

## Franz Galich's *Tikal Futura* and the Perpetuation of History's Violent, Eurocentric Cycles

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**ABSTRACT:** Guatemalan-Nicaraguan Franz Galich's dystopian novel *Tikal Futura: Memorias para un futuro incierto (novelita futurista)* (2012) is an unmistakably anti-imperialist text that criticizes U.S. foreign policies and global capitalism broadly. This article argues, however, that the work's strong focus on external impositions results in the dismissal of Cané, a fictional Indigenous character, and her project of cultural decolonization as represented through the rewriting of official history and the recuperation of marginalized cultural epistemologies. The ethnic and cultural inequalities within Guatemala that Cané confronts thus remain unchallenged by the novel, consequently aligning the work with assimilationist tendencies that reaffirm the Eurocentric hierarchies that the novel supposedly criticizes. These power dynamics are questioned and critically analyzed utilizing a theoretical approach including critics such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Linda Tuhiwai Smith. These theorists call particular attention to the repetitive nature of history and forms of social and intellectual resistance, prevalent themes throughout the narrative.

**KEYWORDS:** Central American literature, dystopian fiction, Franz Galich, *Tikal Futura*, anti-imperialism, cultural decolonization

Guatemalan by birth and Nicaraguan by exile, Franz Galich (1951-2007) has gained increased recognition over the past two decades from literary critics for his narratives that call attention to the socially and economically devastating effects of global capitalism in Central America. Galich is undoubtedly most well known for his novel *Managua, Salsa City* (*¡Devórame otra vez!*) (2000), which relates the story of ex-Sandinista combatant Pancho Rana and his nocturnal adventures with the prostitute Tamara ("la Guajira") that conclude with a bloody firefight leaving most of the participants dead. The pronounced post-war disillusion that is so foundational to the text, along with its treatment of demilitarization and continuing violence in Nicaragua, prompted literary critics like Misha Kokotovic and Daniel Quirós to conceptualize such ideas as "neoliberal noir" and to support the claim that this work represents a new type of late-20<sup>th</sup>-century Central American literature, respectively.<sup>1</sup> As other critics like Silvia Gianni have similarly pointed out, Galich's narrative production maintains its critical vigor due to its intimate exploration of the Isthmus's present circumstances: "las obras de Galich se sitúan en la realidad más cercana, en las contradicciones sociales generadas por políticas económicas injustas, indagando sobre la identidad cambiante que configura la sociedad de Nicaragua" and, without a doubt, Guatemala (27). Galich's latest novel, *Tikal Futura: Memorias para un futuro incierto (novelita futurista)* (2012), a work of dystopian fiction, revitalizes and strengthens the critical economic and social resolve of his previous works to an exaggerated, if not hyperbolic, degree.<sup>2</sup> The novel relates the existence of Ciudad de Abajo where countless "descartables" produce for the wealthy citizens of Ciudad de Arriba, a space constructed hundreds of meters above the poverty and pollution of the 23<sup>rd</sup> century. Apocalíptico, a

member of the Guatemalan elite, and Mr. Kilowitz, an Ambassador from Quisyanland (formerly the United States), collaborate to further the exploitation of those of Abajo by creating the *Tikal Futura* tourist megaproject so foreigners may come and take advantage of Guatemala's natural wonders and peoples.<sup>3</sup> Unbeknownst to the ever-vigilant Tribunal Supremo de Ciudad de Arriba, Indigenous grandmother Cané raises her grandson Namú and granddaughter Ix while clandestinely recuperating and recording the fictional Yama peoples' lost history despite omnipresent surveillance from video cameras and implanted microchips in the inhabitants' brains. For their part, the Ejército Revolucionario de Liberación de Ciudad de Abajo (ERLCIA) is a small revolutionary group that seeks emancipation via targeted attacks on Arriba's infrastructure.

Literary critics such as María del Carmen Caña Jiménez and Patricia Alvarenga Venutolo have analyzed—at least in part—the uneven power dynamics and destructive consequences of neoliberal economic policies as they relate to Guatemalan (and Central American) urban spaces and subjectivities within the novel. Building off of the critical contributions of these and other scholars, I argue that despite *Tikal Futura's* desire to break the long-standing imperialist tradition between the United States and Central America, as well as to reject the continuation of similar impositions via global capitalism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the novel does not seek any real revisions to culturally- and ethnically-rooted structural racism within Guatemala; that is, the text largely leaves the hierarchy of internal colonialism untouched. In order to effectively criticize the fictional representation of these forms of systematic exclusion and exploitation, I consider two concepts in Galich's work: (historical) repetition and resistance. Central to this approach is Cané's nar-

rative of cultural and historical recuperation that intends to "write back" to the empire, for it serves as a response to Guatemala's cyclical and violent history in regards to Eurocentric impositions and subjugation that date back to the conquistador and colonial periods. However, not only does her project of cultural decolonization become silenced and, therefore, devoid of potential due to the remarkably pessimistic tone of the novel, any similar Indigenous movement would seemingly meet the same fate since Cané is the only truly self-aware Indigenous character in the text, thus coming to represent (on very essentialized terms, of course) the broader Maya Movement. Cané's would-be narrative project is designed to challenge and dismantle Eurocentric social structures and power hierarchies that dominate the region through education, the narration of history, social values, racial hierarchies, and so on, along with a reconstruction of Yama historical resistance in order to affirm unity and a common culture in the present. These notions, according to Kaqchikel historian Edgar Esquit, point towards a Mayanist perspective regarding past/present/future (200-01). Cané's project is intimately related to ideas like Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's "decolonization of the mind" and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's notion of the "intellectual project of decolonizing," or, as I would like to think about it, intellectual revolution, which "provokes some revolutionary thinking about the roles that knowledge, knowledge production, knowledge hierarchies and knowledge institutions play in decolonization and social transformation" (xii). However, the stunted project of cultural and intellectual resistance within the novel does not manage to advance what theorist Walter D. Mignolo terms "epistemic disobedience," a thinking that aims to delink from the illusion of Eurocentric and/or Western epistemologies as universal or in some way superior to other ways of being and knowing ("Epistemic" 160). The devaluation of Cané's resistance writing does not bring the novel in line with cultural critic Arturo Arias's thoughts on post-war Central American literary production:

