doing so, he discovers that corruption runs deep into the Colombian government. To further complicate matters, the U.S. government officials in the country – the ambassador, DEA, and CIA – had always known about these shady deals and willingly turned a blind eye to them. They trade the violence and chaos of the Medellin Cartel for the appearance of law and order that the Cali Cartel presents, all the while trafficking more cocaine than Escobar could ever have dreamt of.

Just like *Sicario*, the best the government can do is try and control where the drugs go; stopping them is impossible. In short, the narco-narratives portrayed by *Narcos* (Season 3) and *Sicario* exhibit characteristics common to narco literature, the most basic of which being the sentiment expressed that “any reasonable person ought to consider by now that either the war is irretrievably lost or that the strategy by which it is being fought is entirely mistaken and should be drastically altered” (Acosta Morales 221), which is echoed by CIA operatives in both works, by Agent Stechner in *Narcos* and Matt Graver in *Sicario*. The protagonists and supporting characters either arrive at this conclusion (that the drug war is a lost cause), as happens with Kate and Peña, or already operate with that knowledge in mind, as do Graver and Stechner. Their strategies are to control and contain as best they can.

A key part of the strategy is the CIA or DEA actively othering the cartels and narco-traffickers, which Oswaldo Zavala has described as the casting the cartels as a “dispositivo simbólico cuya función principal consiste en ocultar las verdaderas redes del poder oficial que determinaban los flujos del tráfico de drogas” (Zavala). By turning the cartels into figureheads of crime, drugs, and violence, the (primarily) Latino other is “constructed in a negative and degrading way, which completely reduces their complexity and the interaction of social groups” (Hachenberger 47). Portraying them as such makes the suspension of law for order much easier for the public to handle – after all, how else are we supposed to police criminals for whom violence is commonplace?

In speaking about the War on Drugs during Calderón’s presidency in 2000’s Mexico, Rebecca Biron writes that “murder has been cheapened to the point that it loses its status as labor and product; it has become simply a way of life” (Biron 821). Biron here is commenting on the act of murder as a way of life for sicarios and hit men specifically, and their roles as laborers in a

generally amoral global market specifically. However, I would argue that her analysis extends into the narratives at hand, and that the acceptance of death, murder, and violence as a “way of life” for the narcos is how law enforcement, and general public viewers, justifies fighting fire with fire.

Much of what has been written about *Narcos* and *Sicario* revolves around violence and geopolitical borders; more specifically, the manner in which the United States consistently disregards borders and laws of sovereign nations in pursuit of their own goals, be it during the Cold War or its successor, the War on Drugs. Like Anzaldua commented, borders are an open wound where the “Third World grates against the first and bleeds” (Anzaldúa 3), and the pooling blood creates a new culture in border culture. For many, this border culture is inherently violent, and the need to control this space, as portrayed in *Sicario*, exposes “the enduring ideologies and the ensuing colonial power relations of US imperialist destiny, which has generated inconceivable violence both on the American continent and elsewhere” (Loyo 62).

Thus, the border becomes a “network of relations between infrastructural objects and knowledge practices...[that] simultaneously articulate cultures of visibility and invisibility, legality and illegality” (Brousseau 243). Brousseau echoes Anzaldua’s analysis that border spaces are unstable liminal spaces that “lack clear boundaries” (Anzaldua, cited by Brousseau 243), and given that, border crossings in *Sicario* become a scenario in which nationality and law can be superseded by violence to maintain order. Political borders, then, do not serve as limits for United-statesian violence in the name of law and/or order, a violence that seems to know borders. However, what these three works show to us is that violence *does* know borders; it just has to stay south of the Rio Bravo while every effort is made to minimize violence in the United States.

Much of what has been written about *Narcos* focuses on the first two seasons of the series, centered around the hunt for and capture of Pablo Escobar through the eyes of Boyd Murphy, United-statesian agent in the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). By placing the viewer in Murphy's shoes – a white, middle class, United-statesian government official who doesn't speak Spanish and also serves as narrator for the voice over in the series – we are presented with a United-statesian-centric point of view that presents itself as superior to the Colombians in the series. Like in *Sicario*, the violence committed by Murphy, Peña, and the other US officials in Colombia is seen as justified to prevent the drugs from coming into the United States, even if that violence violates Colombian law. Again, national sovereignty and law are superseded in the name of order, which depends on violence. What sets apart Macer and Peña as protagonists is that they aren't willing to sacrifice law for order (Kojo Koram 217), working to bring down the cartels and drug trafficking organizations *as if* this goal could be achieved by staying within “legal⁴” limits.

Both Peña and Macer have a desire to achieve order by exercising the law – Peña seeks to end the Cali Cartel before they can surrender on their own terms to the Colombian government, and Kate Macer is driven to find those responsible for the mass murder of undocumented immigrants during a hostage recovery operation in Arizona. In pursuit of their goals, they are forced to enter a world that has shades of classic noir and detective cinema, although they themselves are not classic noir subjects. Although they are obligated to participate in the dark noir world, they maintain an idealistic attitude and work *as if* establishing order through law was attainable – the essence of metamodernism's structure of feeling.

⁴ My point here is not to debate the ethical or moral complications of whether or not the United States *should be* involved in other countries sociopolitical goings-on; rather, I would like to focus on the actions committed by the protagonists within the functional legal boundaries and limits as established in the works.

Another way we could categorize Javier and Kate's stances in comparison to those they work with. If the desire for "law and order" that the War on Drugs is predicated on is born out of a "modern outlook vis-à-vis idealism and ideals that could be characterized as fanatic and/or naïve," then the cynicism expressed by law enforcement and government officials in these works fits into a "postmodern mindset that is apathetic and/or skeptic, Peña and Macer's outlook can be "conceived of as a kind of informed naivety, a pragmatic idealism" (5) – a combination of both modern and postmodern tendencies. As explained by Vermeulen and van den Akker, metamodernism is aligned epistemologically with Kant's negative idealism, which is to say that it "seeks forever for a truth it never expects to find" (5). It moves for the sake of moving toward an unknown goal *as if* it had a purpose. To cite Vermeulen and van den Akker,

Like a donkey it [metamodernism] chases a carrot that it never manages to eat because the carrot is always just beyond its reach. But precisely because it never manages to eat the carrot, it never ends its chase, setting foot in moral realms the modern donkey (having eaten its carrot elsewhere) will never encounter, entering political domains the postmodern donkey (having abandoned the chase) will never come across. 6

For both Kate and Javier, establishing order without supplanting law for violence is the carrot they know they might never reach, but they keep pursuing it. Meanwhile the modern donkey (the United-statesian public) believes that they are a beacon of democracy, liberty and order for all, and are able to remain blissfully ignorant of the true nature of the United States' involvement in other countries, while the postmodern donkey (interestingly enough, the Central Intelligence Agency in both *Sicario* and *Narcos*) has given up fighting the War on Drugs and is resigned to managing the fallout of the loss. Two specific quotes from each work can quite simply sum up the apathetic cynicism of postmodernism as portrayed through the CIA. From Agent Stechner of

Narcos to Peña; “The drug war? We lost it! You were there!.” Matt Graver, in speaking with Kate; “...until somebody finds a way to convince 20% of the population to stop snorting and smoking that shit, order is the best we can hope for.” Modernity thinks everything is under control and the War on Drugs will be won, while postmodernism has given up fighting it.

Ontologically, metamodernism constantly oscillates between modernism and postmodernism, interacting with both and neither at the same time and “inspired by a modern naivete yet informed by postmodern skepticism, the metamodern discourse consciously commits itself to an impossible possibility” (5). Much like a pendulum, it swings between “hope and melancholy...naivete and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity” (6). Metamodernism does not seek to find a balance between these poles, but continuously shifts between them and, like a pendulum, as it swings towards one pole, gravity acts upon it and pulls it back in a different direction.

These two conditions – *as if* and *between* – are neither an either/or, nor and/or, but a “both/neither dynamic” (7), as in “they are each at once modern *and* postmodern and neither of them” (7). This both/neither dynamic can be described by metaxis, or the state of being between. Kate and Javier embody this dynamic of being in their pursuit of justice and order. They hang on to modernist meta-narratives of justice and “law and order” while existing in the cynical, apathetic postmodern world that is the War on Drugs as portrayed in the film and series where there is neither law nor order.

Metamodernism and film noir certainly make odd bedfellows, but they are not complete strangers to each other. Both are based in the process of working towards something that quite possibly is unattainable when all is said and done. The noir subject sets out to solve a crime, to prevent a murder, to escape from his past, or to stay alive, but often those dreams are rooted in a

positive idealism, in hope, romanticism and nostalgia (hence the voice-overs and flashbacks), until events take a melodramatic turn towards fragmentation, melancholy, and moral ambiguity. Much like metamodernism inhabits space between (post)modernism, viewers of noir dwell in the liminal space between the present of the narrator and the past, swinging from moment to moment as the narration becomes more fragmented.

There are also similarities in the identification of metamodernist traces in art and the seemingly complicated academic debate as to what noir is – is it a genre, a mood, a cycle, a system? Some argue that noir is difficult to categorize due to its being a “non-classical style,” (Silver and Ursini 7), others argue that the visual cues, tied to character emotions and narrative patterns, would dictate that it is a style; and yet others would argue that it was a filmic series that lasted between 1930-1950, produced mainly as B films in black and white that were tied to the current sentiments of post-war disillusionment and realism with a German influence⁵.

Neither *Narcos* nor *Sicario* would fall under a classification as being strictly noir films, put bluntly. In contemplating genres, there are aspects of many subgenres operating in the two at any given time; crime film, western, melodrama, thriller, suspense, action, adventure, war, mystery. There is a futility in trying to categorize *Sicario* and *Narcos* as belonging to one main subgenre of film and television. Upon viewing, though, one cannot help but notice subtle visual clues, character or narrative tropes (or the absences thereof), or feelings elicited by the narratives. To a degree, we know a noir film when we see one – if it has noir visuals and narrative traits, then it might have something noir about it. A phenomenological approach might be more accurate and more descriptive at the hour of characterizing these two works.

⁵ In the *Film Noir Reader*, see the chapters written by Borde and Chaumeton, Schrader, Alain Silver (“*Kiss Me Deadly*; Evidence of a Style”).

This is yet another odd middle ground between how noir and metamodernism are described and categorized. I think that how Vermeulen and van den Akker articulate what exactly *is* metamodernism and how it can be recognized provides a map as to how we can define what noir is when we see it. In their more recent publication *Metamodernism: Historicity, Affect, and Depth after Postmodernism* (Metamodernism 2017), they refer to metamodernism as a “structure of feeling,” using Raymond Williams’s terminology from his introduction to *A Preface to Film* (Williams and Orrom, 1954). In it, this concept is described as an “element of culture that circumscribes it but nonetheless cannot be traced back to any one of its individual ingredients” (8). They liken it to certain scotch whiskeys produced on the coast of Scotland that have a particular salty flavor; no salt was added to the spirits during production or distillation, so it is presumed that the salt was blown in off the sea water, but there is no accounting for exactly where it came from. Nonetheless, the scotch tastes salty. These cultural elements are specific to a time and place, so they might differ from one generation or period to another, but the structure remains the same. In that way, we are able to identify traces of the metamodern, or noir, in the art we consume, regardless of whether or not we can identify from whence they came.

In looking closely at *Narcos* and *Sicario*, and our protagonists Kate Macer and Javier Peña, there is a noir-esque structure of feeling present in the narratives. While I plan to focus on mostly narrative and character-based tropes, there are certain visual and sonic aspects that are reminiscent of noir that I will address later. To begin with, there are two important aspects of noir cinema that are especially appropriate in the analysis of these two stories and serve as points of comparison not only with each other, but with other similar films. The first is the crossing of borders, physical or otherwise; the second is the trope of the hard-boiled detective, jaded and cynical, who gets in over his (or her, in this case) head and pays dearly for it.

Film noir, as described by Eric Lott, “is a cinematic mode defined by its border crossings” (Lott 548). Whether it is a moral or ethical border, as in *Double Indemnity* (a salesman turns to crime when he conspires with his married lover to murder her husband for his life insurance money), the border between life and death as represented in *D.O.A.* (in which a man is unknowingly poisoned and spends the entirety of the movie slowly dying while narrating his demise), or a racial border. Lott explains that the white male protagonist descending in to the “shady” part of town is oft accompanied by a literal darkening of his skin as a lighting effect, which for Lott “has a racial analogue in the American [United-statesian] context...” (548). Even the stereotypically defining character of classic noir – *chiaroscuro* – plays with the borders of light and dark.

In our context, the border in question is the border between the United States and Mexico in *Sicario* and the United States and the Global South in *Narcos*. In his book *Dark Borders: Film Noir and American Citizenship*, Jonathan Auerbach analyses how Mexico functions as a safe haven for lawless fugitives, the site of a fatal ending, or as “an exotic or menacing setting for narratives taking place primarily within the country” (124). The prime era for what experts like Alain Silver consider as the prime era of film noir in the United States was during the 1940’s and 50’s, so the border with Mexico was just the border with Mexico. Yet as the United States extended its imperialistic reach during the Cold War, the border with Mexico soon took on new meaning as the border with what was considered the Spanish-speaking Third World; the U.S.’s involvement in Central and South America to maintain “law and order” or “establish democracy” is well documented. The government agencies in both works justify their violent means to arrive at these end goals.

The CIA and Department of Defense in *Sicario* play hopscotch with the U.S-Mexico border, and their tactics vary drastically depending on which side they are on. The meaning of “law and order” also varies with geographical location, and one way that the film describes this visually is through the portrayal of violence as on screen or off screen. Throughout its entirety, the movie plays with the idea of violence you can see and violence you can’t. Viewers are welcomed into Arizona and Ciudad Juarez with two very different representations of violence and death. As the movie opens, Kate and her team launch an operation into a house where they suspect migrants are being held ransom by coyotes until the migrants’ families pay the fee for transporting them over the border. When they arrive at the house, they originally find a bare house with just a few traffickers there, who they easily subdue. The attitude quickly changes when a shotgun blast blows the wall open and another agent spots a dead body in the wall. The corpse’s head was wrapped in plastic, and there was evidence of torture on the decaying body. As they open up the walls, they find at least 35 bodies in this same state.

Immediately, most of (if not all the team) are visibly ill, throwing up and displaying a visceral reaction to the scene. Kate’s supervisors are equally as disgusted and surprised as the team that found the bodies. It becomes obvious that this is the first time that they have ever seen something like this, and it changes Kate’s outlook on work she is doing. After cleaning up, there is a hard cut to a CNN report detailing the team’s findings as well as the explosion from the booby-trapped shed, where the reporter asks how Washington (D.C.) will be able to “explain how such a dramatic outrage could happen *so deep inside the American heartland*” (emphasis added). The way that the news anchor frames the geographic location of the discovery – “deep inside the American heartland” – is an interesting choice of words, given that Chandler Arizona

is 117 miles from the border as the crow flies, a far cry from what many would consider “America’s heartland.”

In contrast, as we enter Mexico and cross through Ciudad Juarez to the Centro de Readaptación Social (CERESO) and view the city through Kate’s eyes, the caravan passes by a bridge after exiting the main freeway and there are four bodies hanging by rope. All have been mutilated to an extent, all missing limbs and in plain sight of everyone. The DOD agent driving comments to Macer that “it’s brilliant what they do. When they mutilate a body like that, they make people think they must have been involved, they must have deserved such a death ‘cause they did something.” These bodies are not built into a wall, they are not hidden from view of the public; instead of disgust or horror, there is almost a sense of admiration and respect from law enforcement; there is no news report from CNN wondering how something so awful could be happening in plain view. All of the violence is perpetrated off-screen – we don’t see these people murdered or tortured. But how the consequences of the violence (the dead bodies) are displayed, handled, and reacted to are drastically different based in part on the specific geographic location of Agent Macer.

The perception of violence necessary to maintain order and uphold a law is different based on geography as well. When they arrive back to El Paso with Guillermo Diaz, the cartel boss they picked up in Juarez, Graves is in the interrogation room with him, asking him questions to which Guillermo only responds that he doesn’t speak English. There is a camera in the room recording, ready to capture a confession. Alejandro enters with a full water cooler dispenser jug, and gets right in Guillermo’s face, at which point the two agents step out of the room and turn off the camera as they go. At that point, Alejandro says to the prisoner “Ahorita vas a ver lo que es conocer a Dios en tierra Yanqui.” The camera pans over to Graver, who asks

Guillermo why he is looking at Matt if he (Guillermo) doesn't speak English. There is then a hard cut to the water jug next to the drain on the floor. We can hear the Guillermo grunt as it sounds like he is punched, but the camera just zooms in closer to the drain before the scene ends. None of the violence is witnessed by anyone, and we are left to extrapolate what will happen next to Guillermo.

This interrogation is mirrored across the border by another at the conclusion of the movie. After being escorted into Mexico, Alejandro infiltrates the house of Fausto Alarcon, Sinaloense drug lord, who is dining with his wife and two sons. Alejandro sits down across the table from him, with the three family members between them at the table, and they begin to talk. All the while. Alejandro is holding a gun on Fausto and his wife, finger on the trigger. After a short discussion, and looking dead into Fausto's eyes, Alejandro repeats his earlier line, albeit altered slightly – "Ahora vas a conocer a Dios" – and quickly murders both sons and the wife. The camera stays tight in on Alejandro, but we see his finger twitch on the trigger, the muzzle flashes and the gun turn as he kills them. We hear, but don't see, the bodies hit the floor, and the camera turns to focus on Fausto, who we watch jump as his eyes dart back and forth while the muffled shots mix with silverware dropping onto plates. The shot cuts back to Alejandro, who raises the pistol and points it at Fausto, before we cut to a view of both, seated at opposite ends of the table. Alejandro tells Fausto to finish his meal, takes a deep breath, and then shoots him twice, the second shot also being the end of the scene as the screen cuts to black.

Here, as opposed to the other interrogation scene, we are not left to guess what happens. We know the extent of the violence. We watch the gun fire, we see the trigger pulled – I think that worst of all, we see the shock and trauma on the father's face as he watches his life be ripped to shreds in front of him. The audience also cannot decide how to feel. The first interrogation can

be compartmentalized away and the audience is granted plausible deniability – we saw no violence, we witnessed nothing, we only heard some noises, and who knows what that could have happened. This time, we are forced to experience, alongside Alarcón, the shock of his family’s live execution. We still don’t see the murders themselves, but we are not left guessing. Violence is hidden on the United-statesian side of the border, but we see the violent act in Mexico.

Perhaps the most telling example of how violence is justified on different sides of the border. There are two instances in the film in which they speak about “rules,” or “Rules of Engagement.” These are guidelines, established by militaries and government agencies, both national and international, that indicate how deadly force can be used in any given situation. They are first mentioned in the movie during the task force’s return to El Paso, Texas from Ciudad Juarez, extraditing a captive member of the Sinaloa cartel’s leadership. As they notice threats from the cars around them, a voice over the radio channel asks “What are the rules here?” The reply that comes over comms is “We must be engaged to engage...You can do what they do. If they get out, you get out.” “What are the rules *here*?” is an interesting question. Here can be understood as “in this specific situation” or “in this location” – stuck in the line of cars waiting to cross the border. The answer, the rules themselves, render any action taken as purely defensive.

Contrast this with the raid at the end of the movie. They move, unauthorized, into a tunnel that goes under the border into Mexico. As they prepare to enter the tunnel and Alejandro reviews final instructions, someone – it is hard to tell given the almost total darkness of the shot, which is done in night vision – asks “What are the rules of engagement?” The answer this time is a very different from the prior: “Weapons free, my friend. Weapons free.” The context is exactly opposite from the first border crossing – two sides of the same coin, in every sense of the word.

That is why the question “What are the rules here?” is so important, and so closely tied to both the specific situation and the physical location. Both are border crossings, but one is legal – in a loose sense of the word – and the other isn’t. One is in front of everyone, while doing their jobs according to the law and regulations. The other is an act that couldn’t possibly be knowingly sanctioned by any supervisor or higher ups. It goes along with the same idea of suspension of law south of the border; where people can see them, transporting a prisoner, they only act with strictest respect and adherence to the rules. Out of sight of the public, they operate with complete impunity, expressing no fear of any consequences to their actions.

