

# Boricuir Trans-territorial Ecologies: Archipelagic Cimarronaje and Hemispheric Resurgence in Abya Yala

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## ABSTRACT

We share our Boricuir stories as healers committed to the revitalization of Afro-Indigenous *quí* ecologies. Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies are rooted in an archipelagic cimarronaje that is shaping, while in turn being informed by, hemispheric notions of Afro-Indigenous resurgence. Caribbean scholars have theorized Afro-Indigenous, maroon, and queer epistemologies as sites of creative resistance and imagination. We place Caribbean scholars in conversation with Native Studies, Chicana Studies, and Black Feminist Studies to theorize the trans-territorial experiences, and transcolonial kinships, that lie at the heart of Boricuir's ecologies. Boricuir ecologies challenge Christian colonial notions of personhood rooted in racial hierarchies, gender normativity, the human/non-human dichotomy, and nationalist discourses that have sought to erase Boricuir lives, Afro-Indigenous bodies and knowledge, and Boricua diasporas. We contribute to current conversations about what it means to imagine the worlds possible from within and beyond the colonial wound, building transcolonial kinship across the islands and the continent. [Keywords: Boricuir, cimarronaje, trans-territorial, resurgence, transcolonial, ecologies]

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**Myrna Cabán Lezcano** is a queer, Boricua community herbalist, educator, and cultural organizer. Myrna is committed to co-creating liberatory spaces for all. Since 2014, Myrna has opened up her homes for community healing. Since 2012, she returns to Borikén to heal, learn from the land, and share medicine (florymachete.com).

**Toi Scott** is a non-binary Afro-Indigenous knowledge and medicine keeper and community builder with QTPOC/BIPOC communities. They co-created the School of Liberation Healing and Medicine, housing the Herbal Freedom School, BIPOC Communiversity, and QTPOC Healing Histories and Queering Herbalism.

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### By way of return...

Alaí and Ana sat in their home in Eugene, Oregon, speaking with RaheNi and Myrna, who were in their home in northern California. They were completing interviews for the *Caribbean Women Healers: Decolonizing Knowledge within Afro-Indigenous Traditions* digital humanities project at healers.uoregon.edu,<sup>1</sup> using Zoom, an online audio-visual communication platform that took center stage at the onset of the 2020 COVID pandemic. But this was before the pandemic; it was right before, and right after the series of earthquakes that shook Borikén in early January 2020. It was several years after Hurricane María and a few months after the *Paro Nacional* in the summer and fall of 2019 that forced Governor Ricky Roselló to resign after sexist, homophobic, and other derogatory conversations with his Cabinet were made public.<sup>2</sup> We were speaking with each other as devastating incidents of homophobic and transphobic violence took place on and off the island. Maybe in the larger world our gathering across cyberspace might seem insignificant. But we were four queer people, lesbian and two-spirit, Afro-Indigenous and living closer to the Pacific Ocean than to the Caribbean Sea. We are all migrants in our current homes. None of us were born in the Pacific, and maybe we never dreamed that we would be here—or even cross paths, but there we were, coming together to talk about healing and our healing work. In a world that seeks our elimination as Indigenous and Black queer people, our gathering to speak with each other was not insignificant.

After the onset of the pandemic, the significance and urgency of our relationships have deepened. No matter where we find ourselves, we are witnessing our communities disproportionately impacted by the disappearance of plant and animal life, by hurricanes, fires, floods, soil erosion, heat waves, less water, less access to our traditional foods, and non-GMO seeds. We look to each other for our own healing. RaheNi leads a virtual two-spirit gathering at least once a month, providing lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans\*, queer/queer, and two-spirit (LGBTQ2S) people space to heal from deep soul wounds: the “multigenerational, collective, historical, and cumulative psychic wounding over time, both over the life span and across generations” (Duran et al. 1998, 342).

Shortly before our second interview in January 2020, RaheNi posted a beautiful statement on Instagram, along with a photograph of themselves with a ceremonial staff, a rattle, and their face decorated for the ceremony. The words, “You are sacred you are loved,” were written across the photograph. The statement read:

We have a very diverse group of folks who came to connect with the #sacred... within themselves & their ancestors. Last week as we discussed creating an ancestor #altar, one of the participants expressed real fear & shed tears at the thought that their ancestors would not accept their offerings, would not approve of the fact that they are queer. I then shared about how when I was 16 & staying with the only person in my blood family, my paternal aunt, who fully accepted me, I had a female friend spend the night (this was a friend, not a lover). My abuela, who lived upstairs saw her leave in the morning & assumed that something sexual had occurred in my room. My abuela proceeded to go into the room & lit white candles & began to pray to Jesus to remove “the devil” from the space. I was so angered & deeply hurt by this & after that I didn’t engage with her much until she was on her death bed & all she could do was cry. Many years later, on a deep medicinal plant journey, that abuela came to me & the 1st thing she said was, “I’m sorry for what I did. I’m sorry I didn’t understand who you were. I know now that you are a beautiful person.” And we talked there, in the spirit realm & it was such a healing experience. And for me, that was validation that when we cross over, if we were generally “good people” doing our best in this world, we are given divine all-knowing vision & that vision is free of colonized thinking & full of love & acceptance. Haven’t you heard the stories of those who have died & returned to life? Those people speak of being transformed, of having their souls opened, of coming back to this realm & committing to living a life free of bias, free of hatred. Your ancestors, those wise ones, those good hearted ones, they love you, they see you & they are grateful for you, yes, you who are #queer, you who are #twospirit, you who may seem “different”... YOU ARE SACRED... YOU ARE LOVED!!! And whether or not your blood family loves & accepts you, your #ancestors got your back!!

This cybernetic exchange reaches communities across Abya Yala,<sup>3</sup> with whom RaheNi has shared indigenous planting projects, ceremonies, and healing practices in person and in cyberspace. In a world where many of us experience rejection from our families and from the larger society, RaheNi’s story heals us. We propose here that their story articulates a Boricuir trans-territorial ecology—an ecology built on accepting Afro-Indigenous understandings of life and death, of ways to communicate with ancestors and plant life, of valuing non-human and human life alike, and of rejecting Christian colonial notions of gender.

Like all of us, RaheNi engages in Boricuir trans-territorial ecological empowerment efforts that allow us to exist, be, and imagine that our ancestors are guiding us as we revitalize and reconnect with their knowledge in a moment of deep environmental and climate transformation throughout the world.<sup>4</sup> A Boricuir trans-territorial ecology enables us to heal the psychic, physical, emotional, and environmental wounds of Christian coloniality (Lara 2020a) and to imagine and create other ways of relating to each other and to all living beings on earth in a reciprocal way, as kin in solidarity with one another within and beyond coloniality. Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies are *quí*r (Falconi Travez 2014; Lara 2020a), archipelagic (Stephens and Martínez-San Miguel 2020), Afro-Indigenous (Serna Moreno 2017; Serna and Solís 2012), cimarronxs (Figueroa 2020; Lebrón Ortíz 2020; Rolón Collazo 2021), resurgent (Simpson 2017), and invested in transcolonial kinship (Reyes-Santos 2015); all terms that we will further define throughout the article and its conclusion.

