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Sexual/Textual Migrations: Queer of Color Theory in Chile

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ABSTRACT

This article argues that the resistance to certain foreign influences in Chilean queer thought is an understandable defense against neocolonial "adaptations" of queer theory into local debates, but can also leave issues of race and experiences of racialized sexuality by the wayside. It then examines the work of one Black queer migrant to Chile, the Dominican performance artist Johan Mijaíl, to show how Black queer theory can not only help expand the focus of Chilean queer theory beyond US imperialism and neoliberalism to questions of race, migration, and hemispheric colonialism, but also strengthen existing critiques of Chilean exceptionalism.

Keywords: Chile, Queer, Exceptionalism, Migration, Racism.

Este artículo propone que, si bien la resistencia a ciertas influencias extranjeras en el pensamiento cuir chileno constituye una estrategia de defensa comprensible contra el neocolonialismo de "adaptar" la teoría cuir a los debates locales, este rechazo corre el riesgo de dejar de lado consideraciones importantes sobre raza y sexualidades racializadas. Al examinar el trabajo de une migrante cuir y Negre a Chile - le artista dominicane de performance Johan Mijaíl - el artículo muestra que la teoría cuir Negra es capaz de expandir el enfoque de la teoría cuir chilena a asuntos de raza, migración y colonialismo hemisférico que van más allá de su enfoque mayoritariamente dirigido hacia el neoliberalismo y el imperialismo estadounidense. Asimismo, la teoría cuir Negra también puede fortalecer la crítica a la excepcionalidad chilena.

Palabras clave: Chile, Cuir, Excepcionalidad, Migración, Racismo.

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Introduction: The Limits of the Critique of Chilean Exceptionalism

Chile has been a fairly homogeneous, insular place throughout its history — a point of pride for many of its residents[1]. The country's claims to exceptionalism are often related to what Benjamín Subercaseaux (1940) called its "loca geografía", that is, the improbable topography that has isolated it from outsiders while also distinguishing it on any world map. The economic prosperity that Chile has experienced over the last 30 years, while bolstering its claims to being exceptional[2], has reduced its sense of apartness from the world by attracting new waves of (im)migrants[3]. While some of the outsiders that have come to Chile have been foreign investors, received with open arms by the country's elites, others from poorer backgrounds have received less enthusiastic treatment, despite the fact that their willingness to take low-income jobs in the country's growing agricultural and service sectors makes them no less of an asset to the elites' economic projects. Instead of being welcomed, these migrants — many of whom have come from Haiti, Venezuela, and Colombia, and some of whom are of visibly African descent—have often been treated with outright racism.

There has been a small but important minority of people of African descent in Chile since the colonial period[4]. Yet racism has a long history there, and indeed is part of the very formation of the Chilean state. As Ericka Beckman has shown, the whiteness of Chile's inhabitants was seen by elites as the characteristic that made the country most apt to defeat (and then "civilize") Peru and Bolivia during the War of the Pacific, in the late 19th century (2009, 75). The military might that the Chilean state developed during the war was then redirected towards the country's southern region of Wallmapu, to "pacify" the Mapuche inhabitants of the land there (Bengoa 1985, 171) and make way for white settlers. Nicolás Palacios's nativistic and xenophobic (though highly influential) screed *Raza chilena* (1904) praises Chile's particular version of *mestizaje* as what makes its inhabitants

[1] The author wishes to thank Corey McEleney, Cynthia Vich, Jeffrey Lawrence, and Cole Rizki for their extremely helpful comments during the revision process of this essay.

[2] Many critics have referred to the Chilean economy's status, since the early 1990s, as a "model" or "miracle," whether in ironic terms or not. These include Iván Jaksic and Paul Drake (1999), Tomás Moulian (2002), Steve Stern (2010), and Patricia Richards (2013).

[3] Between 2013 and 2018, the number of migrants in Chile tripled (Rojas Pedemonte and Vicuña 2019, 20); in 2018, 6.7% of the population in Chile was foreign-born, compared to 1.2% in 2001 (Méndez 2019, 377). More demographic data and analysis about migration to Chile is available in Stefoni and Brito (2019).

[4] Paulina Barrenechea (2009) talks about the rich tradition of literature about Black people in Chile in the 19th century, particularly formerly enslaved people in Santiago, and offers helpful historical context alongside her discussion. For information about Afro-Chileans in the present day, see the 2017 documentary *Raíces*, created by the audiovisual company Ígneo, available on Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02oZwkjkYEo.

particularly powerful — and distinguishes them from their more "Latin" neighbors in Latin America and in Europe[5]. The exceptionalism undergirding Chilean nationalism can thus be said to have a racist bent at its very heart. As María Emilia Tijoux has written, racism and xenophobia are key to how Chile defines itself at an official level: "la exclusión de la persona inmigrante…forma parte de un proceso de racialización de larga data, nunca interrumpido, que objetiva la exclusión material y simbólica del 'otro'" (2019, 358-9).