Narcos gives us a different view of the same contradictory practices. When two senators come down to visit the ambassador and Agent Peña, the express concerns from Washington, stating that “folks are wondering if we are gonna win this thing [the War on Drugs]” because “cocaine continues to flow north and American [United-statesian] people wonder if the Colombians share our enthusiasm to take this threat head on.” We can equate order here with stopping the flow of cocaine, which would mean that order comes from winning the War on Drugs. But what we later learn is that any act of lawlessness and violence can be made to look like order – as has been discussed above, sacrificing law for order.

Later in the episode, Javier is leading the senators on an expository trip into the jungle to show them how U.S. Department of Defense is working with Colombian special forces to impose order and win the war by shutting down cocaine production plants. As they are led into the camp and see the bullet riddled bodies strewn about, one of them comments about how it “must have been one hell of a firefight.” Upon being asked whether those killed had been members of the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia, Agent Stechner, a CIA operative, informs them that these people were probably both. “FARC wants to overthrow the

government, and cocaine finances their struggles”, Stechner says. By insinuating that a Marxist Communist guerilla group funds their fight with drug money weaves together the War on Drugs and its predecessor, the War on Communism, which is what Stechner considers the real enemy. The Senators are shocked by how lawless and violent it all appears.

Peña later brings this point up with Captain Mills, the D.O.D. liaison, who confirms to Peña that it is, as he puts it, “that hairy down [t]here”, to which Peña responds that it apparently isn’t “hairy enough for the truth to make its case.” He continues to expose to the viewer, given that Mills most likely is already aware of what Peña is saying:

Magazines on the bodies are 7.62 millimeter. They go in an AK-47, right? Those guns, the fancy ones [the ones showed to the senators], they chamber in a 5.56. *This whole thing is staged.* Those are run-of-the-mill guerrillas. Peasants, not traffickers. Emphasis added.

At this point Stechner steps in and retorts that “sometimes you need to make the truth a little more...plain.” In the pursuit for a win – for order – violence is a key tool. By leading the senators to believe that the dead people were both communists and traffickers, Stechner frames the violence in a way that can be both justified and used to his advantage. Like in *Sicario*, much of the violence happens off-screen and is perpetrated with United-statesian support and direction; law is suspended by violence to establish order so that the Senators can convince constituents and lobbyists that their money is invested in a winning cause. The cherry on top, in Stechner’s words, is that the “win” they all want so badly will be done “without firing a shot. No body count, no dirty hands”, which is obviously untrue; the words are pronounced mere meters from where the staged cadavers lie. But as long as those in the Global North believe that order was

achieved peacefully and lawfully, any violence in the Global South is justifiable – violence exported across borders.

It is also worth noting that part of the plan to stop cocaine trafficking was to turn Colombia into a stepping-stone into Latin America. By establishing the country as a foothold for the United States, they were preventing another Cuban Revolution from happening – and even worse, with all the drug money it would have been a narco-communist state, and that was an unacceptable outcome during the Cold War. As Stechner put it, “The right American footprint here...we help secure a stable Colombia, and it becomes a beacon for the region”, which echoes Jameson’s analysis on the postmodern condition during late-stage capitalism. In Jameson’s words:

This whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world; in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror. (5)

In the context of crossing borders, order on one side means blood, torture, death, and terror on the other. And, as is the case in noir, to cross borders is to descend, to go down, to immerse oneself in the violence, to get in too deep, knowing that one might never come back up. How, then, do both Javier and Kate cross that border? Do they, in fact, get themselves in too deep?

In classic noir, what differentiates a classic detective (like Arthur Conan Doyle’s character Sherlock Holmes, for example) from a typical noir “hard-boiled detective” like Philip Marlowe (*The Big Sleep*, 1946) or Sam Spade (*The Maltese Falcon*, 1941) – both of which, coincidentally, feature Humphrey Bogart in leading roles. As outlined by Slavoj Žižek in his analysis of Lacan through popular culture *Looking Awry* (1991), what sets the hard-boiled

detective apart is their distance from the situation. More classic detectives, like Holmes or Poe's Dupin, can be considered "armchair detectives," given that most of their detective work is done from the comfort of their armchair, based solely on facts and bits of information given to them by witnesses. They are then paid for their services to release them from the "circuit of (symbolic) debt and its restitution" (*Looking Awry* 60). They keep themselves as far from the material reality of the case as possible.

On the other hand, the noir detective gets in too deep; they "[lose] the distance that would enable him to analyze the false scene and to dispel its charm; he becomes an active hero confronted with a chaotic, corrupt world, the more he intervenes in it, the more involved in its wicked ways he becomes" (60). There is also no desire to collect any form of payment because "[he] solves his cases with the personal commitment of somebody fulfilling an ethical mission, although this commitment is often hidden under a mask of cynicism" (60). All that they experience after they cross borders into darkness makes them calloused, doubtful, and unable to separate themselves from the situation. More often than not, these men are often private investigators, criminals, or people that otherwise are operating outside the law.

There is a specific reason that these noir subjects are portrayed as private investigators instead of policemen or law enforcement officials. In Raymond Borde and Étienne Chaumenton's seminal publication *Panorama du Film Noir Américain* (cited here from Silver and Ursini's *Film Noir Reader*), they describe the "American 'police documentary' is more accurately a glorification of the police," and that in police novels and films,

The action begins after the criminal act, and the murderers, their minions, and other accomplices move across the screen only to be followed, marked, interrogated, chased, and killed. If some flashback depicts a scene between gangsters it is to illustrate a

disclosure or some testimony, a transcript of which is already in the police file. The police are always present, to act or to overhear. the police are always present, to act or to overhear.

Contrast this with what Borde and Chaumenton classify in the noir series: “If police are featured, they are rotten...sometimes even murderers themselves. At minimum, they let themselves get sucked into the criminal mechanism” (21). Thus, writers fell back onto the trope of the private detective so as to not continuously “impugn American police officials” (21). The private detective, on the other hand, is “midway between lawful society and the underworld, walking on the brink, sometimes unscrupulous but putting only himself at risk, fulfilling the requirements of his own code...” (21). Borde and Chaumenton further describe them as an “inglorious victim who may suffer...appalling abuse. He is often enough masochistic...one who makes his own trouble...he is far from the ‘superman’ of adventure films” (22). As viewers, though, we can’t help but sympathize with the private detectives to a degree; even though how the noir subject goes about his mission is questionable, his purpose often has some moral high ground.

Where Agents Macer and Peña, and in turn *Narcos*’ third season and *Sicario*, differ, is that they are unwillingly forced into the underworld by United-statesian law enforcement officials that need no help in impugning themselves. Instead of the private detective that navigates the liminal space between law and crime to achieve their purpose in ways that police are not permitted to due to their adherence to the law, what Macer and Peña display for the audience is a law enforcement official that tries their best to operate in the most legally appropriate manner to help put an end to the war on drugs. We see a flipping of the script in that both the criminals (the cartels) and the police agencies (the CIA, the DEA, etc.), are operating deep in the criminal

underworld alongside each other, and our protagonists don't realize it until they themselves cannot extricate themselves from their situations without severe consequences.

The best way to illustrate this change is to use Javier Peña as an example. We know that he had operated outside the law before. During the first two seasons of *Narcos*, he very much fit Zizek's description; his desire to find Pablo Escobar and put an end to the Medellín Cartel drove him into a partnership with the Cali Cartel, Pablo's biggest competitor, and Los pepes, a right-wing paramilitary vigilante group and death squad dedicated to fighting Pablo and Communism. By feeding them information that the DEA has gathered but cannot act on, he enables them to function as a hit squad, murdering members of Pablo's inner circle in an effort to bring Medellín down by any means necessary in exchange for intel and help on the side from the DEA. When Peña's connection exposes everything to the *Miami Herald*, he is sent back to the United States to be interviewed by the Board of Professional Conduct of the DEA. He is surprised when, instead of disciplinary action, he is asked what he knows about the Cali Cartel and then re-assigned back to Colombia to lead the charge in taking them down.

His approach upon his return vastly different from what we see in the prior two seasons. Instead of being the author of his own demise, he does his best to do everything by the book. In his first meeting with Agent Stechner, the CIA section chief at the Embassy, Stechner says that he specifically wanted Peña back because he "[knew] how things work." Stechner continues:

To the folks back in D.C., Escobar was a win. But down here, we know what it cost, don't we? Medellín was a failure. Thousands of Colombians dead, and coke still flooding the American streets by the ton... We do Cali different. No swallowing the spider to catch the fly this time. America's got plans for Colombia. Another bloodbath complicates them.

Stechner continues explain to Peña that a surrender is being planned by Calí that will save the country bloodshed and the United-statesian image will be saved. Javier is only there to be the face of it, the dashing DEA agent that helped take down Escobar. The Cartel leaders will plead guilty to lesser charges, serve a period of time in jail, and then walk away with their wealth. When Peña, indignant, asks Stechner if that's "enough for him," Stechner's response is simply "If there were any justice in this world, Javier, you'd be in jail." Peña's job is to sit idly by as a symbolic figurehead of justice while everyone waits the six months for the surrender deal. Any plans to try and arrest the Cali godfathers would just result in another war, which would make everyone look bad. The image and perception of order validates the suspension of law in pursuit of something deemed more important, in this case, the war on Communism.

While reluctant at first, after learning of a chemical attack by the Cartel (through one of their business fronts that worked in chemical transport) on innocent civilians that was dismissed as a faulty gas line by the Colombian police and courts, Javier is dead set on bringing justice *through* the law instead of circumventing or suspending it. Aided by Agents Feistl and Van Ness, they intend to follow a paper trail of money laundering and shell corporations to the top of the Cali hierarchy. In essence, they plan to do what Zizek talks about as the role of the classic detective;

he will literally *catch the murderer* [criminal] *in his deception*... The very deceit the murderer [criminal] invents to save himself is the cause of his downfall... This is how the detective traps the murderer [criminal]: not simply by perceiving the traces of the deed the murderer failed to efface, but by perceiving the very absence of a trace as itself a trace. 57-58.

What Javier and Kate both intend on is using the legal authority afforded them as law enforcement officials to follow clues from their metaphorical armchairs that can find the smoking gun that the cartels have kept hidden. They plan to use the law to establish order.

However, both find this goal complicated at the hour of application. For Agent Peña, this occurs as he finds that his reputation has preceded him. Stechner isn't the only one who thinks he should have imprisoned; Colonel Martinez, who is chief of the Bloque de Búsqueda (Search Bloc) in the Colombian military, insinuates to Peña that "when you sell your soul to the devil, you're not allowed to ask for it back. The men who let loose *Los Pepes* on Colombia should have been arrested; instead, they got promoted." Martinez doesn't have to explicitly mention Javier by name, yet we know exactly who he is referring to. Later in episode two, a reporter by the name of Carolina Alvarez asks him "what conclusions should be drawn from the fact that the new DEA attaché has this intimate history with Los Pepes?" Agent Peña certainly feels as though people's opinion of him is little more than a dirty cop who had a big part in setting the country on fire, and he takes this personally. Not just his reputation, but the fact that he feels handcuffed by the desire to end things peacefully and to let the surrender happen as planned, essentially relegating him to the role of a glorified spectator.

We see evidence of this after Peña and Stechner's jungle camp tour with the senators. As they are getting back on the helicopter, Peña confronts Stechner about how "the whole surrender plan is about fucking fundraising? The Colombians get a check and you get to play army men in the jungle?" Stechner fires back "I'm thinking about the next battle, the one that really counts." Peña, now furious, yells in response "Which means you're willing to lose this one!" Stechner's answer is revealing: "The drug war? Oh come on man, we lost it! You were there! *Did you ever think that anyone who takes it as personally as you do is doing it wrong?*" (Emphasis added.)

Thus, Peña resembles the classic noir subject in that he has a personal mission driven by a sense of moral right and wrong. He has, as Zizek describes, “[lost] the distance that would enable him to analyze the false scene and to dispel its charm,” (*Looking Awry* 60) but at the same time his approach in analyzing the scene is through classic detective work, by following clues that are found by scouring bank documents, business licenses, and shipping manifests, which yields results for the DEA team in the series as they capture Miguel Orejuela, the leader of the Cali Cartel, and Franklin Jurado, the cartel’s money launderer.

We see a similar shift in the noir subject trope in *Sicario*. At the beginning of the film, we arrive at the crime scene after the crime(s) have been committed – the corpses in the walls – just as described in the *Panorama du Film Noir Américain*. While this is her first crime scene of this magnitude, it becomes clear that she has been chasing shadows for months and feels that she needs to get a chance to take down the people responsible for the cadavers in the walls, the cartel leaders. She is driven by a moral compass, and when offered the chance to work as an advisor on a team that deals with cartel violence, her only question is “Do we get an opportunity at the men responsible for today?” Upon receiving confirmation that this is the case, she volunteers for the team and is told that they are going to get Guillermo Diaz, who Matt says is in the “El Paso area” and that their objective is to “dramatically overreact.” However, the world she descends into by forming part of this team is not what she expects, and she quickly gets in over her head.

Graver keeps Kate completely in the dark as to what their plans are. She learns about El Paso the night before she is to go there. She flies with Matt and another man who barely speaks two words to her and she only knows as Alejandro. Upon arriving in El Paso, she learns that the final destination is not Texas, but Juarez, and that they were bringing in Guillermo Diaz from

Mexico to hold in custody in the United States. The exchange Kate has with Alejandro, and then Matt, clue us into her mindset in how order is established by following the law.

When she finally works up to talking to Alejandro, she asks him where he is from. He responds “Cartagena,” and follows that up with “Listen...Nothing will make sense to your American ears. And you will doubt everything we do. But in the end, you will understand.” He gives her a bullet-proof vest and exits as Matt enters the shot. She asks Graver if Alejandro is CIA, which he negates, clarifying that Alejandro is DOD, just like him. His advice that comes next disturbs Kate: “Just pay attention to Alejandro. If he says to do something, just do it.” When she retorts that she is “not qualified to follow orders from Alejandro, especially in Mexico!” and that she just wants to understand what she is getting into, Matt explains very matter-of-fact, “Kate, you volunteered to get on this train because you know you’re doing nothing in Phoenix. You’re just sweeping up a fucking mess. In six months, every single house you raid will be rigged with explosives. Do you want to find the guys responsible, yes or no? ... This is where we start.” As we see, she does accompany with them, and is then completely taken aback by the shootout on the bridge.

When they arrive back in Texas and are out of the vehicles, Graver facetiously comments that it “got a little nutty”, to which Kate, now effected emotionally, yells at him:

Nutty? Yeah, that was fucking illegal. You wanna start a war? You’re a fucking spook. And him [referencing Alejandro]! I mean, who the fuck is that...Jesus Christ. You just spray bullets at...Yeah, sure, there’s just fucking civilians everywhere. *I’m not a soldier! This is not what I do!* Emphasis added.

Matt dismisses her concerns, stating that by accompanying them, she is providing them with “the opportunity to shake the tree and create chaos.” This arrangement sets the pattern that Kate

follows through the rest of the movie; she is brought along, kept in the dark, and then participating against her will because she is already in the action. Viewers witness the events alongside her and are just as unaware of what will happen next as she is.

Like with *Narcos*, though, we see the narrative both follow and diverge from traditional noir. Like other hard-boiled detective literature, *Sicario* is told from a first-person perspective, and by accepting her case, Kate “gets mixed up in a course of events that [she] is unable to dominate; all of a sudden it becomes evident that [she] has been ‘played for a sucker’” (Zizek 62-63). She feels taken advantage of, like this, time and time again throughout the movie – much like a stereotypical noir protagonist. However, unlike classic noir literature, there is no voice-over narration from her perspective to let us know her plans, her feelings, her thoughts on the matter.

The voice-over serves an important role in classic noir. In more traditional film, a narration from first person or of an authorial sense helps establish a hierarchy of narration and a point of view from which the film or text should be read and understood. In noir, though, we see voice-over narration as an indicator of how the perspective showed is slowly fragmenting from what is narrated and “loses control of events...As a result, sound becomes dislocated from image, the gap between the planes of the narrative widens, establishing a narrational hierarchy becomes difficult, and finally point of view fragments” (Silver and Ursini 247). The viewer is left to try and understand the space they inhabit between the visual and audio components of the film. In essence, the fragmenting mirrors the own unraveling of the protagonist as she descends further into despair and possibly death.

It also, perhaps more crucially, has strong ties to the misogynistic roots of noir and the traditional gender roles visible in noir, that of the male protagonist and a *femme fatale*. In

comparison with the ways women were portrayed in traditional Hollywood films from the 30's and 40's – "weak, ineffectual figures safely placed in the fixed female roles of wives, mothers, or daughters and desperately in need of the male hero's affection and protection" (246) – Karen Hollinger describes the femme fatale as a

female object of spectacle, defined by her dangerous, yet desirable sexual presence...*Films[sic] noirs*...grant [the female image] overwhelming visual power. The iconography of the femme fatale grants these beautiful, provocative women visual primacy through shot composition as well as camera positioning, movement, and lighting. Silver and Ursini 246.

The male-centric noir experience and voice-over dominated the 30's through the 50's. Most women in noir narratives are either cast as femme fatales or the angelic, innocent woman that need to be protected, and a first-person voice-over was a ubiquitous characteristic of the genre. *Sicario* breaks from classic noir in two manners – a woman as protagonist⁶ and a total absence of voice-over.

Although she may be a law enforcement official, carry weapons, shows proficiency in her job, and is able to take care of herself, she still fits the typical role of the innocent woman in noir. In fact, Elizabeth Cowie, in her chapter "*Film noir* and Women" writes that female noir investigators are "usually dismissed on the grounds that the women are never shown to be 'as good as' equivalent male figures in some way" and that women that feature as protagonists generally lack the "implied ideal of narrative dominance." We can see from her work that Kate is not this version of the woman in noir. She is her team leader and commander of her operations.

⁶ This is not to say that we don't see women as protagonists in neo-noir or in other iterations of noir, but in classic noir it is uncommon.

However, once she volunteers to be an advisor for Graver, she morphs into a different character, one that aligns with the ideal image of a woman in classic noir.

We see traces of this throughout the film. She is not desired as a sexual object (except, perhaps falsely, through the man charged with murdering her); she represents a “connection with...the past, which [is a] safe, static [state] rather than active, exciting ones...” (Kaplan 63); and she is in need of the male protagonist’s protection. As evidence of these traits, we see evidence of this switch throughout the movie. For example, in a scene with her work partner, he sees her dressed in a bra and jeans and jokingly says that she has had that bra for too long and needs a new bra; the scene is devoid completely of sexual tension. Her connection with the past can be tied to her stubborn desire to fight the War on Drugs as she learned she was required to fight it – within the parameters of the law – and that she is a law enforcement officer and “not a soldier!” as she explains to Graver. This new world of chaos and wanton death is unfamiliar and foreign to her, an unsafe state to operate in. And she is protected by Alejandro on the occasion when she was almost murdered by an off-duty Phoenix cop named Ted, who she meets at a bar and takes home to presumably have sex with.

The lack of voice-over can also be tied to her being a female protagonist. Since we are not given the male characters’ perspective, it’s hard for Kate (and the audience) to keep up on what is going on. Karen Hollinger suggests that male-centric film noirs are structured to show the subjects inability to “comprehend a female nature that because of women’s changing societal roles...appeared unfathomable” (Silver and Ursini 247) as a component of the narrative fracturing. It is possible that we lack a voice-over in *Sicario* for a very similar reason; instead of the man’s inability to understand women’s gender roles, it appears that Kate is incapable of understanding the role of law enforcement in the face of the ever-changing face of the War on

Drugs. She cannot fathom the events that she is participating in or the violence and disorder that she is witnessing, and as viewers, we are left to suffer silently along with her.

