

◆ Chapter 5

A Darkened Caribbean: Metal Music's Imagery as Decolonial Truth-Telling

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“If you are looking for a vacation paradise, go south to Puerto Rico. Hub of the blue Caribbean,” beckons a voice-over during the opening of a short film on Puerto Rico that the Dudley Pictures Corporation created for its travel series *This World of Ours*. The video, released in 1950, aimed to highlight the wonders and wealth of the Island. It shows tourists playing golf amidst the sixteenth-century Spanish fortifications. Descriptions and portrayals of the island’s shops, beautiful women, banks, and government buildings emulating those of the United States promote Puerto Rico’s integration into modernity. An idyllic version of the past is captured in the video through the presence of sugarcane workers, depicted as pleasant figures savoring the sweetness of the cane. All these visuals are accompanied by the soothing voice of an English-speaking narrator, whose cadence and tone add to the overall sense of excitement, albeit amidst an underlying feeling of normalcy. Nothing is happening here other than pure vacation bliss within a setting of modern progress. During the fifties, Puerto Rico was portrayed as a showcase of the United States’s democracy in the Western world. It was a testament to what countries could do with their post-war territories when democracy and capitalism were used as tools of progress. This message would be placed on display time and again in the coming decades. Videos like *Puerto Rico: Showcase of America*, distributed by McGraw-Hill in 1962, and *Progress Island USA*, created by the Economic Development Administration of Puerto Rico in 1973, drove the message home that under the United States’s leadership, colonialism was a thing of the past, and the modern ideals of progress were visible throughout the island, which adopted those ideals willingly. These films all have one thing in common: they hide colonialism’s uncomfortable truths.

Anti-Disinformation Pedagogy: Tackling the Power of Manipulative Media
Hispanic Issues On Line 32 (2024)

The Colonial Experience in the Post-Truth Era

The history of Puerto Rico, a Caribbean island with a Spanish-speaking population of 3.2 million as of 2020, has been marked by colonialism.¹ After more than four-hundred years as a Spanish colony, Puerto Rico was ceded to the United States in 1898 through the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Spanish-American War.² Since then, it has been an unincorporated territory of the United States. Despite being United States citizens since 1917, Puerto Ricans do not have citizenship's entire legal and political rights. The island has faced cultural colonization via the imposition of a foreign language in the education system, medical experimentations on its population, and the use of land for military training. The local economy has been set up as a captive market for United States's corporations, resulting in a \$72 billion external debt.³ The island's economic peril is reflected in the high poverty rates and unemployment. These are just some of the ways in which the ever-present colonial dynamics, what Aníbal Quijano terms coloniality (short for coloniality of power), are present in the everyday lives of Puerto Ricans.⁴ Of course, such facts were beyond the aims and desires of the promotional videos described earlier. On the contrary, they intended to deny such a reality. The practice persists today, as colonial denialism can be found in YouTube videos, webpages, social media posts, and televised discussions by political pundits. They echo more generalized discussions, even within academia, which downplay the continuing consequences of coloniality worldwide.

This denialism of the manifestations of coloniality, which has been a permanent staple in colonial settings, feels entirely in tune with our times. Today it is not uncommon to encounter the idea of the post-truth era in both everyday conversations and academic debates.⁵ Truth has ceased to be a fixed and stable set of information and facts. Instead, it has morphed into a completely fluid assortment of data dependent on the whims of political leaders, social media, twenty-four-hour news outlets, and/or online historical revisionists. Disinformation, which serves as the primary instrument of the post-truth era, has been linked to growing global inequalities, which have, in turn, fostered political polarization.⁶ Its effects have been felt in electoral processes,⁷ discussions about climate change,⁸ the promotion of an overall distrust of scientific discourses,⁹ and the convenient reinterpretation of historical facts. This last issue is of vital importance. As scholars have reminded us, "In the post-truth era, collective memory seems to have lost touch with historical facts."¹⁰ We have seen this disconnect with historical facts take root in academic accounts of colonialism, which aim to deny its death-inducing effects on those who experienced it and continue to live through it.¹¹ We have also seen it throughout Latin American countries (e.g., Bolivia), where recent coup d'états have strategically aimed at invalidating indigenous communities