Sin embargo, si el concepto de Aníbal Quijano de 'colonialidad del poder' conjuntado con la decolonialidad como proyecto epistémico y político operando a veces como metáfora para empujar el pensamiento más allá de sus conceptualizaciones occidentalistas y eurocéntricas, proveen una nueva manera de enmarcar las problemáticas de la producción cultural y agenciamiento, entonces miremos en esa dirección para explorar el fin de la posguerra centroamericana, tomando como punto de partida la crisis de los modelos occidentales de desarrollo en el presente. (14)

Although the matrix of coloniality per Quijano is treated within the novel, it does not ever move past an anti-imperialist stance in order to develop viable notions of cultural decolonization or social equality. Reading *Tikal Futura* in this manner still situates the narrative into a broader conversation occurring throughout the conti-

nent, for it dialogues with many 20<sup>th</sup>- and 21<sup>st</sup>-century social movements and literary works that thematically coincide with projects of cultural decolonization and the rejection of global capitalism. In Costa Rica, for instance, widespread opposition to CAFTA-DR intended to slow, if not prevent, the ratification of the Agreement (of which Costa Rica was the last to sign) that now tightly binds the country's economic lot with the United States. Likewise, in Galich's native Guatemala, the more comprehensive Pan-Maya Movement inevitably comes to mind, representing an Indigenous struggle against Ladino hegemony and social and political marginalization, not to mention the neighboring Zapatista National Liberation Army's (EZLN) project that struggles for Indigenous rights—and for those of many repressed groups—as well as to escape economic and political impositions such as NAFTA.<sup>4</sup> Other examples undoubtedly abound, such as the idea of Aby Yala, a Kuna concept that, in part, undermines foreign influence by rejecting the imposed name of Latin America, consequently restoring some Indigenous rights to those peoples subjugated by such outside classifications. Furthermore, *Tikal Futura* is not an isolated case literarily speaking either, for its generic predilections and social criticism engage with texts like Costa Rican Fernando Contreras Castro's *Cantos de las guerras preventivas* (2006), Salvadoran Jorge Galán's *El sueño de Mariana* (2008), and Costa Rican Edwin Quesada Muñoz's *La corporación* (2010). These explicit literary, cultural, and social connections evoke a principal aim of the dystopian fiction genre employed by the novel, for the reader's thoughts are inevitably coaxed from the fictional pages of the text to a direct and deeper consideration of reality despite the veiled (albeit very thinly so) nature of the society in question (Booker 5).

As I indicate above, a primary focus throughout the entire narrative is the relentless criticism of global capitalism. This primarily economic- and class-based critique is, in large part, what eclipses the urgency and necessity of the culturally- and ethnically-based project of cultural decolonization that demands a response to the economic violence and social oppression that the novel problematizes. The dominant economic system in the narrative has utterly devastated the environment due to excessive manufacturing and production, leaving a permanent Coca-Cola-colored cloud of contamination in which Ciudad de Abajo languishes. Beyond the borders of Guatemala, powerful nations like Quisyanland (along with two or three unnamed others) have "de tanta producción acabaron con toda la naturaleza, es decir, fauna y flora" throughout the vast majority of the planet (35). The industrially-enslaved masses of Ciudad de Abajo have long since been converted into "algo menos que parias" (180), "disposable" people that have been reduced to tradeable commodities: "materia prima a manos de unos intereses [neoliberales] particulares" (Caña Jiménez 74).<sup>5</sup> What's more, many of these "descartables" have been invigorated with a renewed sense of purpose—not only to endlessly produce for Ciudad de Arriba until their bodies physically fail, but also to serve as sex slaves in the elite pleasure clubs of Arriba. This particular form of enslavement,

argues Caña Jiménez, is a reflection of Kilowitz and Apocalíptico's vampiric tendencies that suck the life out of the masses for their own benefit. However, it is not via fangs that these men come to possess others, but rather through penetration with their erect penises (76-77). Physical manifestations of oftentimes graphic sexual pleasure thus come to allegorize the rape and consequent control of Guatemala's land and peoples by perverse external forces like the Empresa Constructora responsible for Tikal Futura and the hegemonic Gran Confraternidad de la Cofradía del Nuevo Orden Mundial Universal, both of which employ Kilowitz.<sup>6</sup> The instant gratification of exploitative sexual pleasure, however, is not limited to those of the uppermost echelon. Many Quisyan tourists likewise participate in such activities thanks to the Ruta Maya Sexy, a Tikal Futura attraction where participants can hunt, capture, drug, and rape young women in Ciudad de Abajo, dehumanizing events that parallel the abusive treatment that some Indigenous and Aborigine peoples have suffered (Tuiwai Smith 9). Another scene has el Indio Sacul, commander of Arriba's paramilitary group at the Gran Confraternidad's disposal, frenziedly masturbate as he watches thousands of cadavers burn after raiding Ciudad de Abajo to acquire more Tikal Futura slaves (282). These forms of radically dehumanized sexual pleasure represent a deeper reflection of neoliberalism's core values: "el rechazo de la sociedad a merced de la ambiciosa promoción del individuo/empresa privada" (Caña Jiménez 77). In conjunction with these ideas, cultural critic John Beverley asserts that under the auspices of a global capitalist modernity, such abusive deeds as those occurring in the novel are part and parcel of the economic and social structure; if there is modernity, there will necessarily be "colonialism, slavery, genocide, demographic catastrophe, mass immigration, combined and uneven development, boom and bust cycles, the reproduction of sexism and racism, and so on" (49). Accordingly, the novel is an oftentimes exasperating experience for the reader who remains impotent before such seemingly "universal" and monolithic processes, ones that are indeed reflected in today's tensions between the Global North and the Global South in addition to the internal islands of wealth contrasted with the seas of poverty throughout Central America. All of these ideas that the novel challenges are, regrettably so, natural consequences of the increasingly contentious neoliberal economic model that necessitates the existence of "descartables" for the system to function: "hidden behind the rhetoric of modernity, economic practices dispensed with human lives, and knowledge justified racism and the inferiority of human lives that were naturally considered dispensable" (Mignolo, *Darker Side* 6).