The unwillingness to suspend law to achieve order is eventually how both discover they are in far over their heads and being played for suckers. Javier and Kate are convinced that by reading all the clues and accounting for the cunning of the criminal and maintain an idealistic attitude that if they can piece together enough clues, they can bring justice and order to their respective assignments; they work *as if* the possibility of order exists and can be attained, although it ultimately sits just out of their reach.

How do we know they are both played for suckers and in over their heads? In *Sicario*, it's near the end of the movie before the unacknowledged raid on the tunnel. Kate and her partner Reggie are told by Matt to hang back and not get involved because they are only there to support the CIA, which can't operate within US borders without another agency present. Essentially, Kate has been a glorified hall pass that allows Graver to act with impunity – she's been played for a sucker. During the raid, Kate tries to apprehend Alejandro, who has been escorted into Mexico to go after and ultimately murder Fausto Alarcon. When she does, he shoots her twice in the chest, directly into her bulletproof vest, and leaves her gasping for breath on the ground. After she makes it out of the tunnel, Kate punches Matt in the face and asks what Medellin is – Alejandro has been referred to as Medellin by traffickers that they had apprehended. Matt's answer further reveals to Kate that she has no idea what she has gotten herself into. As he puts it, Medellin refers to a time when one group controlled every aspect of the drug trade, providing a measure of order that we could control. And until somebody finds a way to convince 20% of the population to stop snorting and smoking that shit, order's the best

we can hope for. And what you saw up there [Alejandro leaving to kill Fausto] was Alejandro working toward returning that order.

Alejandro is (or was) a drug trafficker himself. He works for “the competition” and has a vested interest in the way all this turns out monetarily, not to mention that he seeks revenge against Alarcon, who murdered his family. In essence, the CIA and Graver are no better than Alarcon and the Sinaloa Cartel they have been pursuing – they just carry badges and wear uniforms. When she tells Matt that she is going to expose everything, all he says is “That would be a major mistake.”

We know she is in over her head in the last scene in the film. We open on Kate smoking on her balcony when she hears a sound and walks inside to find Alejandro sitting in her apartment. She sits down across from him at her table and he tells her that she needs to sign an affidavit stating that everything they did “was done by the book.” When she protests, saying that she can’t sign that – doing so would mean that she willingly suspended the law to achieve order through violence – Alejandro puts a gun under her chin and says “You would be committing suicide, Kate. Come on. Sign it.” When she reluctantly complies, he stands up and takes the contract from her and says, as he begins disassembling his pistol, “You should move to a small town, where the rule of law still exists. You will not survive here. You are not a wolf. And this is the land of wolves now.” and exits her apartment. The modernist idealism of winning the War on Drugs is gone. There is no future in “law and order,” just feigning order based on violence.

True to form, the noir subject doesn’t seek a reward or compensation even though she got what she set out for, a chance at the men responsible for the bodies in the walls. But there is no satisfaction in it because in the process forced her to take part in what she considered morally

and ethically incorrect and that she was duped. She has descended into the dark, shady world full of crime and deception and cannot get out.

Peña finds himself in a similar situation. By the end of season three, Javier has learned that the Colombian government, specifically the Minister of Defense and President, received money – as much \$6,000,000 US – as “campaign contributions” from the Cali Cartel specifically to maintain immunity while they were in operation. This donation won the election for Samper, Colombian president at the time of the series. The arrests of two Cali godfathers are put in jeopardy if the corrupt politicians who took the bribes take over prosecution of their crimes. Peña turns to the Ambassador Arthur Crosby, who informs him that the groundbreaking information that Javier believes he has discovered is old news to the CIA and State Department. Crosby knew that the charges wouldn’t stick, that money had changed hands under the table, that the Cali Cartel had effectively “bought the President.” It was overlooked, though, because President Samper was seen as a “good friend” to the United States. “The point, Agent Peña,” Crosby begins, “is you’re right. But in this case...*it doesn’t matter*” (emphasis added) because corruption is overlooked to solidify US political and economic influence in the area.

Since he can’t count on anybody to do anything with this, and all of it will be swept under the table to save face for both the Colombians and the State Department, Javier goes to the press to spread the news of what he has “found” – in other words, what has been hidden from both civilians and law enforcement alike. As narrated by the program, “...when the highest-ranking DEA agent in the country went on the record and said not only did the United States know about it, and allowed it to happen...they couldn’t hide from it anymore.” When confronted by Crosby about his interview, the following discussion occurs:

CROSBY: You didn’t really call the country we are guests in a ‘narco-democracy’?

PEÑA: Are you saying that it isn't?

CROSBY: The State Department's livid.

PEÑA: Good. They're responsible. We all are.

CROSBY: Samper isn't going anywhere.

PEÑA: Well, at least people know the truth.

By valuing the truth over convenience or any career aspirations – he would have been fired had he not stepped down after his declaration to the press – he proves that there is a glimpse of progress in disseminating the truth, even when inconvenient for those in power.

But does that get him out of the dark noir world? It is unlikely. As the third season comes to an end, Javier is fixing a fence on his father's ranch along the Rio Grande. These last few moments of the tenth episode show the shift of focus from the DEA at this juncture, as portrayed by the series, towards Mexico and the growing concerns over the Sinaloa Cartel. We watch a boatload of some sort of drug being scuttled across the river by smugglers coming into the US. Before turning his focus back to the fence, his father tells him that if he stands there for an hour, "you'll count twenty of them [the boats] going by" as they continue their work. In what seems to be discussion about the fence, Peña asks his father "y que, ¿tienes que arreglar la cerca cada vez que hay tormenta?" In response, the father states his rather simple answer: "Alguien lo tiene que hacer. Así es la vida." When subsequently asked if he will take up the DEA on their offer to go to Mexico, Peña replies that he has done enough and someone else can take over.

There is something metaphorical about the fence; much like the "War on Drugs", there will always be a mess that needs to be cleaned up, consequences that will need to be mitigated. That's life, according to Peña's father. We see in both *Sicario* and *Narcos* that the Drug war is changing and moving, openly encroaching on new territory with new products. Soon, war will move north,

and only the wolves will survive. Both Kate and Javier accomplished their missions, and yet there is much that is left undone. Perhaps that is why noir and metamodernism complement each other in odd ways; both anticipate failure (and even death) as a strong possibility yet press on despite the apathy and melancholy that surrounds them. Caught between worlds leaves one with few options, but maybe there is hope – even if we never get that carrot.

Suspended Presents, States of Exception: Metamodern Literary Techniques in Post-neoliberal Mexico

Originally a short piece written for theater by Sara Uribe, *Antígona Gonzalez* tells the story of one woman's search for her brother who everyone assumes has been killed in a bus attack in the drug related violence in Tamaulipas, Mexico, in the 2010's. Tamaulipas sits on the border of Mexico, is home to three major "sister cities" border crossings along the Texas/Mexico border (Laredo/Nuevo Laredo, McAllen/Reynosa, and Brownsville/Matamoros) and where a large portion of the violence in the "drug war" is focused. Her family discourages her from searching for Tadeo, claiming that the search will only bring her trouble. Uribe intercalates memories from Antigona's childhood with her brother and fragments from non-fiction headlines and news articles about other missing persons with the search for Tadeo, which ultimately leads her to a mass grave containing 196 bodies. There, she waits in line with other "Antigonas", as she calls them, to look at photos taken of the deceased that have been found there. The last line of prose is a callback to the Sophoclean tragedy itself: "¿Te unirás a mí para tomar el cuerpo?"

In contrast to *Sicario* or *Narcos*, which are told from the perspective of law enforcement, *Antígona* deals with the consequences of the wanton violence from both parties, narcos and police, as well as the incompetence of the government to adequately handle the social tolls of the conflict. In direct opposition to the supposed order portrayed by law enforcement in *Sicario* or

Narcos would have us believe, *Antígona* helps illustrate that no one achieves order. Instead, chaos and lawlessness reign along the border.

If *Sicario* and *Narcos* provide us with the structure of feeling that defines metamodernism, *Antígona Gonzalez* is an example of the literary techniques that are common among metamodernist works, specifically what Vermeulen and van den Akker refer to as “upcycling”, or the use of postmodern tendencies like parody or pastiche as a method to express different ideas. Uribe weaves the original Sophoclean Antigone into other iterations of the Antigone story from Latin America and other Spanish-speaking contexts (such as Zambranos’ *La tumba de Antígona*, Gambaro’s *Antígona furiosa*, or). In their analysis of Southern Cone Antigone’s, Braulio Fernández Biggs and Joaquín García Huidobro conclude that Latin American Antigone characters “involve themselves in a strong moral protest, but not in defense of a traditional divine order; theirs is a protest, rather, against the dissolution of the human as the result of the capriciousness of power” (Fernández-Biggs and García-Huidobro 263). To this point, Tamara Williams writes that “like the many Antigones that precede her, *Antígona González* is undone by grief but does not assume a position of defiant opposition. Rather, she embodies the collective desolation, the vulnerability, the precarity of those that grieve a double loss” (Williams 10), which she characterizes as the lack of a loved one’s remains and the “sense of suspended abandonment and invisibility” evident in an indifferent, neglectful Mexican state.

In any case, Antigone stories in Latin America (and from other Spanish speaking contexts) are focused on the dilemma of legal authority vs moral authority, especially in settings where human life is lost (or made to disappear) in name of gaining and maintaining legal authority, and where legal authority is more closely tied with individual power of rulers than the good of the *polis* in general.

As has been established here, the use of the Antigone story across Latin America serves as a vehicle to critique events, either past or present, that pose questions about legality vs morality, civil unrest or instability, and one's love of their family. On page 30 of Uribe's work itself, the narrative voice tells us that

La argentina Griselda Gambaro utiliza la figura de Antígona para criticar el gran número de desaparecidos durante la dictadura militar que existió en su país.

Antígona Furiosa es un pastiche.

Antígona Furiosa es también la indagación sobre quién es el verdadero héroe. (emphasis in original)

Referencing Gambaro's own Antigone, we are told that *Antígona Furiosa* is a pastiche; as Jameson explains it, neutral mimicry "without parody's ulterior motives" and lacking in any satire or laughter; a "blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs" (Jameson 17). These narratives use the Antigone story as a mask to deliver their criticism, their message. The Sophoclean formula provides a way by which other stories can be understood through an established, familiar literary artifact.

It is important to clarify here that just because *Antígona furiosa* came out in the 80's, long before Vermeulen and van den Akker published their initial article on metamodernism in 2010, doesn't mean that it falls directly under Jameson's characterization of the postmodern pastiche sentiment as an empty, ironic mask. The variants of the Antigone tragedy that have emerged from Latin America more closely resemble metamodernist iterations of the plays – examples of "upcycling", or, the repurposing of forms and styles as pastiche while adding a new significance to the work. Like with our analysis of the structures of feeling present in *Sicario* and *Narcos*, a phenomenological approach is beneficial in this endeavor.

Comedy is an easy avenue to understand this repurposing of material. Gry Rustad and Kai Hanno Schwind, in their chapter titled “The Joke That Wasn’t Funny Anymore” in Vermeulen and van den Akker’s edited volume, analyze different sitcoms that were popular during the end of the 00’s and beginning of the 10’s, like *Community* and *Parks and Recreation*. Their investigation into *Community* revolves around the show’s ability to employ postmodern techniques of pastiche and irony to convey real, heartfelt emotion or show character growth in the show. They compare it to the animated series *Family Guy*, citing that both use visual gags, throwaway jokes, parody, and pastiche as the source of their humor. However, citing Crawford, they contest that *Family Guy* depends on these elements because there is “nothing left to say”, (135). *Community* does the opposite, using a *Goodfellas* parody to allow for emotional growth amongst the characters, an anime sequence to help process childhood trauma caused by bullying, a Christmas style Claymation episode to help work through the effect of an absent mother, or an eight-bit arcade style video game episode where two long lost brothers come to terms with the death of their estranged father through the game.

Antígona Gonzalez is most certainly not a comedy like *Community*, but the two share similar metamodern sensibility, defined by the “meaning the stylistic tropes are imbued with” (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism* 136) and not the tone or style of the work. The question we are left to ask as readers of *Antígona Gonzalez* is “What new meaning does the story include under the mask of Greek Tragedy?” I posit that what we learn from this *Antígona* is that the Mexican state is not failed, but functioning as it is designed to – that is, the Mexican State is waging a slow war of attrition and accumulation by dispossession on its own public under the guise of a Drug War on the cartels. I pull three examples from the text in support of my argument, basing my analysis in large part on Paley’s *Drug War Capitalism* and Zavala’s *Los*

carteles no existen. The first is the repurposing of roles and characters throughout the work, like Antígona, Creonte, or Polynices; second, the part that violence plays in the State's strategy and necropolitics/necrocapitalism in action; lastly, the control that the State and the cartel's violence exerts over the polis.

Uribe's Antígona is one example of the many examples of the trope of reformulation and reassignment of traditional Sophoclean roles from the tragedy itself. Antigone, for the most part, is a stand in for a woman searching for a desaparecido, a living call to remember. The role of Creon, however, sees a wide range of changes to how it is depicted. Some iterations, like Marechal's *Antígona Vélez*, Don Facundo, the Creon placeholder, is not portrayed as arrogantly as Creon nor is he concerned with the rule of law in his city, but rather his own conquest of "American land". In Gambaro's *Antígona furiosa*, the role of Creon is changed drastically: "una carcasa representa a Creonte", which is spoken through by the Corifeo (chorus leader) whenever they enter the stage. Creon's (Corifeo's) political philosophy is not centered on law and order in the city, but instead on who is strongest and wields the most power. Zambrano's *La tumba de Antígona*, from Spain, portrays Creon as a stand in for traditional, misogynistic male gender roles in a "conflicto entre dos potencias morales y exclusivas, el derecho del Estado [Creonte]...y el derecho de la familia [Antígona]" (Duroux and Urdician 81), a portrayal of the larger issues at hand in Franco's Spain. Daniela Cápona Pérez, playwright and author of *Antígona, (historia de objetos perdidos)*, foregoes Creon and all traditional characters, writing just two: Él and Ella (He and She), and the play takes place in an unnamed location, a place named only "La Ciudad" and ends in Brussels, Belgium.

Similarly in Uribe's work, the role of Antígona becomes the stand in for many people (especially women) in Mexico. In the section "Esta mañana hay una fila inmensa", we learn that

Antígona has gone to San Fernando to search for her brother Tadeo. As she stands in line, the narrative voice comments that “Aquí todos somos invisibles. No tenemos rostro. No tenemos nombre. Aquí nuestro presente parece suspendido” (100). All are people searching for their brothers, fathers, husbands, and sons (102), just like she is. Antigone is no longer a singular role, but a multiplicity of women, all wondering where their loved ones are. This is also indicated to us at the beginning of the text, where the narrative voice asks us “¿Quién es Antígona González y qué vamos a hacer con *todas las demás Antígonas?*” followed by the somber statement “No quería ser una Antígona/pero me tocó” (10). And when Antígona asks what happened to Tadeo, she is told that “somos muchos los que hemos perdido a alguien” (12). Like in other versions, Antígona represents many people. But she is an Antígona in a sea of other, simultaneous Antígonas, all searching for their loved ones.

Her brother, Tadeo, is the reference to Polynices here. Like Antígona, there are many Polynices in the story, many Tadeos. Where these differ from the other renditions of Polynices in Latin America and from *Oedipus Rex* itself is the context surrounding Tadeo when he was killed. In the original, Polynices killed his brother, who in turn killed him, in single combat during the Theban civil war. As referenced in other Latin American or Spanish Antigone stories, he is a substitute for the desaparecidos, one of the many who were murdered by state forces because they were considered subversive (read: communist) during the Cold War era (in Spain’s case, pre-WWII). Whether or not claims of subversive were substantiated was not important; the mere chance that someone *could* have *maybe* been in a labor union or part of a leftist university group was reason enough to apprehend someone and subject them to torture and death. As warped as it seems, there was a method to madness.

In Tamaulipas, the Thebes of the story, Tadeo appears to have been killed because he was in the wrong place at the wrong time. He is not a threat to national security nor responsible for violence against the polis, as in *Oedipus Rex*. He is not insinuated as a Communist or their 21st century equivalent, drug trafficker. Instead, he was simply unlucky (a gross understatement, given the circumstances), an innocent bystander who happened to get caught in the crossfire between the Mexican State and one of the Cartels. Antígona travels to San Fernando, where she waits in line, to find out if Tadeo's body had been found. San Fernando is the site of the two largest massacres in the war on drugs; the first in 2010, perpetrated by Los Zetas, which claimed 72 lives, and the second in 2011 (also carried out by Zetas), which official counts listed at 193 bodies but members of Los Zetas who were involved numbered at upwards of 600.⁷ The idea that these people were in wrong place at the wrong time can be supported if one follows the narrative that was pushed in explaining the murders, that the Zetas were trying to prevent people from joining the Gulf Cartel, from whom they split in 2010. That can be easily written off as drug violence, further pushing the idea that the drug cartels are responsible for the violence in Mexico and are the “bad actors” in this conflict and that the State is working against them to end the violence.

This leads to the third, and most critical distinction, between this version of Creon and others. Creon, as we've discussed above, is the authority figure and leader of the polis; he is law incarnate, portrayed as ruling with “mano dura”. Here, though, the narrative voice tells us that Creonte is “silencio amordazándolo todo” (104). Tamara Williams comments that this is the only reference to Creonte in the entire work and compares the environment that the state silence

⁷ See (*La Crónica de Hoy* | *600 Fosas En San Fernando, Dice El Autor de Las Matanzas*; “Drug Hitmen Dump 72 Bodies at Mexican Ranch”; *El Universal* - - *Hallan 7 Fosas En Tamaulipas; van 193 Muertos*)

creates to Comala from Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo*, "a liminal woeful lawless space stifled by a power that is as pervasive as it is horrific, invisible as it is indivisible, unintelligible as it is inapprehensible" (Williams 8). This silence, begat by fear, causes her family – who fill the role of the chorus – to beg Antígona not to search for her brother. This fits with what Uribe herself has said about Creonte in a 2016 interview: "The silence...was, and still is, our most unyielding Creon" (Buuck).

There have been many interpretations of Creonte's silence; for example, silence as the state's appropriation of discourse surrounding the violence, a play on the double meaning of the word *contar* (as in "Instrucciones para contar muertos") and the role of public discourse in filling the silence (Alicino 333) or the silence as a signal of Creonte's absence, using her family's pleas as an example of the state not doing its job and the absence of law. However, there are two interpretations that seem to get closer to the truth. On one hand, Tamara Williams indicates that the family fills in for the state, begging Antígona not to go looking so as to avoid repercussions in a manner resembling that of the chorus animating Creonte's corpse in *Antígona furiosa*. On the other, Nuñez argues that the silence is synonymous with the "permanente estado de excepción" of the Mexican state, and that both Antígona and her lost brother Tadeo are the exception, alongside other immigrants, the poor, and the other desaparecidos (Nuñez 285–86).

I claim that Creonte is in fact silent because he himself is responsible for the violence – in other words, that the Mexican state is responsible for the creation of the very violence that plagues their citizens in a process of accumulation by dispossession through necropolitical processes; they pushed the narratives that created the cartels while themselves benefitting from their connections to the cartels and how they continue to exercise control over the cartels, leading

to the state role in and dependence on the violence as a tool to gain capital and make natural resources available that wouldn't be otherwise.

Of course, it is impossible to dissect current events without an understanding of Mexican political history in the last half-century. As Oswaldo Zavala explains in his analysis of “narco-mythology” in Mexican noir fiction, the mythology and narrative around the cartels that

es el resultado directo de ese discurso que ha permeado en la sociedad durante décadas y que posiciona al crimen organizado como un enemigo que permanentemente desafía la dimensión soberana del Estado con la amenaza latente de construir un interregno pospolítico.(Zavala).

Mexico's monopoly on the discourse surrounding the narco is born out of, according to Zavala, the intrinsic tie between state prohibitions and the drug trade. There has been ample documentation and cultural production based on the latter half of the 20th century like *Narcos: Mexico*, which provides a dramatized version of events that show the close ties and dependence between both “sides,” the PRI and the cartels.