and their aspirations for a decolonized world. Therefore, it does not seem far-fetched to think that the growing interest in understanding the long-lasting effects of colonialism (e.g., decolonial studies, postcolonial studies) has as its backdrop historical disinformation efforts that deny colonialism's impact on human lives, cultures, geographies, and the world in general. These efforts continue today in the so-called post-truth era. In fact, we would argue that colonial subjects have always lived within post-truth; the coining of a new term does not erase the fact that the denial of truth has been deployed by empires and colonist since the inception of these models of hostile, extractive settlement. Coming to this realization sets up an important question: how do we face disinformation in these spheres defined by coloniality, where the aesthetics, narratives, and methods of a post-truth era seem to negate the long-lasting effects of colonialism? To answer this question, we turn to the arts, where we see the emergence of important voices in this process of pushing back. More specifically, we argue that metal music plays a key role in this process.

Extreme Decolonial Dialogues as Truth-Telling Artistic Endeavors

The arts have been extensively used throughout their many manifestations to reflect upon and challenge coloniality. These include literature,¹² film,¹³ theater,¹⁴ and other varied forms of visual arts.¹⁵ In the past, we have argued that metal music in Latin America and the Caribbean has also engaged in a decolonial agenda by examining the effects of fifteenth-century colonialism on the region.¹⁶ We have posited that metal music confronts coloniality through what we have defined as *extreme decolonial dialogues*.¹⁷ These are invitations made through metal music to engage in critical reflections about oppressive practices faced by Latin American communities in light of coloniality, reflections intended to foster deep thought and creative ways to bring about change. We label these experiences *dialogues* to highlight the exchange of information pertaining to the effects of coloniality between equals, as proposed by Paulo Freire.¹⁸ They are *decolonial* precisely because metal bands engage in conversations concerned with the historical process of oppression faced by the region, stemming from fifteenth-century colonialism and its lingering effects into the present day. Finally, these dialogues are *extreme* not only because they are perceived as threatening by those unacquainted with metal aesthetics and sounds but because they address issues related to death, violence, and oppression, which tend to worry unfamiliar listeners in the region. This includes politicians, the media, and other authority figures who have labored for decades to spread misinformation, promote moral panics, and sow fear in the communities they are meant to

protect. These dialogues address issues of extremity (e.g., colonial violence, murder, political repression) that many in the region would rather soon forget.¹⁹ These *extreme decolonial dialogues* are manifested via polymorphic strategies, which include, but are not limited to, the use of musical sounds, lyrics, and artwork to critically examine coloniality through metal music.²⁰

As part of this article, we would like to focus on the visual dimensions of these *extreme decolonial dialogues* and, more specifically, on one of its particular techniques: the strategic darkening of local culture, which we subsequently define in this article. Scholars working on the visual dimensions of coloniality have stressed the importance of using the image to challenge coloniality. For example, Nicholas Mirzoeff has called for the use of the image to help us engage in a process of counter-visibility, which allows people to challenge how the image is used in colonialism to champion a view of history from the perspective of the hero (i.e., the colonizer).²¹ Similarly, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui has posed that the image can help us reveal the aftermath (and afterlives) of coloniality, which is usually hidden in the written and spoken word.²² In both instances, these authors pose the idea that the image holds an important place in helping people understand how colonialism affected their past lives and how coloniality still influences them today.

We stand on the shoulders of these authors to state that the visual dimension of the *extreme decolonial dialogues* that take place via metal music in Latin America are another tool to help us navigate coloniality and challenge its effects in our lives. We have seen this throughout Latin American metal and use Puerto Rico as an example in this article to show how the images that accompany metal music (e.g., album artwork, T-shirts, stage practices) engage in these dialogues through what we have termed strategic darkening. By this we mean a process through which narratives and images important to local cultures (e.g., communal histories, folktales, artwork, political discourses) and others that emanate from everyday life (e.g., photos, promotional material) are (re-)conceptualized and/or transformed via metal music aesthetics. As such, they are altered to highlight a palate that prefers black as its prime color (blackened), portray experiences of oppression and violence, engage with the gruesome dimensions of life, and use shock value intentionally. We describe this process as strategic because, far from a simple transformation of the image to make it fit traditional metal aesthetics, it consciously negotiates traditional and nascent iconography with more specific purposes in mind. It moves away from the expected adoption of the image as a way to make it palatable to the unwritten aesthetic rules of a metal subgenre and its fans (e.g., Black Metal's emphasis on satanic imagery, death, and natural landscapes) and, instead, challenges those expectations with clear political and sociological motives. Strategic darkening aims to transform these narratives and images of local culture, delink them from official accounts

that aim to leave power dynamics unaltered in the post-truth era, and make them part of a truth-telling strategy. We have seen this strategic darkening happen via two specific techniques in the Global South: 1) the creation of new images that challenge official governmental and social narratives, and 2) the transformation of already existing culturally important images or visual practices to critique such power endeavors. In both instances, the process entails the systematic use of the aesthetics of metal music to reveal a hidden truth.