Whereas Peruvian and Bolivian migrants — as well as indigenous Chileans — have also been objects of derision in Chilean society, the recent increase in the migration of people of African descent has led to new apprehensions. Explicitly citing Palacios's text, a February 28, 2018 news report on Chile's national television station anxiously speculated about how the arrival in 2017 of 100,000 Haitian migrants might change the "Chilean race" (Figure 1). Indeed, the exceptionalism to which Chilean nationalist discourse has often resorted is an exclusionary concept, with an idealized protagonist that is not only white, but also male and heterosexual: figures who deviate from those norms are often met with disdain at best, and violence at worst[6]. Questioning this exceptionalism is thus an urgent project, made all the more so in light of the country's recent *estallido social*, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic, both of which have exposed the falsehoods and ongoing exploitation behind designations of the country—by former president Sebastián Piñera and others—as an "oasis" in Latin America (Baeza 2019). This exploitation is something that many migrants have experienced alongside Chileans.

[5] For more information about *Raza chilena*, see Sarah Walsh's excellent *The Religion of Life: Eugenics, Race, and Catholicism in Chile* (2022), an account of efforts by the Catholic Church and other institutions to reinforce Chileans' claims to whiteness.

[6] As I have argued elsewhere (2016), "Chile's supposedly exceptional economic and political status…is constructed, often quite aggressively, in tandem with models of masculine, heterosexual comportment. […] Subjects that threaten the country's official discourse of exceptionalism are marginalized or even marked for death" (5-7).

Figure 1: The invocation of the "raza chilena" in regard to anxiety about recent migrants. Televisión Nacional (Chile), February 28, 2018.

One way (among many) to critique this exceptionalism is through queer theory, which posits that the figure of the queer, always already exceptional in their deviation from the reproductive norm, can symbolically destabilize the heterosexual lineages through which exceptionalism gets perpetuated from generation to generation. Meanwhile, since queerness often posits an antagonistic relationship to the norm, it can expose Chilean exceptionalism as a queer gesture a priori, unsettling the normative spirit in which that exceptionalism is often invoked[7]. However, the ways in which queer theory has been discussed in the Chilean context do not sufficiently engage with the complex, intersectional vectors of oppression that its nationalistic discourse upholds — particularly in terms of race. Even though academic writing in and about Latin America and Chile has (rightly) critiqued the neocolonial drive behind the unproblematic adoption of queer theory into the Latin American context[8], it has not been in sufficient dialogue

[7] For an in-depth set of debates about the relationship between queer theory and normativity, see *Queer Theory without Antinormativity*, the 2015 special issue of the journal *differences* co-edited by Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A. Wilson. In the introduction to the issue, the editors seek to "show that norms are more dynamic and more politically engaging than queer critique has usually allowed" (2): they show how queer theory's critique of "norms" sometimes entails an oversimplification of all the nuances of identity that appear to be contained within those norms. Jasbir Puar (2007) stresses that queerness is in itself exceptional (22), so it can absolutely be complicit with empire (4). In the Chilean context, I have argued that many of the country's "queer subjects dodge the very intelligibility upon which exceptionalism depends to make certain persons, countries, and products 'stand out' among others" (8).

[8] Such arguments mirror those of other *cuir* theorists wrestling with "resenting" the discipline's "ethnocentric" tendencies while also "sensing" its promise. These are the terms, in any case, that Castellanos, Falconí, and Viteri use (2013, 10-13). Earlier, Félix Martínez Expósito argued that the application of queer theory "a las sociedades de habla hispana es, como poco, problemática, cuando

with how queer of color critique, and specifically Black queer theory from the North Atlantic context, is addressing neocolonialism. Indeed, Black approaches to queerness in the US are part of a larger intellectual tradition of decolonial thought, in conversation with cultural and intellectual praxis stretching both across the Atlantic and throughout the Americas, and thus have shared roots with Latin American approaches to sexual dissidence. Given these shared roots, here I propose bringing two bodies of work together that have not traditionally been placed side-by-side, to think through how Black queer studies might enrich Chilean queer theory.

In what follows, then, this essay will draw an analogy between the misgivings about foreign strains of queer theory among theorists working in the Chilean context, on one hand, and contemporary anxieties in Chilean public discourse over the country's ability to receive migrants of visibly African descent, on the other. First, I will summarize how queer theory has developed in Chile around an exclusionary, localized, white version of that theoretical corpus, and argue for a more capacious approach that incorporates queer Black critique from the US and elsewhere. Then, I will analyze a corpus of writings by the queer Dominican writer and performance artist Johan Mijaíl, to foreground Black queer theory and Black migrant literary production and their potential to strengthen critiques of Chilean exceptionalism, which have left race and experiences of racialized sexuality by the wayside.