Along with the evident social, economic, and environmental destruction, there is also a cultural annihilation that permeates the narrative. The novel acknowledges the fact that the very economic system it criticizes is directly responsible for such cultural devastation, yet the work still does not prioritize Cané's project of rectification and speaking out. Apocalíptico, establishing a firm link between economic and cultural discrimination, affirms that the

only ideology that is permissible is that of neoliberalism, a system enforced by the only army left in the world—that of Quisyanland. Kilowitz begins the disparaging exchange:

—¡Oh! Eso haber sido antes, mucho antes. Ahora no hay tales, ni teles, nuestro ejército ser el único y más fuerte del mundo.

—¡Claro, claro! A eso me voy a referir ahora...Pues antes, hace muchos años atrás, aquí en Cuahutemallán (se llamaba Guatemala), existió una guerra a causa de que pequeños grupúsculos como se les llama también a las pandillas, se alzaron en armas en contra del gobierno. Ellos pertenecían a una ideología.

—¿Idiotología? ¿Qué cosa ser eso?

—No, Mr. Klitorikz, no es idiotía ni idiotología. Se dice i-deo-lo-gía...Eran formas equivocadas del pensamiento de la modernidad primitiva, opuestas a la única forma correcta de pensar: el capitalismo neoliberal, que por supuesto era la forma de pensar de nuestros últimos padres, los quisyan... (51-52)<sup>7</sup>

Despite having published his seminal text *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* in 1986, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's assertion that Western finance capital steals from Africa and Latin America alike, an imperialism led by the United States (read: Quisyanland) and enforced with conventional and nuclear weapons, dialogues with the fictional world imagined by Galich (2). What's more, Ngũgĩ states that the most dangerous weapon of all is actually the "cultural bomb," or the systematic devaluation of non-Western beliefs, values, and epistemologies that intends to obliterate "a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves" (3). In the face of such cultural devastation, Cané's efforts *should* serve to counter these damaging effects by confronting the larger process of appropriation and annihilation by means of cultural and epistemological resistance, recuperation, and revitalization. In affirmation of the strength behind this notion, Tuiwai Smith explains that, "The production of knowledge, new knowledge and transformed 'old' knowledge, ideas about the nature of knowledge and the validity of specific forms of knowledge, became as much commodities of colonial exploitation as other natural resources" (62). The result of such cultural obliteration in the narrative was the inevitable indoctrination of the inhabitants of Ciudad de Abajo, and presumably many more marginalized peoples throughout the world: "Nuestros bisabuelos fueron sometidos por la fuerza y se les injertó otra mentalidad. Se les obligó—prácticamente—a creer en algo que les era totalmente ajeno. Ello se fue metiendo muy adentro de su mente y de su sangre, hasta llegar a ser una verdad cruelmente ineludible" (81). Literary critic Alvarenga Venutolo sees in this process a powerful amnesia: "La condena a la amnesia funciona en la obra como antídoto contra toda voluntad de

cambio" (130). This imposed "truth" regarding their identity, beliefs, and values is precisely what the novel does not challenge, as Cané's writing does not succeed in struggling against the appropriation of knowledge that capitalism has encouraged, for—as we well know—such a design is "not only a domain of economic transactions and exploitation of labor, but of control and management of knowledge and subjectivities" (Mignolo, *Darker Side* 33). Negations of Indigenous and Other knowledges and views of history in this regard as "incorrect" and "primitive" traditionally serve to promote the assertion of colonial ideologies and, accordingly, the expansion of imperialism (Tuhiwai Smith 31).

The dominant tone of overwhelming impotence throughout the narrative yields major obstacles for Cané's "primitive" text that actively undermine her work's potential. First, there is a notable lack of explanation and exposition of the project throughout the narrative; that is, the value of what Cané is writing and the consequent cultural worth is never explicitly discussed. This lack of consideration substantially weakens her project, for the implicit presumption is simply that Cané's efforts are inherently "good," and that the positive benefits it will reap are "natural" or "obvious." These sentiments, however, come across as paternalistic and condescending. Even if this were Galich's way to insist that readers take a more active role by critically thinking about social, economic, and cultural inequalities on their own terms, such a dynamic is nonetheless problematic because even the essential value of what she is doing remains undeveloped and unexplored, as if her responsibility were more so to preserve static knowledge, as might an outmoded museum or an archive, when in reality her project must be an integral part of a real-world, living space with the power to grow and transform based on individual interpretations. Compounding this issue are the doubts that Cané expresses as she writes "con mano dubitativa," an indication that she isn't only uncertain about the future, but about her own writing (187). The most notable doubt, however, comes when Cané states that she wonders if her work will make any difference at all and if it is possible for history to stop cycling and repeating itself (187). Thoughts like these chisel away at the strength of such affirmations as, "Todas las señales dicen que habrá un triunfo final pero no cuándo" (225), forcing a sense of pessimistic contradiction onto Cané's project and its future success. What's more, one of the titles by which she calls her text is a metafictional reflection of the novel itself: "Memorias para un futuro incierto." And since Galich's novel remains unfinished, this subtitle alludes to the incomplete nature of Cané's work as well, powerfully suggesting that there will be no equitable social change. These major misgivings that Cané experiences as the last person able to recuperate and save Yama history hugely undermine the strength of the project of cultural decolonization in the text. Her writing as a way of confronting the *Tikal Futura* tourist project, then, becomes a reinforcement of sentiments of uncertainty and doubt towards resistance and change, which coincidentally forces the narrative into a more Eurocentrically-licit stance that supports the status quo given

the notable reservations towards cultural and intellectual anti-imperialist and anti-internal colonial resistance. If her doubts were to revolve more so around a fear of her work being appropriated and utilized to disadvantage her peoples by the imperial powers of Arriba, then the hesitancy would be more justified. However, misappropriation and deeper cultural exploitation are not preoccupations ever expressed by Cané, which is also problematic since Indigenous writing can become dangerous if not thought through critically because it can be appropriated and employed in the fostering of hostile views towards Indigenous and marginalized peoples (Tuhiwai Smith 37).