We argue that the archipelagic cimarronaje that characterizes Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies finds itself in a productive dialogue with continental notions of Afro-Indigenous resurgence across Abya Yala/Turtle Island. Through cultural and philosophical analysis, Caribbean scholars Pedro Lebrón Ortiz (2020), Lissette Rolón Collazo (2021), and Yomaira C. Figueroa (2020) have, to different degrees, theorized Afro-Indigenous, maroon, and queer epistemologies as sites of creative resistance and imagination. Furthermore, Alai Reyes-Santos (2015) has theorized transcolonial kinship as solidarities across difference that seek to transform social relations shaped by coloniality and racist, xenophobic, sexist, homo/transphobic, and elitist nationalisms. We build on their theoretical conversations with US-based Native Studies, Chicana Studies, and Black Feminisms, while engaging continental Indigenous scholars Leanne Betasomasake Simpson's (2017) notion of radical resurgence and Angela Mitlanxochitl Anderson's (2020) articulation of trans-territorial knowledge, to theorize from within the experiences of transcolonial kinship that lie at the heart of Boricuir ecologies today. Through storytelling across cyberspaces, we demonstrate that such ecologies challenge what Ana-Maurine Lara (2020b) describes as Christian colonial notions of personhood based on racial hierarchies, gender normativity, and the human/non-human dichotomy as well as nationalist discourses that have sought to erase Boricuir lives, Black and Indigenous bodies and ecological knowledge, and Boricua diasporas. We actively undermine the social, political, and historical processes that attempt to limit our capacity to build solidarity across the islands and the continent.

Moved by the decolonizing potential of storytelling, here we share our stories as Boricuir healers committed to further decolonizing the Caribbean. Storytelling is a powerful method for confronting and undoing the logics of Western imperial knowledge production (Smith 2013). Storytelling allows for multiple voices and perspectives to be shared—polyvocality—and for the story itself to do the work of producing meaning. It decenters the researchers' perspectives and allows all of us to participate in theorizing our own experiences. We follow the lead of Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill Collins (1999), who along with many others embraces the first-person voice and perspective—"I" and "we"—to reclaim the power of knowing from within a Black experience. Western epistemologies are rooted in the idea of a singular, transparent, all-knowing truth. This impulse within Western imperial knowledge production is at the root of violent processes of ongoing colonization that seek to erase Indigenous and Black *quí* and two-spirit voices, bodies, experiences, and ecological knowledge.

The structure of this article seeks to replicate the pedagogical methods used by our ancestors and elders, who continue to teach through stories. By sitting at each other's feet, we get to practice deep listening. Deep listening is

to listen with the whole body, to what is both articulated and unarticulated, and paying attention to what is seen and not seen. Deep listening is about observing collective ritual behaviors and the utterances that take place between people. To listen deeply is to be a part of, extending beyond ethnographic participant observation and into the realm of being in loving community. To listen deeply is to also listen to dreams, to listen to "the counsel of spirits and ancestors" (Abebe Oshun 2016), to dance to music, and to be present to the ups and downs of our elders' (and their families') lives. (Reyes-Santos and Lara 2020)

We will not then start by telling our readers what we mean by Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies in detail, as if there is only one possible or comprehensive definition, as if we seek to convince you of one whole truth under colonial epistemic terms. Just like elders and ancestors have done since time immemorial, we have begun this article by posing some possibilities and leaving you with stories to feel, decode, interpret on your terms. We ask our readers to listen deeply and through that process, to first draw your own conclusions—based on your own embodied experiences—before engaging with us in reflection and analysis on the possible meanings of Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies for our collective present and future.

### **Stories of Boricuir Trans-territorial Ecologies<sup>5</sup>**

#### ***Alaí and Ana, RaheNi and Myrna***

Alaí and Ana are both Afro-Indigenous identified lesbian women who navigate the boundaries between academia and other worlds. Alaí is an Associate Professor of Indigenous, Race, and Ethnic Studies, and Associate Director of the Just Futures Institute for Climate and Racial Justice, whose work focuses on inter-ethnic, decolonial, feminist, and queer kinship across the Antilles and the Americas. Alaí is also an Iyalocha, a priestess in the Regla de Ocha and Palo Monte traditions, committed to Afro-Indigenous community building. Ana is an Assistant Professor of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies whose work focuses on questions of Black and Indigenous freedom. Ana is also a novelist, poet, and a traditional knowledge keeper with responsibilities to her own Afro-Indigenous communities. Both of us have taken on an active role in building bridges between Afro-diasporic traditional community leaders and Native American cultural leaders in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Mexico, Oregon, and the rest of the US. Since 2011, we both have been active in supporting and being a part of Regla de Ocha, Mexica, and Afro-Indigenous ceremonies. When we write about Boricuir ecologies, we are writing about this story.

We met RaheNi at a Mexica ceremony in Austin, Texas in 2013. Ana had known about RaheNi for several years, having heard about a Boricua *quí*r healer who was working on Indigenous gardens in New York and California. But to meet them was a powerful experience: RaheNi stood in the space as a calm force. It was some time after that first encounter that RaheNi tattooed their face with marks that transform RaheNi's body into a site of Indigenous embodiment (Jacob 2013). In August 2020, RaheNi turned fifty years old. RaheNi's survivance (Vizenor 2015) is significant when we consider the necropolitics that foster death among *quí*r Black and Indigenous communities in colonial capitalism, and the tactical strategies that must be deployed by *quí*r people to become elders in our communities (Lugones 2003).

RaheNi is not alone. They are joined by their partner, Myrna, a Diasporican queer ciswoman whose roots extend from the island to Florida, to New York, and now, to California. We met Myrna in 2018, at a historic gathering of Indigenous, Black, and Afro-Indigenous healers in the Dominican Republic. Both RaheNi and Myrna were there to witness the gathering and to also support its ceremonial components. At that ceremony, Myrna played the guamo (conch shell horn) for the first time, its sound reverberating off of the hills at midnight and at dawn. Myrna is an herbalist and has led healing justice initiatives for *quí*r Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) around the US and Puerto Rico. Like RaheNi, her survivance is

an important testimony. She was active in founding and working with the Casitas Wisdom collective in New York from 2015 to 2019, with the goal of creating “learning/healing spaces where [POC+ QTBIPOC]<sup>6</sup> people can be creative, tell stories, and share the knowledge we carry in our memories and bodies” (Flor y Machete n.d.). The collective was also started to honor the legacy of *casitas* (small houses and cultural spaces on abandoned lots) and community gardens built by Boricuas in the 1970s. She has coordinated healing spaces and crisis responses following the 2016 Pulse massacre in a queer club in Florida, after Hurricane María, and over the past few years in the Bay Area. Myrna has also been teaching ancestral medicine making with plants from Borikén in community gardens throughout New York since 2016.

In early 2020, Ana and Alai asked RaheNi and Myrna if they could interview them for the Caribbean Women Healers Project (Reyes-Santos and Lara 2020). Together, Myrna and RaheNi have run QTPOC (Queer/Trans people of color) spaces since 2018. Though the project has up until now been primarily focused on the Caribbean and the Pacific Northwest, Ana and Alai could not ignore the significance of two Boricuir healers working and living in northern California, who are both active teaching and leading community spaces. Their stories are necessary and vital. A few months after RaheNi and Myrna were interviewed, we all visited together. Ana and Alai visited with RaheNi at the BAITTS two-spirit pow wow, where they were providing a space for themselves and several other two-spirit artists/healers to sell their products. Then we all spent time together as RaheNi gathered with M. Zamora and Loa Niumeitolu to lead a two-spirit drum circle and ceremony for Native American/Indigenous lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit (LGBTQ2S+) community. Ana and Alai then visited RaheNi and Myrna’s home, learning about their garden—both indoor and outdoor—as Myrna gave a brief tour of the many plants she had dried and prepared for her teachings at the Ancestral Apothecary School workshops she leads.

