



Centro Journal

ISSN: 1538-6279

centro-journal@hunter.cuny.edu

The City University of New York

Estados Unidos

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CONTEMPORARY HISPANIC CARIBBEAN DISCOURSES

Centro Journal, vol. XXIII, núm. 1, 2011, pp. 197-215

The City University of New York

New York, Estados Unidos

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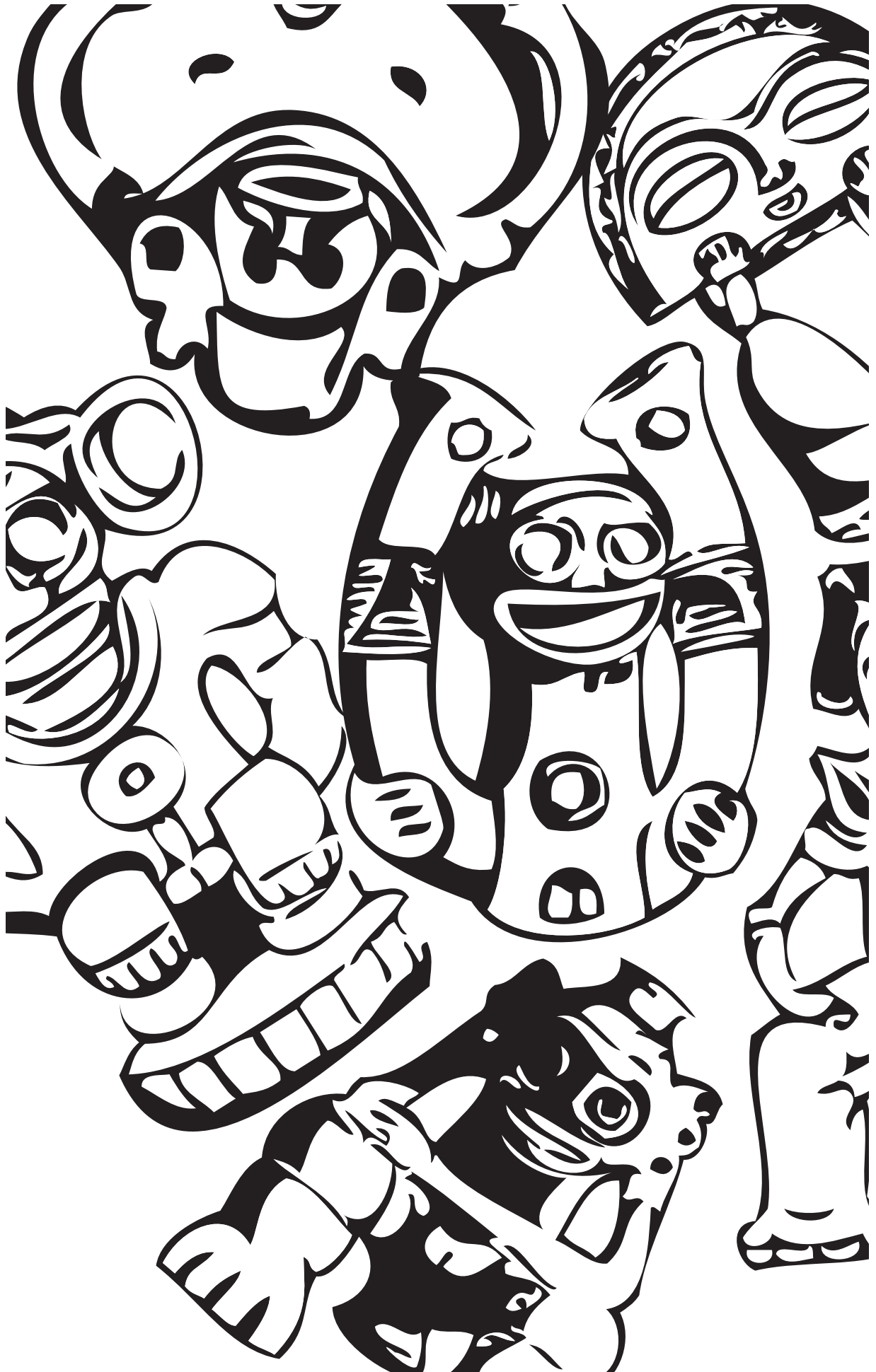
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# TAÍNO WARRIORS?: STRATEGIES FOR RECOVERING INDIGENOUS VOICES IN COLONIAL AND CONTEMPORARY HISPANIC CARIBBEAN DISCOURSES

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YOLANDA MARTÍNEZ-SAN MIGUEL

ABSTRACT

This essay explores how to study and recover Caribbean indigenous voices by discussing two cases as a possible example of “strategic essentialism”: contemporary neo-Taíno movements and the study of indigeneity in colonial texts of the Hispanic Caribbean. After reviewing several approaches to study *indiano* textualities in the Hispanic Caribbean, the essay concludes by criticizing indigenous revivals in the Caribbean as an essentialist reappropriation of Latin American *indigenismo* that reduces the translocal and diasporic dimension of the Caribbean. [Key words: Colonial, Hispanic Caribbean, Taíno, Literature, Indigeneity, indiano, strategic essentialism]

