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Antropofagia, Calibanism, and the Post-Romero Zombie: Cannibal Resistance in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Antropofagia, Calibanism, and the Post-Romero Zombie: Cannibal Resistance in Latin America and the Caribbean

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Max Brooks's *World War Z* includes the surprising assertion of a Cuban character, Seryosha García, that "Cuba won the Zombie War. . . . Just look at where we were twenty years ago as opposed to where we are now" (228). The explanation for Cuba's "victory"—particularly its conflation of electoral democracy with participation (and even dominance) in a globalized, neoliberal order (228-33)—reflects US rather than Cuban ideals, but the notion that a mass of undead cannibals could somehow benefit the island nation fits surprisingly well within Latin American and Caribbean thought. Indeed, while North American and European literature tends to cast the zombie in a negative light by emphasizing its grotesque articulation of enslavement and captivity, much zombie literary and cultural production from Latin America and the Caribbean posits resistant ties between the walking dead and the oppressed peoples of the region(s). The principal focus of this article is the contemporary, post-Romero zombie through the lens of Latin Americanist theorizations of resistant cannibalism, particularly Oswald de Andrade's *antropofagia* as discussed in his *Cannibalist Manifesto* (1928) and Roberto Fernández Retamar's Calibanism as discussed in *Caliban and Other Essays* (1971). These thinkers signal two particular ways in which the human-eating, post-Romero zombie becomes especially resistant in the Latin American and Caribbean contexts. Firstly, the post-Romero zombie's complex etymology allows us to view its articulation in both regions as a cannibalization of US and Western cultural products despite the fact that this figure also traces its roots back to Haitian vodou and society. Secondly, the post-Romero zombie's ability to foment an apocalypse by destroying the reigning structures of power allows for powerful critiques of the neoliberal order that has devastated many sectors of the population both politically and economically.

Zombies are by no means a new phenomenon in the Latin American and Caribbean imaginary. The earliest mention of the term zombie in world literature occurs in Pierre-Corneille Blessebois's *The Zombie of Great Peru: Or the Countess of Concagne* (1697). The novel was French, and the term here refers more generally to a ghost or specter than to an enslaved corpse; that said, Latin America served as the novel's backdrop due to its supposed exoticism. Of course, the most significant tie between the zombie and Latin American and Caribbean culture is the Haitian folk belief in *zombis*, which holds that a vodou priest called a *bokor* can raise and control soulless bodies (Cohen, *Voodoo* 60-61; Pressely-Sanon 11). This undead lacks any subjectivity, functioning instead as an appendage to its master. The Haitian *zombi* first entered US cultural thought by way of sensationalized representations of Haitian vodou in literature, particularly William Seabrooks's *The Magic Island* (1928) and films like Victor Halperin's *White Zombie* (1932). Toni Pressely-Sanon captures the uncomfortable ties between an undead status and slavery when she states that Haitian *zombis* are "socially dead" because "their master consumes their labor until physical death releases them from this liminal

state” (11). Her invocation of consumption is not coincidental; rather, she argues that the *bokor* literally cannibalizes the *zombi*'s life force.

This assertion helps explain why the zombie would eventually evolve into a grotesque, cannibalistic cadaver after its transposition to a US context. The cannibalistic zombie that permeates contemporary (Western) popular culture first appeared in 1968—thirty-six years after the production of *White Zombie*—with George Romero's classic film *Night of the Living Dead*; the director later cemented this iteration of the figure in the popular imagination with his sequel, *Dawn of the Dead*, in 1978. Much has been made—and rightfully so—about the differences between the Haitian *zombi* and the post-Romero zombie; Sarah Juliet Lauro and Karen Embry distinguish between these undead through spelling: they maintain the French form, *zombi*, when referring to the Haitian iteration (97 nt. 31), for example.¹ We should not allow this necessary distinction to impede us from recognizing important similarities between both types of zombie. Beyond Lauro and Embry's assertion that “in its history and in its metaphors, the zombie is most often a slave” (87), we should also note that many of the titles that exported the *zombi* from Haiti to the United States emphasized taboo behaviors like cannibalism that supposedly also ran rampant in that Caribbean country (Najman 251; Pressley-Sanon 8-9; Lauro and Embry 98, nt. 33). The undead were certainly not the agents of cannibalization at this point (in many cases they were the victims), but US writers, directors, and viewers clearly associated the *zombi*/zombie with cannibalism long before Romero's ghouls first graced the silver screen. The post-Romero zombie's Haitian roots have led numerous critics to assert that this monster, in its many iterations in the United States, represents the “implacable racialized threat” of an imminent inversion between colonizers and colonized (Canavan 423; see also Comentale 193-209; Moraña 274-75). The post-Romero zombie threatens to invert the roles of colonizers and colonized in Latin America and the Caribbean as well; nevertheless, as the example from *World War Z* suggests, this potential becomes surprisingly resistant when articulated in those countries.