As the PRI lost popularity, Mexico's federal security forces underwent a period of dismantlement during the sexennial of Vicente Fox, which allowed for new and stronger connections between organized crime, government agencies and local business. When Calderón came into office, there was a decided attempt to reestablish control that Fox had lost, thus the declaration of the “Guerra contra las Drogas”. That marked the beginning of the major spike in violence throughout Mexico, starting in Michoacán and slowly spreading. This subsequent violence should be understood “como el intento desesperado por reconstituir el poder soberano del Estado” (Zavala). The state of exception that is the drug war reveals “most clearly the essence of the state's authority” (Schmitt 13); the capture of el Chapo, for example, shows us

that the state is in fact capable of exercising their sovereignty over the drug cartels. However, the real power, he claims, is that “el narco en México es reducible a las estrategias de seguridad del Estado” CNE while the state hides behind “la falsa narrative de los cárteles y su supuesto reino sin fin” (Zavala).

To some extent, we see this reflected in *Antígona* anecdotally, when the narrative voice relays to us how a woman leaving the district attorney’s office was approached by a man who grabbed her from behind and whispers to her “Vale más que dejen de chingar. Ustedes síganle y se los va a llevar la chingada” (32). It is unclear if this person works at the state office or is part of a cartel but following the state’s false narrative it could be an understandable interpretation. More telling is the interaction between Antígona and her family, who beg her to cease her search for the truth and Tadeo’s body. They fear that her inquiries will warrant unwanted attention from both the government and the cartels:

Son de los mismos. Nos van a matar a todos, Antígona. *Son de los mismos.* Aquí no hay ley. *Son de los mismos.* Aquí no hay país. *Son de los mismos.* No hagas nada. *Son de los mismos.* Piensa en tus sobrinos. *Son de los mismos.* Quédate quieta, Antígona. *Son de los mismos.* Quédate quieta. No grites. No pienses. No busques. *Son de los mismos,* Antígona. Quédate quieta, Antígona. No persigas lo imposible. 26, emphasis added.

Zavala deduced that the cartels exist because of gaps in the Mexican state; Dawn Paley writes that in many cases, they are one and the same. “While the armed actors vary from place to place, it has long been established that the lines between state and criminal groups are murky, and that each empowers the other” (Paley). Los Zetas were state officials who defected into becoming armed traffickers; state and local law enforcement officers and corps that double-dip, taking money from cartels alongside their paychecks; autodefensas and paramilitary groups that operate

independently. Furthermore, Paley writes that “there is no reason to assume a clear division between state forces and cartels” because, citing Yolanda Figueroa, it isn’t possible to move the quantities of drugs, launder money, and carry out large, clandestine operations “without a system of political and police protection” (Paley).

And not only that, but organized crime began to fill those voids in the government until they themselves became para-governmental entities. Sayek Valencia, in her book *Capitalismo gore*, writes how when Nation-states transform from a political body to an economic body (which she characterizes as “el estallido de Estado-nación) that is governed by “las leyes del intercambio y del beneficio empresarial, y conectada por multiples lazos al mercado mundial” (31), they are now a Market-state, not Nation-state. This Market-state is no longer beholden to their citizens, but to glocal investors and business interests. One example of this are ejidos. Returning hacienda land to peasants was a key article (27) in the 1917 Mexican constitution, and ejidos were instated by Cárdenas in 1934, allowing farmers to use government owned land to grow crops that were mainly used for subsistence with any surplus being commodified. By the 1990’s, 56% of Mexico’s arable land and 70% of forests were redistributed to “3.5 million *ejidatarios* and communal landholders in 30,322 *ejidos* and communities” (Bello 46).

However, this land could not be privatized and commodified, which was a problem for the PRI after their agreements with the World Bank and IMF post-peso devaluation. So when NAFTA came into effect, Article 27 was amended so that this land could be privatized. While many peasant farmers were offered the opportunity to formalize their own private ownership of land, most did not, given the astronomically high investment costs of cash crops for export. Corn cost \$210 per hectare, while melons could cost up to \$700 and snow peas running a \$3,145 investment price per hectare (Bello 49). Given that most couldn’t afford these prices, many

farmers were forced to seek employment elsewhere, oft migrating to the US or to larger urban areas to find work (this latter topic will be investigated in more depth in the next chapter). By the late 2010's almost \$20 billion in remittances were being sent back to Mexico from the United States, and rural towns were seeing population decreases in the thousands as people left to look for work. In short, and so as to not delve into a topic that will be further explored later on, the Mexican state was seeking every opportunity to squeeze a profit out of their natural resources and land.

In *Antígona Gonzalez*, the same process is occurring, but this time the natural resource isn't land or exportable produce, but people – more specifically, their labor value – while further “streamlining” the state. As Sayek Valencia describes it, NAFTA brought about social conditions that further eroded the middle class by raising prices and lowering wages, which made violence a viable route as a “herramienta mercantil”:

Factores como la liberalización de precios, la desregulación de los mercados, escasos apoyos al campo (al sector agropecuario), desestructuración e ineficacia de las funciones del Estado, faltas en el cumplimiento en las garantías mínimas de los derechos humanos, espectralización del mercado, bombardeo consumista-informativo, frustración constante y precarización laboral. 36

With these contributing factors, the country entered a period of “desolación económica y política absoluta” (36), where prices for everyday necessities (canasta básica) soon became untenable for everyday people, yet where investors bought into industries that had been subsidized at the subsidized prices, causing an even more drastic descent into social inequity as the latter were essentially given license to print money (Valencia, citing Glenny). This economic freedom for a select few allowed them to challenge the law and push into markets where legality was

questionable at best if not disregarded completely; if you had enough money, anything was permissible.

We see here the four tenets of accumulation by dispossession laid out by David Harvey: Privatization and commodification, financialization, management and manipulation of crises, and state redistributions (161-163). By using the state of exception they created through the Drug War, Valencia observes that in Mexico, this is taken further to become accumulation by murder:

Enriquecimineto cuasi-instantáneo que tenía como precio el derramamiento de sangre y la pérdida de la vida: precios que no resultan demasiado altos cuando la vida no es una vida digna de ser vivida sino una condición ultraprecarizada envuelta en frustración constante y en un empobrecimiento irreversible por otras vías. 36-37.

She echoes Achille Mbembe in that the “ultimate expression of sovereignty...resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die” (Mbembe and Corcoran 66), and that terror becomes a political tool in the hands of those who wield it (72-74). Furthermore, she suggests that perhaps the government’s stance and motives behind the drug war “obedezca a las lógicas de un proyecto de eugenesia cruenta en la que se busca matar a los peces menores” (38) so that society can be taught a lesson and that state can reinstate its respectability in the face of its citizens.

All the while, people continue their lives. Rather, their lives continue and they must keep pace. As Antígona says, “...hay que comprar el gas, pagar las cuentas y seguir yendo al trabajo. Porque desde luego que a una se le desaparezca un hermano no es motivo de incapacidad...La vida nunca detiene su curso por catástrofes personales” (76, emphasis added). Systems of production operating in Mexico still function as they are designed to – as has been discussed, the neoliberal apparatuses that cut social aid, welfare funding, and protection for land rights forced

people into precarious economic situations. Much like her family, Antígona is expected to put her head down and go to work, being content that the “‘state of emergency’ in which [she] live[s] is not the exception but the rule” (Benjamin 682). It is necessary that these modes of production continue to produce surplus value for those that own them so that they can continue to accumulate wealth while those at in the lower classes are forced to turn to any form of work they can, including illicit activities like trafficking in drugs or people. The cycle starts with oppression and ends with violence, not the other way around, as the Mexican government claims. As long as there is systemic oppression, there will be violence.

The state of exception becoming the rule and the disappearing of a middle class is something that is reflected in a few different places throughout Uribe’s text. For instance, while Antígona is waiting in line in San Fernando she likens her waking hours to a bad dream: “Aquí nuestro presente parece suspendido. Voy a despertar en cualquier momento, me digo cuando intento engañarme...Pero ese momento nunca llega: lo que ocurre aquí es lo verdaderamente real” (100). This sentiment is stated again, still waiting in line to identify bodies: “Somos lo que deshabela desde la memoria...Un cuerpo que no aparece, que nadie quiere nombrar. Aquí todos somos limbo” (120). The uneasy feeling of being between states of consciousness is used here as a metaphor for subjectivity in the face of ruthless capitalism – the nightmare is reality, they are the void itself, the space between the “subject of enunciation and the subject of enunciated” (Žižek, “‘The Thing That Thinks’: The Kantian Background of the Noir Subject” 211). Their identity has been determined for them by capitalism, a reduction to a space between being and nothingness where their lives are unimportant in the face of accumulation.

This idea of identity as liminal is complicated later while Antígona is expressing her feelings to her brother that she herself is also disappearing. She adds: “Todos aquí iremos

desapareciendo si nadie nos busca, si nadie nos nombra. Todos aquí iremos desapareciendo si nos quedamos inermes solo viéndonos entre nosotros, viendo cómo desaparecemos uno a uno” (164). Tadeo, along with all the other desaparecidos, are in a Schrodinger’s box of sorts – simultaneously dead and alive. Those they have left behind, like Antígona, are in a similar state, dead and alive together. Marx quipped that “the Roman slave was held by chains; the wage-labourer is bound to his owner by invisible threads” (Marx et al. 719). Achille Mbembe, in dialogue with Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, explicates that slaves were kept alive because their labor had value, and so they are kept alive in a “*state of injury*” governed by violence (Mbembe and Corcoran 75). “Violence...becomes an element in manners...an act of caprice and pure destruction aimed at instilling terror. Slave life, in many ways, is a form of death-in-life” (75), in contrast to Tadeo, who is living a form of life-in-death. The lines between them, for Antígona, are blurring, like the relationship between life and death itself.

How then do we suppose that this violence will come to an end? Valencia arrives at the conclusion that no use of violence will end this war, seeing as how violence is a tool that the government employs and not the byproduct of drug trafficking. The drug cartels will never be able to be done away with...

mientras no se erradiquen las desigualdades estructurales entre la población, mientras ‘la ausencia de trabajo [persista...con] la imposibilidad de encontrar otra salida que no se la migración’, mientras no se deconstruyan los conceptos de *modernidad y de progreso*...mientras no se escape a la espectacularización de la violencia y la celebración del hiperconsumismo; mientras no se cuestione el discurso político basado en la

supremacía masculina...y, sobre todo, mientras no se cuento con una estabilidad económica sostenible que funcione a medio y largo plazo. 42.

Getting rid of the cartels has little to do with violent armed conflict against the cartels, with suppressing them until they submit. Carrying on with senseless violence and then wondering why it seems to be increasing in frequency and ferocity is akin to wondering why a boat full of holes continues to take on water while adjusting the sails; the root of the problem is not addressed. Working to address disparity and inequity between classes through anti-racist, anti-patriarchal and anti-capitalistic means would lead to the solving of the problem, as Valencia suggests.

Antígona believes in a similar approach while adding another element to the equation: empathy. She wants those who hold positions of power to recognize and understand her struggle and trauma so that they might work together to build something better. As she puts it:

No, Tadeo, *yo no he nacido para compartir el odio*. Yo lo que deseo es lo imposible: que pare ya la guerra; que construyamos juntos, cada quien desde su sitio, formas dignas de vivir; y que los corruptos, los que nos venden, los que nos han vendido siempre al mejor postor, pudieran estar en mis zapatos...Tal vez así entenderían. Tal vez así harían lo que estuviera en sus manos para que no hubiera más víctimas. Tal vez así sabrían por qué no descansaré hasta recuperar tu cuerpo. 94.

She recognizes that what she desires is likely impossible, but that if perhaps there were to be a change it would be borne out of empathy and compassion to the plight of the oppressed. This plea aligns with the conceptualization of metamodernism suggested in “Notes on Metamodernism”; “Inspired by a modern naivety, yet informed by postmodern skepticism, the metamodern discourse consciously commits itself to an impossible possibility” (5). This desire is

constructed through the metamodern form, the upcycling and repurposing of past forms to direct cultural sensibilities towards new horizons (Van den Akker et al., *Metamodernism* 7).

In Sophocles' original work, Antigone pronounces that she is not born to share hate, only love, in much the same condition as Antígona González – by violating Creon's law that was to be met with death, she was in the liminal space of "death-in-life". She knew that asking empathy and compassion of Creon was an impossible possibility, yet called for it anyway. Likewise, Antígona González asks the same of the silent Creonte, aware that she, like her namesake, could soon meet a similar fate.

Chapter 3. Hechos de maíz: Indigenous Resistance to the Capitalist Realisms of *Tikal Futura* and *Sleep Dealer*.

Augusto Monterroso's *Mister Taylor* tells the story of a United Statesian businessman who becomes enamored with the shrunken heads produced by one tribe that he interacts with. Mister Taylor's desire to accumulate wealth leads him to pay the tribe for as many heads as they can produce, decimating other tribes' populations as well as their own, and eventually (spoiler alert) costing Mister Taylor his own head (Monterroso). Written in 1959, the short story is a satirical twist on the era of "Banana Republics" in Central America during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In the short story, indigenous tribes are the ones that suffer the most; they are decimated by the system of head hunting that the capitalistic Taylor has sponsored. In real life, much the same thing happened leading up to and during the 36-year internal conflict in Guatemala – of the estimated 200,000 victims of state sponsored terrorism, 83% were indigenous ("Truth Commission").

This same pattern has existed for hundreds of years – foreign powers come and take whatever they please, with little (if any) regard for the lives of the indigenous people that live on the continent, lining their own coffers in the name of capitalism, development and "modernity" while leaving instability, unrest, and poverty in their wake. In the words of Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan philosopher and cultural critic, "Latin America is the region of open veins. Everything from the discovery until our times, has always been transmuted into European – or later United States – capital... *Our defeat was always implicit in the victory of others; our wealth has always generated our poverty by nourishing the prosperity of others*" (Galeano 2). Put simply, capitalism and imperialism are the cause of riches and wealth for some but death for others, namely indigenous peoples.

In this chapter, I address the contemporary implications of the patterns denounced by Monterroso through a close analysis of Franz Galich's novel *Tikal futura: memorias para un futuro incierto (novelita futurista)* (2012) and Alex Rivera's film *Sleep Dealer* (2009). First, I rely on these two works to examine the settler-colonial systems of oppression, extractive capitalism, and imperialism that shaped the Americas and how they have targeted indigenous peoples and practices. Mark Fisher's understanding of capitalist realism allows us to analyze the material conditions created by settler-colonial practices and the way that they oppress indigenous peoples. I then argue that Rivera and Galich's works show material resistance against Western, Euro and Anglo-centric geopolitical hegemony based on Emil Keme's conceptualization of Abiyala as a "political project and locus of enunciation" for and by indigenous peoples as a rejection of an imposed colonial identity (Keme and Coon).

Capitalist Realisms in the (Near) Future: *Tikal Futura* and *Sleep Dealer*

Tikal futura is set in what is presumably a futuristic Ciudad de Guatemala, but one that is divided into a "ciudad de Arriba" – where the mega-rich live in opulent wealth and lack nothing – and "ciudad de Abajo", which is a skid-row-turned-city full of indigenous people who work for and are controlled by those above them. Weaving together various storylines, we follow a teenage couple, Ix and Namú, from ciudad de Abajo as they discover their budding romance under the watchful eyes of their abuela Cané, who is transcribing sections of the *Popul Vuh* and other historic indigenous writings from memory to preserve their history; a businessman and aspiring civic leader in the ciudad de Arriba who with foreign investors, led by Mr. Klimowitz from "Quisyan", plan to construct a mega-theme park called la Ruta Maya that would be an ecotourist dream attraction with a dark side – tourists would be able to buy prostitutes for sexual tourism or pay to hunt "guerrilla" fighters (enslaved people from ciudad de Abajo) in an eerie,

morbid reiteration of the Guatemalan internal conflict; an attempt at armed resistance from a group of outsiders in Abajo that ultimately fails; and the preparations for a Mayan ball game (albeit with altered rules permitting hypermobile motorcycles) between the upper classes and the poor from ciudad de Abajo.

Sleep Dealer is the story of a young man named Memo Cruz with a fascination for technology who, upon losing his father in a drone attack he is responsible for, goes to live in Tijuana to work and send money back to his mother. Set in a “near future” from the time of production, Memo finds work as the operator of a remote machine via virtual reality technology that hooks directly into his Central Nervous System. Eventually, he finds compatriots in Luz and ex-drone pilot Rudy, who together plan to use the same drone technology that killed Miguel Cruz to avenge him.

Academics have approached these two works from studies of borderlands fictions or from the point of view of cyberpunk and dystopic science fiction.⁸ These frameworks have allowed them to analyze the hybrid nature of immigrant, chicanx, latinx, or other identities in the context of colonial and neocolonial material conditions post-NAFTA. For instance, Lysa Rivera, in her chapter “Neoliberalism and Dystopia in U.S.–Mexico Borderlands Fiction” discusses how, when confronted to the text, readers often pose the question “*What have we as a society done to get here?*” What in our collective history and our current historical moment has caused this strange,

⁸ See, for example, Rueda, Carolina. "The everlasting Sleep Dealer: Alex Rivera's visionary mind and fantasy nightmares in present times." *Studies in Spanish & Latin American Cinemas* 14.3 (2017): 333-348; Straile-Costa, Paula. "Hacking the Border: Undocumented Migration and Technologies of Resistance in Alex Rivera's Sleep Dealer and Digital Media." *Theory in Action* 13.2 (2020): 54-74; Alvarenga Venutolo, Patricia. "Poder, memoria y sujeto en Tikal Futura: memorias para un futuro incierto (novelita futurista), de Franz Galich." (2016); Boyer, Emilie. "Una mirada hacia el futuro: utopías y distopías de Centroamérica." (2019): 627-642; Garza, Alejandro González, and Diego Zavala Scherer. "Mundos utópicos y distópicos: el progreso y la ciencia como síntomas modernos en el cine mexicano de ciencias ficción/Utopian and Dystopian Worlds: Science and Progress as Modern Symptoms in Mexican Sci-Fi Films (2002-2012)." *Secuencias* 38.

troubling, and uncannily familiar future to take shape?” (Rivera 294, emphasis in original). She posits that the near futures can be better apprehended by understanding “how histories of...colonial and neo-colonial relations of power have provided and continue to provide the material conditions of this future” (294). In the film, the Mexican-United States border ecosystem is presented as a palimpsest of centuries of colonialism and imperialism, and to understand it in the present of the film one must understand the traces left from the past. As Rivera states,

borderlands sf writers defamiliarize borderlands topographies, both social and political, to provoke a prolonged and deeper consideration of the devastating human and environmental tolls of neoliberal economic hegemony, the communications technologies that accelerate it, and the impoverished border communities that are forced to live under its so-called invisible hands. 417

In other words, the setting we see is born out of the existing material conditions created by neoliberalism (and capitalism as a whole). Similarly, although Guatemala doesn't share a border with the United States, it certainly bears traces like those the U.S. left through decades of imperialism in the country after their independence from Spain. Furthermore, the reach of the Quisyan in *Tikal futura* means that Guatemala does in fact, in the realm of the narrative, share a border with the Quisyan (Yankees). While this doesn't reflect our current geopolitical reality, the role of United Statesian capital investment in many countries doubles as a business investment and extension of government, Chiquita Banana/United Fruit Co. perhaps being the most well-known example of this dynamic in Central America. These sorts of speculative future science fiction work best when we see our own world in them, as both works exhibit.

Rivera's observations regarding borderlands science fiction indeed illuminate several aspects that are vital to the narratives in these two stories. *Tikal futura* shares its title with a shopping mall complex in the zona 11 of Guatemala City, Tikal Futura. Inside are shopping centers, movie theaters, restaurants, offices, and the luxury Grand Hotel Tikal Futura. More recently in Guatemala, Dr. Richard Hansen, an anthropologist from the University of Utah, has worked with Senator Inhofe of Oklahoma to push Bill S.3131 through the US Senate, which would create a Maya Conservation and Security Partnership program in the Mirador-Calakmul Basin, where the Tikal site is located (Inhofe). In the country, Hansen is also pushing for classification change of the area from a biological reserve to a wilderness area, which would allow him to fulfill his "extreme economic vision for tourism—a Maya 'Disney' type park, in the middle of nowhere without roads or airstrips, just a train" (Clipston), a project which would not only invite the United States back into Central America, but would alter a protected landscape and displace thousands of people. The Plan Maya presented in the story works as a conglomeration of the two separate projects.