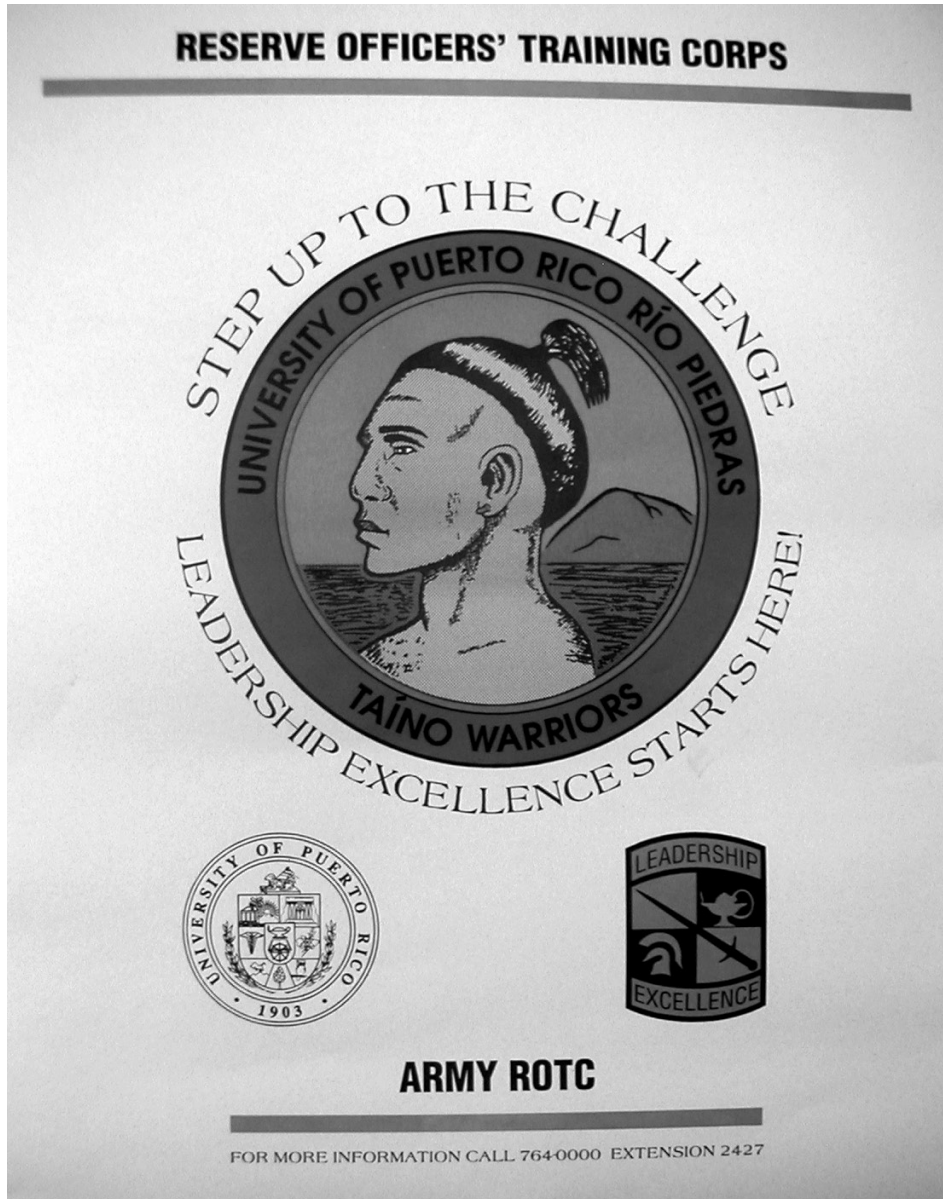
# INDIGENEITY AND CARIBBEAN STUDIES

Indigeneity occupies a problematic place within Caribbean studies from a historical and cultural perspective. On the one hand, the analysis of Arawak and Taíno history has become the central agenda of a series of studies that attempt to recover the actual contribution of indigenous cultures in the configuration of contemporary Caribbean cultures. In the case of the Hispanic Caribbean, the Taíno presence has been studied first through the scientific recovery of a diverse array of elements, such as the documentation of their lexicon (Alvarez Nazario 1999; Cruz de Jesús 2003; Arrom 2000), archaeological and anthropological recovery of their cultural and social productions (Fewkes 1907; Chanlatte Baik 1976; Arrom 1989; Fernández Méndez 1972), as well as the reconstitution of their history (Sued Badillo 1978; Robiou Lamarche 2003) and their mythology (Fernández Méndez 1972; López-Baralt 1976; Arrom 1989; Coll y Toste 1979 [1897]). More recently a group of biologists studied their genetic traces in the mitochondrial DNA (Martínez-Cruzado et al. 2001; Martínez-Cruzado 2002).

On the other hand, some indigenous studies have supported an essentialist Taíno revival that displaces the centrality of Spanish, African and Asian cultures in the constitution of creolized and translocal discourses on identity in the insular Caribbean. This paper interrogates this problematic place of indigeneity in the Hispanic Caribbean by focusing on two particular cases. The first one is the recent reappropriations of a Taíno legacy in several cultural manifestations or campaigns produced in Puerto Rico after 1995. The second case is the study of indigenous voices in colonial texts produced in the Hispanic Caribbean in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the Taíno population was alive and in the process of rapid decimation under the Hispanic colonial system. If one case reveals some of the perverse dimensions of indigeneity in the context of the contemporary Caribbean, the second case interrogates the need to find adequate ways to incorporate Taíno history and culture as crucial elements in the study of the colonial period in the insular Caribbean. The main contention of this essay is that indigeneity can become a productive form of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 1987: 205) that could transform and decolonize the field of Caribbean colonial studies by questioning the dangerous erasure of the Taíno as a historical figure, but it can also devolve into an essentialist *indigenismo*, which has become an exhausted symbolic repository in Latin American studies as a field.<sup>1</sup>

**Case #1: Taíno Revival in the Contemporary Hispanic Caribbean**

In 1996 the Army Reserve Officer's Training Corps (ROTC) launched a campaign at the University of Puerto Rico with the slogan: "Taíno Warriors... Step up to the challenge. Leadership and Excellence starts here!"



This campaign was announced through a poster that showed the image of an alleged "Taíno" Indian, and was based on the heroic rearticulation of the pre-Columbian colonial past of Borinquen, or the island of San Juan Bautista, that will later be known as Puerto Rico. Historically, the "taíno warrior" was the participant in the *guazábara*, or the war cry of the Arawaks, a "hybrid fighting system that incorporates ancient Spanish sword play, native close quarter battle strategy as well as guerilla warfare tactics and the cultural philosophy of the Taíno Warriors to form a balanced blend that symbolizes the fighting spirit of the Puerto Rican people"

(<http://www.guazabara.com/membership.htm>).<sup>2</sup> This public display of Boricua<sup>3</sup> indigenous pride presented in the ROTC poster was unusual for at least two reasons: (1) the Taínos have been traditionally portrayed as a docile ethnic identity that vanished from Puerto Rican colonial history as early as the sixteenth century; and (2) the indigenous identity is frequently invoked in Puerto Rico as part of an anti-colonial, if not openly nationalist, discourse. The interesting gesture behind this campaign, nonetheless, was the paradoxical recovery of the Arawak fighting practice to signify imperial military bravery in the context of Puerto Rico's U.S. colonial domination. In this reappropriation of the Taíno as ROTC warrior, the U.S. army was recruiting a young generation of Puerto Rican soldiers to defend U.S. expansion as an expression of their nationalist and indigenous pride.<sup>4</sup>