Breaking with Chilean Queer Theory's Exclusivity

In general, queer theory has been conceived in Chile with its own sort of exceptionalisms, even when these are deployed for ostensibly liberatory purposes. Discussions of Chilean queer culture have tended to reinforce conceptions of the national: a legitimate anticolonial position justified by the relentless deluge of foreign capital in the neoliberal 1990s, which took place concurrently with the rise of queer theory as a field. Nelly Richard, arguably the most pioneering, prominent voice in the development of a uniquely Chilean corpus of critical theory related to gender and sexuality, makes the case for "una producción cultural local surgida con anterioridad a la catalogación internacional de lo queer que amerita ser confrontada al imperialismo académico de las terminologías y bibliografías hoy definitivamente consagradas" (2017, 123; emphasis in original). Richard thus reads queer theory as a foreign lens that risks distorting the Chilean cultural production that preceded it. Richard expresses interest in Judith Butler's work only to the

no abiertamente dañina" (2004, 23), due to its neocolonial implications. In the Chilean context, a number of critics have questioned the neocolonial tendencies of queer theory, as I will argue below.

extent that it brings out the Chileanness of the local queer scene (137). This means eschewing ideas — whether from other parts of Latin America or the US — that could challenge that scene in productive ways. It also has the effect of reinforcing the negative history of Chilean exceptionalism.

Richard is hardly alone in these sentiments. Even though Juan Pablo Sutherland — another groundbreaking voice in Chilean queer thought — provides a useful summary for Chilean readers of the work of several important US-based theorists, including Butler, David Halperin, and Gayatri Spivak, he expresses misgivings that "al traducir el término queer al español, se pierde el poder connotativo del vocablo inglés, limitando su poder de transformación política" (2009, 22). For Sutherland, adapting queer theory into the Chilean context risks losing the specificity of both Chilean sexual dissidence and Anglophone queer theory. To shore up the critical power of *lo queer* in Chile, then, he puts it in dialogue with a number of Latin American thinkers, such as Ángel Rama, to broach the possibility of a "queer lettered city". However, rather than using Rama's ideas to question *lo chileno* itself, he channels them back into a re-signification of Chilean literature and nationhood. This is in line with his previous work to create a queer canon of Chilean cultural production (2001): "la ciudad letrada re-significó a la Nación" (2009, 28).

Meanwhile, Felipe Rivas San Martín's warning against "la celebración acrítica de su traspaso disciplinario literal Norte/Sur" of queerness, even if he also rejects "un excesivo localismo latinoamericano – que rechace de plano cualquier uso de 'lo queer'" (2011, 70), is another example of the inward-looking perspective of Chilean queer theory. Although Rivas is inspired by José Javier Maristany's (2008) idea of a "differential genealogy" of a more broadly Latin American form of queerness, Rivas's own genealogy ultimately leads him back to how certain strands of queer Chilean cultural production, such as the Escena de Avanzada[9], can create "una teoría de género local" (72). By invoking the (admittedly rich) queer interventions of the Avanzada to supplement Maristany's genealogy, Rivas ends up narrowing the genealogy he theorizes rather than broadening it.

Richard's description of the "productive conflict" (133) that ensued in 1995 when she hosted a showing of the 1990 Jennie Livingston documentary *Paris is Burning* is typical of misgivings about foreign ideas, specifically about race, in Chilean circles of queer thought and activism. Richard describes how the Chilean audience (at Fausto, arguably the country's most iconic gay disco) reacted negatively to the film, because they viewed its Black and Latinx subjects as

[9] See the work of Robert Neustadt (2001) for a detailed analysis of Chile's neo-avant-garde scene in the 1980s, which incorporated many elements of sexual dissidence that have been read as queer.

> reafirmando así el modelo capitalista de la mujer blanca primermundista, [mientras que] la "loca" tercermundista…elegía compartir el lugar menospreciado de lo femenino para…agrietar los bloques autoritarios de la violencia dictatorial y…la cosmética del falso pluralismo democrático administrado por el consenso neoliberal (134).

The subversive implications of Black and Latinx sexual dissidents parodying white, wealthy womanhood were lost on audience members. Focused as they were on resisting imperialism through neoliberal economic expansion, given the histories of US interventionism in the region, they may have made too strong a class critique without taking into account the nuances of how class, gender, and race interact. Although for Richard this screening was still valuable, in that it showed how such misreadings "generaba[n] contratiempos en el orden de sucesión y progresión de los conocimientos linealmente acumulados según la recta academia" (137; emphasis in original), she sympathizes with the audience members, from whom she learned that day that "ningún traspaso entre…norte y sur puede descansar en un liso proceso de conciliación entre significados culturales pretendidamente equivalentes" (137; emphasis in original). It makes sense that Chilean audience members would be wary of *Paris is Burning* in the context of the postdictatorship, but that suspicion undoubtedly foreclosed the possibility of exploring broader approaches to queerness.