Sleep Dealer is much the same. A border wall cuts off the US from Mexico, as if the "Build the Wall" campaign promise platformed by many right-wing politicians in the United States in the 2010s had been fulfilled. The continued polarization between the upper and lower economic classes and disappearance of the Mexican middle class (as discussed in the previous chapter) has worsened, and NAFTA and USMCA-esque policies are still in effect, forcing many to migrate north to work in maquiladoras on the border. United-statesian companies have continued to privatize natural resources – water – not unlike the way Bechtel tried to privatize SEMAPA in Cochabamba, Bolivia in the late 90s. In this way, Del Rio stands as a sort of symbolic extension of the United States as both nation and as a villain in this film. We also see

this portrayed through television shows about drones flown via virtual reality from the United States blowing up “aqua-terrorists” in which Rudy himself features as a heroic protagonist protecting America’s water source.

This fits in with Jameson’s analysis of postmodern culture, that it is “the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror” (*Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* 5). Of the myriad examples of United-statesian aggression, drone strikes are one of the most recent and controversial ways the U.S. has shed blood on foreign soil. Since 2004, it is estimated that in Pakistan alone, the United States launched 414 different drone strikes, killing a total of between 2,366 – 3,702 deaths, of which around 700 are judged to have been civilians or cannot be categorized (“America’s Counterterrorism Wars”). These numbers vary source by source, and the discrepancies in the tracking of these numbers have raised various questions about the ethics of drone strikes (“Drone Warfare”). Overall, in the Middle East it is estimated that some 14,000 strikes have resulted in eight million deaths; of those, around 2,000 civilians (give or take 450 of them children) have been murdered by the United States. Using drones to protect United-statesian assets and natural resources that we demand access to is nothing new and could certainly continue well into the future as portrayed in *Sleep Dealer*.

It is these sorts of events and patterns that paint both narratives as dystopic science fiction. These “new” worlds aren’t new at all – as we have seen, they are merely extrapolations of our existing world. This future setting, or novum, is the “central imaginary novelty of any sf text, the source of the most important distinctions between the world of the tale and the world of the reader” (47), writes Istvan Csicsery-Ronay Jr in *The Seven Beauties of Science Fiction*. It

serves as the “‘narrative kernel’ from which the sf artist constructs a detailed imaginary alternative reality” (50). The creation of a novum (literally translated *New Thing*) is a “refreshment, not a rupture” of the world we live in – it’s how the author (artist, as Csicsery-Ronay Jr. puts it) or creator arrives at that novum that differs. There are two key components that remain the same in any new novum: physical-material novelty (change of material conditions of existence) and an ethical novelty (shifted ethics and morals) (56) born out of some innovation or discovery (60). These need not be always logical or explainable – they merely exist.

Although the abovementioned academic readings that, such as Rivera’s, classify *Sleepdealer* and *Tikkal Futura* in terms of genre illuminate important aspects of these two works, I contend that David Fisher’s approach, outlined in the 2009 book *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* enables a more nuanced interpretation of their underlying material conditions and structures of feeling. Fisher specifically cites *Children of Men* and *V for Vendetta* as poles of comparison for sets a Capitalist Realism dystopia apart from other iterations of dystopia; *Children of Men*, Fisher explains, displays a dystopic narrative unique “that...is specific to late capitalism” (*Capitalist Realism* 1), unlike *V for Vendetta*, which exhibits a “familiar totalitarian scenario routinely trotted out in cinematic dystopias” (*Capitalist Realism* 2). Other common dystopias are “exercises in...acts of imagination” that invoked natural disasters and major emergencies as pretexts for the extreme conditions. *Children of Men*, similar to the worlds of *Tikal futura* and *Sleep Dealers* “[seem] more like an extrapolation or exacerbation of ours than an alternative to it” (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* 2). We don’t have to reach to imagine the fictional worlds because they are dystopias “specific to late capitalism” (1). This is precisely what Fisher means when he writes about capitalist realism, which he situates “under the rubric of postmodernism as theorized by [Frederic] Jameson...I would want to argue that some of the

processes which Jameson described and analyzed have now become so aggravated and chronic that they have gone through a change in kind” (7). The future portrayed in *Children of Men* – and by extension *Tikal futura* and *Sleep Dealer* – is a neoliberal paradise, or what Fisher denominates a capitalist realism. Fisher explains that there is no public space left, and most definitely no state funded social programs or assistance. The state hasn’t withered away at all but has been stripped back “to its core military and police functions” (6) who the neoliberal depends upon to maintain the status quo, a trend that has been emerged time and time again⁹, ironically by the same neoliberals that “ideologically excoriate” (6) the state. Fisher cites Jameson and Žižek in that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism - this is the future imagined in *Sleep Dealer* and *Tikal futura*. They are living through the end of the world, but capitalism is far from finished.

Much like metamodernism has succeeded postmodernism as an accompanying cultural logic, I assert that capitalist realism has succeeded neoliberalism. It isn’t clear in Fisher’s analysis the division between capitalist realism and neoliberalism – in fact, he calls neoliberals “capitalist realists par excellence”, and notes that a capitalist realism derives its power from its ability to “subsume and consume all previous history” and can assign an economic value to any cultural object (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* 4). This sentiment, echoing Jameson’s discussion of the past as referent until it is erased “leaving us with nothing but texts” (Jameson 18), would support that capitalist realism is borne out of neoliberalism. Yet for Fisher, this realism seemingly serves as both economic system and cultural logic.

⁹ Fisher references the 2008 Mortgage Crisis and subsequent bailouts from the U.S. Federal government as a prime example of this.

Fisher gives three defining characteristics that separate capitalist realism from postmodernism. First, when Jameson wrote about postmodernism there were political alternatives to capitalism (if in theory only), whereas now we are plagued by “cultural and political sterility” (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* 7); next, postmodernism dialogued with modernism, if only to push back against it, but capitalist realism only cares for modernity to resurrect it for aesthetic purposes; and last, “a whole generation has passed since the collapse of the Berlin Wall” (8). There are no alternatives to capitalism, and there is nothing that capitalism hasn’t consumed. Citing Jameson, Fisher states that if under postmodernism capitalism had seeped into the unconscious, “now...capitalism has colonized the dreaming life of the population...” (8). Additionally, capitalist realism employs postmodern irony to seduce us into believing that it is protecting us from “terror and totalitarianism”, when in reality the realism is equivalent to a tool to convince anyone that “any positive state, any hope, is a dangerous illusion” (5). So, even though Fisher states that his analysis can still be subsumed under Jameson’s postmodernism, I consider it to be a chronological successor and current system under which we all operate, as do the futures created in *Tikal futura* and *Sleep Dealer*, and parallel Fisher in establishing capitalist realism as postmodernism (and neoliberalism) but aggravated and chronic (his terms), or as I would say, accelerated and exponentially intensified.

Fisher’s book was published in 2009 and is novel in its description and diagnosis of the cultural austerity, stagnancy, and malaise of the moment that still resonates today. However, I would disagree with the characterization of capitalist realism as something that emerged in a post-Berlin Wall era. Instead, I contend that in Latin America, a version of capitalist realism has existed since the Conquista, and “progress” or “modernization” are mitigated through the region’s interactions with the United States and the West. Galeano writes that the success and

wealth of the modern world has been constructed on the exploitation of Latin America (this same line of reasoning could potentially be applied to the colonization of Africa or southeast Asia, given the colonization in both regions). If we take Galeano's reasoning, we can see characteristics similar to those expressed by Fisher.

For one, cultural and political sterility. The United States has long peddled the notion that progress is only available through their capital, and under Spanish rule (or Portuguese, or French, or British, or Dutch), there was no other option than colonization, where "production methods and class structure" in Latin America were determined externally by "meshing it into the universal gearbox of capitalism" (Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America* 2). Already existing gaps between classes were exacerbated by imperialism, a system that "rests on the necessary inequality of its parts" (3). The ruling classes in Latin America, who benefit most from the imperial or colonial state, have mortgaged their sovereignty to international capital because "there's no other way" (4), no alternative to progress than to sacrifice autonomy and sovereignty to capitalism.

Next, anything can be commodified for aesthetic purposes, as Fisher suggests capitalist realism does. Take, for instance, juxtaposed scenes from Pamela Yates' 1983 documentary *When the Mountains Tremble*. The Miss Guatemala pageant (a very Western event), featuring contestants from each of Guatemala's departments, take the stage in the latest Western fashion; one-piece swimsuits, Levi's, evening gowns and tiaras, while attendees in black tie formal wear applaud from the crowd. Then, the contestants are paraded out in their departments' traditional indigenous vestments' as they explain traditional indigenous customs or symbolism from their respective communities. This scene ends with a hard cut and transitions to an interview with an indigenous woman who states "El gobierno nos utiliza [referencing indigenous peoples] cuando

miraba que lleva a favor de sus intereses” (*When the Mountains Tremble*). She further explains that they would station people in indigenous dress in parks so that people could pay to see them, as if they were zoo animals. After other scenes we see indigenous people digging through trash at a landfill, some with babies strapped to their backs, searching for anything that may be useful. These two scenes – the pageant and the landfill – serve to blatantly expose the cruel dichotomy of indigenous existence, which is to serve as an aesthetic and commodity when convenient and cheap, exploitable labor force the rest of the time.

Lastly, there is no generation that knows anything other than colonization and imperialism. My generation was born post-Berlin Wall, and I fit into Fisher’s proposed chronology of a capitalist realism. While some isolated anti-capitalist or anti-imperial projects exist(ed), like Allende’s Chile, Castro’s Cuba, Chavista Venezuela, or MAS in Bolivia, they are never considered viable alternatives and constantly criticized or acted upon by the United States in an effort to bring them down. Pinochet’s 1973 CIA backed coup in Chile, the 2019 coup in Bolivia or Juan Guaidó’s farcical claims to presidency in Venezuela are examples of this. But nobody in Latin America since 1492 has known a world that isn’t colonized – or, to build into Keme’s argument, known a world that isn’t *America*, a world that hasn’t been determined by outside forces.

Thus, while Fisher’s proposal of a capitalist realism is certainly helpful as it provides a framework by which we can easily examine the current moment, it is nothing novel in Latin America and is another iteration of the pattern established some 500 years ago. I employ it here as it fits chronologically in our current cultural and economic moment.

In the next section of this chapter, I focus on material examples of oppression and resistance in the two narratives, specifically in regard to indigenous peoples, cultural practices

and artifacts. In other words, I analyze the texts' portrayal of the capitalist, imperial, settler colonial West trying to kill Abiyala, and the ways in which the actions of various characters fit Keme's call to recenter Abiyala as a "political project and locus of enunciation" (56) against colonizing hegemonic powers so that the Americas die.

Material Aspects of Settler Colonialism, Imperialism, and Oppression of Indigenous Peoples

There are two commonalities in how oppression is shown in both *Tikal futura* and *Sleep Dealer* that I will address first before turning to each narrative individually. The most glaring example of the capitalist, extractivist imperialism is what resource the colonizers are depleting – the people themselves. In his explication of the labor and valorization process, Marx lists three elements of the labor process: "1) work itself, 2) the object on which that work is performed, and 3) the instruments of that work" (Marx et al. 284). The latter two can be categorized as "raw material" and "instrument of labour (*sic*)" (284–85) – the commodity being extracted or produced, and the thing or person producing it. Using Marx's own wool coat example, the wool is a raw material that is spun, turned into yarn or fabric, and sewn into a coat by a worker who might use a machine, both examples of an instrument of labor. The commodity is imbued with use-value that transforms into exchange value, which helps generate a profit for the capitalist/colonizer. This worker is paid based on the hours of labor they produce, not by commodity produced, and by this manner the capitalist generates a surplus value. If the worker produces four coats in an hour, for which he is paid ten dollars (the same value as the coat), then has produced forty dollars' worth of labor but is compensated a quarter. In this way, the capitalist earns a profit whilst underpaying his laborers, exploiting them for their labor.

On a basic level, much of Latin America's colonial development is predicated on this simple system. Whether the raw material be mineral ore or cash crops, as was the mainly the case during the commencement of the colonizing invasion of the Americas, indigenous peoples were used as instruments of labor during this period (and still are today). This was not exclusive to Spanish colonies, nor was it limited to only indigenous laborers. Forced labor by enslaved and indentured peoples was common at the time as well. In whatever form it existed, with whichever raw material being sought, humans were the main instruments of labor. This resulted, as history has shown, in massive indigenous genocide and literal extermination of entire peoples, with causes ranging from poor living and working conditions to transmitted diseases and outright murder. When Spanish colonization ended, this was picked up and intensified under the banner of the United States and the West at large. And, although conditions were supposed to have been improved through human rights campaigns, organizing efforts of labor unions, and intermediation on behalf of indigenous and enslaved peoples, the system largely remained the same, except instead of iron chains, the chains were foreign investments through the IMF and heavy handed, United-statesian influenced interventions from the Organization of American States.

A worthwhile example for comparison is *The Wave*, as this system is exemplified beautifully by the film. *The Wave* is the story of a group of fishermen who work for a single capitalist. They are paid according to the total weight of fish caught, and these fish are sold at a high margin in the city. Fish is the raw material, and the boats, nets, and workers are the instruments. The workers' wage is a pittance compared to the profit earned. They can't afford food or necessities due to low wages; they live in houses they piece together out of old aluminum, spare driftwood, and palm frond thatched roofs; hence they believe that they are in no

position to challenge the capitalist. Here is the reiteration of Marx's teachings – wage-laborers (instruments of labor) are underpaid for their labor (catching fish, the raw material) to the benefit of the capitalist, who pockets the surplus produced from this exploitation. All that matters to the boss is his profit (*Redes*).

In both *Tikal futura* and *Sleep Dealer*, this Marxian system is altered. No longer are people only instruments of labor, but they are now *both* instruments *and* raw materials. In the case of Memo, the robot avatars used to work on the U.S. side of the border directly consume the life force of those controlling them, from where the term sleep dealer emerges – if you stay connected for too long, you end up in a coma. Other dangerous complications can result in the maiming or death of employees, who are tempted because of the high pay. So, although it is unclear if the life force powers the robot avatars, it is obvious that the work drains it from the workers, making their lives a raw material, while they (and their avatars) are instruments of labor.

Tikal futura displays two ways in which we see this alteration. First, the “Safari sex tours”, where the poor people forced to play the roles of guerilla fighters are providing the commodity (the experience of battle and war) as instruments of labor as they are killed. They are seen as expendable and interchangeable, meaning that they are objects of labor (which can be raw materials), giving their lives for a wage if they are able to survive. In a similar vein, the sex workers (instruments of labor, as they provide pleasure/sexual experience) are used as objects of labor (the body upon which the sex act is performed) themselves in the commodity of a sexual experience.

There is also the case of mind-monitoring that keeps residents of Abajo in check. By implanting a chip in their heads that scrutinizes every word they say, everything they see and

hear, and keeps track of their location, they are never off the clock. The companies they work for control their lives, not allowing any time off or breaks. Anybody who has disabled or removed these chips and lived is a social outcast, living in the fringes as a social stratum lower than those in Abajo. There is no private life anymore, no eight-hour workday, nor limits to how much you can work. Much like their indigenous ancestors, they are worked to death. While the work itself may not consume their life force directly, there is no aspect of their life that isn't commodified and manufactured. This may not make them an object of labor or raw material but being a permanent instrument of labor is their identity – they are consumed by capital, meaning their life force now belongs to the colonizers in Quisyan.

This brings us to our second similarity between the works – the reordering of space to further entrench the material reality of oppression. This can be found in representations of geopolitical space, like in *Sleep Dealer* where it is horizontal, across political borders, or urban spaces, like in *Tikal futura*, where it is vertical, creating literal class divisions that cannot be breached in any way. Sarah Ann Wells explains this as a trope of postmodern (she uses the phrase “post-Fordist”) science fiction in the depiction of capital as increasingly mobile while labor becomes immobile (Wells). She further argues that the construction of vertical paradigms with upper and lower worlds such as those displayed in classics like *Blade Runner*, *The Matrix*, *Elysium*, and *Tikal futura* “perhaps [suggest] a residual understanding of or even desire for a totalizable hierarchy, even in the face of virtual, invisible, or rapidly mutating forces of capital” (74). This explanation certainly correlates to Arriba, Abajo, and what I would call either “más abajo” or “afuera”, like those in the ERLCIA.

Border narratives, she continues, “tend to challenge this high-low spatial metaphor, positing instead a horizontal world that speaks to capital’s multinational character. Here the

division is not between upper and lower worlds but *across* spaces whose interdependence is as pronounced as their inequalities” (74). The post-Fordist, postmodern, cognitive-capitalist United States still needs the modernist, mechanistic assembly lines in Mexico – in fact, it “thrives upon it” (75) - it just doesn’t want to see them. Two distinct but interrelated temporalities exist in tandem, where “labor is both mind-numbing Fordist factory and postmodernist flexible virtuality” (77) – the First World existing in the Third, and the Third in the First. This calls to mind Marx’s description of commodity fetishism, further alienating consumers from the conditions in which their commodities are produced, nor do they care to know.

In either case, the restructuring of physical space is a tool used by the capitalists, the colonizers, imperialists – call them what you will – to maintain control over the labor force that generates them money and profit without having to physically interact with the same. There is some technological mitigation – the nodes or the brain chips – that aid in exerting control, extending the upper into the lower, but nothing to counter that by forcing the lower into the upper. That is the end goal of this oppression – to nail labor down into place while allowing capital all the freedom it desires.

We also see how political borders are changed or rendered useless by business and capital. Today, the Tohono O’odham tribe lives on their traditional land in Southern Arizona and Northern Sonora, which has been bisected by the United States-Mexico border (Santosfeb). For much of Westward Expansion and into the 21st century, their land was taken and used by ranchers, as well as having an international border imposed on their land, of which they are no longer sovereign (through no fault of their own). These practices and political borders disrupt their way of life. To use traditional nomadic migration patterns they are forced through Border Patrol checkpoints *on their own ancestral land* to cross into what is modern Mexico. Access to

water, only 100 yards across the border, is cutoff, forced one rancher to drive four miles to get water from a well on the U.S. side of the border. Pilgrimage for ceremonies or to visit grave sites is restricted as well, and there is fear that border fortifications could either cut their land in half or leave them in a gap in the wall, funneling drug and human traffickers through their towns (NYT article).

Both *Sleep Dealer* and *Tikal futura* have similarities in how geopolitical borders – the fortified borders on the Del Rio privatized water supply or the border wall that immobilizes labor in *Sleep Dealer*, and the subsumption of all North America into Quisyan for ease of consumption in *Tikal futura* – are more examples of how cases like those of the Tohono O’odham will become more the rule than the norm as the Americas continue to oppress and snuff out Abiyala.

Suppression of hybrid and mestizo subjectivities and accumulation by dispossession under NAFTA in *Sleep Dealer*

We see in *Sleep Dealer* different material forms of oppression – privatization of natural resources and land, the maquila industry at large, and repressive state apparatuses (both local and foreign), for example – that can be explained by an analysis of *mestizidad* and the creation of a *mestizo* identity in post-revolutionary Mexico. Going back to the early 20th century what would become the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) consolidated power after the Mexican Revolution and set about to create a new sense of Mexican national identity. They needed to undo the elitist and hierarchical social strata left by the government of Porfirio Díaz and reinvent what “Mexican” meant and make it more inclusive. Inclusive has two meanings here: not only was this new national identity supposed to be all-encompassing regarding who was to be considered Mexican, forging a new *mestizo* image of Mexico, but also in the myriad ways that the government approached this attempt at nation building, employing music, film, mural

painting, and even food to their ends (López; Mraz). This traditional Mexican identity found its basis in a *mestizo* heritage and placed agricultural production at the forefront of the economy. The term *mestizo* began as a racializing term in Spain's slave markets but took on new meaning in colonial Mexico to describe anyone who was of Peninsular and Indigenous descent. *Mestizo* was, in effect, hybridity of different races and ethnicities extant in the same body.