When the post-Romero zombie (re)appears in Latin America and the Caribbean,² it functions both as a cannibalized text from the colonial center and as a rearticulation of a monster that has long existed in the region. Interestingly, the post-Romero zombie's penchant for human flesh signals it most explicitly as a cannibalized figure in the regions' cultural production because this action most readily distinguishes it from the *zombi*. Carlos A. Jáuregui defines cultural cannibalism as the appropriation of cultural forms from the Center which are then adapted to local context(s) (431). Antonio Luciano de Andrade Tosta understands cultural cannibalism as “an act of possession (or re-possession), which inverts fallacious views of civilization and savagery, cultural superiority and inferiority, and originality and imitation, thus empowering the peripheral post-colonial culture”

(218; see also Rolnik 2). The Latin American texts that most explicitly advocate for cultural cannibalism are Retamar's *Calibán* and Andrade's *Cannibalist Manifesto*, two works that employed the imaginary of an anthropophagus indigenous population in order to bring about a “devoração crítica do legado cultural universal” (Campos 11, translation mine).³ The two theories formed independently of each other; indeed, Retamar has admitted that he was unfamiliar with Andrade when he penned *Calibán* (“Caliban ante la antropofagia” 204). That said, their texts share much in common: both authors questioned the historical veracity of a barbarous and anthropophagous indigeneity (Woodford 135), but they problematically created what Jáuregui calls an “affirmative” and “imitative barbarity” as a strategy for resistance (540; see also Madureira 109).

The poet-theorists sought strategies to reassert peripheral (nonwhite) cultures and ideologies in a new national (and regional) cultural scene that favored the cannibalization of Western aesthetics in order to refashion an autochthonous art. Andrade sat at the forefront of the Brazilian Avant Gard (Pezzuto 117-18), and he used his playful prose (and poetry) to promote a rupture between his *antropofagia* school and Western thought by calling into question Europe's cultural superiority. His manifesto was a glue that united an eclectic literary and cultural movement obsessed with finding a new national aesthetic (Umpierre and Beaupied 44). His work remains current despite the fact that he wrote over ninety years ago.⁴ Andrade based his *antropofagia* on the ritualistic cannibalism of indigenous populations who would devour their enemies in order to internalize their strength (Xavier 14; Jáuregui 39). Retamar's *Calibán* further elucidates the subversive potential of the post-Romero zombie in Latin America and the Caribbean. The essay reverberates especially well in the Caribbean (Torres-Saillant 24-49), but it also engages Latin American concerns at a continental level (Moraña, “Postscriptum” 367).⁵ According to Teresa Basile, Retamar postulates Caliban as a “*máquina de guerra*” (595, emphasis in original),⁶ a fact that ties the Shakespearean protagonist to the teratological questions that Moraña engages in *El monstruo como máquina de guerra*. Retamar frames his essay as a response to José Enrique Rodó's seminal text, *Ariel* (1900), which used Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* as an allegory for Latin America.⁷ That said, Retamar approaches the essay “through the eyes of [José] Martí” (Hulme 117).⁸ Rodó posited Ariel as the protagonist of Latin American identity and exhorted his pupils—and all of (white) Latin America⁹—to turn to Europe in search of the spiritual refinement needed in the region. For Rodó, Shakespeare's “uncouth Caliban signifies the *torpeza* of the uneducated Latin American masses” (Castells 168);¹⁰ Retamar concurs with Rodó that this character represents the masses, but given his affinity for equality and social justice, he ascribes Caliban a positive role in the national and regional myth.¹¹ Retamar somewhat ironically defends his choice to associate the region with Caliban through highly intellectual arguments despite the possible anti-intellectualism that one

could associate with the figure (Bonfiglio 74). Indeed, the Cuban essayist explains that “Caliban is Shakespeare’s anagram for ‘cannibal,’” a word that comes from “carib” (*Calibán* 6; see also Versiani Galery 313-15). Retamar uses Shakespeare’s play to show that the trope of a cannibalistic, nonwhite monstrosity—particularly that of the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Caribbean—has long governed Europe’s relationship with the region (*Calibán* 6-7).