### ***RaheNi***

Ana and Alai asked RaheNi to speak about their process of becoming a healer. This is what they shared:

I needed healing. The healers need to be healed first before doing healing for anybody else. And I’m still healing. I needed some deep, deep healing from all of the trauma of being around violence and not having my mother around as much as I would have liked as well as a lot of ancestral trauma that came to the surface. My ancestors guided me to ceremony. They guided me there. And that was the two-spirit Sun Dance, where I felt safe because it was all folks like me and I could be fully me. Sun Dance is a Lakota ceremony, and I’m very grateful to the Lakota peoples and that tradition because it was that ceremony that brought me closer to my ancestors. Because when I sat in that sweat lodge I felt my ancestors sitting there with me. That was huge, and I was really drawn to dancing. Once I learned more about the dance and what it was about, and that it was about healing, I wanted to heal. I wanted to heal myself, I wanted to heal for those that are coming after me, I wanted to heal those ancestors that I felt were still suffering. I pledged to do that. When I came out of the closet at 15, I started searching in books because I knew I couldn’t go to church anymore. I started looking into Santería. I remember reading Luisah Teish’s (*Iyanifa Fajembola Fatunmise*) book of rituals.<sup>7</sup> I remember reading that book

really young and resonating with some of those rituals and starting to practice some of those rituals she had in that book. After that I was mixing all these worlds, I was dabbling in brujería and still partying and doing drugs. But when I found Sun Dance and they were like, you can't drink, you can't do this, you can't do that. So that was a big shift. I also found meditation and it's what helped me. When I started to Sun Dance, all these chronic illnesses started to hit me. I started getting migraines, body pains, all kinds of physical issues started hitting me and I couldn't Sun Dance anymore. I completed my 4 years. One of my teachers came to me and told me, "Your dance of suffering and fasting is over because you are physically suffering already, in your life. You have deep medicine that you need and you need to give people. I want you to come into the arbor and help the dancers. I want you to feed yourself and take care of yourself. And give your medicine to the dancers to help them pray." That was how I continued my dance there. I was a helper and when the dancers would fall apart and would cry, and all the various things, I would take care of them. And that's really how I learned how to do the work that I do now was all those years of just being in that arbor with those dancers and all the various things that came up. And one of the things she told me at the beginning—'cause I would ask all these questions—she just said, don't think. Forget about any thoughts. Just feel and do. And that's how I proceeded. And the work that we did together was beautiful like that. I was pushed to do, start Atabey Rising Tides by a two-spirit elder. She really worked with me. Even though I had all these years in ceremony and had been doing all this work, I didn't have a lot of confidence in myself. I think that is connected to being a person of color, being queer, being two-spirit and that struggle that we have with our worthiness in the world. This elder helped me to realize my worthiness and did a lot of work with my mind in changing my story. That was a journey in itself, to put my medicine out there. And that's the reason for putting the medicine out there because there are so many people—our Afro-Indigenous people, our queer folk two-spirit people who are really struggling with their worthiness, with trauma, with the pain living in their DNA that comes down in so many ways and is so confusing. I'm doing circles with folks. Right now I'm doing a class called *Corazón Sagrado*—there was this younger queer person of color who was so fearful of creating this ancestor altar and was in tears, in real pain, and believed "I'm just not sure that my ancestors will accept me or what I have to offer, that they will like who I am." It was deep for me to see so much pain. I sat with that for days after and shared that story with how I had had an experience of not being accepted. Stories are medicine, too. When our blood families turn their backs on us and don't accept us, it's devastating. And so many of us that are queer/trans/two-spirit have to deal with that. If they're scared that those ancestors are not going to be there for them, where are they going to turn? I am really trying to get folks to reconnect with nature and plants. That was another thing taken away from us living in the "hood" in those concrete jungles that are full of trash and hardly have any trees.

RaheNi's story traverses multiple territories. For RaheNi, a second-generation Nuyorican, being in Lakota ceremony became a way to get closer to their own Afro and Indigenous ancestors, because they could feel them "sitting there with" them. RaheNi was not accepted by their family and struck out on their own very soon after coming out. This experience produced deep personal pain that manifested in self-destructive behavior—a pattern that they had seen reflected in their family and community throughout their life. In addition to that

pain, they also connected to an impulse to heal that pain. This impulse also gave RaheNi the embodied knowledge of what it means to find acceptance from ancestral, spiritual, and floral beings, and multiple territories. Because of their own relationship to plants, RaheNi was able to connect to the spirit of their grandmother and then draw on that story to help others suffering the devastation of family rejection. The story of their grandmother conveyed the possibility that even when people are harmed by colonialism and violence in their lives, their spirits can find peace, and they can be loving and good; it is a story that presents the possibility of intergenerational reconciliation across spiritual and psychic terrains.

Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies situate living *quí*r Boricuas within a web of relationships that transcend material-corporeal territories. By traveling to the Lakota world, RaheNi was able to return home, to their Taíno Indigenous roots in Borikén, while holding Afro-Caribbean spiritual practices close to their heart. They also returned to the ancestral geographies of their family, reconciling with loss and producing deeper meaning in their life and in the lives of others. Today they offer their teachings and herbal remedies in a variety of spaces throughout the US mainland and Borikén, firmly grounded in their trans-territorial Boricuir ecological experience. In California, along with their partner, Myrna, they recreate a lush Boricua medicinal garden, including plants like yerbabuena, alcanfor, sábila, and tabaco, while incorporating local plants such as eucalyptus in their herbal practice.

### *Myrna*

In her website's biography, Myrna describes herself as follows:

Myrna is a queer, mixed race Boricua (brown and white heritage Boricuas) herbalist, educator and cultural organizer. She grew up eating mangos and being doused in Agua Florida. She was born in Mayagüez, Puerto Rico, grew up in central Florida, and lived for about 10 years in Flatbush, Brooklyn. Her abuelxs inspired her to connect to Spirit and healing by growing gandules, raising chickens, making dream-based predictions, and singing spontaneous songs. Her parents and ancestors on both sides of her family, for at least 5 generations, are from (Borikén) Puerto Rico: Arecibo, Manatí, Morovis, Lares, Mayagüez, and Ponce. They were espiritistas/plant-led spiritual mediums, Santería/Ifá practitioners and community nurses. Since 2012, Myrna has been returning to Borikén to heal, learn from the land, connect with her people and provide medicine. Myrna honors her ancestors' practices in all of her medicine. (<https://www.florymachete.com/about/>)

Myrna was born in Puerto Rico and migrated to Florida when she was nine years old. In the early 2000s, she moved to New York City. Myrna began training as a healer because she was seeking to heal her own pain and trauma. She trained in yoga, herbalism, and farming. Myrna shares with us here how her social justice work, and experiences as a *quí*r Boricua with a racial and Indigenous consciousness, shaped her training as a healer.