Cané's "subversive" writing via the recuperation of her peoples' history, then, ultimately fails to become a source of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, or any other type of resistance project. This dynamic suggests that her unique consciousness and knowledge of the history of her country and its peoples, along with the fact that she is the only one in possession of prohibited texts like the *Anales de los cakchiqueles* and the *Popol Vuh*, is of little import, as is the "nueva historia de los pueblos que una vez poblaron el territorio de Cuauthemallán" that would emerge from her hand (159).<sup>8</sup> In addition to the Indigenous knowledge that she possesses as a member of the Yama peoples, she also harbors mestizo knowledge, meaning that her project takes on greater relevance as it recuperates even more epistemologies and cultural thought: "sabía de ritos, libros y danzas, practicadas por los antepasados. Sabía de profecías y astronomía y astrología y libros, de música, pintura y escultura" (46). Cané's narration, crafted so that the cultural memory of the marginalized does not disappear forever, essentially represents a fundamental part of subaltern struggles: the need for self-representation. As Bill Ashcroft posits, "underlying all economic, political and social resistance is the struggle over [self-]representation which occurs in language, writing and other forms of cultural production" (36). Subaltern critic Ranajit Guha would agree with this statement (201), as would Tuhiwai Smith given the possibility for such self-determination to lead to social justice (120). The historical, cultural, and epistemological recuperation proposed by Cané's recording and rewriting of history is a necessary first step to consciousness and resistance, for more than half of the citizens of Ciudad de Abajo are descendants of the fictional Yama peoples, yet they are unaware of this past (45-46). The Spaniards, Cané reflects, were able to conquer Indigenous bodies, but they were unable to completely conquer their thoughts, hearts, minds, and souls, although this utter domination has since been targeted and has clearly transpired by the 23<sup>rd</sup> century (47). A principal goal of Cané's project of cultural decolonization through her writing has to do, then, with a certain consciousness-raising for those of Ciudad de Abajo. In other words, she aims to bring awareness to the "descartables" who, despite their complicity in the overall project of global capitalism that keeps them in positions of exploitation, continue to serve the "superiores." What's more, the workers of Ciudad de Abajo finance their own drug dependencies that keep them working in the factories until exhaustion (44). Re-

alization of this power dynamic is fundamental to the undermining of the broader, repressive global capitalist system. Cané is not ignorant of the enormous potential that her project bears in regards to reshaping the dominant social structure, and she consequently aims for her writing to be accessible to all, until doubts and a severe lack of motivation overwhelm her. This is particularly disheartening because historical accounts and writing of this nature generally hold the capacity to move beyond the local. That is, despite existing imperialistic social and economic structures, writing and knowledge may still circulate, whether within a small circle of interested individuals, a specific community, a country like Guatemala, or beyond. Unlike Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in Kenya, Cané does not have to contend with the choice of the language in which she writes, for the Indigenous tongues have been eradicated and long since forgotten. Therefore, the language of the once colonizers—Spanish—is the only option, yet it now unites all Yama and mestizo speakers in Ciudad de Abajo. The complete disappearance of Indigenous languages in the novel points towards an assimilationist tendency that is also not problematized, a serious cultural issue that pairs closely with the novel's rejection of self-representation and consciousness-raising of the marginalized.

As Tuhiwai Smith explains, there ultimately needs to be a process of rewriting that subsequently rereights Indigenous (and, I propose, other marginalized) positionalities: "Indigenous peoples want to tell our own stories, write our own versions, in our own ways, for our own purposes. It is not simply about giving an oral account... but a very powerful need to give testimony to and restore a spirit, to bring back into existence a world fragmented and dying" (29-30). History in the novel has already mostly been effaced and rewritten, as we witness in a conversation between Apocalíptico and Kilowitz:

—Sí, Mr. Klitorwisky, ustedes ser los extraordinarios de ahora. Los mayas fueron los de antes, mucho antes. ¿Ok?  
 —¡No!, ni de antes ni de nunca. Nosotros somos los de siempre, antes, ahora y después. ¿De acuerdo?  
 ¿Comprender?  
 —¡Ok, ok! De acuerdo. (42)

This arena of historical and epistemological narration becomes, as a result, a serious site of struggle as history itself is contested, for history is about power: "In fact history is mostly about power. It is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others" (Tuhiwai Smith 35). Consequently, if this battle over historical narration were to be waged as Cané intends, there would unquestionably be alternative histories that would ultimately give way to alternative knowledges, yielding alternative pedagogies and distinct ways of living (Tuhiwai Smith 36).

Hopelessly struggling against the imposed world order, Cané's voice is eventually swallowed up and silenced. As Edward W. Said explains, the hegemonic world order thoroughly works against

her: "Without significant exception the universalizing discourses of modern Europe and the United States assume the silence, willing or otherwise, of the non-European world. There is incorporation; there is inclusion; there is direct rule; there is coercion. But there is only infrequently an acknowledgement that the colonized people should be heard from, their ideas known" (50). What's more, Cané foresees that physical revolution is also destined to fail, for her grandchildren Namú and Ix "no tienen un futuro" (81), especially when they decide to join the ranks of ERLCIA (232). This aspect of the narrative strongly indicates that physically violent resistance is not the path to success in regards to social change. In the context of the novel, this type of struggle undermines the broader impetus for Cané's writing—to seek unity and peace, not only for Guatemala, but presumably throughout the whole planet, now connected by the Gran Confraternidad. As such, I argue that ERLCIA is represented as an antiquated, somewhat aimless, and failing revolutionary group. The most supportive moment of this interpretation is the novel's conclusion, for ERLCIA carries out a two-pronged attack against a military outpost and a hydroelectric dam in order to provoke more chaos for Arriba. However, poor timing of the plan results in their premature discovery at the outpost, leading to a shoot-out with a number of soldiers and a narrow escape: "Algo había fallado" (298). Additionally, those responsible for bombing the dam are nearly captured and must put into effect their "plan de emergencia," abandoning their boat and seeking refuge in nearby caves (300). As the concluding moments of the novel, we are undoubtedly left wondering about the long-term potential that ERLCIA represents, for although all of the stolen munitions and periodic bombings in Ciudad de Arriba have indeed produced anxiety and fear, there is no well-developed plan to actually change any of the circumstances for those in Abajo. Other literary critics like Alvarenga Venutolo disagree, for she reads the ending of the novel not as problematic, but rather as a "viva" and "efectiva" resistance (118). However, the project can't possibly be described as "viva" (or "efectiva") for long, for not only are there significant challenges recruiting members due to drug addictions to Rogua (alcohol) and Opsin (synthetic opium), as well as the implanted anti-subversion microchips, but the current members are rapidly aging. The group is constituted of "[a]lgunos viejos sobrevivientes de los levantamientos de hacía cincuenta años, [quienes] transmitieron la savia [de la lucha por la libertad] de una manera poco clara" (167-68). Lastly, the acutely patriarchal nature of the revolutionary group is notable when they desperately need information and fresh recruits, and one way that they devise to meet these needs is to send female members to the exclusive sex clubs of the elite in Ciudad de Arriba to spread the word amongst the exploited female workers. However, the ERLCIA recruiters and activists must still "atender a los clientes" as part of the process in order not to reveal their true identities (169). Ideas like these inevitably return our thoughts to feminist critics like Margaret Randall when she discusses Nicaragua's Sandinista Revolution: "If a revolution is unable or unwilling to address the needs of *all* people, it is doomed to fail-