Another way in which queer methodological approaches to Chilean culture have fallen into overly localized, exceptionalistic forms of thinking is in debates about the idea of a canon of queer Chilean cultural production. Sutherland and Fernando Blanco (the latter alongside Carmen Berenguer) sought to formulate such canons in 2001. Although they importantly corrected the often heterosexualized cultural foundations of the nation — which "excludes what it deems as 'abject citizens'", in Blanco's terms (Viteri 2017, 416), they did not question why the nation — with its racist, imperialist origins — should be the foundation of such a canon in the first place. Meanwhile, Cristeva Cabello's (2017) innovative chronicles of Chilean *travestis* work as a way of recovering a specifically Chilean form of trans aesthetics, by combatting "la estrategia política del olvido familiar heterosexual, y…otras narraciones, otras historias políticas y otros conflictos…que te hacen olvidar" (26). Although the "archaeology" Cabello outlines — a canon of sorts — is a way of countering this national forgetting and affecting "los discursos monumentalistas de una nación masculina" (69), affecting that national discourse is not the same as undoing it.

My own work (2016) has also reinforced the insularity of Chilean queer theory. Examining a series of works that "queered" the foundations of Chilean nationalism, I questioned the exceptionalism that canonicity inevitably creates — figuring particular works as more intelligible and worthy than others — but this argument still took place in a monograph about exclusively Chilean cultural

production that cited mostly white Chilean, European, and US theorists. Indeed, white theorists are the ones most commonly cited in work on queer theory in the Chilean context: Blanco, Richard, Sutherland, Rivas, Cabello, and I cite Michel Foucault, Lee Edelman, Jack Halberstam, David Halperin, Michael Warner, Brad Epps, and Butler much more than theorists of color.

Seeking to move beyond discussions of queer theory's neocolonialism in the Latin American context, Diego Falconí Trávez, Santiago Castellanos, and Viteri (2013) look for answers in the "marginality", the constant translation and inventiveness, and the "hybridity" that are already part of the Latin American theoretical tradition. They also mention theorists of color as possible interlocutors, including Marcia Ochoa, Martin Manalansan, and José Quiroga (10). In the Chilean context, and once again echoing Maristany, Jorge Díaz (2017) calls for a new genealogy of Latin American queer studies, beyond Butler, Edelman, and Foucault: he makes the "alarming" observation that it is somehow possible to "ser un investigador en performance latinoamericana sin tener la exigencia...de escribir...citando lecturas al menos de algunos de los autores del continente, inclusive a los consagrados," leading to "la producción de imágenes coloniales" (291) and "extractivismo académico" (285). Here, I am responding to these calls by examining ideas that may help to question some of the insularity with which critics, myself included, have addressed queerness in Chile.

Blackness and Queer Theory: New Horizons for Chile

The theories of gender, sexuality and queerness developed by Black queer theorists in the United States might seem like a counterintuitive lens for a reconsideration of queer theory in Chile, but there are a number of useful reasons for turning to this body of work — aside from moving away from the nationalistic thinking outlined above. The fact that in February 2020, a right-wing protester manifested his opposition to a new, more democratic constitution in Chile by brandishing the US Confederate flag (Figure 2), a symbol of white supremacy, is reason enough: people from Chile to Canada have a shared interest in combatting racism and oppression. The critiques expressed by Richard and others of "las exigencias de la academia internacional que controla las producciones teóricas y culturales latinoamericanas" (Richard 124) are understandable. However, it is my contention that the decolonial work of Black theorists can offer a set of tools for Chilean queer theory to address a broader spectrum of queer cultural production by immigrants. By insisting upon the anticolonial roots shared by queer traditions across different geographical and racial contexts, I am echoing Tamara Spira's brilliant argument that "Third World liberation and US racial struggles created the conditions of possibility" (2014, 123; emphasis in original) for articulating the

"overlapping histories of economic exploitation, colonization, slavery, and heteropatriarchy [that] connected the fates of a broad coalition of 'Third World' women" (122). Spira reminds us that antiracist critique in the US is but one node in the development of a transnational discourse against oppression based not only on race but also on gender and sexuality. Connecting these forms of oppression among multiple geographical situations — not only in the Americas, but also in places like Vietnam, Palestine, Lebanon, and Angola (127) — is an anti-exceptional practice in and of itself.

Figure 2: A right-wing protester against a new constitution in Chile wraps himself in the US Confederate flag. Santiago, Chile, February 2020. Twitter.

I am also arguing for a broader, less nation-based way of thinking about Chilean queer theory because it parallels Chile's place within a global system of migration and population exchange. The arrival of migrants there shows the extent to which existing structures of queer thought warrant a "crítica interna de cómo la interpretación del problema y la idea misma de liberación sexual han sido producidas desde el pensamiento eurocéntrico y hegemonizadas por la experiencia de quienes gozan de privilegios de raza y clase," as Yuderkys Espinosa Miñoso stresses (2017, 9). The racial aspects of the queer experience in Chile have been ignored. As Francisco Godoy Vega poetically points out: "¿cómo revelar el halo épico del europeo y la erotización de la/ conquista del cuerpo americano como follable,/ explotable, asesinable?/ ¿cómo revertir este conocimiento intencionado de/ la blanquitud heterosexual?" (2017, 67). Articulating a methodology that would denounce colonialist approaches to race and sexuality across multiple geographical contexts — from the so-called "Hottentot Venus" to the human zoos that put Mapuches and other indigenous people on display in London and Paris — Godoy links together seemingly disparate instances of racism and sexual oppression.