Both Andrade and Retamar emphasize how the act of cultural cannibalization can be resistant as it refashions foreign art to the local context (Martínez Nuñez 252); nevertheless, numerous critics also note that their strategy runs the risk of favoring the foreign over the local (Kaliman 152; Pendse). These observations prove especially important when evaluating the discursive value of the post-Romero zombie in Latin America and the Caribbean. Just as in other contexts, this zombie provides stinging critiques of capitalist modes of production, runaway consumerism, and even “the commodification of the self” (Larsen 157-58, 165-68; see also Moraña, *Monstruo* 278; Rolnick 11-12; Vint 176-78; Webb and Byrmand 116-20). John Beverly inadvertently signals certain ties between Andrade, Retamar, and a zombie hermeneutic when he argues that *Calibán*’s continued relevance—and, one could infer that of Andrade and even (post-Romero) zombies—reflects a global society that cannot conceive of democratic citizenship independently from consumption (122). At the same time, Santiago Colás argues that cannibalism—both artistic and dietary—flaunts the Western failure “to contain, assimilate, or indeed, destroy the resistant societies of the region” (Colás 130).¹² The discussion of Cuba’s “victory” in *World War Z*—while clearly not an example of Latin American or Caribbean literature—suggests that the cannibalistic, post-Romero zombie becomes particularly resistant when it tears down oppressive and corrupt governments and allows survivors to create something better. Brooks imagines a Cuban state that “wins” by becoming the dominant force of a neoliberal and globalized world order; nevertheless, most literature from Latin America and the Caribbean conceives victory as the imposition of a national order that provides greater autonomy and respect for the region’s subaltern, most of whom claim African and/or Amerindian ancestry.

Indeed, unlike vampires—another cannibalistic monster whom scholars like Retamar associate with colonizers (“Drácula” 359)—zombies (and *zombis*) are marginalized bodies who are subjected to dehumanizing constructs of power. The post-Romero zombie deconstructs not only concepts of life and death, but also those of individual and community (Thacker 378); as they navigate this binary, the region’s post-Romero zombies achieve a degree of communion with the region’s people of color. The biopolitical theorist Roberto Esposito argues that community identity often poses a threat against individuality; when this occurs, powerholders attempt to immunize individuals against the excesses of their community. This has played out time and time again in Latin America as a result of eugenics movements

aimed at coercing people of color to accede to European culture and ideals (Dalton, *Mestizo Modernity* 100-07; Stepan 18). Post-Romero zombie literature—both from the United States and Latin America—depicts an immunological process that, by definition, entails the destruction of undead bodies. As a monstrous horde (Vint 172), these undead are a most natural articulation of a dangerous community. Moraña argues that monsters (such as zombies) “cataliza[n] la inmunidad social, visualiza[n] el peligro del contagio e inyecta[n] la alteridad radical en dosis destinadas a probar el umbral de tolerancia de cada época y cada cultura” (*Monstruo* 164). Interestingly, monsters achieve this immunological end by embodying an entity that heroes can kill with impunity. Zombie bodies, for example, “activate the ‘state of exception,’” an act which then interpellates them into what Giorgio Agamben calls killable *zoê* or a *homo sacer* state (Canavan 423).¹³ The post-Romero zombie genre relishes the disposability of the undead masses; gratuitous scenes often show zombie bodies undergoing gruesome and creative forms of destruction. The post-Romero zombie’s bare existence becomes especially problematic when we consider the fact that it often represents communities of color. At the same time, this juxtaposition gives greater significance to the fact that the post-Romero zombie often metes out justice to those who have enabled the suffering of the colonized masses of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Subalternity and the Cannibalistic Undead

Such holds true in Junot Díaz’s short story “Monstro,” which is set on the Haiti-Dominican border.¹⁴ The Dominican-American author captures the post-Romero zombie’s racialized *zombi* etymology in the story’s first line: “At first, Negroes thought it was *funny*. A disease that could make a Haitian blacker? It was the joke of the year” (emphasis in original). Beyond interfacing nicely with the zombie’s Haitian roots, the quote also captures the racial tensions that continue to exist between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Neither US nor Dominican forces attempt to control the epidemic because it claims only poor, black Haitians. Díaz does not reveal the exact nature of his monsters until the final paragraphs of his story. Readers unfamiliar with zombie literary and cultural production may not recognize the author’s winks at the genre until Díaz narrates, “initially, no one believed the hysterical evacuees. Forty-foot-tall cannibal motherfuckers running loose on the Island? Negro, please.” Díaz’s zombies may reside in Haiti, but they have more in common with the figure’s post-Romero articulation than with the *zombi*, a fact that rings especially clear as the creatures charge across the border and into the Dominican Republic. While frightening, these walking dead are not the story’s true villains; rather, colonialist indifference toward Haiti from the rest of the world—particularly the United States and the Dominican Republic—is what has facilitated this apocalypse. Díaz’s “monstros” will avenge their nation by

infesting and consuming all of humankind.