In 2012, Myrna joined a year-long yoga and healer training centered in "healing traditions, including Tantra yoga, the West African Yoruba Orisha tradition—particularly the Orishas Yemayá and Oshún, Vajrayana Buddhism, Taoist energy balancing techniques, Reiki, the Enneagram, spirit channeling." This training was led by a white woman, married to a Boricua



who had ties back to Borikén. It included a trip to the island and enrolled 60% white women and 40% women of color. As Myrna participates in the workshops in Borikén, her body begins to react to the colonial legacy represented by the presence of white women on the land who can travel there without “knowing where they are:”

I was one of two Boricuas [on this year-long healer training]—so I got to actually return to Puerto Rico as an adult by myself for the first time. The training happened in Utuado, *en una finca*, and in Culebra. When I had gone to Utuado, I had reconnected with the moriviví plant (*Mimosa pudica*), and that was in the back of my mind. I knew I had to go back to the island because of that moriviví plant. And also in that healer training, I accidentally—but not accidentally—I ended up hugging up on a ceiba tree. We’re in this training in Utuado and we’re in the mountains, and my teacher is doing these healing rituals with the group. I was resistant in my heart because most of the women there were white. I was having feelings about white folks being up in the space. And I’m like, do you even know where you are? Do you know where you are on the map? In one of the rituals she did, I started to feel this energy and this heaving cough passed through my solar plexus. And then I could feel everybody’s energy around me, it was too much to handle. The first thing I did was run out *y me tiré al piso* [I threw myself on the ground]. And then I started running into the forest and I ran towards this tree, suddenly and very strongly—and it was a ceiba tree! *Me embarré hasta con la tierra* [I covered myself with dirt] and threw myself to the ground. I hugged the ceiba tree, I went to the clay and I put it on my face. That was my way of getting what I needed, because the space was not allowing for a discussion about race. I always had it in the back of my mind that I had to return to that ancestral land. I saved up for three years and I went back to P.R. and worked on two farms for a small period of time. These are all the things that I did that led me towards going back to my people, to the land—specifically the land, the plants—and actually being with my people. Because even though I don’t feel fully at home in Puerto Rico because of the “you’re not from here you’re from there, you look white you’re not white” thing, the closest I feel to home is when I’m there with the land and the people. Going there and working on those farms really propelled my practice of being an herbalist who is connected to my roots.

When Myrna shared this story, we all laughed in recognition and lovingly because we could all relate to the sense of despair produced by white women’s erasure of Boricuir place and being. This is not something unfamiliar. As Afro-Indigenous *quí* people, we had experienced this primal despair at one point or another. For Myrna, the moriviví plant that she encountered on that trip called her back to the island. It had been a deep part of her childhood and being with it again as an adult on the island helped her to reclaim that childhood joy. Moriviví means I lived and I died (*morir* = to die, *vivir* = to live). It is a tropical plant that closes when touched. This plant remained in Myrna’s mind as the eternal reminder of return. It was the primary force that drew her back. But there was also the memory of running into the forest to seek solace from the earth and the ceiba tree, a symbol of ancestral memory and presence, a sacred tree in Indigenous, Afro, and Afro-Indigenous traditions in the island. Through those experiences, Myrna’s consciousness shifted into a deepened understanding about the relationships between plants, place, and people. This consciousness, a form of Boricuir trans-territorial ecology, informs Myrna’s contemporary practices in the Bay Area:

Now that I'm offering Caribbean plant medicine classes through Ancestral Apothecary School, here in the Bay where there are a few of us, the plants have been a powerful way for folks to reclaim wholeness and to reclaim the connection with their people even if they feel very distanced from their people and their culture. So, by connecting with the plants, they can remember they are part of that land, of that legacy, and of those healing traditions. Even if they don't know how to speak Spanish, or they don't have any connection with the relatives from the island, or they're mixed, maybe Japanese and Boricua. It's been really powerful to see how the plants bring back that wholeness and healing to people who are so separated from their cultural land and ancestral legacies.

In Myrna's life experience, Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies are central to all of her work, including an initiative to honor the Boricua casitas and community gardens in New York City, her trips to Borikén after Hurricane María and during the earthquakes in January 2020, and her herbal classes in Northern California that engage Boricuas far away from Borikén. She has resisted violent colonial mentalities within healing circles that erase Boricuir material realities, even as those same circles draw on Borikén's lands and medicines. Like RaheNi, she has connected with trees and plant life as necessary interlocutors in her own healing process; and echoing Toi, she has felt called by plants to reconnect with her ancestral legacy of healers, mediums, and Afro-Caribbean osha practitioners in the island.

### *Toi*

Toi was also at the 2018 gathering in the Dominican Republic. Ana met Toi in 2015, when she first learned about Toi's Herbal Freedom School.<sup>8</sup> Toi is in their late thirties. The Herbal Freedom School is one of the first virtual herbalism education programs specifically geared toward BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) healers. Along with the Herbal Freedom School, Toi has created two significant herbal compendiums—each over 150 pages—that pull together writings and readings about herbal medicine by and for BIPOC herbalists.

Toi grew up in Texas and moved back to Borikén in 2018, at the behest of the ancestors who whispered in their ears that the land was calling them to do the work of planting seeds, and after Hurricane María had already devastated many places across the island. When they moved to Borikén, they brought with them their pre-existing relationships with healing and environmental justice activists and artists to start *Semillas*: “a collaborative based in Borikén . . . supporting the health, healing, and wellness of Indigenous queer and trans boricuas through dance, healing circles, ceremony” (Scott 2020). *Semillas* provides sober healing spaces—which are almost non-existent—, and medicines and care packages, to community members; collaborates to support healing events like “*Liberándonos*”—which Sally discusses below—and “*Bombacuir*,” and redistributes wealth by funding projects with other *quí*r groups, including educational workshops led by *Huerto Vida* after the earthquakes and during the pandemic, *cuir moon circles* (FIOResSER), and *Espicynipples*' infographics on gender violence and COVID-19. Toi also fundraises to get organizers and healers paid, to support individual community members dealing with housing and food insecurity, and to do disability justice work.

We asked Toi to speak about how their identity does or does not shape the work that they do in the world. This is their story:

I feel like I have a billion identities. Politically, I identify as Black Blackity Black, as Afro-Indigenous, as Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Boricua, Afro-Taíno, as nonbinary, trans, omnigender, and I also identify as sick and disabled, chronically ill and as a neurodivergent, sparkly medicine keeper. I definitely am a plant spirit, and something like a bridge, or a tunnel connecting folks in different ways, even with our ancestors. I believe that [my identities are] my medicine and that as I try to understand myself and my ancestors and my community, the work and the medicine are one. I want us all to shine in our power. In the Herbal Freedom School, I want people to feel their ancestors in a way that's honoring them and helping them to unlearn some stuff that they have learned in other modern western herbal classes. We are unlearning a lot and going back to look at some of the traumas we've experienced in being disconnected from our healing ways and medicines. I feel like we are being called back here to remember, to undo, to unlearn, and I believe, too, in the medicine of remembering. I believe that in us returning we're remembering but also we're reclaiming our power. There's something that happened when we forgot about those nonbinary and two spirit and other gendered and queer histories that we might not even have names for. You look at orisha and you see that—you see that they were omnigendered or agendered or whatever and I think that is the key. In everything that we fight for, we keep unlearning and we're going to get to this place where we're going to see we don't have to be all those other labels we're going to be in our power and in our medicine and we're going to hear the trees talk to us.