There is already a rich history of ties and affinities between Black queer and feminist thought around the world and sexually dissident theory in the so-called "third world". From decolonial thought in the Caribbean, to the Civil Rights movement in the US, to LGBT rights movements both in the US and across the hemisphere, these links — of solidarity, (mis)translation, and tension — have extended to Chile as well, dating back to the dictatorship era. Spira writes in great detail about a poetry reading at Glide Memorial Church in San Francisco on October 4, 1973, less than a month after the coup. Pamela Donnegan and Ishmael Reed participated, along with Fernando Alegría, Janice Mirikitani, Laurence Ferlinghetti, and Nancy Fraser (128-34). Spira also highlights the solidarity work with Chile done by the Black feminist poet June Jordan, who published an article in 1975 denouncing violence in Chile, with translations of poetry by Neruda and Víctor Jara. Jordan states that US Americans

> should devise a public mourning for such infamy…as has been committed in our name. And, after we mourn our own infamy, we the leadership that we have failed to control or else remove from power, we should study how we may pursue…some means of recompense to the Chilean peoples who now endure their days bereft of democratic rule (41).

She thus calls on Americans to take responsibility for death caused in the name of their country. Jordan's denunciation of this complicity is a blow to the exceptionalisms that prop up both countries' nationalistic discourses, which falsely view the US and Chile, respectively, as self-reliant, homogeneous, and apart from one another. The fact that Chile is connected to these rich traditions of Black American feminist and queer thought is an argument against the deployment of localized Chilean queerness as a method for countering imperialism emanating from the US.

Johan Mijaíl and Queer Insularity

The work of Johan Mijaíl, a queer Dominican-born writer and performance artist who lived in Chile for several years, has not only denounced racism in Chile against people of African descent like him. It also shows how some Latin American queer cultural production, even in Chile, is already in dialogue with rich traditions of Black feminist and queer thought in the US. One of the main themes underlying Mijaíl's texts, published in Chile between 2014 and 2018 (he has since returned to Santo Domingo), is a conflict between two contradictory impulses related to Chile's insularity. On one hand, he writes, "sueño con no tener que explicar en todos lados lo que dice mi pelo y mi piel" (2018, 28-9); on the other, "siempre me tengo que explicar desde una rigurosidad furiosa" (2018, 133). Despite his first

urge to remain silent and let his hair and skin speak for themselves in Chile — a focus as "local" as Richard's ideal for the queer scene there — Mijaíl instead chooses to build bridges, explaining himself to those who otherwise wouldn't understand. In this sense, I am arguing that his work functions as a site where Black queer theory – even if it comes from the US – can contribute to a richer discussion about queer thought in Chile.

For example, Mijaíl's work can be said to dialogue with that of E. Patrick Johnson (2013), by articulating the particularities of his own experience in more vernacular, local terms that Chileans will understand. Mijaíl seeks to bring his bodily experience of queerness closer to the Chilean experience:

> Intento articular en cada letra un gesto de conexión y de expansión de este cuerpo cimarrón, fugitivo y rebelde. Este deseo constante de partir es lo que entiendo como, de encontrarme de frente conmigo misma y vengar el daño. […] Escribo construyendo un tubo de escape que me conecte contigo, donde nos permitamos dudar (2018, 45).

Johnson's work on "quare" theory — a way of claiming "queer" for the "culture-specific positionality" (98) of African American vernacular and experience — is a gesture of anticolonial resistance. The term "quare" originated in Ireland (98), and in Black vernacular it is used instead of "queer" to question the whiteness at the core of the latter's theoretical framework. For Mijaíl, meanwhile, the use of vernacular is a way to bring broader forms of queer thinking closer to Chileans who otherwise would be "disconnected" from them, and from him. Johnson's approach to the "quare" is similar not only to the designation "kuir" that Mijaíl describes in a book that he and Díaz co-wrote (2016, 170), but also to the idea of "cuir," or "cuyr" elsewhere in Latin America (Viteri 2017, 407-8), and even to the translation of "queer" as "torcida" in Spain (Llamas 1998, ix), all conceived to interrogate queer theory by placing it in dialogue with the vernacular of the Hispanic world. Citing José Muñoz's ideas about disidentification, in which queer subjects of color dialogue with dominant traditions while also challenging them (106), Johnson states that the "quare" makes queer theory less exclusive and more connected ideas about race—something that Mijaíl is also interested in doing with queer theory. Johnson's "disciplinary expansion" of queerness, "such that ways of knowing are viewed both as discursively mediated and as historically situated and materially conditioned" (98), offers a blueprint for a broader, anticolonial approach to queer theory in Chile.