In what follows, we examine three examples from Puerto Rican Black Metal music to evidence the role of the strategic darkening of the image in *extreme decolonial dialogues*. We focus on the work of local bands Argyle²³ and Charca²⁴ and the promotional materials for the 2015 concert series *Blackened*. These three sources of information have as their common denominator the work of Puerto Rican musician and visual artist D.L. Miranda (whose stage name is Insularis), a male in his late twenties, who also serves as a co-author of this article. Let us examine his work in detail.

Our Dark Experience: *Nuestra Herencia* (Our Heritage) and Hurricane María

If there is one recent experience highlighting the need for truth-telling in the face of coloniality in the Caribbean setting, it is the aftermath of Hurricane María. The atmospheric event hit the island of Puerto Rico in September 2017 as a category 4 hurricane. It destroyed the country's already compromised infrastructure, causing the most prolonged blackout in the history of the United States or any of its colonies, leaving thousands of people dead. After the shock of witnessing the initial disaster wore off, the local and federal governments were quick to downplay the hurricane's effect on the island. President Donald Trump visited Puerto Rico on October 3, 2017, and addressed the Puerto Rican people: "You've thrown our budget a little out of whack," he facetiously stated during a press conference, while claiming that it was not a "real catastrophe." He later threw paper towels at the crowd as if he were in the middle of a basketball game. Governor Ricardo Rosselló smiled and took selfies with the President as if to commemorate the visit. While this happened indoors and in a climate-controlled setting, Puerto Ricans around the island were dying. A Harvard-led study estimated that the hurricane left 4,645 dead.²⁵ The local government denied the number, arguing at times that the actual figure was less than 100. The denial of the deceased represented, for all intents and purposes, a disavowal of the plights faced by the local population. It was outright erasure; they did not exist. They were not real. To make matters worse, months later, local people would discover that many of

the supplies that could have saved many lives were stockpiled in warehouses, never to be distributed to the population. The debate over the number of dead people in the aftermath of Hurricane María lingers today.

While all this happened, D.L. Miranda and his Black Metal band Argyle began the writing process for what would become the album *Nuestra Herencia* (Our Heritage). Released in 2020, the work encompasses a profound reflection on the effects of Hurricane María on the Puerto Rican population. Released digitally, the album included a file with images, song lyrics, and accompanying narrative passages. The cover artwork, developed by Jotham Malavé Maldonado, centers the action squarely on the Puerto Rican context by placing a ravaged banana tree in the foreground of the hurricane's devastation (see Fig. 1). The use of this image feels vitally crucial as it centers the events squarely on the Caribbean island, an unusual scenario to tackle under the normative aesthetics of Black Metal music that are so frequently linked to the European Global North. Gone are the frozen landscapes of Scandinavian Black Metal music, which seem to paralyze time, beckon stillness, and elicit silence. This image has a different temperature, transmits movement, and stresses an alternate appreciation of time by pointing to the before and after of the hurricane. Also, the obscure forces at work are not ethereal or human; though haunting, they are linked to a natural event. The cover is made to transport the viewer into the midst of the atmospheric event as if to cement that traumatic experience, one that was not alien to D.L. Miranda.



Figure 1. Artwork for the album *Nuestra Herencia* by Argyle, created by Jotham Malavé Maldonado.

During our interview, D.L. Miranda explained, “It was in the aftermath of [Hurricane] María, driving through the destruction and total ruin surrounding me, that my worldview became one of seeing decay, a force of corruption in all things. (In Black Metal, we call this force Satan, the Devil.) And this corruption I then began to see not just in the sphere of politics, but also on societal, personal, and spiritual levels.” In the aftermath of the catastrophic event, and as if to disconnect from the world, he would take to reading the books available to him. These works of literature would become part of the music he was developing. “During those months, I was reading *La Charca*, *La Vispera del Hombre*, and other books. The last one starts with a hurricane, ironically. I also read *La Carreta* by René Marqués. When you cite those books, you are already adding a cultural piece to the music. Art in Puerto Rico has reflected that local brand of decadence.” These were all novels written by what many consider historically significant authors, like Manuel Zeno Gandía and René Marqués. Both sought to reflect the immorality of colonial society, marked by oppression, violence, injustice, and the unfair treatment of locals on the part of a foreign power and its local allies. That decadence would echo in the lives of D.L. Miranda and other Puerto Ricans in the ways that the local and federal governments sought to downplay what those on the ground already knew; the hurricane had a disastrous toll on marginalized communities, particularly those in the countryside far from the metropolitan areas and the epicenters of government. D.L. Miranda put this reality into song.