In this articulation of the relationship between identity and healing, Toi makes it clear that identity shapes the questions one asks within the context of learning about plants and the natural world. They go on to describe the process of their training in herbalism:

Veganism and environmental justice work ended up bringing me to healing justice and plants. And it was one community herbalism program that made me really upset. A teacher said she taught some Indigenous folks their plants and their culture, and people were being referred to as though they don't exist anymore. We had a plant sit and one of the orisha came to me—and I later found out it was associated with this plant—and so I said it, because everybody was able to say, "this is what came to me." Everybody was like "oh I saw this goddess" or "I saw this or that." But when I said it, everybody freaked out. Everybody acted as though I had summoned some I don't know what. They were like, "You can't say that name, and we've got to put something out for him," and it was ridiculous. I was just like oh my goodness. And so, when we had to do a project, we had to pick a plant. I picked passiflora because I had this deep relationship with the flower and I was like wait a minute, Christ? What? I kept looking for an Indigenous name and found the nahuatl name, coanepilli—six serpents tongue—and that put me on this path of wanting to know more about the Indigenous names of our plants, and how our peoples work with plants, and for my final project I designed the queer herbalism blog. I wanted people to see anti-racist organizing alongside learning about plants. It was going to be a space that didn't exist, that I knew of. The whole idea with Semillas was to co-create healing spaces and healing circles, as well. That's where the idea of "Bombacuir" was developed with Espicynipples, and the quir moon circles "FLOResSer" and other things like that and getting out care packages.

Like with Myrna's story, Toi also deepened their own understanding of who they are in relation to plant beings. The plants themselves showed Toi that there existed the possibility of accessing another worldview aside from the one being shown. Who Toi is as a healer is deeply shaped by an anti-racist, Black and Indigenous consciousness rooted in a practice of reclaiming language and spiritual worldviews. This informs the work they do with others, a work that they define as a process of unlearning Western epistemologies and colonial environmental practices. This work takes place in a community of people who draw together cultural and ecological practices. These practices extend into the ways in which community is both defined and sustained:

My community is a small group of Afro-Indigenous folks, neurodivergent folks, immunocompromised folks, trans and nonbinary folks, queer and trans medicine makers and farmers and growers. We are like a creative family that shows up and cares for each other. This family looks and feels like Espicynipples having Afroboricuir cenas. Picture a whole bunch of Black Boricuas twerking and making food and eating it together and talking about whatever. It was just beautiful because we are all quir and trans and nonbinary and Black, you know? And, it's the bomba quir series where people were just crying because we connected with the drums, with our ancestors. It's like the quir moon circles going and being in community there and working with the plantas and talking about an Afro-Indigenous ceremony where we can pray to our African ancestors and our Taíno ancestors and sing to them. There's not a lot of spaces for that. It looks like us cooking food together or for each other when we're sick, dropping off food, exchanging medicine, giving each other plants and seeds, calling each other up and having jam sessions, teaching each other songs or making songs together. A lot of us are sick and disabled and at capacity and community is having ceremony at the ocean, getting together and watching *Pose* and *Black Lady Sketch Show*, getting together to make care packets and staying at each other's houses when we don't have housing, and taking care of each other's plants.

For Toi, to be Boricuir is to be in community with plants, people, and ancestors. It is to shine and celebrate life, and defiantly exist in the face of a whole world that says Black quir people should die, Indigenous quir people are already dead, and the sick and disabled should not exist. Through their work, Toi enacts a Boricuir trans-territorial ecology in their reclamation of ancestral consciousness—a belief that we are made up of our ancestors' flesh, blood, memories, and traumas—as a site that can be cultivated and healed through collective practices and care.

### **Sally**

RaheNi, Myrna, Toi, and Sally all met at CEPA during the January 2020 earthquakes. Shortly after the onset of the pandemic, one of Ana's apprentices—a self-identified “two spirit indigqueer feminista, brujita, abolicionista, mexicana, angelina, artista, birthkeeper, truth-teller + plant mama” (La Mala Yerba n.d.)—formed a BIPOC Medicine Makers virtual community to foster resource sharing, on-going support, and education. Ana is a member of the group, which has 180 members from all over North America, Mexico, the Pacific Islands, and the Caribbean, including Borikén. Ana and Sally met there. Sally was born and lives in Borikén and runs Finca Huerto Vida:

an ecological, transfeminist and anti-racist project that uses art, planting and traditional medicines as tools for healing and social justice, especially in economically impoverished communities. We use these tools through direct service, workshops, event creation, and brigades. We believe that healing is a priority part of social change, ecological restoration, reparation to our Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities, and should be accessible to everyone, not only to people who can pay for services. (*Queer Ecojustice* 2020)

In August 2020, Sally invited Ana to give a Spanish-language *plática* to their networks in Puerto Rico and across Latin America on alternative medicine protocols for COVID-19. This *plática* is part of Finca Huerto Vida's "weekly online listening circles among healers on the island [to discuss] self-care, collective care, gardening, cooking, and other tools to take care of each other during these times." Sally is in their twenties, and our relationship is developing as we continue to *compartir*, that is, to collaborate on the sharing of stories, resources, and time together (Lara, Reyes Santos et al. 2014). Sally describes the project, Finca Huerto Vida, which they started in 2006:

Huerto Vida es la idea que la vida y el mundo que nosotros deseamos vivir—este mundo ecologista, antirracista, transfeminista, descolonial, anticapitalista—que lo cultivamos cotidianamente. Es una metáfora entre los ecosistemas, las siembras y los bosques y nuestras cuerpos y cómo nos relacionamos una con las otras porque esa práctica de siembra alta y de medicinas tradicionales son cosas que yo siempre he hecho. Hay gente que dicen, "Eso no tiene que ver con aquello", pero para mí siempre han sido herramientas de sanación y justicia social—especialmente en mis experiencias como sobreviviente de violencia doméstica y otras violencias—esas han sido mis herramientas para poder gestionar mi salud y yo poder relacionarme con las comunidades donde habito. Esa es la idea de Huerto Vida—poder nombrar y utilizar estas herramientas con esa intención y esa consciencia. Cuando una es activista, una quiere que pare el hambre y que pare la guerra hoy, una no quiere corrupción, pero si estos problemas sociales llevan unos cientos, unos miles, de años, pues en un día no se van a terminar. Mi experiencia es que cuando tú pones la energía en estar en contra de algo, que es súper importante, pero mi experiencia es que me desgasta mucho más fácil. Y ese impacto que yo quiero que reciba el sistema, lo recibo yo en mi cuerpo. He visto que como organizadora, cuando yo creo cosas que se acercan a lo que yo quiero ver, esa es una energía que me nutre. Hago esa metáfora también con la siembra. Cuando una está en la tala, luchando contra la yerba, esa energía gasta. Pero si (una) empieza a crear un ecosistema. Por ejemplo, en un bosque frutal, uno se fija en qué plantas se complementan para crear un ecosistema de comida saludable. No es que una (modo) no va a trabajar, pero fluye mucho mejor. Esa es la idea de Huerto Vida, ir co-creando lo que queremos ver a través de estas distintas herramientas. Es una estructura flexible, hemos tenido distintos trabajos como proyecto. En 2018, participamos en eventos con Salud y Bienestar gratuitos para personas LGBT. Uno de los eventos fue en conjunto con Semillas, CEPA y Espicynipples. Luego en el 2019 reconectamos con los niños, integrando la siembra, el arte, la meditación y relajación en clases conjuntas. Esa fue el énfasis en 2019 y el trabajo con la comida saludable y accesible. En Borikén, se importa un 80% de la comida. Se come mucha comida enlatada, con

hormonas, hay mucha desconexión entre las personas y la naturaleza, y cuán importante es la nutrición para la sanación. Pero se ve el comer saludable como algo caro. Hay personas que hemos perdido como aprender a cocinar distintas vegetales, viandas. En 2019, esa era el tema. Cómo comer saludable, de comer fácil y de forma barata.