Both Mijaíl and Black theorists of gender studies in the US have constructed genealogies of thought linking decolonial histories and genealogies shared by Black and subaltern subjects in the United States and Latin America, including Latinx people in the US. Indeed, Muñoz is not the only Latinx critic that Johnson cites: he acknowledges his debts to the ideas of Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe

Moraga as well, who have critiqued the tendency of queer theory to render queerness as an abstraction that elides elements of race, ethnicity, and class (98). Moraga (2011, 95) and Anzaldúa (1987, 43) have also emphasized the importance of indigenous identity, ritual, and mythology for their understanding of queerness. Johnson's acknowledgement of the contributions of these theorists shows the extent to which indigeneity, as well as migration within, to, and from Latin America — Muñoz, Anzaldúa, and Moraga are all part of the rich Latinx diaspora in the US — have laid the groundwork for expanding queer theory beyond whiteness and beyond any particular national context.

Meanwhile, Hortense Spillers's (2003) efforts to trace persistent, harmful stereotypes about Black people back to colonial times are part of a tradition of radical, decolonial thought with which both Mijaíl and Chilean queer thinkers are in dialogue. Connecting disparate histories of marginalized people victimized by both "the Atlantic slave trade" and "Spanish intervention" in the lives of "the Mayan and Aztec peoples" (209), the anticolonial "American grammar" she envisions in her foundational essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" (1987) proposes that antiracist approaches to gender can subvert certain dominant, entrenched discourses throughout the Americas. There, she denounces the racialized pathologization of Black families in many such discourses, in ways that could open up discussions about Chilean queer theory:

> "family," as we practice and understand it "in the West" …becomes the mythically revered privilege of a free and freed community. In that sense, African peoples in the historic Diaspora had nothing to prove, if the point had been that they were not capable of "family" (read "civilization") (218-9).

Critiques of how Black families were historically seen as undeserving of the "benefits" of "civilized" familyhood — an attitude rooted in racism (Spillers 204) — are a cornerstone of Black feminist thought[10]. This focus on family ideals is also a way of understanding (and denouncing) the racism of the Chilean state against Haitian migrants like Joane Florvil, who apparently committed suicide in 2017 after being arrested on the spurious grounds of abandoning her infant child[11]. Moreover, Spillers's speculation that "under a system of enslavement…the customary aspects of sexuality, including 'reproduction', 'motherhood', 'pleasure', and 'desire', are all thrown into crisis" (221), makes room for thinking

[10] This mode of critique is foundational to Angela Davis's (1981), Patricia Hill Collins's (1998), and Christina Sharpe's (2010) work as well. Indeed, they have showed how the concept of family itself is impossible under a system of enslavement, where family units were routinely broken up as different family members were bought and sold.

[11] For more information about the Florvil case, see Águila (2017) and Laboratorio Comunitario para Mujeres Negras y Afrodescendientes Negrocéntricxs (2019).

about a different, more decolonial kind of "gender trouble", even though Butler has been much more commonly cited in the Chilean context. After all, these "customary aspects" of sexuality were thrown into turmoil as much by colonization and slavery as they were by Butler's poststructuralist critique of gender's supposed "prediscursivity" (1990, 7).

In a later essay, "Who Cuts the Border?" (1991), which lends a more explicitly hemispheric dimension to the ideas articulated previously, Spillers shows how her ideas — developed in dialogue with diasporic intellectuals throughout the Black Caribbean — share roots with the Latin American tradition. Invoking José Martí's seminal essay "Nuestra América" (1891) and Roberto Fernández Retamar's "Caliban" (1971), Spillers asks "by…what set of moves is the notion [of Caliban] applicable along a range of culture practices…out of which certain US communities express relations to 'Our America'?" (324). She takes up the Shakespearean figure of Caliban to affiliate Latin American liberation movements with US civil rights efforts: the decolonial work of Martí and Simón Bolívar "are entailed with the same fabric of cultural memory…that threads the name of A. Philip Randolph with the successes of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the heady political maneuvers of Adam Clayton Powell Jr." (319). Spillers's linkage of decolonial Latin American thought to theory generated by US communities of color illuminates the fact that Black thinking in the US is not as disconnected from the spirit of Chilean queer theory as it might initially seem.

The connections Mijaíl makes between Black and indigenous people in his writing, in the same ways Spillers has done, are further examples of these genealogies of oppression shared throughout the Americas. Based on an episode in which he was the recipient of a homophobic slur, Mijaíl draws connections that reformulate the "American grammar" of the streets of Santiago: "Camino y me gritan recordándome que se me nota: 'Masisi', me grita un hombre chileno […]. Vestido de obrero…me grita desde un vehículo: 'Masisi', que, en creole, en criollo haitiano es maricón" (2018, 113). Surmising that his interlocutor must have learned the word "Masisi" from his Haitian coworkers, Mijaíl contemplates ways of resignifying this slur, much as queer people once resignified the insult "queer". For Mijaíl, this can be achieved by formulating "una escritura Masisi": it can be "una escritura activista latinoamericana y afrocaribeña. Un vocabulario neomestizo que atraviesa la piel, que se corporaliza. […] Es un recurso epistémico que está por venir" (2018, 105). Resisting the same imposition of normativity that Spillers denounces — in the context of a city "threatened" by Black bodies, "detaining" and "expelling" them in response (Tijoux 2018, 15-6) — Mijaíl constructs a "Masisi" epistemology that links his own experience with those of others facing constant discrimination for their racial difference in Chile and

beyond, including Haitians and people of visibly indigenous descent[12]. In this way, he defies the normative landscapes of Santiago, where people tend to look askance at him and other marginal figures: "en Chile es sospechoso ser lesbiana, aimara, colombianx, mapuche, dominicanx, mujer, haitianx, homosexual. Es sospechoso no haber nacido aquí" (2018, 44). Here, Mijaíl's "American grammar" emphasizes the fact that Chile's imagined (and supposedly exceptional) homogeneity is both racial and sexual in nature.