“Monstro” provides fertile ground from which to gauge the resistant nature of the culturally cannibalized post-Romero zombie in Latin American and Caribbean literary and cultural production. Díaz emphasizes the unique nature of his cultural cannibalization by placing his post-Romero zombies in Haiti, where they both refer back to their roots and challenge a colonial world order. As the zombie signifier transforms in his story, it provides tools for engaging a question that Latin Americanist thinkers have grappled with for decades: that of authenticity and imitation. Indeed, Retamar begins *Calibán* by recounting a conversation (probably apocryphal) with a European reporter who asked him if Latin America could have a unique culture given its colonial status (*Calibán* 3). “Monstro”—and much other post-Romero zombie literary and cultural production from the region—answers that question with an inquiry of its own: who, exactly, is imitating whom? Díaz’s monstros represent an especially complex (re)reappropriation of a decidedly US/Western monster back into the region of its teratological ancestors. They are both autochthonous to the region and not. Similar to the *zombi*—and perhaps the post-Romero zombie as well—Díaz’s monstros are victims of conditions beyond their control that have relegated them to the global periphery and left them vulnerable.

The image of Díaz’s monstros devouring US and Dominican oppressors draws to mind a playful passage from Andrade’s *Cannibalist Manifesto*: “I asked a man what the Law was. He answered that it was the guarantee of the exercise of possibility. That man was named Galli Mathias. I ate him” (41). Leslie Bary points out that “‘Galli Mathias’ is a pun on *galimatias*, or nonsense” (46). The passage thus suggests that Western laws and institutions cannot transfer directly to the Brazilian, Latin American, nor Caribbean contexts because, ever since the contact period, laws have played a central role in creating economies of the body that have assigned blacks to slavery and poverty on the one hand while justifying the displacement and genocide of Amerindians on the other (Omi and Winant 14-50; Feagin and Elias 935-44; Prashad 1-36; Quijano 534-35, 560-61). The circumstances around Díaz’s monstros affirm the observations of numerous scholars that the oppressive body politics of colonial times continue to operate in present-day Latin American and Caribbean society (see Mailhe 203; Pieres Vieira 98); indeed, this body politics lies at the heart of Haiti’s continued marginalization. Andrade engages this oppressive biopolitics most explicitly when he famously writes “Tupi or not tupi. That is the question” (38). The Tupi were a native people that lived in Brazil when the first explorers arrived, and their infamous practice of devouring the flesh of their enemies placed them in the crosshairs of European colonizers. Andrade cannibalizes Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* to reify the resistant cannibal acts of the Tupi in order to celebrate Brazil’s nonwhite—and particularly indigenous—heritage. In a similar vein, Díaz cannibalizes the post-Romero zombie

in order to imagine a resistant Haitian uprising against the countries that have historically kept it marginalized.

Where Díaz employs cannibalism to catalyze action in favor of social justice, Andrade uses it to reconstruct the indigenous past and create a pluricultural and decolonial present (Nunes, “Becoming Whole” 32-33; Madureira 102-03). Far from suggesting that the region eschew Western legal and cultural traditions in all of their forms, *antropofagia*, Calibanism, and post-Romero zombie literature from Latin America and the Caribbean advocate for the consumption, digestion, and refashioning of foreign discourse so that it will work in the national contexts of the cultural producers (Carrasco 81). The conjugation of Marxist values (Madureira 99-100), postcolonial sentiment, and Avante-Gard style rings clear in one of Andrade’s more problematic assertions: “We already had justice, the codification of vengeance. Science, the codification of Magic. Cannibalism. The permanent transformation of the Tabu [sic] into totem” (40). These words underscore José Luís Jobim’s observation that “*Bárbaros* são os que não pertencem ao contexto em que determinadas verdades e certezas são generalizadas, mas os que são chamados de *bárbaros* podem ter outras verdades e certezas, consideradas válidas em seus respectivos contextos” (394, emphasis in original). Andrade demonstrates the discursive power of *antropofagia* as he advocates for the sanctification of the taboo. The early sentences in the passage show that, despite claims of moral and intellectual superiority, people of the West simply dress their base desires in specialized terminologies meant to give them greater legitimacy. Díaz recognizes a similar fact in “Monstro”; as a result, he uses his hyper-black, post-Romero zombies as a foil for Western indifference and colonial practices. In this way, Díaz produces a post-Romero zombie hermeneutic that, similar to Andrade’s *antropofagia*, denaturalizes notions of racial and cultural superiority of one people over another.