[Huerto Vida is the idea that life and the world that we want to live—this ecological, anti-racist, transfeminist, decolonial, anti-capitalist world—is one that we cultivate daily. It is a metaphor between ecosystems, crops and forests and our bodies and how we relate with each other because this practice of planting and traditional medicines are things that I have always done. There are people who say, “That has nothing to do with that,” but for me they have always been tools for healing and social justice—especially in my experiences as a survivor of domestic violence and other violence—these have been my tools to be able to manage my health and to relate to the communities where I live. That is the idea of Huerto Vida—to be able to name and use these tools with that intention and that awareness. When one is an activist, one wants hunger to stop and war to stop today. One does not want corruption, but if these social problems have been going on for a few hundred, a few thousand years, then they will not end in one day. My experience is that when I put the energy into being against something, which is super important, I wear myself out much easier. And that impact which I want the system to receive, I receive in my body. I have seen that as an organizer, when I create things that are close to what I want to see, that is an energy that nourishes me. I also make that metaphor with sowing. When you are working in the field, fighting against the grass, that energy is spent. But if you start to create an ecosystem—for example, in a fruit forest, one notices which plants complement each other to create a healthy food ecosystem—it’s not that one (way) isn’t working, but it flows much better. That is the idea of Huerto Vida, to co-create what we want to see through these different tools. It is a flexible structure, we have had different jobs as a project. In 2018, we participated in free events with Health and Wellness for LGBT people. One of the events was in conjunction with Semillas, CEPA and Espicynipples. Then in 2019 we reconnected with the children, integrating planting, art, meditation, and relaxation in one class. That was the emphasis in 2019, that and working with healthy and accessible food. In Borikén, 80% of the food is imported. You eat a lot of canned food, with hormones, there is a lot of disconnect between people and nature, and how important nutrition is for healing. But eating healthy is seen as expensive. There are people who no longer know how to cook different vegetables, meats. In 2019, that was the theme. How to eat healthy, to eat easily and cheap.]

Sally’s work with Huerto Vida, and their vision for a more just world, intimately connects the work of environmental justice, gender and sexual justice, health justice, anti-racism, decolonization, and anti-capitalism. Huerto Vida pursues this vision through classes and workshops that foster healthy changes in children’s and adults’ daily life. Through the COVID-19 pandemic, Huerto Vida continues to organize two workshops a week—on everything from accessible food and dietary habits to emergency responses to crises. This community-level response is an attempt to mediate what Sally and others understand as government corruption, and how it impacted people’s access to food and resources after Hurricane María and the earthquakes. Sally, Huerto Vida, and many other healers responded to the 2020 earthquakes by

going South to provide food, supplies, acupuncture, and healing: “*una forma de acompañamiento para que la gente sepan que no están soles*” (it’s a way to accompany people so that they know they’re not alone). Sally’s understanding that isolation is the primary outcome of colonization is reflected in the way they seek to always build relationships.

Sally states:

Hay muchas grupos de sanadores que no tocan temas de justicia social, o temas de raza o de dinero. Y hay muchas grupos de justicia social que no tocan el manejo de las emociones o la comunicación efectiva. Estas dinámicas coloniales y capitalistas están en nuestras cuerpos y en cómo nos relacionamos unos con los otros. [Por eso,] a mí me encanta conectar la gente. Parte de ser archipiélago y parte de la colonización es sentirnos que estamos aislados, cuando somos más personas de lo que a veces se siente, verdad, haciendo cosas chéveres, que a lo mejor nos vendría bien sentir que estamos juntos. Y a mí se me hace bien fácil unir un tema al otro, persona con otra persona.

[There are many groups of healers who do not touch on issues of social justice, or issues of race or money. And there are many groups of social justice that do not deal with emotional wellbeing or effective communication. These colonial and capitalist dynamics are in our bodies and in how we relate to each other. (Because of that,) I love connecting people. One thing about being an archipelago and being colonized is that we feel isolated, when in reality there are more of us than we realize, doing cool things, and maybe it would be good for us to feel that we are together. And it is very easy for me to link one topic to another, one person with another person.]

A Boricuir trans-territorial ecology in Sally’s experience deeply articulates relationship to place and the realities they face as an archipelagic subject: what at times can be a sense of isolation for Boricuas as islanders, but, in the end, for Sally becomes a radical capacity to claim connections with one another, and between non-human and human beings, as a central ethic to counter colonization and its many violences.

We asked Sally why they stay in Borikén, with so many people leaving. This is what they shared:

Mira yo me siento bien conectada a esta tierra, y siento que me toca cuidar esta tierra como esta tierra me ha cuidado a mí. Y la verdad que sí, yo sueño con que sanemos. Para mí es súper importante, aunque no tenga nada, simplemente estar aquí. Simplemente estar aquí estoy cuidando mi tierra, mi familia, mis comunidades y a la gente que amo. Me siento súper conectada aquí y a la gente y estoy súper agradecida con Borikén y la amo—quisiera ver sus tierras y sus aguas libres, y cuidar las tierras y el aire y unirse al otro y que no nos impongan violencia.

[Look, I feel well connected to this land, and I feel that I have to take care of this land as this land has taken care of me. And the truth is I do dream of our healing. For me it is super important, even if I have nothing, to just be here. Just being here I am taking care of my land, my family, my communities and the people I love. I feel super connected to this place and to the people and I am super grateful to Borikén and I love her—I would like to see their lands and waters free, and take care of the lands and the air and one another and that violence is not imposed on us.]

These desires were shared by everyone who was interviewed, regardless of where they find themselves living. They are desires to see the island herself—her waters, lands, and her people—and its archipelagos heal. They are desires that express an understanding of Borikén as a totality of human and non-human communities who seek to live good lives in the face of crises and devastation.

### Theorizing Boricuir Trans-territorial Ecologies

Having listened to these stories, we ask the reader now to ask themselves, “What are Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies?” Here, we elucidate our own thoughts and theoretical articulations of what we have witnessed in kinship, in solidarity with one another. For one, we are choosing to use the term “Boricuir” as an explicit indication of the politics of *quí* Afro-Indigenous resurgence that have emerged in environmental and healing justice circles over the past decade. Boricuir refers to the word *quí*. *Quí* is a gloss for broad sexual and gender possibilities (Falconi Travez 2014; Falconi Travez, Castellanos, and Viteri 2014; Lara 2020a; Viteri 2017). All of us in these stories identify as queer, *quí*, two-spirit, gender nonbinary, gender non-conforming, pansexual, lesbian, gay, or transgender, and may likely shift between these identifiers at different points in our lives, or even in our conversations. The desire to fix identities to bodies is part of the Christian colonial project (Lara 2020b); once those identities are fixed along a racial hierarchy and within a gender binary across a specific body, that body becomes easier to manage, to control, and to eliminate. Our ongoing *quí* existence challenges the very impulses central to Christian coloniality.