More recently, however, there have been three other cultural and research initiatives in which Taínos have functioned as the vital core symbol in the rearticulation of a Puerto Rican contemporary identity. First, since the 1960s, but especially from the 1990s on, there are a few organizations of Latinos of Hispanic Caribbean origin, as well as island-based groups that have claimed an indigenous identity in what is known as the "Taíno Revival Movement" (see Haslip Viera 2001; Dávila 2001; Duany 2001; Klor de Alva 1989). The main contention asserted by these organizations is that Taíno identity is still alive in the Caribbean and that it can be recovered genetically and culturally. These cultural organizations have also been supplemented by the development of academic and research initiatives, such as the work of Lynne Guitar, Pedro Ferbel-Azcárate and Jorge Estévez in the Dominican Republic and José Barreiro in Cuba on the survival of Taíno culture, and the foundation in Trinidad of the journal entitled *Kacique: Journal of Caribbean Amerindian History and Anthropology*. According to Maximilian Forte, *Kacique* was created by:

**... a desire to correct the long standing impression that Caribbean Amerindians were either irrelevant to the making of the modern societies and cultural formations found in the Caribbean basin, merely mute witnesses to history, or that they have been altogether absent in post-colonial Caribbean history. In addition, KACIKE endeavors to counter the impression that there were few or no historical documents that inform us of Caribbean Amerindian societies, groups, individuals or lifeways, or that they were produced entirely by naive individuals guided solely by superficial and predetermined impressions or by agendas so sinister that absolutely nothing of importance is to be learned. Hence this journal features a historical dimension to the study of Caribbean Amerindian society and culture, extending before 1492 and after (<http://www.kacike.org/aboutkacike.html>).**

The same utopian quest for a native subjectivity was encouraged by the scientific studies of the Puerto Rican gene pool conducted by biologist Juan Carlos Martínez-Cruzado several years ago. In December 2003, the historical "presence" of the *taínos* spurred another debate in Puerto Rico, when a genetic study revealed that 61.3 percent of the population has mitochondrial DNA through a single maternal line from American Indian foremothers (Martínez-Cruzado 2000, 2002; Martínez-Cruzado et al. 2001), compared to 26.4 percent who are African and only 12.5 percent who are of Caucasian origin (Martínez-Cruzado 2002). It is interesting to note, though, that even though the study states that the samples used were not representative, and that the genetic studies offer very different results when the Y-chromosomes are analyzed (Martínez-Cruzado et al. 2001), most of the

interpretations of these studies tend to emphasize the results about Taíno DNA (Estévez 2008). These genetic studies reintroduce the question of the place of biology in the definition of notions of *mestizaje*, an approach that used to be very common in nineteenth-century discourses in Latin America. Another question that emerges as a result of these studies is how to relate biological studies with issues of cultural identity (Haslip-Viera 2006, 2008; Estévez 2008).

In a newspaper article published in *Diálogo*, Rima Brusi Gil de Lamadrid and Isar Godreau critique the use of mitochondrial DNA findings to sustain claims of racial/ethnic and cultural identities, and question the ideological racist underpinnings of the popular reception and celebration of this research by the press and the broader public. According to the authors of this article, the studies conducted by Martínez Cruzado do not define the presence of Taíno Indians in contemporary Puerto Rican culture, but they encourage us to “revisar, darle profundidad y textura a los escenarios históricos que mejor describen lo que estaba pasando en la isla *durante la conquista y la colonización española*” [revise, and give some depth and visibility, to the historical scenarios that describe better what was happening on the island *during Spanish conquest and colonization*] (2007: 11).<sup>5</sup> For example, these studies could be used to compare the degree in which *mestizaje* between indigenous women and European or African men was prevalent, while inter-racial relationships between indigenous males and other ethnic groups were less common. At the same time, Martínez-Cruzado’s findings allow us to propose some hypothesis about the geographical origin and the migratory patterns of Taíno Indians in the Caribbean. However, the predominant interpretation of these genetic studies privilege an utopian desire to recover an indigenous identity, one that most of the time is constructed as the foundation for a Puerto Rican “fictive ethnicity” at the expense of the genetic and cultural contributions of African origin.<sup>6</sup>



Promo of the film taken from ([www.tainospelicula.com](http://www.tainospelicula.com))

Finally, in 2005, Benjamín López directed *Taínos: La última tribu*, a film about a “young archeology student, Sara Cordero, [who] organizes an expedition to la Mora Caves in Comerío, Puerto Rico. Sara and her four friends are guided by Yabey, who happens to know the area very well. Unexpected incidents occur, and they discover a hidden Taíno Indians tribe alive, who were believed to be extinct 500 years ago” (movie cover).

The production of this film as late as 2005 is symptomatic, because in it we are offered a glimpse of what has been a fantasy of many Puerto Ricans: to find an indigenous identity that represents an autochthonous and pure origin. The Arawak Indo-American could become the first native subject of a geopolitical area historically conceived as a result of translocated populations brought together by several successive experiences of colonization. Benjamín López, with the assistance of artisan and historian Martín Veguilla (who also identifies as a Taíno cacique), re-enacts in his film the same utopian gesture developed by Luis López Nieves in his fictional epic narrative of resistance against United States colonialism, *SEVA* (1983).<sup>7</sup> However, in this case, López and Veguilla reconstruct a Taíno identity that precedes Boricua resistance against U.S. colonialism, and that is more organic than the Creole heroism invoked by López Nieves rearticulation of a Puerto Rican nationalism in 1898.<sup>8</sup>

The currency and fascination so prevalent in these Taíno identity claims are significant because they seem to contradict how the Caribbean colonies have been traditionally conceived or defined. One of the ways in which the colonial experience in the Caribbean differs markedly from the colonization process in most of the areas of the continental Americas is the sudden drop and decimation of the indigenous populations since the beginning of the colonization process (Picó 1984: 57; Robiou Lamarche 2003: 243–5). The three recent cultural and research projects I have just mentioned illustrate the consistent presence of Taínos as a foundational element in the constitution of a Boricua and Hispanic Caribbean ethnic and national identity. In this regard, these initiatives seem to coincide with the definition of the Puerto Rican identity advanced by the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, which conceives Boricuaness as the harmonious mixture of three originary races: the Indians, the Spaniards and the Africans (see Godreau 2000; Duany 2001; Flores 2008; Godreau, Cruz, Ortiz and Cuadrado 2008).