Crown of Mud and Tears tells the story of a woman living in the countryside who survived the hurricane. She is visually portrayed as distraught, ragged, and looking at the viewer directly in the eyes (see Fig. 2). The image is delivered in black and white and has a rough and almost DIY quality, all of which help situate it alongside the aesthetic practices of Black Metal music.²⁶ And yet, simultaneously, the decision to depart from traditional Black Metal aesthetics from the Global North is worth noting. Corpse paint is absent from the central character’s face and replaced, in an effort to regionalize her, by mud and tears. The preferred face covering of Black Metal music in the Global North feels trivial in this setting and is therefore only hinted at in the woman’s face. Also, gone are the traditional Black Metal linkages to death as an expression of misanthropic views of society. Death is now linked to necropolitics,²⁷ which played a central role in the mismanagement of the disaster.²⁸ The world as she knows it has ended, not because of existential nihilism but due to the fraught political responses to disasters that are unnecessarily cruel and horrific. As if to drive the point home, the liner notes for the song present her scenario in detail before the listener can hear the lyrics. They state the following:



Artwork by Julianny Fonseca Torres

Figure 2. Artwork for the song *Crown of Mud and Tears* by Argyle, created by Julianny Fonseca Torres.

[ESCENA:] Una joven mujer cojea por un camino excavado entre los escombros dejado por la Gran Tempestad que arrazó contra su barrio en la montaña. Su rostro es uno de abatimiento tallado por las horas del huracán y días consiguientes sin dormir; lágrimas hacen surcos entre los parchos de fango que cubren su cara, su cabello, su ropa, todo. Su mirada se fija en una distancia imperceptible por el hombre. En sus brazos sostiene un embudo de sábanas empapadas en humedad, fango, y sangre podrida. . . . Hubo muchos campesinos que vieron a la pobre mujer sollozar cruzando por la ruina, y se cuestionaban lo que decía, y lo que llevaba en sus brazos. . . . La sombra que la perseguía se extendía a lo largo de los siglos. Sus cuernos arrasan las generaciones del hombre.²⁹

([SCENE:] A young woman limps along a path dug through the debris left behind by the Great Storm that swept through her neighborhood in the mountain. Her face is one of despondency carved by the hours of the hurricane and subsequent sleepless days; tears make furrows between the patches of mud that cover her face, her hair, her clothes, everything. Her gaze is fixed on a distance imperceptible by man. In her arms she holds a funnel of sheets soaked in moisture, mud, and rotting blood. . . . There were many peasants who saw the poor sobbing woman crossing the ruin, and questioned what she said, and what she carried in her arms. . . . The shadow that haunted her stretched across the centuries. Its horns devastate the generations of man.)

When asked about the song, D.L. Miranda explained that *Crown of Mud and Tears* portrays the hurricane's aftermath as it truly was: "We used the image of a woman leaving the wreckage and crossing the countryside. Her world is now destroyed. She can only hold on to a dead baby. She lost her child because of the event." It is not a coincidence that he used Black Metal's preoccupations with death and violence to portray the woman's story.³⁰ It recognizes the denied facts that plagued the governmental response to Hurricane María. People had, in fact, died. The poor had suffered disproportionately, and many had just stood by as this suffering took place. Colonial dynamics had fostered the downplaying of this aftermath, as the Puerto Rican government sought to avoid looking incompetent in front of its United States's counterparts. The decision to make a peasant woman the centerpiece of the song is significant, as it stands as a recognition of what the most marginalized populations had lived through. More importantly, the last line of the narrative points to a haunting shadow that stretches for centuries. This shadow, a nod to the island's colonial history, stands as a recognition of how colonial dynamics shaped the local and federal governments' response to the hurricane. Echoing what Nelson Maldonado Torres has termed the coloniality of being,³¹ these colonial subjects lacked worth, their lives needed not to be respected, and their deaths would stand unacknowledged. D.L. Miranda had seen this colonial disdain long before the hurricane arrived on our shores via books published more than a century prior. He now felt the need not only to sing about it but also to create dark images that could foster a post-María truth-telling process. These images could provide a counter-narrative to the government's official story. His strategy would extend beyond the topic of Hurricane María and tackle historically important figures in Puerto Rico's national identity.