Mijaíl's writing about "islas utópicas" (2018, 87), which constructs commonalities between Hispaniola and Chiloé, in southern Chile, also links these decolonial histories and genealogies. Describing his exchanges with the Chilotxs on a trip to their island, he writes, "Les pregunto a las personas por su isla y me hablan del mar. Les digo de la mía reconstruyéndola. Les hablo de…mi deseo de escribir un texto que reconfigure el sexo, el régimen heterosexual y su violencia" (2018, 87). This rhetoric, which we might call archipelagic, following Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel (2017, 157), harkens back to Mijaíl's first book, *Pordioseros del Caribe* (2014). There, he frames his migration from the Dominican Republic to Chile as the construction of multiple diasporic islands:

> Yo construí una isla. Todo el que se fue también construyó la suya y ahí se armó un lío de islas. Todo el que tenía deseos de recordar o inventar lo que era, no midió el problema que estaba armando. Ahora andamos por el mundo con tantas islas que no caemos en la de origen y se va a hundir (22).

The atomized insularities that Mijaíl denounces are a metaphor for the needless isolation of both migrants and queers. Later, he writes about how "[m]e estaban juzgando por dejar entrar a mi casa-universo gente muda, por conspirar contra la ley de la inercia y la gravedad" (2014, 34), emphasizing the need to bridge that isolation through solidarity and humor. By inserting himself into conversations, by dialoguing with those who would otherwise not speak to him, Mijaíl shows how migration can forge connections among different fields of thought that had previously been separate. Mijaíl's work models a new way for Chileans to reckon with the "others" against which their country has defined itself. It also marks a way for the Chilean cuir scene to rethink the exclusive, nation-based assumptions it has long made about the country's cultural production (and the

[12] Future studies of cultural products indexing the connections between racial and sexual difference in Chile might turn to the writings and video art of Antonio Catrileo and Manuel Carrión, who (along with others) form the Comunidad Catrileo+Carrión, and to the work of the artist Sebastián Calfuqueo. Calfuqueo's performance art piece *Alka Domo* (2017) and Catrileo+Carrión's essay film *Kizungünewün Epupillan / Two-Spirit Self-Determination* (2020), among others, represent the complex interactions of queerness and indigeneity in ways that critique the homogenizing oppressiveness of the Chilean state.

way it interacts with queer theory from the North Atlantic) in light of larger, diasporic traditions of Black radical thought.

However, there is another key tension in Mijaíl's work. Although he critiques the occasionally provincial ways in which queer sexuality is spoken about in Chile, he also critiques queer theory itself. Admittedly, he does advocate against an excessively inward-looking approach to queer theory, and he invokes Anzaldúa, Halberstam, Shulamith Firestone, and Paul Preciado – a much broader corpus of theorists than are usually cited in Chile – to "leernos y conocernos, establecer vínculos que permitan enriquecer nuestras miradas" (Díaz and Mijaíl 168). However, he also denounces the neocolonial and racist despoliation to which he and others like him have been subjected — despoliation that often goes hand-in-hand with certain white frameworks of queer thought. He states that "[n]os han quitado todo, incluso las imágenes. […] Nosotras queremos imágenes que exijan nuestro derecho a la dignidad. 'YO NO SOY QUEER, SOY NEGRA'" (49-50). Like Spillers[13], he suggests that one's blackness supersedes gender, nationality, location, and sexual orientation as the key marker by which one should be identified.

But Mijaíl was not the first to articulate the aforementioned quote in all capital letters: it was first made by Yos (Erchxs) Piña Narváez (2017), a Black Venezuelan theorist living in Spain. In not explicitly crediting Piña for this quote, Mijaíl may be showing the extent to which he is counting on the very insularity of Chilean queer theory that he is critiquing. Piña argues that "[s]i lo queer es una categoría apropiada desde la blanquitud académica…pues tampoco lo soy. […] Soy intensamente negrx" (38). Piña's work cites bell hooks and Audre Lorde, showing the extent to which Black feminist and queer theory from the US has already enriched Latin American queer thought. For Piña, as well as Cathy Cohen (1997), identity-based alliances — if they must be made among those who are marginalized by hegemonic power — may not be desirable if based solely upon sexual orientation, particularly if they take place at the expense of considerations about race and gender. As Cohen states, "I am suggesting that the process of movement building be rooted not in our shared history or identity, but in our marginal relationship to dominant power which normalizes, legitimizes, and privileges" (89-90). Although she is referring to coalitions within the US — among queer people of color and straight people of color who are oppressed by the same