The question that seems to be left unanswered in these more recent definitions of Boricuaness is how to address the study of indigenous discursivities in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One of the problems we have faced in contemporary and colonial Caribbean studies is that indigenous voices are often ignored or displaced to favor a creolization process that equates miscegenation with *blanqueamiento* (Godreau, Cruz, Ortiz and Cuadrado 2008: 115–6). As a result, indigenous perspectives and voices become marginalized as a symbolic and elusive element both in colonial and contemporary Caribbean identities. Peter Hulme also notes that “empirical archaeological, anthropological linguistic work,” or the “scientific strands” in the study of Caribbean indigenous identities should not be conflated with the crucial and necessary analysis of the discursive reappropriations of “taíno,” “caribe” and “arahuaco” as linguistic nomenclature that was transformed into ethnic notions reflecting the ideological construction of a colonial/imperial other (1992: 45–87). Therefore, the question I consider in the second case I present in the next section is how to study the indigenous voices as *traces* in the discursive manifestations from the colonial period in the Caribbean, or how can we propose a research agenda that will recover Taíno discourses and cultural contributions in the field of Colonial Caribbean Studies.



### **Case #2: Lecturas Indianas in Caribbean Colonial Textualities**

I base this section of my essay on my experience of designing and teaching a graduate course on “Indigenous Textualities.”<sup>9</sup> In this class I proposed a set of “lecturas indianas,” by using the definition of “Indias” and “indiano” from Covarrubias’ *Tesoro de la lengua castellana* (1611):

**“INDIA. Región oriental, término de la Asia, contiene casi gran tierra y población. Tomó nombre del río dicho Indo, que atraviesa por ella. Oy día se tiene más noticia de las Indias que en los tiempos antiguos. Ay Indias Orientales y Occidentales; de la mayor parte de ambas y de lo descubierto dellas es señor la magestad del rey Filipo Tercero, que Dios guarde, señor nuestro. Ay libros escritos del descubrimiento dellas y corónicas; y assí no tengo que detenerme en esto. Indio, el natural de la India; indiano el que se ha ido a las Indias, que de ordinario éstos buelven ricos” (1979 [1611]: 734—emphasis by author)**

**[INDIA. Oriental region, term from Asia, which contains almost great land and population. The name derives from the river known as Indus, which runs through it. Today we know more about the Indies than [we did] in old times. There are Oriental and Occidental Indies; and the greater part of these have been discovered under his majesty, King Phillip the Third, our master whom God protects. There are books and chronicles written about their discovery, so I do not need to describe this here. Indian, the native of India; indiano, the one who has gone to the Indies, who usually returns rich.] (emphasis by author)**

In this context, we should note “indiano” has two possible meanings: (1) an European living in the West Indies, or the Américas (what is currently known as “criollo”) and (2) the name given in Spain to those who returned rich from the Américas (or the “nouveau rich” that unsettled the caste system of the Spanish Empire). Using this double meaning of one word, I propose a working definition of “indiano textualities” as those produced during the colonial period and precisely at the intersection of European and American rhetorical and discursive genres. The “indiano” corpus is defined as a set of texts produced in an intermediate and specifically colonial space, neither fully American nor fully European, but not Creole or mestizo either. The purpose of this exercise was to arrive at a definition similar to Homi Bhabha and Robert Young’s hybridity, or Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zones,” or even Fernando Ortiz and Angel Rama’s central trope of “transculturation,” but by using the linguistic notions of the period as a point of departure to arrive to contemporary debates on subaltern studies, minority discourse and colonial and postcolonial theory.

There are five texts that have been central in my articulation of the concept of indiano textualities: (1) Rolena Adorno’s “Cultures in Contact: Mesoamérica, the Andes, and the European Written Tradition”; (2) Galen Brokaw’s essay, entitled “The Poetics of Khipu Historiography”; (3) “Colonial Studies as Cultural Studies: Theoretical and Pedagogical Issues in Classroom Practice” by Gustavo Verdesio; (4) José Antonio Mazzotti’s book entitled *Coros mestizos del Inca Garcilaso*; and (5) Walter Mignolo’s definition of colonial semiosis in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance*. These texts share a couple of important traits: first they offer reflections on the study of indigenous cultures in the Américas that provide a global vision suitable for the specialists and the non-specialists; and second, they point out how our limited knowledge and understanding of Indo-American media of communication is due to our still Eurocentric and alphabetic-centered training as literary and cultural critics.

The main question that I want to address here is how to approach the study of indigeneity in the colonial Caribbean, where there are no texts produced by indigenous scribes, as in the case of the *Popol Vuh*, the *Chilam Balam de Chumayel*, or the *Huarochirí Manuscript*, or even narratives produced by native Indians or mestizos, such as Titu Cussi's *Instrucción* or the *Royal Commentaries* by the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega. How can we study indigenous perspectives and voices in regions of the Americas where the significant reduction of indigenous populations and the paucity of their legacies make almost impossible the study of colonial indigenous textualities? I propose that we resolve this question by using three complementary approaches: (1) a lexicographic and historical approach that questions the invention of "Tainidad" in the colonial period; (2) a close-reading strategy that sensitizes readers to an *indiano* semiosis while conducting some form of discursive analysis comparable to studies we propose of modern literary texts; and (3) a comparative approach that would allow us to benefit from other cases in which indigenous experience and textualities are well documented to develop and expand our study of Caribbean indigeneity. I will explain each of these three strategies in the rest of this section.

## HOW CAN WE STUDY INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES AND VOICES IN REGIONS OF THE AMERICAS WHERE THE SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION OF INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS AND THE PAUCITY OF THEIR LEGACIES MAKE ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE THE STUDY OF COLONIAL INDIGENOUS TEXTUALITIES?

In the case of the Arawaks, Taínos and Caribs, there is a problem of nomenclature that needs to be critically addressed. As Peter Hulme notes, these terms do not comprise the self-ascriptions used by the natives to identify their communities (1992: 59–61): "Instead of two names, Carib and Arawak, mark and internal division within European perception of the native Caribbean, a division variously articulated in all European accounts, from Columbus's first jottings in his log-book to the historical and anthropological works written today" (Hulme 1992: 46). Christopher Columbus, for example, establishes from the beginning that all the natives of the island share the same language (Colón 1999: 70). "Arahuacos" is the name used for the "gentle agriculturalists" Indians, whereas "Caribes" refers to the "fierce, man-eating, nomadic" tribes, believed by many to have lived in the Lesser Antilles. We also

know that “Indian” was a misnomer based on Columbus’s belief that he was in the island of Cipango (Japan). Therefore, in Colonial Caribbean studies, referring to the “indios taínos” is in many ways assuming the colonizing perspective that neutralized and erased the cultural specificity of the inhabitants of this region.