We Are Darkness: *Charca* and the Transformation of the *Jibaro*

If you were born in the '70s in Puerto Rico, the initial acquaintance with the word *jibaro* was likely through popular music. “Jibaro, jibaro soy” (I am a jibaro, a jibaro) sang the Italian-born and Puerto Rican-adopted folk singer Tony Croatto. The single *Jibaro*, from the 1982 eponymously named album, placed the Puerto Rican peasant’s voice at the center of the song’s narrative.³² The *jibaro*, a local term used to describe the countryside working peasants, sang to the listener about his contributions to the country. The peasant returns to the word *traigo* (I bring) as a refrain throughout to highlight his contributions to Puerto Rican culture. His link to the mountains, his *bohío* (house), the singing of the birds in the countryside, the greenery of the plantain crop, the shadow of the coffee trees, the flowers gathered for the women, the *melao* (sugar) and tobacco harvests, and his songs, are just some of the things the *jibaro* brings to local culture mentioned in the music. The song perfectly encapsulates the idealized version of the *jibaro*, which would be present in much of its positive depictions in Puerto Rican culture. The aura of the *jibaro* was reinforced by the cover artwork for Croatto’s albums, many of which showed the former plowing the land, wrangling cattle, and living in the countryside. His work stands today as a testament to the idealization of the *jibaro* in Puerto Rican culture. Of course, this positive and almost ahistorical vision of the Puerto Rican peasant did not happen in a social and political vacuum.

Lillian Guerra has extensively researched the figure of the *jibaro*.³³ She posits that to truly understand how this figure was defined and deployed, we must come to grips with the underlying rationale behind its championing by local elites during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She postulates that Puerto Rican *criollos* feared a loss of influence in local issues after the 1898 invasion of Puerto Rico by the United States. To create a narrative to counteract North American power, they systematically appropriated the figure of the *jibaro* as a symbol of national identity. This entailed transforming the *jibaro* from an ignorant and lazy subject relegated to work endlessly in the fields into an almost heroic entity viewed as the natural inheritor of some form of Spanish heritage. The *jibaro*, as part of this nation-building strategy, exemplified all the positive qualities to which working-class Puerto Ricans should aspire. In this process of reinvention, the *jibaro* was portrayed as a racially White and morally tireless worker. The *jibaro* not only harkened to a romanticized past in the minds of local elites but, more importantly, offered hope for an idealized future where “North Americans were out of the picture, and in which the elite presided over a colonial society that operated much more on their own terms.”³⁴ It is not a stretch to think that the *jibaro* incarnated in Croatto’s work echoes the same romanticized ideal, now put to song.

The process of romanticizing the figure of the *jibaro* would extend to Puerto Rican visual arts and painting in particular. One of the most salient representations of this figure in Puerto Rican painting is Ramón Frade's *El Pan Nuestro* (Our Daily Bread) (see Fig. 3). The painting dates to 1905 and portrays a *jibaro* carrying plantains.³⁵ The sky is blue, and the land is green and lush. His face is surrounded by an “aureole of a golden-colored hat” that perfectly centers his presence in the frame.³⁶ As pointed out in Guerra's work, the *jibaro* projects Whiteness as an indicator of his Spanish heritage. Although analyses of the painting have pointed to its potential critique of United States' colonialism and its control over Puerto Rico's land and population, the depiction of the *jibaro* seems to stay firmly in the realm of idealization. This is where Black Metal music and iconography come into view.



Figure 3. *El Pan Nuestro* by Ramón Frade (1905). Oil on Canvas. Collection of the Puerto Rican Culture Institute.