ure" (171, emphasis in the original). ERLCIA's actions are consequently not going to satisfy any true social change. Yet the organization's viability remains intact at the close of the novel, whereas Cané's path to the "destrucción del orden universal" has been absolutely mired. It seems, then, that even though the novel recognizes the impracticality of ongoing guerrilla-type struggles to ensure social change, that it still sees these struggles as more realistic than projects of cultural decolonization, especially from Indigenous thinkers.

The lingering lack of success coming from both Cané and ERLCIA remind the reader of the disenchantment and cynicism so deeply embedded in Central America's post-war literature. Reinforcing the cyclical nature of oppression, defeat, and disillusion, the novel conjures exploitative episodes throughout Guatemala's history, evoking such moments as the defeat of the K'iche' people against Pedro de Alvarado in 1524 with the death of Tecún Umán (205-06), later relating the story and inevitable death of the fictional Namú Tecum (60-62) along with Cané's grandson Namú who is also destined to fail before the current oppressors (81). The similarity in the names of these characters is indicative of the cyclical nature of their struggles and defeats, recurring events that make distinct future outcomes seem quite improbable. Cané, recognizing this oppressive pattern, laments, "Ya llevamos cientos de años esperando y nada. Luchando y nada" (81). Additionally, a temporal reference in the narrative refers to the ousting of the democratically-elected leader Rabenz with aid from the Quisyan government (147), a connection that unmistakably points towards the real Guatemalan president Jacobo Árbenz and his infamous removal from office in 1954. Along similar lines, other names like el Indio *Sacul* and his massacre-loving violence transport our thoughts to 1980s genocide and Fernando Romeo *Lucas* García. Furthermore, Xibalbá (Ciudad de Abajo) and Ablabix (Ciudad de Arriba) mirror—and dramatically oppose—each other on textual and physical terms which reflects internal social divisions, like the historical infighting between the K'iche's and Kaqchikels to which Cané constantly refers, calling attention to internecine struggles that have left Guatemalan peoples vulnerable to outside exploitation.<sup>9</sup> And, of course, the play between the fictional Yama and the actual Maya peoples points towards the social dynamics of the Guatemala of today. What is particularly curious about many of the names that the novel employs is that they are effectively mirrored or "spun" versions of each other. That is, the circular motion associated with the formation of the names reflects the cyclical historical repetition of Eurocentric and imperialist impositions, suggesting that social circumstances have really not changed in a significant way for hundreds of years. These dominant structures, along with the numerous domestic impositions from Guatemalan elites and other citizens, is what incites literary critic Alvarenga Venutolo to acknowledge that, "En la obra se trata de una constante histórica, que erosiona las potencialidades de resistencia de quienes podrían abrir las vías de la imaginación a un futuro que trascienda la repetición incesante de una historia infame" (114). If we also consider the shortening of the names over

time, as with Ixmucané (Cané's ancestor and muse) to Cané to Ix, or with Tecún Umán to Namú Tecum to Namú, we find that, physically, there exists less and less to each name. This is indicative of the fact that, as time passes, cultural distancing and loss become more and more pronounced. Furthermore, the circular structure of the novel also works to perpetuate the sense of inevitability of oppressive historical repetition. The novel opens with the mutilated cadaver of a woman found on the streets of Ciudad de Abajo with her heart extracted (7), a scene that later resurfaces on multiple occasions (248-51). The open-ended nature of the novel's conclusion likewise proliferates the doubt that anything will change since there is no resolution whatsoever as ERLCIA's attack has mostly been repelled. Although we may possibly attribute the abrupt ending to Galich's premature death and the posthumous publication of the narrative, the mid-story conclusion nonetheless heavily hints at the fact that there is no proper ending, nor a new beginning, to the current state of oppression under global capitalism; that is, no disruption to the cyclical nature of Guatemala's historical pattern has been effected. Although perhaps by pure coincidence, the publication of the novel in 2012 was also the start to a new Maya time cycle, creating a parallel between reality and the text's failure to mark significant alterations to the previous time cycle saturated with violence and oppression.