This hybridity extended to everything in Mexico, especially as they sought a place on the global market. They (the new government) wanted to inject traditional agricultural production with new technologies, create factory jobs, immunize their citizens, and ideally speak Spanish; they had to *be* modern to *achieve* modernity (Dalton 4–5). This modern utopia is especially evident in the murals of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who “strove to produce a culturally hybrid aesthetic that would promote mestizaje by fusing the latest styles of European art...with techniques and colors used in pre-Columbian murals” (Dalton 61). This was in order to exalt “statist ideals of racial hybridity and modernity” (61).

One particular mural painted by Roberto Cueva del Rio, which hangs in the Mexican Cultural Institute of Washington, D.C, portrays in a more specific manner his own grandiose view of hybrid modernity as it presents us with the wider vision of how it fit into Mexico of that time. Titled *Industrial Mexico*, it shows a road lined on both sides with farmers in a military-like formation (2012). Instead of lances or weapons, they are hoisting either corn stalks or rakes. The land around them is all farmed land, and it extends off into the distance where it eventually runs into a city, with chimneys billowing smoke. Tractors that look like tanks are driving into the city, and planes are flying overhead. This mural, along with others located in Mexico's Ministry of Education “link the rise of industry – represented by the factories and smoking chimneys – with the triumph of the revolution in both Mexico and Russia” by showing the pairing of the

agricultural and the technological in play with the political “as a powerful force that would lead humankind to a better future and would advance the goals of socialism by producing a kinder society where all men and women...would live together in harmony and peace, united by the common goal of building a better world” (Gallo 6–7).

However, the (perhaps intended) byproduct of creating a mestizo identity was that any particular trait or characteristic that could not be assimilated was suppressed and erased. Memo and his father become stand-ins for the “traditional” way of doing things (milpa farming) and a turn towards a new, hybrid modern future. His father dresses in campesino clothing and farms as his family has always done; Memo dresses in more “modern” fashion and is interested in electronics, having built a HAM-style radio from scratch. In fact, their milpa is one of the first images of the film, where we see Memo assisting his father Miguel in watering the mostly mature crop of maize. Memo asks Miguel why they still live in Santa Ana and why they haven’t left like most others who didn’t see a future in staying. His father responds with a question: “¿Crees que nuestro futuro pertenezca al pasado?” When Memo laughs, Miguel continues by proclaiming, as he points at the earth, “Tuvimos un futuro; estás parado en él. Cuando obstruyeron el río, cortaron nuestro futuro”. By cutting off the water, Del Rio has both literally and symbolically killed off crops and people. Memo makes this connection himself, stating “Me estaba derramando la energía y mandándola lejos. Lo que pasó al río me estaba pasando a mí.” He recognized that, like the river – symbolic of life force – he was being consumed by capitalism.

In a larger sense, what we see represented by the film is the death of milpa and those who farm it. *Milpa* functions as system of agriculture common in meso-America, from the southern United States southward throughout Central America. While it varied in its many iterations, in

Mexico it tended to consist of maize (corn), beans, squash, and sometimes chili peppers grown on the same plot of land. These plots were left fallow for long stretches before being farmed for short times, maintaining a healthy and productive soil while producing the basis of the Mayan and Aztec diet. This tie to indigenous heritage was another component of the PRI's vision of *mestizaje*: it also embodied the economic vision for the country as conceived during the revolution and the reconstruction thereafter, emphasizing agricultural production – especially of corn – as a primary source of work and subsistence. Keme notes that “the idea of citizenship endorsed by the state through narratives of *mestizaje* or ‘blood quantum’ only aims to erase our [indigenous peoples] millenarian origins” (53 emphasis in original). By killing the milpa, one takes away from the notion of hybridity that is supposed to have been part of *mestizaje* and kills the less exploitable side – the indigenous side.

The powers that be aren't just killing off people and communities by way of manufactured drought. They are also murdering them by way of drones, piloted from the United States, in defense of the Del Rio water supply against so called “aqua-terrorists”. These drone attacks are turned into a television program that is broadcast across the United States and Mexico. While using his homemade receiver one day, Memo accidentally tunes into a channel where Rudy, a drone pilot, and his colleagues are communicating. Upon detecting the hack, the defense company tags the foreign signal as evidence of aqua-terrorists and sends drones to attack Memo's house. Sadly, Memo's family is watching the program, and he recognizes that it is their house that is being targeted. He makes it out, but watches his father die as the house is destroyed.

This is what Fisher meant when he said that the state had been stripped back to essential military and policing functions. It is unclear if the drone company is run by the government or not, but either way we see that the upper classes – those who own the resources – are not

interested in protecting people with their enforcement agencies but protecting the resources from the masses. Their desire to accumulate wealth means consuming all that stands in their way, whether they can buy it or not. We see current trends in extractive imperial industries, like mining or oil, wherein private entities become governmental agencies that operate with total impunity and disregard for those whose lands they invade.

Indigenous peoples make up about 5% of the world population, they have claim to over 20% of the land and resources on the globe (Gedicks). In the mining world, it is estimated that in the next 20 years over half of resources mined will come from indigenous land (Gedicks 131), a statistic that is worrying especially considering that this land will most likely be taken by unscrupulous methods from its indigenous stewards because “[e]ven where indigenous peoples have legal title to their lands, Latin American states often grant mining concessions without consulting the indigenous community” due to the fact that most nation states claim right of ownership of any subsoil resources, like oil and minerals. In essence – anything that is on the immediate surface belongs to the indigenous peoples that reside there, but anything under that does not.

Further compounding this absurd practice is the manner by which business assumes the roles of polis in the areas where they operate. Peter Larsen, in his 2017 article “Oil territorialities, social life, and legitimacy in the Peruvian Amazon”, argues that as oil companies move into spaces granted them by the governments, these operations “encompass a set of social, cultural, economic, and political relations and negotiations far more complex than well beyond the legal status of an oil concession” (51) and that these “practices involve subtle governance shifts from public to private, from citizenship to contractuality, and from environmental regulation to environmentality in an attempt to build legitimacy around the neoliberal

conditions” (51). The author further argues that these trends indicate a shift towards a “‘postfrontier’ approach” to state and business relations. Del Rio presents as a cementing of these practices in the future – they operate in all the ways a polis operates, complete with repressive and ideological state apparatuses (the drones and the television program, respectively). They become the state because the state itself cedes total control to them. Indigenous peoples who dwell on and work these lands now are beholden to private business, who view them as no more than sources of income and workforce. As corporations take their land, their resources, their money, and in the Rodriguez’s case, their lives, they are further replacing Abiyala with America.

Memo leaves for Tijuana to find a job. En route, he crosses paths with Luz, a reporter. He notices nodes on her wrist. These nodes function as connection ports on a computer or television, allowing her to be plugged into by cables and wires. The catchphrase for these nodes, mentioned earlier in the film, is “¡Tu A.D.N. es tu password!”. Luz takes him to a “coyotek”, a play on the term *coyote*, someone who leads undocumented migrants across the U.S./Mexico border. His first experience goes poorly, as he is robbed and flees the area. Luz, whose ex-boyfriend had been a coyotek, ends up installing them for him. After they are placed, Memo’s reaction is “Por fin puedo conectar mi sistema nervioso a otro sistema...a la economía global.” These nodes are necessary to work in the “sleep dealers”, maquiladoras that use workers’ nodes to connect them with robot avatars on the other side of the border and, as discussed, these connections are incredibly draining and harmful to the workers, who become cyborgs as they now are part machine.

The post revolution period championed progress by way of hybridity, not only in methods of production but in their people. Mestizaje meant the Westernization of indigenous

peoples, the combining of traditional and “modern” methods and practices to progress as a society. Liberalism and positivism were supposed to bring about advancement and inclusion, with science and technology leading the way. Foreign investment led to cash crops and infrastructure, owned by the investor, and the exploitation of mestizo and indigenous peoples in the growth, harvest, and cultivation of these crop (Carmack et al. 263). A process not specific to Mexico, Rigoberta Menchú Tum’s account of indigenous exploitation in Guatemala details this process in all its horror. Mexico was a top exporter of corn in the world, and there were protections in place to protect communal lands and those that lived on them, producing commodity that could be exported.

These capitalist practices intensified when neoliberalism was adopted wholeheartedly during the Salinas de Gortari presidency, and later with the passing of NAFTA in 1994 during Zedillo’s sexennial. The economic situation of agrarian communities, specifically those who grew corn in Mexico, were slowly deteriorating while there was a rise in the number of *maquiladoras* (Henriques and Patel 2004). The privatization of agricultural land and the dismantlement of the ejido system (as discussed in chapter 2) led to massive immigration to border cities and urban areas for work. More and more people left their fields and their crops, much like Memo’s neighbors had, and went to work in the maquilas. There, taking imported objects, they process them and then ship them back to their country of origin, most likely for sale. But, because the objects are not for sale in Mexico, these companies avoid tariffs, and the factories in Mexico often pay low wages for these services (Gruben and Kiser 2001). The sleep dealer in which Memo works is a futuristic version of current maquiladoras, an intensification of the maquiladora industry.

Now, in the film, we have a different form of hybridity and mestizaje: cyborg. The name of the maquiladora, Cybraceros, a word that itself is a hybrid (cyber braceros). These maquiladoras model their labor after the bracero programs that began in the the 1940's United States, allowing Mexican men to come over and work on short term contracts for guaranteed wages. While this program changed over the years, what is certain that the United States has long depended on – and would fail without – labor from immigrants. At the moment, it is estimated that around 70% of farm workers in the United States are immigrants, and 50% of farm workers are undocumented (FWD). The presence of undocumented migrants was (and still is) one of the principal reasons why the political Right in the United States pushes so hard to build a wall – to keep them out. Xenophobic theories, like The Great Replacement (which the 2020 El Paso Walmart shooter cited as one of his reasons for his actions), fuel these efforts, which have come to fruition in the novum. That way, there are no undocumented immigrants in the United States and, as a factory foreman puts it in the film, "Le damos a los Estados Unidos lo que siempre han querido: todo el trabajo sin los trabajadores" (Sleep Dealer).

Before he embarked on making *Sleep Dealer*, Rivera worked on an artistic project called "Cybracero Systems". It was a fake high-tech corporation that had testimonials, pictures, mission statements, etc., which "claimed to have pioneered a new technology in order to allow employers to extract all the labor without having to deal with the presence and the problems of workers from the south" (Martín-Cabrera 590). It drew requests from real companies in the United States asking for workers, and a newspaper even wrote a report contemplating the viability of the business (590). Luis Martin Cabrera writes that these sort of responses

suggest that the capitalist unconscious is driven...by white supremacist fantasies built around the possibility of extracting a maximum of labor from workers of color without

having to deal with the materiality of their bodies, their rights, their culture, and above all, their presence. 590

Not only does this business keep immigrants out of the United States, but it also keeps the consequences out of sight of the United Statesian public. They don't see the maimed, blinded former workers that populate the shanty town around Tijuana. In an effort to become modern, to "plug into the global economy", as Memo put it, Mexico sold its indigenous soul. In permitting foreign investors and foreign capital to come and privatize indigenous land and resources, to force migrations to cities and factories where they can exploit indigenous labor and kill Abiyala to make room for the Americas, same as they always have.

Exploitation and Effacement of Indigenous Peoples and Cultural Production as Oppression in *Tikal futura*

In *Tikal futura*, the settler colonial oppression is an intensified exploitation of indigenous peoples that imperial powers have employed since the Spanish invasion of Abiyala. The capitalist practices from one of the main characters, Sr. Apocalíptico, and his boss Señor Klimowitz, are new iterations of the Banana republics and labor practices of the 20th century (like those during the internal conflict) and total political and social sterility through mind control that specifically targets any thoughts or actions related to the populace's Mayan heritage. In this way, they are killing the Mayan people and Abiyala by suppressing their Mayan identity while simultaneously (and incredibly hypocritically) using these same people as stand-in's for guerrilleros and as sex workers *because they are Mayan*.

This oppression is made possible, as I've established, by resurrecting modernity solely for aesthetic purposes. This is precisely what I mean when I say capitalist realism is postmodernism intensified. The business plan presented by the Señor Apocalíptico to the

Quisyan representative, which he names “la Ruta Maya” (Galich 109), revolves around this concept, building a major tourist destination with the goal to “[volver] a crear las condiciones de aquella insurrección [the internal conflict in Guatemala] y luego vienen los turistas que quieren y hacen una...safari para cazarlos” (109). In Jameson’s words, “the producers of culture have nowhere to turn but the past: the imitation of dead styles...” (Jameson 17–18).

Where postmodernism cherry picked from past aesthetics and styles to commodify them, what Apocalíptico proposes here is to kidnap citizens of Abajo and force them to become fake guerrilla fighters that are given facsimiles of guns and let loose to be hunted like wild animals to sell a Cold War aesthetic. The experience is what is for sale; people are merely collateral damage. This would later expand to include forcing kidnapped women into sex work as part of the “tours safari-sex” (137), as we’ve discussed prior.

If dystopic capitalist realism is extrapolated from our past or present, as Fisher suggests, this business plan most certainly reflects what were the banana republics. Foreign investors, like United Fruit Co. (of which John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State to Eisenhower and brother of CIA director Allen Dulles, was on the board of directors) used their capital and connections in the upper class of Guatemalan government and society to protect their economic interests in the country (LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions* 77–80, 119–27). This meant displacing, arresting or killing any who they perceived to be a threat; in the global context of the time, that meant communists and socialists.

All this effort is spent to resurrect the cultural logic of the Cold War but not the Cold War itself. Their goal is to make a profit off the experience of the aesthetic and event itself. If at the time Fisher wrote *Capitalist Realism* we were 20 years removed from the fall of the Berlin Wall and it currently appears as if there is no alternative, today, in 2022, in the 23rd century when

Tikal futura is set there is most certainly no apparent alternative. In fact, Klimowitz and Apocalíptico consider any ideology other than neoliberal capitalism – more specifically, capitalist realism –passé and “formas equivocadas del pensamiento de la modernidad primitiva” (Galich 52), contrarian to the best interests of their own ruling class.

We must also consider the use of *Tikal futura* as the title of the book as a reference to contemporary Guatemala City and how the capitalist classes use indigenous aesthetic to market an experience, much like Klimowitz and Apocalíptico do and the real world shopping center of the same name. In 1997, the Grand Tikal Futura opened in Guatemala City. It was constructed in Zona 1, the city’s historic center, on la sexta, the main avenue in the zone that at the beginning of the 20th century was “the city’s most luxurious strip” (Way 13) as part of an urban remodeling project to return the area to its former glory and luxury. Towards the end of the century, it had become an area known for street vendors selling knock offs, the unhoused, cantinas and porn theaters that was a popular shopping and entertainment area for lower- and middle-class families during daylight hours, but at night was deserted.

When J.T. Way, author of *The Mayan in the Mall*, asked one rich businessman why the area was avoided, the man merely gestured towards the vendors and said “Them.” Implicit in his answer “them” was the fact that the populace that frequented the area were Mayans, who make up a large portion of the lower- and working classes in the Guatemalan capital. Way writes,

Many of the postmodern planners who were clamoring to remake the district...overlook[ed] the culture and commerce of the “popular class” [read; Mayan], envisioning instead a future exemplified by Grand Tikal Futura. Theirs is a first-world future that effaces the local and enshrines the global. 14

In other words, the upper-class elite were more than willing to displace hundreds and thousands of indigenous peoples that dwelt in the area, restructure entire systems of production that these residents depended on, and reshape the economic landscape of the city to the detriment of those affected to put in a hotel designed to attract travelers from abroad who could afford 5-star luxuries, appropriating the name Tikal as they erased all traces of indigeneity from the area.

Way's description of the planners as "postmodern," and the case of the Tikal Futura in itself, bears echoes of Jameson's analysis of the postmodern condition. By employing Guatemalan indigenous past as a branding tool, the developers have turned to the cultural graveyard of the past and in an "imitation of dead styles, speech through all the masks and voices stored up in the imaginary museum of a now global culture" and "cannibalize[d]...styles of the past and combine[d] them in overstimulating ensembles" (Jameson 18–19). The architects incorporated "elementos de la cultura maya precolombina tales como los motivos animales, las estructuras piramidales y la utilización del jade" (María del Carmen Caña Jiménez 70) in the construction and design of the building, covering it in mirrors to reflect the city around it.

Much like Jameson's analysis of nostalgia films, this "callback" to Guatemala's past is not a "'representation' of historical context, but instead approach[e]s the 'past' through stylistic connotation, conveying 'pastness' by the glossy quality of the image..." (Jameson 19). Tikal Futura was designed to represent a step forward into the 21st century while embracing an indigenous history, a metaphorical space where a transnational capitalist future and proud, indigenous past could coexist at the same time. To achieve this, the architects employed modernist architectural designs to house a postmodern shrine to consumerism. If we turn to Jameson, we are to understand this as the imitation or cannibalism of a dead style akin to

pastiche, a “neutral practice of...mimicry” (Jameson 17); a simple job of aesthetic copy/paste, a superficial reproduction, basic simulacra.

However, some have suggested that this reproduction is not neutral mimicry, but instead serves a larger purpose. Caña Jiménez suggests that the “asignación del nombre maya a una construcción que se erige como ícono moderno de la ciudad podría leerse como un intento por inyectar en este espacio...el espíritu de la tradición del sitio maya precolombino” (70). Way outlines the manner in which Mayan themes were appropriated as marketing tools as early as 1917, with the elite media publication *Patria Nueva* portraying “the Mayan Woman as the harbinger of a modern era” (Way 17), while more contemporary marketing takes advantage of Mayan spirituality as a tourist attraction, paying for shamanic healing or training (18). In essence, what is being used to attract business is, like with Tikal Futura, an attempt to inject a spirit of tradition into these spaces. Instead, what occurs is not dissimilar to how the Miss Guatemala beauty pageant used indigeneity in Yates’ *When the Mountains Tremble* – the upper classes use indigenous aesthetics and presence to market a commodity that displaces indigenous communities, exploits indigenous labor, and passes along no earnings or profits to the communities they oppress.

Like in *Sleep Dealer*, there is a belief that modernization – plugging into the global economy – comes through hybridity. Injecting a Mayan spirit into a shrine to neoliberalism, as was done with Grand Tikal Futura, in theory sounds like a good way to connect a nation and peoples past and future. The material consequences negatively impact the peoples whose identity is being used as a marketing tool. We can contrast this with the case of la Ruta Maya, Klimowitz’s project, and a literal effacement of Mayans. As Apocalíptico explains to Klimowitz his plan for his project called Tikal Futura, he explains that it is named after the “mítica ciudad

de los primitivos mayas” (Galich 37). He wants to build giant hotel complex replete with amenities and attractions, save two – “la selva y...la granja” (37) and connect it all with superhighways that rise up over the cities so that “para nada tengan que entrar en contacto ;ni visual! con la gente de Villa Miseria” (37), the other name for Ciudad Abajo.

Klimowitz inquires “¿Putá Maya? ¿Qué ser eso de Maya?” (42), Apocalíptico explains that “los mayas fueron una cultura extraordinaria de hace miles de años que vivieron en esas que tierras que ahora es Cuahutemallán” (42), using the Nahuatl name from which Guatemala was derived, another example of the exploitation of indigeneity. Klimowitz rebuffs him, saying that the “Los únicos extraordinarios ser nosotros, los quisyan.” When Apocalíptico tries to couch his agreement with Klimowitz by clarifying that the “mayas fueron los [extraordinarios] de antes” and the Quisyan were the extraordinary people of now, Klimowitz responds “¡No!, ni de antes ni de nunca. Nosotros [the quisyan] somos los [extraordinarios] de siempre, antes, ahora y después...” (42).