“Monstro” thus provides an answer to those critics who hold that Calibanism and *antropofagia* “[omit]” people of African descent from the narrative of Latin American identity (Castells 174). Rather, the story reverberates better with Peter Hulme’s claim that Retamar viewed Caliban as “a symbol of *black* pride” (119, emphasis in original); indeed, the cannibalistic, even Calibanian, resistance in the story is explicitly coded as black. Certainly, Retamar explicitly ties Caliban to *mestizaje* (*Calibán* 26; Chanady “Latin American” 42), but he does this not to elide the region’s black (or indigenous) presence. Rather, he promotes a cross-racial (and cross-class) alliance throughout the Caribbean and Latin America.¹⁵ Díaz answers this call with “Monstro”: while the text clearly criticizes the world’s indifference to Haitian and black suffering, it does so with a story that cannibalizes and recycles US refashionings of the *zombi*. As such, Díaz uses a monster that has long been associated with white supremacy, racism, and the dehumanization of Haitians. This fact alludes to a degree of ambivalence not only in “Monstro,” but

in *Calibán* and *The Cannibalist Manifesto* as well. Retamar himself problematically builds on Orientalized understandings of indigenous—as well as African—beliefs and practices in order to advocate a racialized reawakening. As he reifies an exotified practice of cannibalism, he reappropriates an imaginary that has historically relegated many inhabitants of both Latin America and the Caribbean to the periphery.

Amaryll Chanady questions Retamar's commitment to the "internal Other" (read: blacks and Amerindians) because, in her estimation, his commitment to Marxism tends to reduce the region's history to class while eliding race ("Nuestra América" 178).¹⁶ At the same time, numerous critics view *Calibán* as the Latin American and Caribbean "equivalent" of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Jameson 4; Spitta 276). Given this fact, it seems that we may more precisely argue that, while Retamar certainly builds on Orientalized notions of indigenous and black cosmologies and ways of life, he does so in order to "transform eurocentric society and U.S. imperialism" (Lara 86), a goal that can only come into fruition through a legible resistance against the colonizing forces—both internal and external—that continue to operate within the region. This postcolonialist reading of *Calibán* becomes especially relevant in our discussion of the post-Romero zombie figures that appear in "Monstro" and other Latin American and Caribbean cultural products. The actions of Díaz's zombies seem to come right out of the annals of Retamar's notion of Calibanian resistance by conflating race, cannibalism, and political revolt into a single metaphor for (neo)colonized existence in Latin America and the Caribbean. Díaz's text makes it clear that colonizing nations ignored Haiti's needs when they could interpret the island nation's problems through humanitarian language. Nevertheless, as the poverty-stricken population transforms into monsters, their indictments against global capital become instantly legible (and urgent) not only to their Dominican neighbors, but to the United States as well. Curiously enough, Díaz's cannibalization and refashioning of cannibalistic, post-Romero zombies is key to enunciating his critique in a way that his audience—US, Dominican, or both—can understand.

Language and the Plague

Legibility and language sit at the core of Retamar's thought. Perhaps the most oft-cited quote from *Calibán* is the following: "Prospero invaded the islands, killed our ancestors, enslaved Caliban, and taught him his language to make himself understood. What else can Caliban do but use that same language—today he has no other—to curse him, to wish that the 'red plague' would fall on him?" (14). The essayist's words invite numerous interpretations: Caliban may resist literally through armed rebellion or discursively through language and appeals to morality. Our reading of "Monstro" shows that Calibanian resistance often requires colonized

people to embrace the dehumanizing imaginaries—such as exotic understandings of vodou and assertions of cannibalism in Haiti—that have relegated them to the periphery on the one hand while refashioning that image into a symbol of power on the other. By doing so, these monstros problematically engage the “language” of their oppressors while employing it in a subversive way. Language (or the lack thereof) is a key and recurring trope in post-Romero zombie literary and cultural production both in Latin America and throughout the world. I will dedicate the balance of this essay to a discussion that places Retamar and Andrade in dialogue with Pedro Valencia’s 2009 play *Con Z de zombie*, which explores the resistant potential of a linguistically challenged zombie in an innovative light. The playwright centers his play on Randy, a zombie from Mexico City who inexplicably recovers upper-brain function after months as a mindless, cannibalistic monster. Even after regaining his ability to think, he cannot communicate with other surviving humans because his vocal cords have rotted away. Unlike most post-Romero zombies, whose ultimate expendability lies in their inability to think (Cohen 390), Randy clearly enjoys a similar level of beingness to his human counterparts. That said, the zombie’s inability to communicate with humans means that his attempts to use language come across as senseless.