The radical social change sought by Cané that the narrative rejects dialogues with Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's call to displace Western and European thought and culture as the universal center (*Decolonising* 94). Ngũgĩ explores this idea in depth in his book *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993). His detailed thoughts on this epistemic shift coincide critically with Cané as well as Tuhiwai Smith:

I am concerned with moving the centre in two senses at least. One is the need to move the centre from its assumed location in the West to a multiplicity of spheres in all the cultures of the world. The assumed location of the centre of the universe in the West is what goes by the term Eurocentrism, an assumption which developed with the domination of the world by a handful of Western nations...The second sense is even more important... Within nearly all nations today the centre is located in the dominant social stratum, a male bourgeois minority. But since many of the male bourgeois minorities in the world are still dominated by the West we are talking about the domination of the world, including the West, by a Eurocentric bourgeois, male and racial minority. Hence the need to move the centre from all minority class establishments within nations to the real creative centres among the working people in conditions of gender, racial and religious equality. (xvi-xvii)

Culturally speaking, the major problem with such exclusionary

systems is the resultant "flattening or fossilisation of its victims' cultures" (Ngũgĩ, *Moving* 43). In the narrative, the dominant world order has forced the elimination of local heritage, culture, and even the memory of such knowledge: "Durante algún tiempo, algunos científicos se empeñaron en demostrar, por medio de infinidad de pruebas, [la existencia de los Yamas]. La verdad es que esa rama de las ciencias—la de conocer a las antiguas civilizaciones a través de sus restos materiales—, pronto cayó en el desinterés y luego en el olvido. Ello debido a las exigencias que el nuevo orden mundial impuso" (163-64). This is the manifestation of imperialism as a "discursive field of knowledge," one of many such manifestations that permitted colonizers to actually "colonize" minds and intellectual spaces (Tuhiwai Smith 22-24). This is precisely the type of domination that Galich does not challenge in *Tikal Futura*. Cultural homogenization and assimilation do not seem to be issues of importance for him, quite likely due to his acceptance of a perceived "ladinización" of Indigenous peoples: "Dentro de la dialéctica de la ladinización—hecho que ya debemos dar por aceptado y empezar a moldearlo de manera que nos haga converger a todos en los puntos comunes y positivos que nos permitan ir construyendo una Guatemala justa, para todos—, el indio ha ido avanzando hacia metas más concretas de su historia" ("¿Existe?" n.p.). This type of intellectual imperialism, argues Tuhiwai Smith, has led to concepts such as hierarchical classifications based on the "humanness" of an individual's race and typologies (26). This becomes reified when Indigenous peoples, such as the fictional Yama or the real Maori, are considered as "not fully human, or not human at all, [which] enabled distance to be maintained and justified various policies of either extermination or domestication" (Tuhiwai Smith 27). Here, we find that the research gaze penetrates culturally, socially, and intellectually, a process that runs in parallel with the vampiric and phallic penetration mentioned earlier as performed by Kilowitz, Apocalíptico, and many others. Additionally, the Quisyan people—economic and cultural conquistadors, to be sure—can be read as a slight variation (mispronunciation?) of "Christian," the religious faith that drove an enormous part of the original Spanish conquest. The parallels signaling a supposed European superiority, however, do not end here, for to be a citizen of Ciudad de Arriba, one must have fair-colored skin, an education, and—most importantly—wealth. Nonetheless, none of these characteristics alone will guarantee access to privilege and power: "La selección [de ciudadan@s] se hizo siguiendo los modelos implantados por la nación Quisyan. De manera que si alguien era rubio pero económicamente pobre, era del bando de los descartables. Si se tenía fortuna pero se era moreno o de pelo ensortijado, igualmente se confiscaban las cuentas bancarias y pasaba a ser del bando de los descartables" (126). This process of what is effectively arbitrary hierarchical classification has, as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o asserts, a long history of self-enrichment: "In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries Europe stole art treasures from Africa to decorate their houses and museums; in the twentieth century Europe is stealing the treasures of the mind to enrich their languages and cultures"

(*Decolonising* xii). This "structure of attitude and reference" (per Said) ultimately remains unchallenged by the narrative (62). The tourist megaproject of *Tikal Futura* within the text consequently does not come to represent the breaking point and opportunity to collectively resist that it could. It does symbolize an opportunity to remember what has been appropriated: the Maya site of Tikal, yet the unmet challenge is, as J.T. Way points out, to rectify the fact that *Tikal Futura* (both the real one and the fictional one) epitomizes "a first-world future that effaces the local and enshrines the global" (14). The failure to re-inscribe *Tikal Futura*, a symbol of pre-colonial, colonial, post-colonial, and future time, leaves dominant social structures in place, thus leaving history in the hands of Ladinos, foreigners, and others who will inevitably mold Indigenous peoples on their own terms and transmit this "national history" in schools and official discourses (Esquit 204).

Just as it is up to the citizens of Ciudad de Abajo to take it upon themselves to enact a re-signifying and re-interpretation of *Tikal Futura*, the novel also calls attention to their partial responsibility for their current circumstances and their power to change them. The text even has Cané lament at one point that the Indigenous peoples have effectively destroyed themselves, again referring to the historic infighting between the K'iche's and Kaqchikels (118). Although a biomedical imposition, the implanted microchips in the citizens' brains also point towards complicity with their subjugation. The microchips and omnipresent video cameras inevitably call to mind French thinker Michel Foucault's well-known discourse on surveillance as detailed in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975). Foucault's concise conclusion is simply that, "Visibility is a trap" (200). This idea relates to his exploration of Jeremy Bentham's concept of the panopticon, a prison with a central watchtower surrounded by a circular building housing the inmates. Given that the prisoners may always be watched, yet do not know precisely when the watchperson's gaze falls upon them, they will theoretically act as if they are in fact being directly observed at all times. This dynamic ultimately aims to "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (201). In other words, the prisoners necessarily perpetuate the uneven power structure. In the 23<sup>rd</sup> century of Ciudad de Abajo, we find that the fictional citizens, like the theoretical prisoners of the panopticon, are perpetuating their own oppression by fulfilling the desires of the dominant class despite having ways to "burlar" the system. I refer here to the distinct "languages" that those of Abajo have devised in order to avoid subversive detection by the implanted microchips. One such language is that of the eyes: "habían aprendido a hablar con los ojos, los cuales cambiaban el color, dependiendo de qué era lo que querían expresar" (32). The ability to transform one's eye color thus became a way to transmit prohibited emotions. For instance, emerald green indicates patience, whereas light blue suggests worry and deep blue means tenderness (32). In response to this non-linguistic communication system, literary critic Caña Jiménez would agree with its "appropriative" nature: "La