This is further exposed as Apocalíptico continues explaining the guerrilla hunting expeditions. He asks Klimowitz if he remembers guerrilla warriors, small, poorly armed military forces that were able to defeat larger ones. Klimowitz, in similar fashion as before, says that these must have existed a long time ago because “nuestro ejército ser el único y más fuerte del mundo” (51). Apocalíptico elucidates that these guerrillas were communists who fought against “la única forma correcta de pensar: el capitalismo neoliberal” (52). Apocalíptico categorizes both communism and neoliberal capitalism as “forma obsoleta...de pensar y actuar”, which signals to us that they have moved on to something more extreme than neoliberal capitalism, which I argue is capitalist realism.

When Apocalíptico continues explaining that the Mayans lived in the forests of Yucatán and Petén, Klimowitz retorts that while they were living in forests, the Quisyan were living in cities like New York and never lived in forests. Fisher, building on Jameson's description of postmodern temporality, explains that capitalist realism allows subjects to dwell in a 'continuous present', as Klimowitz does, in which subjects lack a narrative memory but retain a formal memory that is made up of "techniques, practices, [and] actions" (Fisher, *Capitalist Realism* 60). Klimowitz, a capital realist par excellence, has no memory of anything but the present. He even says it himself, pronouncing to Apo, as Klimowitz calls him, "para qué contarme esas cosas macabras de muertos y torturados si a mí no importarme nada eso del pasado" (Galich 53). However, he lives in a state of constant nostalgia for a colonialist, imperial past, as evidenced by his racist characterization of the Mayans as savages and the Quisyan (white people) as civilized city dwellers. Any memory or historical reality that is inconsistent with the present he constructs is disregarded or entirely ignored so as to not create cognitive dissonance and challenge his view of the world. This is the sort of intensified postmodern condition that Fisher describes – the Quisyan have compartmentalized history to the point that the past and future don't matter.

This erasure and oppression extend into an effort to control and subjugate the indigenous people who will serve as the labor force for this eco-tourist destination. They plan to use people they kidnap from Abajo as the workforce to maintain this tourist's paradise as well as to populate their guerrilla experience. Apocalíptico explains that Abajo is from where they get all of their "personal reciclable" and that it's cheaper to use them than to make androids. Klimowitz raises the concern of safety, asking how they will control them – digging into his characterization of them as savages – and Apocalíptico tells him that they will use Opsin, a synthetic drug that has been developed by scientists in Arriba based on narcotics from the past. The docile nature

produced by Opsin is described as “algo un tanto similar a la alegría” and allows its users to “obtener plusfuerza” (33), seemingly a benefit to some of the workers to justify its use.

Opsin would also be distributed for “free” amongst the workers - its production would be financed by the same workers who used it. It wouldn’t be done through trickery or through deception, “en contra de la voluntad de los trabajadores” (44). Apocalíptico mentions that capitalist logic of the sort had been “la esencia y base del sistema productivo que los ha mantenido en la cúspide del poder” (44) during many years. While that had worked before, this time there wasn’t a need for it. The workers were aware that they were financing their own addictions.

The Opsin was only one method to control the workers – mind chips that could monitor what one said or did and even suggest safe topics of conversation. In Abajo, we are introduced to Abuela Cané, her teenage grandson Namú, and his girlfriend Ix. Namú is inquiring as to the existence of a God. As they are conversing, they are shocked and there is a voice that tells them “Tema prohibida, por ocioso. El Dios de ustedes no existe, ni las Cuevas de Chicomostoc, ni mucho menos ese cura. Ocúpense de cosas productivas, vean televisión. Único aviso. Después viene el castigo. Cambio y fuera” (27). On another occasion, Cané and Namú are discussing how Namú picks up double shifts so that Ix doesn’t have to work and be exposed to Opsin or do what thousands of other youth do – be exploited in sweatshops – when the same metallic voice chirps “¡Conversación prohibida! ¡Conversación prohibida! ¡Último aviso!” (33). Namú shouts angrily “De qué vamos a hablar si todo está prohibido”, to which the voice replies “Hable de los líderes de Ciudad de Arriba, hable del clima, el cual es soleado y muy radiante” (33), a suggestion made ironic due to the heavy pollution fog that rarely allows for glimpses of the sun.

Just there are physical limits, divisions, and boundaries, there now exist mental boundaries as well. The Quisyan and their pawns in Arriba have successfully colonized the consciousness of everyone that lives in Abajo, a more drastic interpretation of Fisher's commentary on the colonization of one's dreaming life. This is not the colonization of the subconscious or dreaming state; the Quisyan's monitoring system can interject and cause physical harm to a person based on their words, their actions, or what is in their field of vision. It seems expected that any topic that criticizes or undermines the (re)production of capitalism. However, that is only met with a verbal warning. The physical violence only comes when discussing Mayan theology and creation.

There are two boundaries to analyze in the short message from the control chip. First, the us/them distinction established by the use of the plural personal pronoun "ustedes": then the separation of the real/irreal regarding what God(s) are real or not. These lines demarcated by the chip directly contradict Klimowitz's declaration that the Mayans don't exist; by acknowledging that, as the chip says, "Your God doesn't exist", it is implied that Arriba and the Quisyan know that indigenous people do in fact exist and possess their own system of theological beliefs and mythology. The use of the possessive – your – and the deferential reference to God with a proper noun (something that is known to the reader, but not the character) indicate this to us as readers quite clearly. This is oppression that works to combat solely Mayan subjectivity. There is the mention of the Mayan God(s) and Nahua creation myth (cuevas de Chicomostoc).

There is evidence of Mayan mythology already in use through the use of the name Xibalba as a synonym for Ciudad Abajo. Xibalba was the name of the underworld in Mayan mythology and the home of the Gods of Death, namely Jun Kame (One Death) and Wuqub'

Kame (Seven Death)¹⁰. Xibalba, as used in the *Popul Wuj*, refers not only to the physical place but also those that dwell there. The references to the *Popul Wuj* indicate to us that the God that Ix, Namú and Abuela Cané mention is most likely Q'ukumatz, the Quetzal Serpent, often considered synonymous (although not entirely identical) with Kukulcan of Yucatec Maya traditions and Quetzalcoatl of Aztec mythology. Q'ukumatz is one of the Gods that creates the Earth and Man, central to the K'iche' cosmology.

The Chicomostoc (also spelled Chicomoztoc) Caves spoken of is an important part of Nahuatl creation mythology, being the cave from which Man first sprang forth. It is regarded as a fictional place with no physical location that was replicated in many different regions, meaning that many Chicomostoc's existed in various places (Aguilar et al 83). Although a primarily Nahuatl belief, it is not surprising that a Nahuatl tradition or word be expressed in a Mesoamerican context – as mentioned here, the name Guatemala comes from the Nahua word Cuahtemallan, and there is evidence of Nahua loan words in Mayan glyphs and lexicon, although the direction of lexical borrowing and frequency of this circumstance is debated (Macri andLooper 2003, Law). Linguistic discrepancies notwithstanding, it is generally accepted that there was contact between indigenous peoples in Abiyala before and after Spanish invasion, so the combining of traditional Maya and Nahua cosmologies is not unprecedented.

We have a God and a creation myth that are both specific to indigenous peoples from Abiyala that are said to not exist or be false. This purposeful erasure of Mayan subjectivity is a more pervasive form of oppression than any violence or extraction of natural resources; it depends on the cultural and political sterility that is bred by capitalist realisms, where the only god is profit and accumulation is “Moses and the prophets!” (Marx). The labeling of the topic as

¹⁰ All translations from K'iche' are from Allen Christenson's *Popol Vuh: Literal Translation* (2004).

“ocioso” is also telling, given the varied meanings of the word. In this context, it most likely refers to the topic as useless, having no purpose, or meaningless. It can also be translated as idle, both as unused and/or lazy. While it makes the most sense that it be construed as a useless or pointless topic and discussion, the insinuation of this discussion as a source of laziness bears racist, classist undertones that further perpetuate the belief that indigenous peoples are slothful and avoid working.

During her conversation with Namú, Abuela Cané pulls books out of a makeshift Faraday cage, stacks of papers that she quickly shows to Namú. He has to scan them rapidly so that the chip doesn't register them, but he notices that they are full of strange symbols. As she passes them to him, she tells him that “Aquí yacen nuestras historias, pasadas y futuras” (33). She mentions to him that they contain a prophecy of some kind and the story of their future before putting it back into the box from which it came and placing it back into the hole in the dirt floor. It is likely (and later we learn that) these are copies of the *Popul Wuj* and *Annales de los Cakchiqueles*, recompiled from memory by Cané, among other documents that she has likewise recreated or gathered. In order to preserve them, she must hide them, a metaphorical representation as to how she must hide her true nature and being: out of sight of the chips. Abiyala, like her documents, has to remain concealed for fear of being shocked – or worse.

The plan to bring tourism to Guatemala and Ciudad Arriba depend on killing indigenous peoples inside and out. To make them subservient workers, the part of them that identifies as Mayan or indigenous must be killed, in this case by mind control and drug use. Once they are subservient, they can be used as objects who serve no purpose other than to be murdered by tourists looking for a good time. Colonization begins not only with accumulation by dispossession but by killing the native from the inside out, or as Keme puts it, indigenous

peoples can only become part of America if they “give up [their] lands, languages, and cultural and religious specificities” (55). Note that land is a material commodity, something physical and tangible that exists outside of any person, but language or cultural and religious characteristics exist as a defining aspect of subjectivity and personhood while also being expressed externally. Speaking a language, written texts, religious buildings and locations: all are material companions to intangible aspects of a culture. And, as Keme continues, giving these things up doesn’t guarantee acceptance or assimilation, but maintains indigenous peoples “as slaves in [their] own lands” (56). As long as citizens of Abajo are forced into compliance with the Quisyan colonial project, the Americas will continue to kill Abiyala.

At the conclusion of this discussion of colonial oppression and imperialism, we must ponder the question “To whom does the term “postcolonial” apply?” Or, more directly, “Is colonialism ever over? Are we ever *past* colonialism?” That is not to say that the study of postcolonialism implies the end of colonialism as a whole, but that the field encompasses studies of the aftereffects and consequences of a formal Anglo- and Eurocentric colonial period that is supposed to have ended (Buchanan). Jeff Abbott writes that “The colonization of Latin America never ended, it merely changed forms” (11). Now, he contends, instead of marching in with armies and enslaving groups of people to mine for them, for example, foreign investors depend on mining permits and exploitative, cheap labor, illegal land purchases to dispossess lawful owners, and government corruption have ushered in a new era of colonization that ultimately achieves the same goals it always has.

Instead of being enslaved by invisible chains, campesinos and rural communities (including indigenous peoples) are enslaved by company stores, and falsely altruistic “community outreach” or community development programs (Abbott 45). *Sleep Dealer* and

Tikal futura both display glimpses into the future where neither colonialism nor capitalism have ended but intensified and the Americas continue the prolonged killing of Abiyala.

Centering Abiyala as a Methodology of Material Resistance

How does one resist the oppression of Abiyala? What do these narratives tell us about acts of material resistance, and what methods of resistance within? We have spent time dissecting the means of oppression brought onto Abiyala by settler colonialism and Empire; how then does one proceed in pushing back against it, and ultimately is it worth it?

For the purposes of this section, I will provide my definition for resistance as an abstract concept and then how to quantify it materially, in concrete terms, taking my cues from Keme's article. His title "For Abiyala to Live, the America's Must Die" and central thesis of establishing Abiyala as a central locus of indigenous political project are abstract concepts. Like the Marxist call to "seize the means of production", it serves as motto and rallying cry but does not provide steps that guide us towards that goal. To this end, Keme offers material ways to recenter Abiyala, like the recovery of ancestral names and territories (like the use of Abiyala itself, or the renaming of Mt. Mckinley in what is now Alaska as Denali, the Koyukon name for the peak (49)); he also mentions Aaron Carapella's map *Tribal Nations of the Western Hemisphere*, who uses indigenous names and boundaries to demarcate geography and reconfigure the colonized map to represent the ancestral homeland it still is to indigenous nations. He further discusses the need for international forums, both academic and political, to continue the "exchanges of ideas and knowledge" (52) that have allowed the potential of this imagined community's existence and highlights the need to "champion permanent criticisms of all those positions that threaten...efforts to recover and defend...ancestral territories and to dignify and restore...Indigenous life" (52).

He specifically names Zapatismo, the Water Protectors at Standing Rock, and Idle No More from colonial Canada, as points of departure in efforts to “restore our [indigenous peoples] memory and...organic relationship with our territories” (52). These movements and efforts to resist colonial America stand as examples of opposition to the perpetual “conditions of subalternity” that indigenous people have endured for centuries. Continuing these sorts of movements and specific ways in which Abiyala can be recentered give this analysis the basis to look for similar processes in both *Sleep Dealer* and *Tikal futura*.

“For Abiyala to live, the Americas Must Die” is, at its core, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, and Anti-American. But it is not inherently violent. It can be espoused by some groups that use violence in some aspect but is not inherently violent. Abiyala, as a region of open veins, is consumed by capitalism which “vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour (*sic*), and lives the more, the more labour it sucks” (Marx et al. 342) Empire lives at the direct expense of its victims, as we see in both Rivera and Galich’s works. Contrary to capitalism, Keme is not calling for Abiyala to kill the Americas – rather, he is calling for Abiyala to be for Abiyala and put Abiyala first. By centering and strengthening indigenous nations, the America’s lose their victim from which they draw sustenance. Unlike the America’s, Abiyala doesn’t enact violence on anyone. It starves the America’s by depriving them of resources, commodities, and exploitable labor forces. That is not to say that keeping Abiyala alive doesn’t require violence and should be purely pacifist, but that the rejection of the Americas will keep them from consuming Abiyala.

Both Galich and Rivera’s narratives share commonality in how Abiyala is centered through both violent and non-violent processes. On one hand, we see a centering of Abiyala in maintenance of indigenous identity and customs in *Sleep Dealer* by Memo’s turn away from

engaging in the world economy by selling his labor and his cultivating milpa in Tijuana – in *Tikal futura*, it is Abuela Cané’s efforts to compile and recreate Mayan written history and her instillation of Mayan identity in others that resist the Americas, reject hybridity and mestizaje, and center Abiyala by non-violent means. On the other hand, Memo, Luz, and Rudy orchestrate the drone attack on Del Rio’s dam to make the water available to all near the end of *Sleep Dealer* and the ERLCIA’s attempt to launch their own armed, guerrilla resistance of the Quisyan that show us how violent acts of resistance might also fit into the centering of Abiyala.

Rejection of hybridity and a return to milpa are one way that Memo centers Abiyala. After his attack on the dam (which we will discuss further on), he recognizes that he can never work in a sleep dealer ever again. He and his companions will be fugitives for the rest of their lives unless they don’t ever plug their DNA back into the system ever again. We are reminded of Memo’s interaction with his father at the beginning of the film, when Memo asks Miguel why they still live in Santa Ana and why they haven’t left like most others who didn’t see a future in staying. His father responds with a question: “¿Crees que nuestro futuro pertenezca al pasado?” Memo laughs while Miguel continues, as he points at the earth, “Tuvimos un futuro; estás parado en él. Cuando obstruyeron el río, cortaron nuestro futuro”. Abiyala had been colonized and privatized. Now that he has seen and experienced the dangers of the sleep dealer and hybridity, as he works his narration echoes his father when proclaims that he is going to “crear un futuro con un pasado, si reconecto y lucho.” His future is rooted in his past, and to connect with it he decides to cultivate his milpa and presumably subsistence farm in direct opposition to the push to hybridize and sell oneself and one’s labor to colonial capitalism.

This is not a return to post-revolution efforts to modernize Mexico by using milpa and cash crops to create an export economy by hybridizing the Mexican people and their existing

practices. It is probable that any sort of commodity exchange, like buying comestibles and other goods necessary to survive requires the use of technology that would expose his presence to those who are likely hunting him. Participating in this market by creating product for sale or export is antithetical to keeping himself hidden and safe, meaning that his milpa is most likely his own. Its location in the industrialized mechanopolis of Tijuana, a city that is built around exporting human labor, is a “step in the creation of a global Indigenous...movement against predatory neoliberalism” and “recover and...restore [their] Indigenous life” (Keme and Coon 50, 52). There is no hybridity in his refusal to play into the capitalist system that would consume him – instead, he strives to relearn old knowledge and tradition to further emancipate himself from the Americas and make Abiyala his focus through milpa.

There is also a symbolic representation of milpa in Rudy, Memo, and Luz’s cooperation in their attack on the dam. Milpa in its most basic form was comprised of maize, beans, and squash (Hurt 3–5) with chili often added in as well. These three main components were key due to their symbiotic relationships in cultivation and are often referred to as the “Three sisters” or “Santísima Trinidad.” Corn provided room for the beans to climb, who in turn deposit nitrogen in the soil which helps gourd plants, who provide shade and protection to the other seeds on the ground. The three of them together make each other’s success and cultivation possible. At the gastronomic level, corn and beans in any combination are complementary in their nutritional value – together, they offer a complete plant-based protein (Hurt 5-7), important in societies where it was important to maximize caloric input and minimize caloric output in cultivating or otherwise obtaining food and where meat was not always available.

Memo, Rudy, and Luz’s success in their attack only came because of their relationship. Luz connected Memo and Rudy when she sold Memo’s memories to Rudy. These memories

pushed Rudy to see the damage that his work as a drone pilot was doing to people like him, being Mexican himself (raised in the U.S. by immigrant parents). However, had he not been able to fly drones, the attack could not have happened. Memo's experiences in Oaxaca and the Cybracero maquiladora catalyzed him into acting for change but acting alone he would have had little chance for success. Their symbiotic intertwining is a human embodiment of milpa that shows us the need for connection and allyship to establish Abiyala in the midst of America, something that Keme mentions as well in his expression of need for and recognition of non-indigenous allies that work alongside indigenous people (Keme and Coon 52–53).

For Memo, it is the cultural practice of milpa. In *Tikal futura*, it is simply one's own indigenous identity that centers Abiyala. In Abajo, where the Quisyan are the only extraordinary people of all time and Mayan Gods are dead, rejecting colonial labels and the Americas in favor of her indigeneity. We are reminded here of the indigenous philosopher and activist Fausto Reinaga, who write in *La revolución india* "No soy escritor ni literato mestizo. Yo soy indio. Un indio que piensa; que hace ideas; que crea ideas...El indio no es una clase social...El indio es una raza, un pueblo, una nación oprimida (Reinaga 45, 57). Indigenous peoples, to Reinaga, shouldn't bow to bourgeois masters, shouldn't try to fit in with *campesino*, white society. There is no need to be anything other than indigenous and fight for "la libertad de su raza" (57), lest they end up like Pumakahua, the indigenous ally of Spanish royalists who put down the Tupac Amaru II rebellion and fought against independence from Spain only to "morir degollado por los españoles" (57). His exhortation was for indigenous people to not be a traitor to their race, but to be proud of their race: "Una gran raza, raza virgen; una gran cultura, cultura milenaria; un gran pueblo, una gran nación" (56). This rallying cry for indigeneity is one way to

understand how Cané positions herself as a source of indigenous pride and Abiyala in the midst of the capitalist realism of Abajo.

Being indigenous in Abajo can be expressed in myriad ways. One simple way is taking traditional Mayan names like Ix and Balanque, as well as the inverted names from K'iche' history, like Namú (Tecún Umán) and believing in Mayan gods or cosmology, although it has to be kept quiet. There are some, particularly the ERLCIA (which we will discuss below) that have figured out how to get their chip out and form a guerrilla army to fight against the Quisyan like, for instance, the URNG in Guatemala. Perhaps most interesting is the role of Abuela Cané, who was

la depositaria de la sabiduría de los pueblos Yama...La abuela guardaba muchos tesoros en su prodigiosa memoria, sabia de ritos, libros y danzas, practicadas por los antepasados. Sabía de profecías y astronomía y astrología y de libros, de música, pintura y escultura...Asimismo ocultaba algunos objetos por ella llamados libros, libros que esperaba que algún día fueran leídos por los descendientes de la casa de los quichés y cakchiqueles. Nadie sabía de la existencia de esos libros. Menos que supieran de qué libros se trataba. Galich 46.