Christian coloniality refers to the ongoing processes of colonization that structure knowledge, power, and being within the logics of Christian moral personhood (Lara 2020b). Christian coloniality requires the continual re-centering of procreative sexuality in order to perpetuate the continued expansion of Christianity and capitalism across territories and bodies necessary for the accumulation of wealth. Non Biblical sexual and gender desires exist in excess and as an affront to Christianity’s moral imperatives, thereby—from a Christian colonial worldview—necessitating the elimination of all those whose bodies and personhood refuse to conform. The Boricuir stories centered here allow us to reframe and contest Christian colonial assumptions of personhood. The concept of Boricuir itself calls into being a specific ontological subject posing distinct epistemic possibilities (Rolón Collazo 2021).

We first encountered the term Boricuir on the website for the Center for Embodied Pedagogy and Action (CEPA).<sup>9</sup> CEPA is a collaborative project that gained momentum after Hurricane María when they distributed care packages that contained herbal medicines produced by Boricuas in diaspora. CEPA defines itself as



a project that designs and facilitates encounters rooted in practices to heal accumulated trauma from our being. It's part of a movement of people working to transform their relationships and everyday life to co-create freedom, centering all marginalized peoples especially Puerto Rican women, gender nonconforming, trans, queer folk. To manifest a just future, we honor the wisdom of the earth and of our ancestors as we work to heal. (CEPA 2020)

The decolonial, just future imagined by CEPA articulates a Boricuir epistemology that transcends Christian colonial binaries male/female, human/non-human, body/soul, living/dead to transform how people relate to all living beings in a quest for freedom. It legitimizes Caribbean Indigenous—and we would add African Indigenous—notions of personhood that decenter the human, or the concept of “Man,” as a biocultural given (Wynter and McKittrick 2015) and re-centers the “agency of multiple non-human entities, material and nonmaterial: animals, plants, spirits, places, and other things [that] all have the capacity to contribute to the creation and transformation of the world” (Johnson 2018, 7), an agency that is seeking to call itself into the present and the next seven generations.

We learned pretty quickly that CEPA has provided a common thread for all of the Boricuir featured in this article. RaheNi and Myrna were the first openly Boricuir to stay as solidarity visitors at CEPA and run healing circles specifically for *quí*r and trans communities in Borikén. Both Toi and Sally attended their workshops and circles. And, after that experience, CEPA came to explicitly articulate Boricuir-ness in its description.

Lisette Rolón Collazo has explicitly defined Boricuir epistemologies as the processes to “*rescatar y reivindicar los conceptos que se han tallado en las fronteras, en los territorios liminales, en los intersticios de una ontología imposible que no se atiene a las formas ni a los contenidos dominantes, como la arena*” [rescue and reinvigorate the concepts that have been carved on the borders, in the borderlands, in the interstices of an impossible ontology that does not adhere to the dominant forms or contents, like sand] (2021, 36). In conversation with Gloria Anzaldúa and Rosamond S. King, Rolón Collazo invites us to embrace “*la fuga como acción que resiste ontologías y epistemologías de certidumbre, como homenaje a la fuga cimarrona y a las diásporas en constante fluir, como devenir territorial, de los cuerpos, de los sexos y de los deseos furtivos*” [fugitivity as an action that resists ontologies and epistemologies of certainty, as a tribute to the fugitive maroon and to the diasporas in constant flow, as a process of becoming territorially, of the bodies, of the sexes and of furtive desires] (2021, 31). For Rolón Collazo then, to produce knowledge—to engage epistemic projects—through a Boricuir gaze is to be “*en fuga*,” to accept ontological possibilities—ways of being—that do not fit within the Christian colonial paradigms or the nation; to be and know from within in-betweenness, from interstitial spaces; to refuse certainty and embrace opacity; to know from within movements across ways of being, spaces, bodies, and desire; it is a form of maroon fugitivity. For us, Boricuir epistemologies pose the possibility of reclaiming the *quí*r, the Indigenous, the African, and the Afro-Indigenous; an ancestral memory and embodied experience of resistance that cannot be found, fixed, or legitimated in the colonial or national archive. We draw on CEPA’s and Rolón Collazo’s use of the word “Boricuir” to describe ecologies that are inherently trans-territorial, and grounded in the memories and lived experiences of archipelagic, Afro-Indigenous cimarronaje, and the transcolonial kin relations that shape our claims to Afro-Indigeneity.

Caribbean Afro-Indigeneity? We are aware that the idea of Indigenous survival in the Caribbean and its diasporas can be both controversial and dismissed through *blanqueamiento* and indigenization (Serna and Solís 2012), even though a multiplicity of scholars seek to openly name it (Serna Moreno 2017). This dismissal erases the very real subjective choices and lived experiences of Caribbean Indigenous peoples in ways that are mirrored across Abya Yala. It also paves the way for the very *blanqueamiento* that scholars critique within elite nationalist discourses on *mestizaje* in Latin America: if Indigenous people can be erased from the landscape, from history and from paper, it not only commits violence against Indigenous peoples, it also makes it much more feasible to do the same with Black people. In fact, the two processes are implicated with each other. Colonial projects needed to enslave, and then physically and symbolically disappear, Indigenous peoples as a way to justify colonial claims to land in the Caribbean. The colonial project also intentionally used African labor to transform Indigenous landscapes into plantations, cattle farms, and settlements (King 2019). Census practices and the development of *casta* social categories further sought to erase Indigenous presence. Why do we then continue to produce discourses where colonial ideas of who is “Indian” and who is “Black” is the primary framework for articulating Indigenous, Black, and Afro-Indigenous identities—especially when scholarship throughout the hemisphere has noted the limits of such modes of inquiry (Coulthard 2014; DeLoria 2007; Gómez and Goldsmith 2000; Simpson 2014; Smith 2010; Viaña, Claros, and Sarzuri-Lima 2010)?

In addition, national projects have attempted to erase Blackness and the violence of African slavery and anti-Black racism to create myths of racial harmony, and ignore calls for reparations and demands to address the political and economic disenfranchisement of Black-identified communities (Godreau 2015; Goett 2016; Hooker 2017; Loperena 2020; Rodríguez-Silva 2012; Reyes-Santos 2015) by not only mobilizing elite discourses of *mestizaje*, but also appropriating Indigenous ethno-nationalism rooted in notions of the disappeared or extinct Taino. This, again, does violence to Indigenous and Black communities and projects of self-determination. As demonstrated by many scholars, within nationalist discourses, Blackness in Borikén is often articulated as extraneous to the nation, as something that lives elsewhere, or else arrives in *yolas* (Dinzey Flores 2005; Duany 2003; Godreau 2015; Llórens 2014; Rodríguez Silva 2012; Reyes-Santos 2015). The work of reclaiming Boricua Blackness takes place in a context of anti-Blackness, where Blackness is assumed to be non-existent, or at best, folklore. Like in other sites across the Caribbean, Indigeneity can be mobilized to keep grandmothers well hidden behind the ears (Candelario 2007). To be Black in the Caribbean is to also always contend with the predominant US imperial notions of hypodescent that characterize Blackness as monolithic, usually at the expense of complex ancestral orientations central to so many traditional Caribbean belief systems, such as *espiritismo*, *regla de ocha*, *palo monte*, *sanse*, *vodoun*, and *la 21 división*. Simultaneously, the insistent context of global anti-Blackness often requires scholars to argue for a particular kind of homogenized identification that minimizes and even erases the impacts of Afro-Indigenous histories, experiences and embodiments.

Of the six people whose stories are contained here, four of us identify as Afro-Indigenous and two are committed to the valorization of Afro-Indigenous knowledge while not identifying in those terms. We urge readers to conceptualize Afro-Indigeneity as a set of

relationships to place that are inherited and re-inscribed through embodied actions that upend colonial categories of time and space. Being Afro-Indigenous means something to each of us. What this means is made visible through our stories.