adopción de este código lingüístico no debe ser leída como una forma de sucumbir a los patrones sobre ellos impuestos sino más bien como una táctica que les permite—dentro de la dificultad—luchar en su intento por reafirmar su naturaleza humana y con ello la escasa vida que aún poseen” (82). In a similar manner, a smaller group of “iniciados” have developed a simple opposite-driven linguistic code that aims to deceive the microchips as well: “Por ejemplo, al decir no, lo que estamos diciendo realmente es sí [...] Si quiero decirle a una chica que la amo le decimos ‘Yo te odio con toda la debilidad de mi corazón!’” (64). Furthermore, there is also complicity from the Guatemalan elites as represented through Apocalíptico, a character who allows for his native lands and peoples to be commodified, bought, and sold for personal gain. The destruction to which his name refers plainly alludes to the devastating consequences that his acceptance of (which evolves into a passionate desire for) the Tikal Futura and broader neoliberal economic project represents for his country. This dynamic is reminiscent of the beautification projects that literary critic Daniel Quirós calls our attention to in *Managua, Salsa City* as an indication that certain Nicaraguan administrations aimed not only to transform Managua into a Miami, but that there was also an attempt to obscure the historical memory of the Nicaraguan Revolution (11-12). Apocalíptico, then, is an icon of global capitalism as well as of an elite sell-out who actively contributes to the decimation of the local culture, willing to prostitute his country in order to become personally wealthy. What's more, Apocalíptico is originally from Ciudad de Abajo (as is el Indio Sacul), so he also comes to represent the assimilationist tendency to “save” oneself via “blanquización,” or as Kaqchikel critic Demetrio Cojtí explains, the struggle to distance oneself as much as possible from “las personas y grupos que estaban en la escala más baja de la jerarquía: los indios y los negros” (*El racismo* 46). All of these aspects of the novel are reminiscent of Said's affirmation that, indeed, not all of the problems in the colonized world can be blamed on the colonizers (81). This has the effect of placing more blame on the Indigenous and marginalized peoples of Ciudad de Abajo for their circumstances, resultantly alleviating the culpability of the racist and unequal social structures that the dominant system maintains.

And when it comes to blaming others, it seems that in *Tikal Futura* the only way that cultural decolonization may occur is if it begins with the Indigenous and other subaltern groups. This attitude, problematically so, strikes the chord that Cojtí explicitly acknowledges: “Piensan [los demás] que si el indígena está ‘interesado’ en los cambios del país hacia la multiculturalidad, entonces es él quien debe ser versado en el tema y aportar propuestas de solución y estrategias para lograr dichos cambios” (“La educación” 100). Galich has openly supported this perspective elsewhere, concluding an article on Guatemalan Indigenous literature by paraphrasing José Martí: “en estos tiempos de la cólera neoliberal, es más necesario que nunca que [sic] la revolución social y para que esta sea, pasa necesariamente por la revolución de los pueblos indios de América Latina, pues ésta no echará a andar hasta que no marche el indio”

(“¿Existe?” n.p.). This sociopolitical stance implies that since projects of social change must begin with these peoples and that they have not reached fruition, that they—at least in part—bear the blame for their ongoing exploitation, marginalization, and oppression. The novel therefore strains tensions even more, ones that the dominant social structure already aggravates, by pressuring subaltern groups to change the hegemonic hierarchy alone, for there is no dialogue whatsoever among marginalized groups or otherwise regarding Cané's project; it is exclusively her responsibility. This is quite detrimental since Cané will undoubtedly encounter resistance from both Arriba and Abajo, where Rogua and Opsin keep the masses brainwashed and subdued, forcing a loss of will to think and act while simultaneously eliminating their sense of self.

What's more, there is no mention of formal or systematic education as a means of reaching the masses of Ciudad de Abajo, that is, a clear theory of knowledge sharing that would serve to disseminate Cané's and other similar ideas does not exist within the text. An assessment of Guatemala's Maya Movement from 1997-2007 concludes that education is still extremely uneven: “por apego al formalismo de la ley, por ladinocentrismo y por pobreza propia, hay limitantes para el acceso de los indígenas a la educación superior” (Cojtí, “La educación” 98). A reconsideration of the educational system (or lack thereof in the narrative) and its content does not, to be sure, need to follow Western paradigms such as the liberal arts philosophy. Modes of learning and communication such as orality and storytelling, critical inquiry and thinking, artistic and cultural production, and so on are equally valid, yet remain undeveloped (if not entirely excluded) as part of the project of intellectual revolution in the text. Maori cultural critics Mere Kēpa and Linitā Manu'atu remind us that schooling “does not simply provide knowledge (meaning accumulated experiences); rather, it dismisses one kind of knowledge for another in the context of a power relationship. Power, in this sense, is almost characterized by what is excluded” (1806). Consequently, most important are local designs that meet the needs of each group: “What is obvious is that the education necessary for developing countries has to be implemented and concentrated by developing communities if they are to produce resourceful and creative human beings able to face the challenges of an increasingly globalized world—one that is undergoing a communications technology revolution and rapid changes in worldviews and world order” (Nettleford 36-37). If this type of restructuring and re-epistemologization does not take place in order to fight against the reproduction of social inequalities, a certain “Otherness” may be established, as Beatriz González Stephan argues, where reading and writing on national terms, for example, may create a standard destined to unify and, therefore, to exclude (319). Nonetheless, the entire political and cultural arena of education is completely missing from the discussion of the decolonization project in *Tikal Futura*. As we already know, if there are not significant changes to the educational structure, Indigenous elites (and others like el Indio Sacul and Apocalíptico) will be groomed into the imperial narrative, ul-



timely imposing dominant perspectives upon their own peoples as they seek acceptance and power. This dynamic parallels typical colonial educations and the formation of Indigenous elites: "Their elite status came about through the alignment of their cultural and economic interests with those of the colonizing group rather than with those of their own society" (Tuhiwai Smith 68).