Due to the fact that the native populations of the Caribbean were decimated so early during the conquest and colonization of the area, it is quite difficult to trace the ethnic origin and the cultural diversity of the groups inhabiting the islands at the end of the fifteenth century. We know that some of the populations present in the islands were originally pre-ceramic cultures, known as the Archaic tribes. The ceramic cultures arrived around 4,000 years ago, and are currently known as the Huecoid and Saladoid (Igneris) cultures. Beginning in the year 600 after Divinity, the Ostionoid arrived to the island (Martínez Cruzado 2002). This last group is divided into two stages, the pre-Taíno and Taíno, and these were the natives that Columbus found in the Caribbean. However, it has become a general practice to refer to the native inhabitants of the Caribbean by using three familiar and colonized misnomers: “taínos, arahuacos and caribes.”<sup>10</sup> It seems, then, that the experts of the colonial Caribbean—as well as the Taíno revivalists—are doomed to depend on colonized categories and notions to refer to the indigenous inhabitants, so the field itself cannot be totally decolonized.<sup>11</sup>

Our second goal is to learn how to read Caribbean colonial texts to identify an indiano semiosis. To train readers to be sensitive to the resonances of Taíno alterity in chronicles and “relaciones” (following Mazzotti 1996; Brokaw 2010; Mignolo 1995), I usually discuss the *Popol Vuh* and the *Chilam Balam* before reading Christopher Columbus, Pané, Las Casas and Alvar Núñez. The idea behind this alteration in the chronological structure of the course is to put students in contact with some of the best-known transcriptions of native oral narratives, so they could then trace the presence of some rhetorical structures or even references to local beliefs or tales in canonical texts that are not usually conceived as a zone of discursive tension between different modes of knowing and preserving historical memory. By questioning chronology, on the other hand, I was also insisting on the artificiality of our definition of indigenous discursivity since, as Gustavo Verdesio has already noted, in many anthologies of Latin American literature the indigenous texts are located in a remote past that supposedly precedes colonization—even though we know that most of these texts were produced during and as a result of the colonial/imperial experience (Verdesio 2004).<sup>12</sup> At the same time, this rearticulation of indigenous discursivity, so central in our conceptualization of colonial discourses, resignifies Columbus’ “foundational aphasia” from a less Euro-centric perspective.<sup>13</sup> In this indiano context, Columbus is at a loss of words not only because the American reality surpasses his imperial linguistic referents, but also because the contact with indigenous orality compromises his language competency.

The Latin American colonial canon includes a broad and diverse corpus of texts produced with indigenous informants or scribes, narrations that were transcriptions of non-alphabetic means of preserving discursive memory, and official reports on the Amerindians produced by Spanish chroniclers from New Spain, the Caribbean and the Andean region. One of the main problems faced by literary critics is that, given that these texts were all produced through different degrees of translation—in some cases, literal translation, since we know that they were directly transcribed from glyphs or codices, or because we are using an edition translated from a native language—we cannot apply modern notions of narrative, literature or even close-

reading or linguistic deconstruction to conduct textual analysis. We cannot, on the other hand, limit the study of colonial indigenous textualities to a comparison of themes or topics, as that would imply a hierarchy in which Western texts are thought to have a figurative and polysemous dimension supposedly lacking in the indigenous texts. Therefore, I propose that we read this primary indiano corpus along with classic studies on orality by Walter Ong, Martín Lienhard and Paul Zumthor, and I rearticulate the notion of “narrative syntax”—or a contemporary and less mechanic reappropriation of Propp’s conception of narrative morphology—to address the discursive and narrative structure of this indiano corpus.<sup>14</sup>

Reading two Taíno-related texts using this analytical framework produced new interpretations in which the Caribbean discourse is both reconnected with the Indo-American experience in general, and also distinguished from the cultural and regional specific experiences of Euro-American coexistence in the Mesoamerican and Andean regions. This approach supplements the ethnographic comparative framework that has been so useful to reconstruct the historic significance of the Arawak cultures in the Caribbean and Amazonian region (López-Baralt 1976), or even the comparative studies that have linked the mythological narratives summarized in these texts with the archeological findings in the region (Arrom 1989). This corpus of “indiano” narrations can be studied by addressing the relationship between discursive structures, alternative ways of knowing and the imperfect processes of translation or assimilation of those contents into “relaciones” and “chronicles.”

This sort of approach illuminates our analysis of Pané’s *Relación acerca de las antigüedades de los indios* (1498), the first proto-ethnographic account of any indigenous culture in the Americas, and a text requested by Columbus in order to try to understand indigenous cultures and beliefs. Reading Pané against the grain, it is therefore interesting to note that this brief text, frequently described as fragmentary and “disorganized,” shares many structural and narrative elements with the *Popol Vuh*, a more canonical text within the Latin American colonialization produced around 50 years later. These common structures transcend particular themes and contents and point to a similar way of organizing a knowledge in which the concept of the origin is linked to the understanding of life after death. For example, Pané begins his narration with a summary of the Taíno system of beliefs and interrupts this narrative in Chapter 13 to talk about the blurred limit between the worlds of the living and the dead. This interruption functions as a transition used to change the topic and focalization of his text from a recollection of myths of origin to an ethnographic description of the Taíno society as witnessed by the compiler of the text. The *Popol Vuh* has a similar structure—it begins with a description of the origin of the world and the three attempts of the gods to create humankind, and the narration is interrupted to represent and explain the death of Seven Macaw; immediately, the text transitions into a narration of the lives of Hunapu and Ixbalanqué, a story that defines the relationship between the human and divine realms. In both cases death serves as the limit and transitional topic from archetypal myths to everyday beliefs and practices.