Valencia’s alignment of a babbling, post-Romero zombie with Latin America’s subaltern becomes especially clear as we consider Ileana Rodríguez’s discussion of the subversive, even threatening, potential that European conquerors feared (and Retamar celebrated) in the region’s non-European populations:

Una corporalidad centauresca hipermasculinizada, ligada a un color oscuro, ojos y pelo negro, a un balbuceo ininteligible, colocado sobre un fondo de apreciación primordialista, que acentúa el poder de los sentidos sobre el de la razón y el de los derechos de la “tribu” sobre los de la comunidad civil global, representan una clara amenaza a todo lo establecido. (206-07)

The post-Romero zombie invokes a similar imaginary; indeed, its babble and ties to imaginaries of African and indigenous cultures imbue it with its threatening allure. The play’s focus on language and the zombie condition draws attention to the incomprehensibility that necessarily emerges between living and unliving as well as colonizers and colonized. The undead of these plays thus align themselves further with Andrade’s thought; indeed, the Brazilian poet took great pleasure from the communicative breakdown that necessarily resulted from his *antropofagista* refashioning of Western texts (Pérez Villalón 166). Whether giving “a triumphalist interpretation of our [Brazil and Latin America’s] backwardness” (Schwarz 7), positing modernity through primitivism (Pérez Villalón 170; Xavier 14-15), or advocating the reinstatement of discourses, ideas, and practices that disappeared after

the conquest (Iribarren 211), Andrade constantly subverted the colonizer's language and cultural forms in his work. Valencia engages in a similar practice by articulating his own linguistically challenged post-Romero zombie in Latin America.

The play draws to mind Edward P. Comentale's argument that "when it comes to the postcolonial zombie, we're dealing less with monster as other than with monster as form of becoming" (191); rather than focus on the monstrosity of his postcolonial, post-Romero zombie(s), Valencia instead signals telling parallels between these undead and the oppressed peoples of Mexico and Latin America. Retamar and Andrade can provide further insight into the nature of the postcolonial "becoming" of the zombies of this play if we consider Hugo Achugar's assertion that *antropofagia* and Calibanism function as a sort of "baluceo teórico": a subaltern appropriation of the colonizer's language that Prospero (i.e. the colonizer) views as incoherent and thus invalid (98). *Con Z de zombie* enriches Gerry Canavan's characterization of zombies as "completely realized colonial objects" (418); for Canavan this colonial status reflects the figure's lack of intelligence and thus its inability to communicate. Valencia, however, suggests that Randy's dehumanization results from the colonizer's inability to recognize and validate his intelligence. Achugar puts it best when he says, "la respuesta de Calibán a Próspero implica la reivindicación de su discurso, implica su derecho a balucear no en tanto un discurso inválido o incoherente sino como su propio, válido, estructurado discurso" (100). Similar to colonized beings throughout the world, Randy fails to commune with the living not because he is stupid but because his intelligence is incompatible with theirs. As such, his situation becomes analogous with that of the nonwhite peoples of the region whom Iberian conquerors identified as unintelligent due to linguistic and cultural incommensurabilities that existed between their cultures.

This power dynamic leads William Luís to argue that there are probably Calibans who "have been denied Prospero's language, or they actively rejected it, preferring not to curse him but to punish him for his transgressions and inflict bodily harm on him" (132). Viewed from this perspective, most post-Romero zombies in Latin America could be Calibanian figures who "speak through their actions" rather than words (Luís 132). In many cases, the post-Romero zombie's lack of upper-brain function means that this figure's resistance is more visceral than intellectual, but the fact remains that post-Romero zombies in Latin American literary and cultural production tend to tear down oppressive regimes. This observation takes on greater significance when we consider Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia's argument that cannibalistic Calibans use Prospero's language against him even when they remain silent or mute. As Quintero Herencia argues, "la monstruosidad de Calibán surge del ocultamiento de su verdadera voz (caribe) bajo la imposición de la máscara caníbal" (75). In a similar vein, the post-Romero

zombie hides its postcolonial potential under its cannibalistic mask—a fact that becomes especially literal in *Con Z de zombie*, where the actors literally cover their faces to project their identity to the audience. Randy’s performance suggests that his supposed *zoê* reflects not his inability to think and reason but a physical disability that impedes him from communicating with the living. When survivors like the feisty Pumocu—a character who speaks only through pantomime—find him, they cannot speak or communicate despite the fact that both have human-level intelligence.