Influenced by Frade's painting, D.L. Miranda would reinvent the figure of the *jibaro* (see Fig. 4). His depiction, recreated in black and white, would modify three main things. First, the gaze of the *jibaro* is absent as if to recognize that the oppression experienced by the peasants rendered them an anonymous mass with no agency. There is no direct gaze, or even a casual encounter, with the *jibaro*'s eyes. He is not a subject but rather part of a larger amorphous group. Second, the landscape is eliminated as if to highlight how the lush scenery presented by Frade

was fraudulent, a simulacrum hiding the real landscape of Puerto Rico under colonialism. The country was in the midst of colonization, which entailed using force and appropriating land—a far cry from any idyllic conception of this new frontier. Thirdly, and most importantly, the plantains are replaced by hookworms. Gone is the food from the *jibaro*'s hands. He now bears in his hands, for the viewer to see, the cause of his anemia, an endemic problem for the population at the time.³⁷ Finally, the frequent linkages to death in this musical subgenre, which are usually associated with an overall sense of misanthropic nihilism towards humanity, are transformed (see Fig. 2, discussed earlier). Instead, D.L. Miranda brings into focus the role of necropolitics embedded in the colonial experience. We spoke to him about using *uncinariasis*, the scientific term for hookworm infection, as the title for the album released by his band *Charca* in 2021. He explained the following:



Figure 4. Artwork for the song *Uncinariasis* by Charca. Artwork by D.L. Miranda.

The *jibaro* is adored in our culture as an archetype of simplicity and humility, which I feel do not exist in current day Puerto Rico. Some of that is true, but *Uncinariasis* reflected their everyday reality. It was marked by hard work, toiling in a land that was not theirs anymore, and lack of nutrition. It was a crude life, very hard. On top of that, those illnesses were present among them. . . . Ramón Frade's painting *El Pan Nuestro* was the basis for the work. It encompasses the traditional image of the *jibaro*, and we combined it with the idea of *uncinariasis*, which was endemic among the peasants. . . . The

problem was widespread among peasants working the fields on the island. All of it links the *jibaro* with illness.

D.L. Miranda's visual reinterpretation of the *jibaro* would echo, even if inadvertently, the work of Sidney Mintz, who vividly described the strenuous life and forms of oppression faced by Puerto Rican peasants during the 1940s and '50s.³⁸ Frade's *jibaro* would need to be transformed into something else to reflect Puerto Rico's colonial dilemma. Transfigured by Black Metal aesthetics, the *jibaro* would become almost monstrous. His artwork would deprive the *jibaro* of a face and thus question the very essence of his identity. He would remove him from the landscape to call attention to the effects of colonialism on poor local people. Finally, he would rob him of his food and sustenance as a way to call attention to the dire malnutrition and exploitation that affects any chance for good health. His transformation of the *jibaro* in this particular piece echoes the call posed by Sheila Rodríguez-Madera for the need to understand the everyday ways in which marginalized communities face necropolitics, what she has termed necroresistance.³⁹ The *jibaro* becomes visually and lyrically darkened as a truth-telling strategy. Far from the romantization of the *jibaro's* experience, which used him/her to construct a post-truth narrative in the colonial setting, this reinterpretation is presented as a counter-narrative. The lyrics, performed in Spanish, drive the point home: "Estomago desviado en su función primaria, engendra enfermedad y la muerte de un pueblo" (A stomach cut off from its primary function, engenders illness and the death of a people).

A Dark Resistance: The *Vejigante* as Social Critique

In the previous two examples, we have aimed to illustrate how D.L. Miranda, a Black Metal artist in the Puerto Rican context, has engaged in the process of darkening the local cultural experience to address the everyday manifestations of coloniality in our setting. We would like to turn to a different approach in this process: the darkening of a pre-existing artwork that shares a truth-telling agenda against coloniality. Specifically, we focus on how a Black Metal initiative in Puerto Rico, led in part by D.L. Miranda and his colleague Kadriel Betsen, used the artwork of local artist Rafael Tufiño to reflect on the island's colonial plight.

In one of our conversations about the motivation behind the creation of *Uncinariasis*, Miranda mentioned having come "across the idea for the album after reading a pamphlet from the Puerto Rican Division of Community Education, in which artists like Rafael Tufiño were actively involved." This fact is significant to understanding how Black Metal artists have examined local art and culture to inform their endeavors. DIVEDCO (its acronym in Spanish for the División de

Educación de la Comunidad) was created in the late 1940s and saw its peak in productivity during the 1960s and '70s. The government division was tasked with using the arts (e.g., painting, film, music) to educate the local population on issues related to health, literacy, and civic engagement. The most influential artists on the island at the time would be part of it, and the work that originated out of that effort remains to this day as some of the most significant in Puerto Rico's art history. Born in Puerto Rico, Rafael Tufiño (1922–1989) would become one of the movement's central figures; decades later, his work would inadvertently influence Black Metal music.