The other aspect that becomes more evident in the “indiano” reading of Pané’s text is the author’s tension and struggle to understand, transcribe and translate ways of knowing that are significantly different from his own, not only in terms of content—systems of beliefs, language, social structures—but also in terms of the ways in which oral and alphabetic knowledge constantly collide. According to López Maguiña: “In Pané’s narration, orality is seen as subverting the organized knowledge produced by writing”

(1992: 298). Being sensitive to orality as another way of knowledge illuminates a passage of the text that otherwise seems illegible: “Puesto que escribí de prisa, y no tenía papel bastante, no pude poner en su lugar lo que por error trasladé a otro; pero con todo y eso, no he errado, porque ellos lo creen tal como lo he escrito” (Pané 1980: 28) [“Since I wrote in haste and did not have paper enough I could not put down in its place that which by mistake I transferred to another place, but notwithstanding that I have in reality made no mistake since they believe it all as has been written.” (Pané 2008: 87)]. Here the friar insists on the veracity of his account, yet writing and linguistic difference become consistent barriers that interrupt his proto-ethnographic project of transcription. Pané is aware of another form of thinking that he is not translating well into his written account. As Galen Brokaw notes in regard to other texts from the Andean tradition, we could say that Pané is signaling here that “the text [he is transcribing] does not conform to the expectations of a Western subject” (2002: 281). The materiality of writing is represented here as a limited medium to contain the diversity of knowledges, conceptions of temporality and space, and in this case, the fluid frontier between religion, myth and history from which Pané derives his transcription of the native accounts of the Arawaks. In this context, in the second part of the *Relación...*, Pané proposes his own experience as a witness, and the evangelical script as modes to transcend two of the most obvious barriers of his ethnographic and testimonial project: his imperfect knowledge of the indigenous languages, and the incommensurability of the alphabetic and oral knowledges that interact within his text.

The second text discussed in class is the “Elegía Sexta de los Varones Ilustres de las Indias” (1589) by Juan de Castellanos,<sup>15</sup> one of the few existing epic poems that depicts the conquest and colonization of the Caribbean indigenous populations. To complicate the analysis of this epic text, we should take into account Zumthor’s reassessment of the genre: “It has been noted that it finds its most fertile grounds in border regions where there exists a prolonged hostility between two races, two cultures—neither of which obviously dominates the other” (1990: 35). Paul Firbas (2000) and Luis Fernando Restrepo (2000, 2003) have explored this representation of the limits of the empire in the epic of the Américas. If the epic enacts a symbolical reappropriation of the cultural borders of the empire, then the interpretation of this text can be enriched by focusing on three aspects: (1) the intimate relationship between Castellanos’ text and Ercilla’s *La araucana* (1569–1589)—for we know that the *Elegías* were originally conceived in prose and later versified to imitate the famous epic poem about the conquest of the Mapuches in Chile; (2) the intersection between epic orality—given the fact that literature as such was still conceived as oral, since texts were read out loud to an audience not necessarily capable to read and write—and indigenous orality by comparing the ways in which Castellanos represents Juan Ponce and Agueybana’s “*arengas*” [rousing speeches] to their men, and by analyzing the incorporation of indigenous languages and oral histories and myths in the text; and (3) the interrogation of the Spanish value system in comparison to the moral superiority of the Indians, since in key scenes the Spaniards violate basic aspects of their honor code, such as when in Canto VI another Spaniard intervenes in a singular struggle between Pedro López and Yabureibo and kills the Indian in order to be able to defeat the Caribs and conquer the insular Caribbean. In both *La araucana* and the *Elegía*, Valdivia and Juan Ponce de León, the Spanish leaders of the expedition are defeated by their own moral flaws, such as greed and envy, and even delirium, since after all we should not forget that at the end of the *Elegía Sexta*, Ponce de León abandons his leadership and later loses his own life following the mythical fountain of the eternal youth.

The “noise” that these narratives contain is not neutralized by the subsequent colonization of the insular Caribbean, as Castellanos’ epic signals the crisis of a moral system that is not producing a coherent imperial project that could expand through the effective subordination and incorporation of the colonized subjects and territories. So even in the case of the epic, considered one of the most hermetic and supposedly hegemonic genres within the imperial literary canon, the “indiano” perspective allows us to trace the constant intersection and juxtaposition of modes of representation and communication, value systems and ways of knowledge that collide and transform the narrative syntax of these texts. This is precisely how Rolena Adorno has characterized the cultures in contact: “Diverse systems of thought and expression come together in these cultural productions, yet the resultant reformulations of native experience tend not so much to resolve tension or conflict between the donor cultures as to create new cultural syntheses whose hallmark is the uneasy coexistence of their diverse and sometimes contradictory components” (1996: 35).

Finally, incorporating a comparative approach to the study of Caribbean native populations in this context illuminates other ways of thinking about this problem. In a through-provoking study entitled “Becoming Indian in the Central Andes of Seventeenth-Century Peru,” Irene Silverblatt studies the invention of the notions of the “Andean” or the “Incas” after the Spanish invasion, as a way to foster the creation of a Pan-Andean indigenous identity that was effectively used to resist Spanish colonization. This pan-Andean consciousness created through the Taki Onquoy, a movement of nativist redemption (1565), encouraged indigenous communities to transcend the borders of “ayllus” and ethnicities: “Indianism verbalized Andean’s experience as colonized subjects as a continuous assault on life’s fabric—high mortality, loss of lands, insufficient food or clothing, harried and insecure existence” (Silverblatt 1995: 285). Tom Cummins (1994), on the other hand, documents Andean transformations of their modes of representation based on geometric abstraction to use more literal and Europeanized systems of communication and Hispanicized modes of visual representation in order to preserve their historical memory in a colonial context in which natives were losing their access to their own cultural symbols. In both studies, these invented pan-ethnic notions and media of visual representation are seen as effective in the reconstitution of a distinct native identity that could resist Spanish assimilation during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This example allows us revisit the “taíno/arahuaco/caribe” debate and transcend the initial rejection of the ethnic labels imposed by the Spanish conquerors to reconceptualize our notion of this other dimension of “lo indiano.” As Silverblatt suggests: “Indian,’ like ‘identity,’ must be understood in its sociability, emerging in the social relations that engage human beings in time” (1995: 293).