Lastly, Galich seems to believe that he has the authority to accurately write about and represent the Yama perspective, another assimilationist tendency evident throughout the narrative. To be sure, a project from below, the marginalized "Others," is undoubtedly a necessary component to the dismantling of Eurocentric power structures. The novel, however, effectively rewrites K'iche' cosmology and philosophy as it parallels parts of the *Popol Vuh*, for Cané's text is also called "Libro de consejo" (a subtitle of the *Popol Vuh*), she calls upon her K'iche' ancestor Ixmucané to guide and inspire her work, and her grandson Namú's uncles are Balanque and Napu (corresponding to the twin ball players Ixbalanque and Hunahpu), among many other connections to the sacred text. As Galich "speaks" for the Indigenous visionary Cané, we are reminded of the work of Indigenista writers like Miguel Ángel Asturias and his *Leyendas de Guatemala* (1930). Galich, who considered himself to be a "ladino bueno," would likely not take issue with this assessment, for he asserts that Maya writer Luis de Lión "se había ladinizado" and that it therefore makes no sense to "quitarle el mérito [a Asturias] por no ser indio" as a result ("¿Existe?" n.p.). Even the opening line to his article titled "¿Existe una literatura indígena en Guatemala?" (2003) is an answer expressing Indigenista attitudes: "La pregunta conlleva una gran dosis de cuestionamiento y duda" (n.p.). Accordingly, since Cané is represented as a character with profound knowledge and cultural understanding with the strength and potential to drive significant social change, yet at the point of giving up and succumbing to the imperialist and racist enterprise,

Indigenous peoples are consequently represented in the narrative as weak, hesitant, able to be dominated, and ultimately accepting—albeit reluctantly—of their subjugated position. Cané, then, comes to represent support for cultural and linguistic assimilation, as well as unchallenged internal colonialism and even more land grabbing by the economic elites. This representation of marginalized groups within the text only serves to reaffirm Eurocentric social hierarchies and to perpetuate misguided stereotypes. As Ramón Grosfoguel insists, projects like that of cultural decolonization must be done *from* and *with* the subalternized Global South, not *for* them (212). The appropriation and reconsideration of K'iche' cosmology by Galich in the novel thus becomes extremely problematic and it largely reflects the history of the *Popol Vuh* itself. As literary scholar Adrián Recinos indicates, not only was the actual *Popol Vuh* manuscript stolen and relocated various times over the years, it has almost always remained in the hands of Western powers like Europe and the United States and not with the originators in Central America (2). It was indeed the Europeans who once again imposed upon the nature of the text by adding sections and chapters that did not exist in the original manuscript, implicating yet another cultural imposition (3), not to mention the fact that the original K'iche' manuscript has disappeared and what is left is the version created by Francisco Ximénez, a text now mediated by external, Eurocentric powers (7). Without more voices and intellectual contributions, the project of cultural decolonization in the narrative remains woefully inadequate and incomplete in the negative sense, thus becoming much more of an imposition than an emancipation. Nevertheless, the novel still holds much critical value, for all of these ideas lead to deeper reflections on fundamental questions of culture relating to equality and social justice. Additionally, the salient criticism of global capitalism is relevant and urgent as well, and the seeds of cultural decolonization are indeed interspersed throughout the text.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Per Kokotovic, Latin American literary works that may be considered part of the neoliberal noir phenomenon are "characterized by a pervasive sense of corruption, decay, and disillusionment, in which the social order itself, and particularly the state, is the ultimate source of criminality, rather than of justice" (15). In Central America, this translates to a categorical distancing from the Left and disenchantment with the outcomes of the armed struggles (16). Along similar lines, Quirós indicates that *Managua, Salsa City* "became an archetype of sorts, used to discuss the disillusionment with leftist political struggles, and the transition to a more pessimistic neoliberal socio-economic order, where rampant individualism, crime, violence, and poverty seemed to reign" (9).

<sup>2</sup>The third novel of an intended tetralogy, *Tikal Futura* was published posthumously due to Galich's premature death in 2007. The first novel of the collection, *Managua, Salsa City* (*¡Devórame otra vez!*), was published in 2000 while the second text, *Y te diré quién eres* (*Mariposa traicionera*), was released in 2006.

<sup>3</sup>Although Galich's novel presents a monolithic, yet imagined, tourist project named *Tikal Futura*, it alludes to the luxury hotel Grand *Tikal Futura* in Guatemala City that is housed within the modern shopping center of *Tikal Futura*. This contemporary creation, completed in the late 1990s, also incorporates restaurants, movie theaters, offices, and other entertainment venues.

<sup>4</sup>For further reading and more detailed descriptions and analyses of these social movements, please see Arturo Arias's *Taking Their Word: Literature and the Signs of Central America* (2007), Kay B. Warren's *Indigenous Movements and Their Critics: Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala* (1998), *Our Word is Our Weapon: Selected Writings by Subcomandante Marcos* (edited by Juana Ponce de León) (2001), and *Challenges of CAFTA: Maximizing the Benefits for Central America* (2006) by Carlos Felipe Jaramillo and Daniel Lederman.

<sup>5</sup>The human toll of the *Tikal Futura* tourist project's construction is also presented in an unfeeling manner: "A esos costos [financieros y materiales] había que agregar los humanos, pero fueron subestimados por los esclavis-

tas, contratistas e ingenieros así como por los representantes del país sede y por los financieros: varios miles de ciudadanos reciclables de Ciudad de Abajo" (227).

<sup>6</sup> The Gran Confraternidad is effectively the planet's elite ruling class that has assumed the management of the world's economies, societies, and overall development.

<sup>7</sup> Kilowitz's name constantly changes throughout the text to mirror what he and Apocalíptico are doing. In this case, "Klitorikz" clearly reflects the content of their discussion of the Ruta Maya Sexy, hence the "clitoris" connection with his name. On other occasions, when they are also drinking liquor, he goes by "Klitoriswisky" (among many other variations).

<sup>8</sup> Edgar Esquit explains that the fundamental nature of reconsidering such foundational Indigenous texts today is about recognizing "the principles that unite the actions and knowledge of the ancient Maya with those that nourish the contemporary Maya. By examining these sorts of ancient texts [...], Mayanists try to rebuild a version of their past that specifies the particularity or essentiality of Maya culture. They also attempt to reconstruct the history of resistance and leadership that they believe can have an important role in thinking about and imagining resistance today" (200). As we can clearly observe, *Tikal Futura* does not value these texts in the same fashion.

<sup>9</sup> Cané frequently alludes to the historical alliance, albeit brief, between the Kaqchikels and Pedro de Alvarado in order to defeat the K'iche's.

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