[13] Spillers writes about the incommensurability of enslaved Black bodies during their terrible passage across the Atlantic to the Americas: "removed from the indigenous land and culture, and not-yet 'American' either, these captives, without names…were in movement…but they were also *nowhere* at all. Because…we might imagine, the captive personality did not know where s/he was, we could say that they were the culturally 'unmade'…. Under these conditions, one is neither female, not male, as both subjects are taken into account as *quantities*" (214-5, emphases in original).

white supremacist institutions — her work is a call to be critical about the affiliations made among academic and cultural milieux throughout the Americas using queer theory, including those made by Mijaíl himself. For Piña, these can be based on "afectividades no binarias, no dimórficas, cuerpxs imaginados que nunca leyeron a Judith Butler…pero quizás bailaron Vogue con lxs negrxs de *Paris is Burning* y dialogaron con deidades incaicas que inspiraron a Giuseppe Campuzano y su Museo Travesti del Perú" (40). The alliances that Mijaíl's work forges, then — looking to other islands, theorists, and other marginalized migrants and indigenous people — must also be subject to the scrupulousness that Cohen posits. The fact that the queer Mapuche artist Sebastián Calfuqueo once accused Mijaíl of harassment[14] shows that Mijaíl and Calfuqueo's shared queerness and non-whiteness hardly guarantee that they should construct any kind of identity-based alliance.

Citing Piña and returning to *Paris is Burning* is an apt way to close my analysis of Mijaíl. As Díaz (2014) has written apropos of Mijaíl's work, "esta isla…tan estrecha llamada Chile…está dividida por espacios negros y espacios que se miran a sí mismos como blancos" (9), and Mijaíl questions the binaries that define Chile by writing about "cuerpos que no se limitan a una forma porque se trasvisten, se infectan de sida y repiten mantras con una religiosidad pagana en ebullición" (12). Mijaíl's critique of the isolationism inherent to Chilean exceptionalism exposes the need to broaden the conceptions of queer theory there. The destabilizing and decolonial possibilities of queer Black thought from the US, then — misunderstood by the viewers of *Paris is Burning* in 1995 Santiago — are already part of North Atlantic queer theory, preempting the critiques of Chilean queer theorists with a narrower view of that theoretical corpus. However, Mijaíl's unacknowledged dialogue with Piña's work shows the urgency of expanding the field of Chilean queer theory with precision — giving credit where credit is due.

In any case, the presence of caution in this process of expansion does not mean that it can't still take place joyously. To quote Lawrence Lafountain-Stokes's argument (2016) about the manifold expressions of sexual dissidence in the multiracial context of the Caribbean diaspora (he also cites Johnson and Cohen): "Las sinvergüenzas, welfare queens y malas malas transcaribeñas y latinoamericanas, nuevas locas archipelágicas y diaspóricas, reelaboran lo queer en mil maneras". This is important to take into account in Chile, whose "loca geografía" is certainly insular, and perhaps more *loca* than it realizes.

[14] See Vanessa Vargas Rojas (2018).

Conclusions

In this article, I've argued that the stance taken by the majority of theorists of queer culture in Chile—including myself—against the supposedly neocolonial positionality of a rather limited number of texts written by white queer thinkers cannot fully account for the intersectional complexities of how *lo cuir* functions in the country. More needs to be done, therefore, to broaden these exceptionalistic approaches to queer theory there, which can then better critique racist iterations of Chile's idea of itself as exceptional. Migration to Chile by people of African descent like Mijaíl has brought to the forefront the urgency of confronting how some thinkers in and beyond Chile have perpetuated these lacunae in queer theory there.

By placing the trajectory of queer theory as it has been traditionally conceived in Chile side-by-side with the work of Black queer theorists, it becomes clear that the conception of Chile as a place that needs to be somehow insulated from the more imperialistic aspects of (a somewhat limited, mostly white corpus of) queer theory is one of many "desentendimientos" between Latin American queer theory and "lo queer anglo" (Viteri 408). Instead, I have proposed that Chilean queer theory can connect itself to a rich corpus of Black queer theory that is a priori anti-colonial, just as Chile itself is connected to a rich diaspora of Black migration across the Americas in ways that its rhetoric of exceptionalism has systematically occluded. I am aware, as are Díaz and Mijaíl (167), that no one academic article can make these epistemic connections clearer; many more works by US Black queer theorists will need to be translated into Spanish[15], and a greater awareness is necessary across the Americas of the decolonial traditions shared by the work of Black queer thinkers in the US and queer thinkers working in the Chilean field. With that, the "mistranslations" that Richard describes (137) can hopefully be reduced, in the interest of breaking down the exclusions inherent to Chile's exceptionalism as a whole.

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[15] In this sense, I join Marcia Ochoa's call for the translation of more works of queer theory by people of color in the US from English to Spanish (Viteri 407), as well as Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel's and Marisa Belausteguigoitía's call for the translation of more works of queer theory from Spanish into English (Viteri 416).

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