This is precisely what Cruz de Jesús proposes in his recently published linguistic study *Los indigenismos en el español de Puerto Rico* (2003). This book traces the usage and definition of 129 words of indigenous origin from their adoption in Spanish chronicles to their redefinition in contemporary Spanish. According to this study, out of the three ethnic categories—“arahuaco”, “taíno,” and “caribe”—only the last one is an indigenous word, used to refer to a pre-Hispanic community inhabiting the Lesser Antilles and the “Tierra firme,” who were characterized as cannibals.<sup>16</sup> Columbus used the term for the first time in his “Diario del primer viaje,” and during the sixteenth century “caribe” and “caníbal” were used as synonyms (Cruz de Jesús 2003: 89). In *Colonial Encounters*, Hulme traces the “invention” of “arahuaco” and “taíno” as ethnic labels. “Arawak” was first used in the sixteenth century to refer to

the Indians of the Guiana and Orinoco regions, and later to refer to the language and inhabitants of the Guianas (1992: 60). “Taíno” was originally used by C.S. Rafinesque to refer to the language of the natives of the Greater Antilles (in 1836) and was later “adopted by Harrington (in 1921) and Loven (1935) to refer to the main culture of these islands, and to their inhabitants. So the term slipped imperceptibly, without anyone taking a conscious decision or showing any awareness of the possible consequences, from the level of linguistics to that of culture, to that of ethnicity” (1992: 60). Currently, Arawak is still used to refer to a family of languages spoken by the natives of the Antilles and South America (DRAE, 1992:178). Hulme’s most important observation, nonetheless, is related to the dubious impermeability of the Spanish perspective and discursive practices in their denomination and representation of the American reality and its inhabitants:

**The most important possibility thereby raised is that the ethnic map of the Caribbean area as described (however sketchily) by the early European colonist, was itself the product of that colonial presence. This would imply an interaction, whose strands it would be impossible to separate, between three elements: the ethnic map as it existed just before 1492; the ethnic realignments that may have taken place in response to the European arrival; and the power of European ideology to impose its own ‘perception’ of that ethnic map on to the Amerindian population. The fact that the first of these three strands is by definition unknowable should not mislead us into thinking that the other two are unproblematically observable. (1992: 67)**

We return here to the notion of the “indiano” as a colonial discourse that inextricably links European and Amerindian perspectives, discursive practices and ways of knowing in a tense relationship that is not harmonic or democratic. In this context, we should remember that many of these modern notions used to create a Pan-Caribbean indigenous identity were based on the linguistic links existing between many of these communities. Mercedes López-Baralt has also explored a similar thesis in her study of the Taíno myth as a set of common beliefs or similar mythical stories that are shared by the insular Caribbean and the continental Amazonia. We also know that the political units—or chiefdoms—of the indigenous communities living on the islands at the time of the Spanish arrival also included some internal communications between the islands and the continental South America. Therefore, we can talk about some areas of commonality that promoted “social relations that engage human beings in time” (Silverblatt 1995: 293). “Taíno-ness” becomes, then, one of those instances of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak 1987: 205) that allow Caribbean national discourses to identify and locate the “presence” of native rhetorical structures, ways of knowing and conceiving the world, and modes of narrating that have left a visible trace in the narrative syntax of the surviving “textos indianos.”

#### **Conclusion: The Limits of Imaginary Revivals**

To conclude, I would like to reconsider the many ways in which we can resignify a “Taíno revival” or a “neo-Taíno” movement in the Hispanic Caribbean and its Diaspora. In our work with colonial texts it becomes clear that we have not been able to recover an authentic, uncontaminated Taíno voice from the written colonial archive available to us, nor have we found yet documents representing the experiences of the Caribbean indigenous Hispanization fictionally recreated by the indigenista literature of the nineteenth century and twentieth centuries.

In this sense, the Caribbean is in a different situation to the one we find in the Mesoamerican and Andean regions, since in both of these cases there are written texts that are closer to an indigenous voice and perspective (see León Portilla 1985 [1959]; Wachtel 1971, as well as indigenous narratives such as the *Libro del Chilam Balam* 2000; *Popol Vuh* 1996; *Huarochiri Manuscript* 1998). However, conceiving the Taíno case as somewhat different, but not completely unique, is an important gesture of our research, as it is time to question the constant isolation of the Caribbean colonial experience vis-à-vis the rest of Latin America. Even though in the Mesoamerican and Andean cases we have access to texts produced by indigenous and/or mestizo subjects who propose their own account of the Spanish conquest, it is also true that in many cases the colonial context makes it impossible to find a narrative that is not intervened by multiple layers of translation, appropriation and assimilation of different linguistic, rhetorical and even epistemic paradigms.

Perhaps the main difference between the Mesoamerican or Andean region and most of the Caribbean is the limited degree in which we are able to study colonial indigenous communities by comparing them with the contemporary manifestations of that same culture/language/ community. Among the few exceptions in the Caribbean are case of the surviving Arawak dialects still being used in Dominica in the 1920s, the “Black Carib” or Garífuna that is still a significant component in the creolized languages spoken by Indo-African communities in Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala and Belize (González 1997), or the surviving communities of descendants of Caribs, Arawaks and Saramakas in the Guyanas, specifically in Surinam. However, in most of the Caribbean it is impossible to produce studies like *The Vision of the Vanquished* by Nathan Wachtel, that compares colonial textualities with contemporary Andean performance and folklore, or an anthology of indigenous texts about the conquest like the one compiled by Miguel León Portilla. One of the unintended outcomes of this sort of comparative study of Indo-American discourses is that we have been able to define much better the differences in terms of rhetorical strategies, and the unequal access of alphabetic writing in each one of the colonial centers in the Américas (i.e., the Caribbean, New Spain and Perú), something we have not done yet in our study of the emergence and constitution of Creole discourses (see Lockhart 1999: 204–28).

However, there is still much to be done in the study of linguistics and comparative ethnography, as the analysis of indigenous etymologies or local oral traditions about indigenous cultural and social identities can reveal ways of articulating a worldview that could be very important in sensitizing us as readers to the indigenous “resonances” still hidden within many of the colonial canonical texts. Again, we can open the canon by adding new texts, but in cases such as the Caribbean, where no new texts seem to be available, we can transform the canon by proposing new readings of the existing Euro-American corpus of verbal accounts and representations. For example, what would happen if we propose a new reading that conceives the foundational aphasia of Columbus or Pané’s narratives as a result of the tension between their writing and Taíno and Carib orality? Or what other underlying narratives or worldviews could we find if we analyze which Taíno lexicon was incorporated to the Spanish chronicles, and how these untranslated notions have survived and evolved as part of an Iberian colonial/imperial discourse? Stressing the constant tension in which these texts were produced, and questioning the supposed impermeability of the conquistadors to the cultural manifestations surrounding the production of their imperial discourse could be a crucial step to recover that ambivalent meaning of “indiano” that lies at the core of the colonial experience.