Tufiño's art reflected the local people's history and the plights they faced under Spain's and United States's colonialism. This engagement with everyday topics garnered him the name "the painter of the people."⁴⁰ Some of his most famous works are closely linked to peasant life in the countryside. His work depicted the cultivation of coffee and sugar cane, the role of Afro-Caribbean music in Puerto Rican life, and artisans creating valuable objects for local culture, among many other topics, all of which are linked to life on the island.⁴¹ One of his most important paintings is "Psychoanalysis of a *Vejigante*" (see Fig. 5), a painting that depicts a *vejigante* lying prostrate on the floor next to a settee. It aims to display the general anxiety surrounding what was perceived as the deterioration of Puerto Rican culture during the 1970s. Hit by economic depression and the effects of the Vietnam War, Puerto Ricans exhibited a heightened concern over the country's state of affairs and the Americanization of (read: the influence of the United States on) local culture. Tufiño had intentionally sought to challenge the hegemonic celebratory aspect of the *vejigante*, a local cultural icon, to transmit a dire message about the country's state. Let us examine this transformation for a moment before delving into Black Metal's adoption of the image.



Figure 5. *Psicoanálisis del Vejigante* by Rafael Tufiño (1971). Reproduced with permission of Pablo Tufiño and the Puerto Rico Tourism Company.

The *vejigante* is a popular character in Puerto Rican culture that often appears at small-town cultural festivals,⁴² particularly the Carnaval de Vejigantes in Ponce. *Vejigantes* display colorful attires and horned masks as they run through the streets during town celebrations; while traversing the streets, they wield sun-dried, inflated animal bladders, which they carry to threaten attendees jokingly. *Vejigantes* originated in medieval Spain, where they made appearances to celebrate Christian triumphs over the Moors. They were used as demonic visual representation of the latter. This original purpose and meaning of the *vejigante* are unknown by most of the populace, who instead see them as figures linked to local entertainment during town celebrations. Transforming this meaning, Tufiño's *vejigante* has nothing to celebrate. On the contrary, it lays prostrate on a divan and almost falls to the floor. He is engaged in a psychoanalytic process, where an unconscious phenomenon needs to reach consciousness, through the spoken word, as a pre-requisite of healing. Something is wrong with him, and the spectator is invited to surmise what it might be. The painting is an invitation to the audience's gaze; if the onlooker is capable of deciphering the *vejigante's* colonial plight, a deeper understanding of how colonialism affects Puerto Ricans may emerge. Tufiño had transformed the celebratory tone traditionally ascribed to the *vejigante*, instead opting to show his darker side, which he sees as intimately linked to colonialism.

More than forty years later, Tufiño's work would appear in Puerto Rican Black Metal visual representations and iconography. During the summer of 2015, Black Metal groups organized to host a series of events throughout the island, focusing exclusively on this musical subgenre. Local bands played in the San Juan (north-east) and Mayagüez (western) metropolitan areas. The events, promoted under the moniker Blackened, included a set of promotional materials developed by D.L. Miranda and Kadriel Betsen,⁴³ based on the art of historically significant Puerto Rican artists (see Fig. 6). Rafael Tufiño's presence stood front and center in the collection. One of the flyers was inspired by Tufiño's *vejigante* painting. Presented here in black and white, once again using darkening as a strategy, the image sparked conversations about its origin amidst the members of the metal scene. It was not strange to be in one of these events and listen to metal fans discussing Tufiño, the transformed painting that now graced their promotional materials, and the artist's intent.

In a colonial setting that aimed to deny its political submission to the United States on a daily basis through the post-truth narratives fostered by political parties in power, the reinterpretation of art through metal music stood as an invitation to see the world differently. D.L. Miranda and Kadriel Betsen had found a way to amplify Tufiño's truth-telling exercise about coloniality for a new generation, one seemingly more interested and open to the darker aspects of Puerto Rican art than generations past. In other words, this was

a generation willing to participate, alongside the artists themselves, in the strategic darkening of Puerto Rican iconography, ideology, and day-to-day reality.