Most audiences will first suspect that Pumocu’s name signals a vaguely indigenous influence, but Randy soon reveals it as a slurred combination of “puta mocosu culero” (41). Pumocu’s name thus epitomizes the linguistic breakdown that plagues Latin American countries. Indigenous languages still exist in the region, but they remain primarily on the periphery. Valencia thus affirms the overwhelming Spanish-monolingualism of his audience by using an indigenous-sounding name to add to his character’s mysterious allure. When the audience interprets Randy’s utterances as an indigenous-sounding word, it indirectly associates the country’s Amerindian cultures with living death: both zombies and Amerindians exist beyond the communicative reach of most Mexicans. The true irony here is that, given Mexico’s majority mixed-race, *mestizo* demographic composition, most of the audience—not to mention the people staging the play—also have indigenous ancestry. Valencia ambivalently straddles the chasm between validating the hegemony of the Spanish language in Mexico and advocating for a Calibanian revolution. At a scene near the end, for example, Randy recovers what Quintero Herencia would call his “original voice” (77), and he uses it to save Pumocu from a herd of ravenous zombies who have not regained consciousness. At the surface, this scene shows that “the characters depend on one another for survival” (Dalton, “Immunizing” 147); they can only protect one another if they can physically communicate in Spanish. Despite their physical inability to form comprehensible discourse, each character has *thought* in Spanish throughout the play. During his monologues, for example, Randy engages his audience in Spanish; it is only when he has to speak with people onstage that we notice his struggles to produce comprehensible discourse. At a deeper level, this scene also suggests that the “original [Mexican] voice” uses Spanish rather than Náhuatl, Zapoteco, or any other indigenous language native to the country.

Due to their general lack of upper-brain function (with the notable exception of Randy), Valencia’s zombies exhibit an ambiguous morality; at times they kill normal, presumably good Mexicans, while at others they cross the border and take down racist gringos and *la migra* (10). Cannibalism functions as a critique of consumer culture on the one hand; on the other hand, however, it removes corrupt and discriminating agents from power. Embry and Lauro argue that “the zombii’s dystopic promise is that it can only assure the destruction of a corrupt system

without imagining replacement—for the *zombii* can offer no resolution” (96). Despite Lauro and Embry’s characterization of the *zombii* as a “swarm organism” (88), their definition of it as “the truly consciousnessless posthuman” (90 nt. 15), suggests that a *zombii* condition reflects a lack of subjectivity that can apply equally to the Haitian *zombi* or the post-Romero zombie. Valencia’s play invites a fruitful dialogue with the theorist by using Randy’s recovery of language to deconstruct the terms *zombii* and (post-Romero) zombie. This in turn leads to an innovative understanding of the zombie/*zombii* apocalypse by including a post-Romero zombie (who is decidedly not *zombii*) as its principal protagonist. *Zombii* actors may be incapable of replacing a broken system, but Valencia appears to suggest that, under the proper circumstances, the post-Romero zombie can. Randy and a horde of other post-Romero zombies lead a Calibanian revolution by devouring the nation’s corrupt politicians while existing in their *zombii* state. The protagonist admits that he ate his fair share of human beings, both good and bad, but he ceases that behavior after regaining consciousness, an event that, significantly, occurs only after the fall of the corrupt regime.

Valencia thus provides possible explanations as to why the babbling, anthropophagic, post-Romero zombie/*zombii* is rarely the primary antagonist in Latin American cultural production: while they may hurt innocent victims, they are a symptom, not the cause. What is more, their cannibalistic nature and their incompatibility with modern, civil society imbues them with a hidden, immunological potential. Indeed, Andrade characterizes cannibalism as a vaccine “against meridian religions. And against outside inquisitions” (39). The idea that cannibalism could immunize Latin Americans from the harsh demands of the Church, the law, or state brutality invites a reading of the region’s post-Romero zombies that sits in direct contrast to the way the monster has been conventionally articulated in (US and Western European) zombie literature and film. In those cases, undead, zombie/*zombii* cannibalism is the disease against which survivors strive to immunize themselves. Andrade’s work invites a resignification of the zombie; rather than represent the plague against which humankind must defend itself, the post-Romero zombie in Latin America vaccinates the region against the imperialistic tendencies—both internal and external—that still lie dormant within its population. Esposito alludes to this potentiality in zombie being when he states that immunization requires “a fragment of the same pathogen from which it wants to protect itself” (46). Post-Romero zombies may lack upper-brain function, but they also serve to bring down oppressive regimes. Similar to Díaz, Valencia posits Latin America’s true enemy as the indifferent, globalized world of late capitalism that dehumanizes people by transforming them into exploitable and expendable bodies. Indeed, both works argue that globalized interests have already interpellated much of Latin America and the Caribbean into a zombie-like condition.