As far as the neo-Taíno movement of the 1990s, what could be seen as a useless anachronistic reinvention of a “Boricua coqui” identity can also be conceived as a productive example of Spivak’s “strategic essentialism” (1987: 205) with the possibility of a powerful political agenda. I am referring specifically to a neo-Taíno movement structured in dialogue with the U.S., South American and Caribbean Native American political projects in mind, which in some cases are looking for a way to claim their own “territory” to vindicate an ethnic identity that circumvents both the current political subordination of the island to U.S. domination, as well as institutionalized nationalist imaginaries that still privilege Hispanic cultural legacies and creole discursivities in the constitution of contemporary national identities. However, both in the colonial and in the contemporary case, it is important to avoid conflating indigenismo and essentialism, since Caribbean identities are more complex and dense precisely due to the translocal displacement of populations that promoted the formation of a new culture forged by the interaction of several diasporic populations. If recovering Taíno—and African—textual resonances and cultural productions is urgently needed to decolonize Caribbean studies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, keeping indigeneity at check in contemporary studies is also crucial to avoid simplistic reappropriations of Latin American indigenismo. Otherwise, indigenous revivals that conflate indigeneity with nationalism produce a notion of identity that is grounded on a racial purity and a continuity with a single origin that is already unimaginable in the context of Caribbean postcolonialities.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank several colleagues who assisted me in writing this essay. Santa Arias encouraged me to study Taíno voices and textualities in the Hispanic Caribbean for an MLA panel in 2004. Gustavo Verdesio commented on a previous version of this essay, and invited me to share my work with his students at the University of Michigan—Ann Arbor in April 2006. Jorge Duany read a previous version of this essay and offered many useful comments. The anonymous external evaluators for *CENTRO Journal* made constructive suggestions. Thanks to their intellectual generosity, the argument of this essay is stronger.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Indigenismo refers to a cultural and literary movement that developed in Latin America and the Caribbean throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to vindicate indigenous cultures and perspectives within a White Creole discourse and agenda. Among the best-known examples, we should mention Clorinda Matto de Turner, *Aves sin nido* (1889) and *Herencia* (1895) in the case of Peru; Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda, *Guatimozín* (1846) in Cuba; Manuel de Jesús Galván, *Enriquillo* (1879–1882) in the Dominican Republic; and Eugenio María de Hostos’s *La peregrinación de Bayóan* (1863, 1873) in the case of Puerto Rico. In the twentieth century, José Carlos Mariátegui will be among the main exponents of the vindication of the indigenous populations in his collection of essays *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana* (1928). Finally, José María Arguedas proposed a narrative and aesthetic project based on the incorporation of indigenous cultures and ways of knowing in his novel *Los ríos profundos* (1956).

<sup>2</sup> Cruz de Jesús defines the term as “Lucha, pelea, batalla” and mentions that some have tried to link this term with the Arabism “algazara,” without discarding the indigenous root of the word (2003: 130).

<sup>3</sup> Boricua is another way of referring to Puerto Ricans, and this denomination derives from the Arawak name of the island, Borikén, so the links between national identity and indigeneity are still present in this common way of addressing Puerto Ricanness.

<sup>4</sup> It should also be noted that this campaign took place in the University of Puerto Rico, where the presence of the ROTC has been a source of a heated debate since the 1960s and 1970s, due to the ROTC’s links to the imperial domination of the United States in Puerto Rico. During the

student strike of 1972, the ROTC was removed from the university campuses, and students were not allowed to wear their uniforms inside the university. Although there has been some relaxation in the application of these regulations in the last two decades, as recently as March 2009 there was a students' protest against ROTC exercises taking place inside the Complejo Deportivo at the Río Piedras Campus.

<sup>5</sup> Unless noted otherwise, all translations from Spanish to English are mine.

<sup>6</sup> I am using Balibar's notion of "fictive ethnicity" to refer to the configuration of a collective identity: "No nation possesses an ethnic base naturally, but as social formations are nationalized, the populations included within them, divided up among them or dominated by them are ethnicized—that is, represented in the past or in the future *as if* they formed a natural community, possessing of itself an identity of origins, culture and interests which transcends individual and social conditions (1993: 96).

<sup>7</sup> In the cinematic production of *Seva*, entitled *Seva vive* (2007), Francisco Serrano revisits some of the same questions about Puerto Rican identity and resistance to U.S. colonialism. For more information, see <http://www.sevavive.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of this movie, see Martínez-San Miguel (2008).

<sup>9</sup> I am using as foundation of this critical reflection a graduate seminar I taught at the University of Pennsylvania in the Fall 2004 that was entitled Spanish 692: "Escrituras indianas: Indigenous Performances of a Colonial Discourse."

<sup>10</sup> Other foundational studies on the Taíno culture and history are Walter Fewkes, *The Aborigines of Porto Rico and Neighboring Islands* (1907), and Irving Rouse's *The Taínos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus* (1992). Interestingly enough, Fewkes avoids using the term Taíno when referring to the indigenous populations in Puerto Rico.

<sup>11</sup> The same thing happens in Mexico and the Philippines, where the names of the different ethnic identities were invented by imperial functionaries to classify the local populations. Some of these denominations, however, become significant for local sectors in the colonies that appropriate these terms to produce their own regional forms of identification.

<sup>12</sup> That is the case of *Chilam Balam de Chumayel* (possibly compiled by Juan José Hoil in the seventeenth century), and the *Huaro-chirí Manuscript*, compiled in 1608 under the supervision of Francisco de Ávila, as well as the mestizo narratives on the conquest of Perú, like the texts by Guamán Poma de Ayala (1585–1615), the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1609, 1617) and Juan de Santa Cruz Pachacuti (1613), to mention a few of the well-known examples.

<sup>13</sup> Foundational aphasia is a term originally coined by Irlemar Chiampi in her reading of the first accounts of the colonization and conquest of the Americas to refer to "certain expressions, like 'I do not know how to narrate,' 'I lack the words,' which denoted and implied his amazement with the things of the New World. We also know that semantic voids forced them to make comparisons with what they have seen or read or, when that was not possible, to linguistic expressions such as 'marvelous,' 'wonder,' and 'enchantment,' etc." (2000: 113–4).

<sup>14</sup> Propp defines "narrative morphology" as "the study of forms and the definition of the laws that govern the structure" of a short story (1981: 13, my translation).

<sup>15</sup> The title of the entire text is *Elegías de Varones Ilustres de Indias*. The sixth elegy was devoted to the Arawak Indians and narrates the conquest of Puerto Rico by Juan Ponce de León.

<sup>16</sup> There is, then, an ongoing discussion about the historical grounding for the real or imaginary distinction between Arawaks and Caribs. For more information, see Sued Badillo (1978).

<sup>17</sup> One of the basis for these claims is the (c) United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; 1994, specifically Articles 25, 26 and 27 (quoted in <http://www.centrelink.org/Oct2002.html>).

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