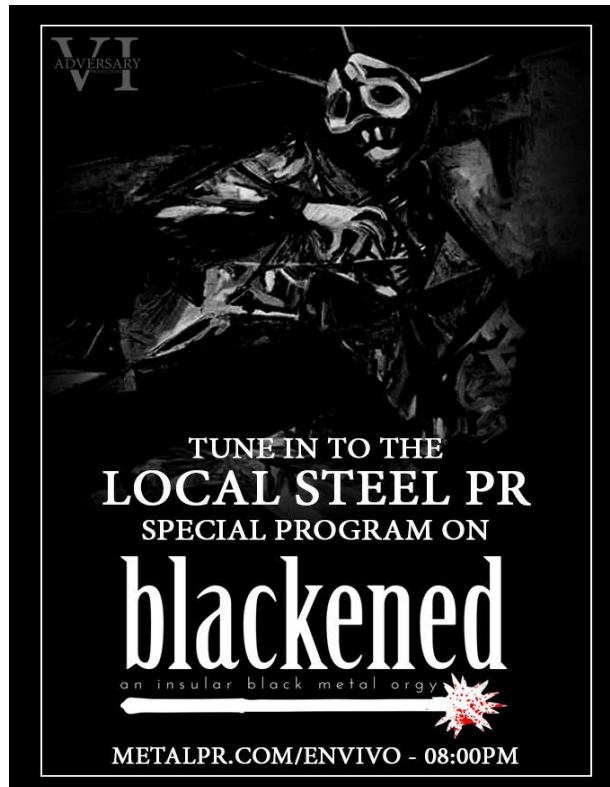


Figure 6. *Blackened* concert series promotional material. Artwork by D.L. Miranda and Kadriel Betsen.

Discussion

Children of the '80s raised in Puerto Rico will surely remember waking up early on Saturday mornings to watch cartoons on local television. Before our favorite shows began, the national anthems of Puerto Rico and the United States would play alongside a video crafted to pull at any Puerto Rican's heartstrings. While the Puerto Rican anthem played, a *jibaro* plowed the land. A child appeared and brought him his traditional instrument, the *cuatro*. He would stand in the countryside and play the national anthem while a military

helicopter appeared in the background. The clip would then show viewers spectacular island landscapes and end with the *jibaro* shaking hands with a national guardsman while standing in front of the helicopter. The United States's national anthem would play immediately after, alongside images of the flags of the fifty states. The message feels clear today, even if it was confusing to us as children back then. At the time, this exercise in propaganda was meant to promote the island subjects' ties to the empire; the empire was benevolent, and its militaristic presence was sold as giving Puerto Ricans the security to continue to live out their idyllic old ways. Being Puerto Rican meant associating with peasant life while living within the militaristic presence of the United States. The latter was supported by the several military bases throughout the island. Now in hindsight, we have come to see the true meaning behind that spectacle. You were unequivocally a colonial subject, and not even the blissful experience of watching weekend cartoons on television could take place without first seeing that strategic reminder. Tying such propaganda to cartoons seems to us now as a sinister effort of indoctrination.

This childhood visual experience, like the videos described at the outset of this article, is an example of how coloniality has been strategically hidden in plain sight. Such images engage in what we might call a "lightening" of colonial reality. That is the use of visual images to deny, hide, or simply suppress the cruelty of the colonial experience. These images are laden with happiness, optimism, and serenity. They exist to drive the point home: coloniality is a non-issue in the world portrayed. Therefore, Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui's call to use the image to challenge coloniality remains crucially important today, as the examples in this chapter make clear. If it tarnishes the truth, it can also be used to question this process and let it emerge again. We would add to that call the need to seriously examine how the image is used for decolonial purposes in places where we traditionally do not look for such efforts. Metal music stands out as an actual example of a type of praxis that challenges the various forms of coloniality.

The strategic darkening of local culture we have discussed in this article continues to evidence how Black Metal music in the Global South engages in *extreme decolonial dialogues*. An essential part of these dialogues is the strategic use of the image, through its darkening, to reflect on the dire consequences of colonialism and its lingering effects today via coloniality. Therefore, in contexts where colonialism's effects have been denied or downplayed, the strategic darkening of local culture through metal serves as a pedagogical truth-telling strategy. In an era of post-truth marked by the rapid sharing of disinformation and in academic scenarios where decolonial efforts are downplayed and even mocked, the strategic darkening of the image through metal music becomes a school for its listeners and viewers. Musicians

use it to motivate truth-seeking, question official narratives, and possibly think outside of the confines of coloniality. In this sense, metal music is doing what many social movements have failed to do, albeit on a smaller scale.

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