This article has posited the post-Romero zombie as a useful metaphor for

interrogating postcolonial discourses throughout the Americas. The figure interfaces surprisingly well with the theorizations of cannibalism of thinkers like Oswald de Andrade and Roberto Fernández Retamar. The works we have discussed imagine the post-Romero zombie in very different ways: Brooks imagines a Cuban state that is uniquely positioned to resist an apocalyptic zombie war in *World War Z*; Díaz conceives of a means for Haiti to punish colonial indifference and antagonism in “Monstro”; and Valencia engages notions of theoretical babble in *Con Z de zombie*. Our discussion of these texts alongside the theoretical currents of *antropofagia* and Calibanism has signaled new avenues for interpretation. Indeed, despite their differences, each of these post-Romero zombie texts’ engagement of cannibalism suggests that Latin American and Caribbean nations are uniquely positioned to survive and even thrive during a zombie apocalypse. The post-Romero zombie’s ties to Haiti always simmer just beneath the surface, but this figure also represents a problematic cannibalization and reconstitution of US cultural forms when (re)articulated in the region. Indeed, Latin American and Caribbean post-Romero zombies open up a revolutionary space precisely because they often kill US imperialists, internal colonists, and officials of corrupt and oppressive regimes. Valencia goes as far as suggesting that some post-Romero zombies in Latin America (and perhaps the Caribbean as well) may not be *zombii* at all. Rather, they, similar to the region’s subaltern, may struggle to articulate their ideals to their (living) allies due to structural communicative breakdown. The “theoretical babble” of the post-Romero zombie in Latin America and the Caribbean adds to their monstrous allure, but it also makes them especially subversive. As they digest colonizing agents—both internal and external—the region’s post-Romero zombies not only overthrow unjust leaders; they also sow the seeds for a fairer social order that will emerge after the zombie apocalypse.

Notes

¹ The critics use the term *zombie* to refer to any articulation of an undead cadaver that lacks subjectivity. In this paper, I use the term *post-Romero zombie* to refer to those undead that first appeared in *Night of the Living Dead* and *zombi* to refer to the Haitian version.

² Walter Mignolo argues that Haiti “is still peripheral, if not absent, from ‘the idea of Latin’ America” (112). This despite the country’s proximity to other Latin American countries, the fact that its official language is a “Latin” language, and a similar colonial history. This paper considers Haiti as a Caribbean nation with close ties to Latin America as well; for this reason it discusses a (re)appearance of the post-Romero zombie in Latin America: the *zombi* is native to the region.

³ Andrade saw *antropofagia* as an aesthetic movement that provided useful alternatives to institutionalized *mestizaje* by providing a space for nonwhite people to productively resist. See Federica Scherbosky (28).

⁴ Recent scholars have approached Andrade through critical lenses like ecocriticism (Cisneros 96-101) and postcolonial studies (Andrade Tosta 220-25).

⁵ According to Horacio Machín (164), Retamar engages both a local and global audience through different strategies.

⁶ Antonio Luciano de Andrade Tosta makes a similar observation regarding Oswald de Andrade's *antropofagia* (218-19).

⁷ According to Donna Woodford-Gormley (131-32), Shakespeare held an ambivalent position as both a European intellectual and as the zenith of classical letters. Retamar probably invoked him to emphasize the Revolutionary government's gains in education.

⁸ For discussions on authors who influenced Retamar, see Patrick Gallagher (9-13); Susan Gillman (188); Francisco Morán ("*E pur si muove*"); Ricardo Castells (166-68); María Clara Versiani Galery (309); Genara Pulido Tirado (247-66).

⁹ In Latin America, the reification of Ariel necessarily entails favoring Europe over the indigenous. See Antonio Melis (115).

¹⁰ Scholars like Elizabeth Milán-Zaibert suggest that Rodó equates Caliban with the United States (163-64).

¹¹ For a brief overview of the antithetical significations ascribed to Caliban by various postcolonial thinkers, see Sadesh Mishra (112-13).

¹² Starting with Columbus, Iberian conquerors validated their conquest of the Americas by highlighting supposed cases of cannibalism in indigenous—and later black—communities. See Dubin; Jáuregui (48-63); McCallister (77); Rodríguez (203-05); Torres Saillant (23-24).

¹³ For a discussion of the binary tension between *bios* (the good life) and *zōē* (animal, or killable life), see Giorgio Agamben (12).

¹⁴ Díaz announced that he hoped to expand the text into a novel after it came out with *The New Yorker* in 2012. See ("Junot Díaz Aims") and Cressida Leysnon. However, the author has since abandoned the project.

¹⁵ While Retamar makes important contributions to debates on race and ethnicity, he ignores the role of gender (Lara 87-88). His constant feminization of his enemies shows his contempt for sexual diversity. See Ricardo L. Ortiz, *Cultural Erotics in Cuban America* (95-109). Elizabeth Millán-Zaibert argues that the essayist undermines his own work by angrily attacking all writers and intellectuals who do not completely agree with him (165-67).

¹⁶ Retamar later recognized that internal (European/*criollo*) colonizers continued to mistreat black and indigenous people after the independence movements ("Adiós a Caliban" 120).

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