These books are the *Popul Vuh*, *Rabinal Achí*, and *Los anales de los cakchiqueles*, written in Spanish. Cané is also recompiling what she can recall from memory into her writings, *Memorias para un futuro incierto*, where she explains her reasoning for writing:

Escribo estas crónicas sin otra intención más que de dejar constancia de que pese al grado de dominación que los de Ciudad Superior en alianza y protegidos por los de Quisyan, ejercen sobre nosotros, *hemos seguido buscando la forma de poner resistencia...* Por eso escribo, para que por lo menos uno recuerde y el recuerdo no muera. 64-65

These memories for an uncertain future are supposed to be a guidebook on how to resist colonial invaders, an unsuccessful task given the fights between indigenous peoples going back to her readings of *Los anales* to her present moment. Infighting and ambition had robbed them of force and numbers to fight off the Spanish and now the Quisyan. The only effective way to fight oppression, in her eyes, is to be united. For that to happen, her people must understand who they are and where they come from, just as Reinaga signals in his writings.

In this sense, Cané's role is comparable to that of a K'iche' Maya elder, or *ajq'ij*, who is responsible for passing along oral traditions and histories, carrying out rituals and ceremonies, and acts as a civic leader of sort, facilitating marriages and helping maintain relationships in the community. This oral tradition is where we get the *Popul Vuh*, a written version of what was orally recounted. The work of an *Ajq'ij* today is analogous to the past, a keeper of knowledge and tradition.

There are two moments in the narrative that signal and confirm to us her role in the community. In the first, she contemplates the possible futility in her writings and actions, wondering if they will ever have the desired effect to bring change to her people. In particular, he writes of a ceremony that should be begun and concluded, and that "la sangre habrá que brillar nuevamente ante la faz del Sol y de la Tierra" (187). In language that appears to describe a ceremonial sacrifice or bloodletting of some kind, she continues to depict this blood that comes forth out of young hearts and spills onto the ground, fertilizing it (187-188) and that "De ella [the earth, la tierra] surgirán los nuevos árboles que los servirán para la sombra que para el fuego, para las casas or para las armas" (188). This description of blood fertilizing a tree and creating new life is reminiscent of the ball game of Jun Junajpu and Vucub Junajpu from the *Popul Wuj*, who were killed while asleep after playing the ball game in Xibalba.

In the tale, the demon lords of Xibalba decapitated Jun Junajpu's corpse and hung his head from a calabash tree. Later on, the head spits into the hand of Xkik' k'ut (Lady Blood), who then becomes pregnant with Junajpu and Xb'alanke, the hero twins. They descend to Xib'alb'a and play the ball game, defeating Jun Kame and Vucub' Kame (One Death and Seven Deaths), gods of the underworld responsible for the death of their father. They are ultimately killed by the demon gods in Xib'alb'a but are reborn and return to kill the same gods of death that killed them, ending them. The story continues with the sacrifice of Xk'ik k'ut by the lords of Xib'alb'a; she implores that she be left alive. Instead of her heart, she asks that they collect sap from a nearby tree, sap which resembles blood – Chuj Kaq Che', Sacrifice Red Tree in Christenen's literal translation (86), Blood Tree in others (Goetz et al. 112) – and use it to make a fake heart to offer instead, which they do.

Namú, in the novel, has two uncles – Cané's sons – named Napú and Balanque. They are preparing a ball game against two servants from Arriba, Gavilan Garras de Sangre and Gavilan Sangriento, referred to as “los Gavilanes,” on motorcycles. If we follow the model from the *Popul Wuj*, it could be that the ballgame that they are training for means their death and sacrifice, the source of new life heralded by Namú and Ix. It is likely that, from that sacrifice, the blood that flows is the blood written about by Cané, blood that signals the rebirth of trees and life. Note here the mention of trees, especially given that the word K'iche' means “Many trees.” The sacrifice of the twins could very well be the beginning of a new world for indigenous peoples, a rebirth of its own.

The second example comes from the last chapter in which she features as a main focus of the narrative. In her dreams, her nahual (spirit guide) comes to her and asks her “¿Qué esperas para ponerte a escribir? La tela de araña de palabras que tejemos ya está llegando a su fin...”

(253). In K'iche', the word for weaving (tejer), is kem, thread (hilo) is b'atz – both are synonymously used in discussing storytelling, so much so that kematz'ib' – literally woven words, translates to computer. The nahual ends with the following plea; “lo que queremos de ti...es que pulas las letras para que adquieran el filo del pedernal, para que rasguen la tela negra que cubre los ojos de la gente y así puedan ver la faz de la Tierra, la faz de la Luna, la faz del Sol, la Faz del Tiempo que es lo único verdadero” (253-254). Her purpose, as explained is to her, is to open the eyes of the people – to use the sharp flint of her words to show them their history so that they can see the truth, which is described in a grouping of four in semantic parallelism, a common trait of K'iche' writings and found all over the *Popul Vuj*. Her purpose in resistance is to teach her people their history, to wake them up to who they are by working against their erasure. Her role as an aj'q'ij is to build out her indigenous community from where it stands and help restore Abiyala in Abajo.

It has been argued that Cané's subversive writing project “fails to become a source of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, or any other type of resistance project” (Severyn 34) and that in her role as a repository and mediator between a ladino/Spanish speaking subjectivity and an indigenous one but characterization of indigenous peoples as “ultimately accepting...of their subjugated position”, Cané represents

support for cultural and linguistic assimilation, as well as unchallenged internal colonialism and even more land grabbing by the economic elites. This representation of marginalized groups within the text only serves to reaffirm Eurocentric social hierarchies and to perpetuate misguided stereotypes. 39.

This criticism of Cané's work is compounded by the use of the materials she has at her disposal, like the *Popul Wuj*, a text that was brought about and maintained by colonizers, compiled and

edited in their language and to their liking, “implicating yet another cultural imposition” (Severyn 39) on a text that is now supposed to be the seed from which indigenous identity will germinate. A seed that, because of the colonial impositions made upon it, will lead to an inadequate and incomplete fruit in the same way that Galich’s novel (as argued by Severyn) presents an altered and colonized version of K’iche’ history that inadequately represents the truth (Severyn 39).

While valid criticisms of Galich’s novel, the troubling aspect of this assessment is the implication that because Cané’s efforts would be met with resistance from both Arriba and Abajo, that it would be difficult to get people off of Opsin and subvert the chips, or that because of the lack of knowledge of the past would jeopardize the ability of those around her to have meaningful input in an anti-capital movement. What is the point of creating class consciousness if not to educate those who would form part of our resistance or revolution? Furthermore, her position as an axis between two cultures, two languages, two ideologies, doesn’t make her a subject representative of mestizaje or hybridity – she is a colonized subject striving to create a locus for indigenous enunciation and representation from where she is and with the materials she has at her disposal. It would be a futile exercise to only use, in her case, purely indigenous materials and guideposts as they simply don’t exist in her reality.

Of more importance is the creating and holding of space for Abiyala, regardless of outcome. By what metric is her project judged a failure? The Standing Rock protests of the Dakota Access pipelines, mentioned by Keme, were not able to keep the pipeline from functioning – in that sense, it was not successful in halting the building or usage of the oil pipelines. At the same time, as Keme proclaims, the protests serve

to revitalize the emancipatory principles of our peoples, that is, to start from our own cosmogonies and those forms of social cohesion that have been the cornerstone of our survival. In these steps we must follow and discuss the proposals of Indigenous women and men who today, as in the past, are guiding the paths of our emancipation...May these movements [The Zapatistas, Standing Rock, and Idle No More], and those Indigenous and non-Indigenous women and men who struggle to defend Mother Earth, be our point of departure in our efforts to restore our memory and our organic relationship with our territories. It is therefore a matter of continuing to generate collective consensus that shows our historical opposition to the deplorable mercantilist and ethnocentric economic principles that have kept us in conditions of subalternity. 52

If Cané fears that she may well lose this battle, there is still a war to fight. Her vision indicates as much, that her words would serve a purpose. It isn't whether or not Abajo and its inhabitants are able to starve Arriba and the Quisyan out of their resources in pursuit of a version of utopia, but whether they desire to and work to restore Abiyala as a central focal point of indigenous subjectivity first and foremost. Even if its full potential isn't realized, it can still serve as a guide along the path to emancipation.

Centering Abiyala through Violence

There are also acts of resistance that center Abiyala through violence and not pacifism. There are many examples of armed and violent resistance from Abiyala and Latin America; Túpac Amaru II's indigenous rebellion against the Peruvian virreinato and Spanish crown, the Morelos Commune and Emiliano Zapata's rebellion during the Mexican Revolution, the Chumash Revolt, and the Zapatista's of Chiapas, to name a few. Non-indigenous resistance that has tangentially or indirectly involved indigenous peoples, like the Sandinista Revolution (in

which the Miskitu peoples sided with the Contras) or the URNG in Guatemala (an umbrella name for multiple leftist groups that included indigenous peoples fighting the U.S. backed military junta in Guatemala).

Indeed, both *Tikal futura* and *Sleep Dealer* include acts of violent resistance: the ERLCIA's double-headed attack on outposts run by the Quisyan in the former and blowing up the Del Rio dam in the latter. In the final section of this chapter, I will outline how these acts center Abiyala and how these texts comment on the role of violent resistance in the process of anti-capitalist, anti-imperial, and anti-United-statesian movements.

When Rudy, with the support of Memo and Luz, blows a hole in the dam, water is returned to the public sphere and is free to access. Opposed to Memo's milpa in Tijuana, there is a simplicity here that is encapsulated in the words of Memo's father – without the land, they have no history and no future, and when they dammed the river, they put an end to their dreams. By blowing a hole in the dam and returning the water, those who depend on the land have a future. Without the ability to profit off the privatized water, Del Rio will see their earnings dry up and their hold on the community lessened. They may not have controlled the land, but by controlling the water they held indirectly controlled the land and those that lived there.

There are larger material implications that surface with the return of the water. Paul Gelles, in his study of water rights in the Andes, found that indigenous Andean communities often had their own systems of resource management in place that were built around cultural and ritual frameworks. These traditional methods frequently were found at odds with local and state government regulations, which “increasingly work hand in hand with neoliberalism and privatization” of resources as they try to extend state control over peoples they find inferior to the “urban *criollo* [mestizo] society”(Gelles 138). What is lost in the simple exchange sought

after by Westernized governments is that water in the region “is not just an economic good, but also a cultural resource”, and that “Longstanding and culturally elaborate beliefs and rituals are intimately linked to water management by local communities” (139). These same people are asked, in the push for “modernity” through hybridization, to allow for state regulation of the water for privatization as they strive to maintain traditional practices, practices that are antithetical at best and impossible at worst.

Santa Ana del Rio finds itself in a similar situation, but in an advanced stage. There is no room for their cultural and traditional understanding of water management, given that Del Rio has complete control of the resource. As such, it is unlikely that the Mexican federal government exerts any iota of control over Del Rio or the water, meaning that when the water is returned to the people, it is returned directly to the people without any colonizing hands muddying the stream. This is certainly not a permanent solution, as Memo’s mother reminds him, but for the time being they can once again dream about their future. Centering Abiyala, in this case, means returning natural resources to the indigenous stewards that they were stolen from.

In *Tikal Futura*, we the “Ejército Revolucionario de Liberación de Ciudad de Abajo”, or ERLCIA, attempt to oppose the Quisyan Ruta Maya by carrying out a two-pronged ambush on the Quisyan security force outpost and bomb a local hydroelectric dam (Galich 232). Even though they make no apparent reference to Guevara, ERLCIA seems to draw from Che’s work in their planning. War, for Guevara, is a “struggle in which each contender tries to annihilate the other”, and although brute force is important, guerrilla fighters “will have to recourse to all possible tricks and strategems...to achieve the goal” (Guevara 13) The main tactic of the guerrillero is to “hit and run, wait, lie in ambush, again hit and run, and thus repeatedly, without

giving any rest to the enemy” (13). This is precisely what ERLCIA plan to do; ambush and create pandemonium.

Sadly, this is not what happens. The ambush on the outpost is ruined by poor timing and a shoot-out occurs; the team in charge of bombing the dam almost get captured and have to flee to nearby caves. Sadly, this is not what happens. The ambush on the outpost is ruined by poor timing and a shoot-out occurs; the team in charge of bombing the dam almost get captured and have to flee to nearby caves, while the team at the outpost is found and engage in a shootout, barely evading capture.

This armed attack, and the ERLCIA in general, are criticized in the novel by Cané. In Cané’s eyes, violence like this is a road that leads nowhere, and her stance is justified by her work sifting through and recompiling a history of the Mayan people in Guatemala. she comes across the recounting of an uprising of the Tukuche Kakchikel clan against the Chajoma, leading to the former’s expulsion from Iximche’, the principal city of the Kakchikels, in the late 15th century.

Commenting on the ERLCIA’s desire to use violence to address the oppression, she muses the following: “Si por años nos hemos matado entre nosotros mismos, cómo no vamos a ser diferentes, extraños, enemigos...” (81). The Tukuches she was researching provide her with metaphor for the current situation of the people in Arriba and Abajo. Cané continues “Entre nosotros mismos hubo gente que desarrolló intereses personales...como en el caso de...los Tukuches, a los que no les importó lleva la guerra a sus propias comunidades con tal de obtener riquezas, gloria y poder” (81). Their sin, in Cané’s eyes, was violence against their own people to benefit off of their oppression.

Like the Tukuches, those living in Arriba are descendants of Mayan peoples, just like those in Abajo. Mr. Apocalíptico, who is working to actively murder and enslave others with the help of investors, is letting his own personal interests bring war to his own people to enable him to obtain riches, glory, and power. He was originally, as Cané puts it, “un hermano renegado” who had been recruited by force by those in Arriba (63). Apocalíptico is not his birth name; there are two names given that could have been his name before adopting Johnny Apocalíptico - Juan Pérez Servilleta or Juan Efraín Montañés. The first is suggested as “una posible lectura de servidumbre del país centroamericano con respecto al vecino del Norte” (María del Carmen Caña Jiménez 72), while the second sounds similar to Efraín Ríos Montt. Apocalíptico is guilty of the same sin as the Tukuches; he has turned on his own people to side with the colonizers in the effacement of Abiyala.

Even if they had been successful, the ERLCIA would have likely faced the same obstacles that Cané would: how would they get the general populace to stop using Opsin? How would they convince people to side with them in resisting the Quisyan and likely lose their lives? Additionally, there is no apparent plan for affecting social change if the attacks would have been successful, or at least none that we as readers are privy to. It is also likely that the ERLCIA is on its last legs, as “[a]lgunos viejos sobrevivientes de los levantamientos de hacía cincuenta años, [quienes] transmitieron la savia [de la lucha por la libertad] de una manera poco clara” (Galich 167-8). Low recruitment and dwindling numbers meant that the ERLCIA’s last chance at any success was likely these attacks.

Like the URNG in Guatemala, the ERLCIA is not an entirely indigenous organization. But the goal of shaking off neoliberal oppression and colonizers is an end that benefits everyone, indigenous or not. Even though Cané is dubious of the need or ethical implications of violence,

to center Abiyala it is necessary to emancipate oneself from imperial chains. That can be done through the centering of indigenous identity, as Cané proposes, or through violent means. In comparison, Bolivia has seen massive changes under the presidencies of Evo Morales and Luis Arce and the MAS administrations since 2002. Their political and social programs that center indigenous identity as a building block for change has shown that an anti-capitalist and anti-United-statesian agenda can have success through pacifist means (see (COHA) for a more in-depth consideration of the topic).

On the other end of the spectrum, the Zapatistas in Chiapas took several townships in their protests of NAFTA and were prepared for armed revolt, although peace accords and a ceasefire were eventually signed. That being said, their anti-capitalist project employed violent means to help distance themselves from the Mexican state and its neoliberal project. In essence, they saw their own state – who had preached inclusion through hybridization and mestizaje – as having sold them out for profit and a spot in the modern world. Much like the Zapatistas, the ERLCIA can see the dangers of further descent into the capitalist realism hellscape that awaits them and their people and judge that action can be taken. Their efforts to fight back against the Quisyan and their Ruta Maya was part of their stand against capitalism and colonialism to create an environment where Abiyala could exist.

Conclusion

Tikal futura and *Sleep Dealer* provide us with material examples of what centering Abiyala looks like and how to go about it in the face of colonialism and capitalist realism. For the indigenous peoples in the narratives, there are both abstract and material elements that are worked into the process. The milpa, for example, is a material cultural element, while one's subjectivity is largely abstract, defined by the person. Much like individual identity, Abiyala as

a conceptualization of the colonized space known as the Americas is something best defined by the indigenous people who inhabit it. In these stories, it can be peaceful or violent; it can be on an individual scale or to serve a large group; it can be in an effort for immediate change or with an eye to the future. Any way it happens, establishing Abiyala as a central locus for indigenous enunciation is something that will benefit all of us, indigenous or not. Not just in environmental and human rights causes, but to provide us with a model and guidepost to resisting colonialism, imperialism, and capitalist realisms.

Concluding Remarks

During the COVID-19 defined 2020 Summer term, I had the opportunity to participate in a virtual “study-abroad” program with the Mayan Language Institute to study K’iche’ Maya “in” Nahualá, Guatemala. I had the privilege of learning from and interacting with the late Manuel de Jesus Tahay Gomez, or Tat Wel, former mayor of Nahualá. In discussing the concepts of revolution and resistance in the context of the Guatemalan Internal Conflict and Civil War, and his participation in the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca, or URNG, a leftist coalition and political party to which he belonged during his tenure as mayor, and what it meant to “be revolutionary” or to participate in revolution, Tat Wel said “Siempre mis ideas han sido revolucionarias. Yo soy revolucionario...la revolución es estar dónde es difícil estar.”¹¹ Tat Wel had taken the abstract concept of revolution and being revolutionary and made it material in his actions and his life work.

The overarching sentiment that is brought on by existing in a capitalist world is that, like Thatcher proclaimed, “there is no alternative.” There is no way out, around, or through capitalism, colonialism, imperialism. There is just survival as one is slowly consumed. Choosing to participate in anti-capitalist, anti-imperial, and decolonial movements *is*, by definition, existing or being in difficult places. If there are no alternatives and no escape from capitalism, then why resist? Why not give in to the apathy, the nihilism, the futility of it all? To borrow the donkey/carrot metaphor from Vermeulen and van den Akker, why chase the carrot that will always be out of reach?

That is where my title comes from: *As if* revolution was possible. As I write this, the Israeli Genocide of Palestinian people that was sparked by the October 7th, 2024 Hamas attack is

¹¹ July 14, 2020

in its eighth month and has seen tens of thousands of unjustifiable casualties, with entire family lines and names erased from existence. The 2014 Russo-Ukrainian war has intensified and exploded into full blown conflict in February 2022 with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. There is a marked resurgence of United-statesian right wing extremism accompanied by Christian nationalism that is not a global outlier, as similar tendencies in other countries are emerging in tandem with it. Cuba remains under a Cold War era embargo and Latin America and Southeast Asia have continued to be proxy battlegrounds for competing Ideologies. Change seems highly unlikely, if not completely impossible.

And yet, we resist. From large revolutionary movements, like the Zapatistas, the Cuban Revolution, or Palestine, to individual actions that likely go unnoticed by the world at large, people around the world continue to push back in the face of incredibly oppressive odds. Like the metamodern donkey, full of informed naivety, we chase the carrot we know that we will likely never attain *as if* it were possible. We exist in revolutionary spaces, hold revolutionary ideas, and resist *as if* this resistance will be successful, and have a positive outcome, knowing full well that resistance may in fact be futile and doomed from the start. But the terrain we will cover in pursuit of that unreachable carrot will take us to places that we never could have imagined possible when we set off after the carrot. It will take us to difficult places, which is exactly where we should be.

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