A Boricuir trans-territorial ecology is very invested in Black affirmation in relationship to Indigenous *survivance*. George Vizenor defines survivance as “the action, condition, quality, and sentiments of the verb ‘survive, to remain alive or in existence,’ to outlive, persevere with a suffix of survivancy” (2015, 19). One of the ways in which Indigenous and Afro-descendant people in the Caribbean have survived has been through the development of a knowledge base emerging from the adaptation to new conditions, kin relations, and inter-ethnic exchanges (Lebrón Ortiz 2020, 55). Historians have demonstrated how “*Los cimarrones establecieron comunidades y las organizaron según las epistemologías y ontologías ancestrales, aunque adaptadas a las circunstancias materiales que se les impusieron*” [Maroons established communities and organized them according to ancestral epistemologies and anthologies, although adapted to the material circumstances imposed on them] (Lebrón Ortiz 2020, 183). Our continued existence is rooted in stories about Afro-Indigenous mutual support, love, and kinship in the *maniel* or *palenque* (Lara 2020b)—spaces that refuse Christian colonial categories of space, time, or personhood.

To claim Afro-Indigeneity is to identify with cimarronaje, maroonage, *la fuga cimarrona*, (Rolón Collazo 2021), the palenque or the maniel (Lara 2020b); to embrace transcolonial kinship between Indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples that seek “to transform the exploitative and dehumanizing social relations that characterized the European invasion of the Americas, and Eurocentric understandings of history, knowledge, power, citizenship, and humanity” (Reyes-Santos 2015, 12); to live in an “*afuera ontológico*” [an ontological outside] that allows to live and imagine worlds that are deemed unimaginable: “*la afirmación de un mundo distinto al que nos aflige*” [the affirmation of a world different from that which wounds us] (Lebrón Ortiz 2020, 165); “*que se fuga del mundo euromoderno y sus lógicas como resistencia a la colonialidad del ser*” [that escapes the euro-modern world and its logics as a resistance to the coloniality of being] (Lebrón Ortiz 2020, 183). To identify with *la fuga cimarrona* is to creatively respond, repair, and inhabit *destierro*, as has been conceptualized by Yomaira C. Figueroa through her engagement with Mississauga Nishnaabeg scholar Leanne Betasomasake Simpson and the radical potential of black and indigenous marronage: “imagining *destierro* as a palimpsest of centuries of overlapping histories, lived experiences, ties to land and land-based practices, and multiple movements (forced and voluntary migrations) by dispossessed peoples onto dispossessed lands allows us to be faithful witnesses to the layers and forms of being forcibly ripped from the land while also seeing the resurgence of those land-based practices and resistance to dispossession” (2020, 93).

Boricuir ecologies align with a commitment to transcolonial kinship and radical resurgence across Abya Yala-Turtle Island. It is to be “en fuga” within and outside of the creative spaces that emerge in confrontation with colonial Christianity and outside of/beyond it. It is to move within, across, and beyond the plantation and the Afro-Indigenous palenque or maniel. As Lebrón Ortiz’s suggests, Boricuir is a struggle “*dentro y fuera de la modernidad europea*” [within and outside of European modernity] that affirms an ancestral subjectivity and enables the epistemic decolonization of the colonized subject (2020, 162).

Boricuir ecologies are characterized by an archipelagic cimarronaje that openly asserts lived experiences of Afro-Indigeneity and is deeply aware of the disparate relationships of power that deem knowledge production from the islands too specific or insular to be relevant to continental conversations about decolonization and justice. Yolanda Martínez-San Miguel, and Michelle Stephens' (2020, 81), and Yomaira C. Figueroa's (2020) affirmations of the value of "archipelagic thinking" resonate with our collective effort to theorize from within our Boricuir experiences in solidarity with continental decolonization projects.

We have much to offer from our Caribbean geographical in-betweenness, as the belly bottom of the continent, a maritime space of trade and trans-continental community building for centuries before the consolidation of colonial/modern nation-states. Diaspora, destierro, as well as transcolonial kinship shape our in-person and cybernetic encounters with one another across the Caribbean, US Caribbean Diasporas, and with continental Indigenous and Black communities also revitalizing their traditional ecological knowledge. In turn, we are transformed by such exchanges.

As Rolón Collazo provocatively suggests, a Boricuir epistemology is always shaped by such interactions beyond the dominant containers of the nation; it is willing to be like sand, always moving with the water, willing to know from a yet to be defined, (un)fixed location. We use the term *trans-territorial* to highlight how archipelagic-continental epistemic exchanges are central to Boricuir ecologies and honor the lived experiences that have brought us together.

As part of a series of knowledge-sharing workshops that we led and were a part of in July 2020, Indigenous, Mexican American scholar-artist-ceremonialist Angela Mictlanxotchil Anderson, defined trans-territoriality as:

a theory that is meant to serve as a tool when we are in settings that bring up the tensions of our colonial and decolonial lived realities. Trans means to go beyond, to surpass. Trans-territorial is a term to go beyond the notions of borders and the politics meant to restrict how we occupy space; [it is] a practice of expansiveness in the territories of our psyche and our embodied awareness. Like Nam-Thu [Tran] stated, the medicines that we have don't have boundaries. That's really important to capture in talking about trans-territoriality: it's movement, it's thinking, it's feeling, it's memory, it's the things that come back to us when we least expect it.

Tranterritoriality serves us in three ways. First, it helps to engage a theoretical framework emerging from within treaties, knowledge exchanges, and ceremonies between island and mainland peoples that have been significant components of the Afro-Indigenous practices that have brought five of us healers together. Anderson's transcolonial kin relations with Boricuir and other Caribbean healers since 2010 are at the core of her theoretical interventions. Her commitment to sustaining archipelagic, Afro-Indigenous, cimarronaje through healing and ceremonial practices have shaped her years of travel between Mexico, the US and the islands. Second, tranterritorial acts as an adjective that allows us to remember that Boricuir ecologies are shaped by trans-territorial decolonizing, ceremonial, healing, ecological efforts across the hemisphere; and trans-territorial decolonizing projects in the mainland are co-constituted by the archipelagic marronage that shapes Boricuir ecologies. Third, it serves as a term that,

alongside *Boricuir*, allows us to openly claim our commitment to hemispheric decolonization as Simpson's notion of radical resurgence; and the specific epistemic contributions of Boricuir epistemologies to such processes.

Defining radical resurgence, Simpson states, "I am interested in freedom, not survival, and as *kwe*, I understand my freedom is dependent upon the destruction of settler colonialism [...] [where] I experience it as a gendered structure and a series of complex and overlapping processes that work together as a cohort to maintain the structure. The structure is one of perpetual disappearance of Indigenous bodies for perpetual territorial acquisition" (2018). In this context, Simpson (2018) defines radical as

a thorough and comprehensive reform [...] to mean root, to channel the vitality of my Ancestors to create a present that is recognizable to them because it is fundamentally different from the one settler colonialism creates [...] Radical requires us to critically and thoroughly look at the roots of the settler colonial present—capitalism, white supremacy, heteropatriarchy, and anti-Blackness. Radical requires us to name dispossession as the meta-dominating force in our relationship to the Canadian state, and settler colonialism as the system that maintains this expansive dispossession.

Simpson's words resonate with CEPA's desire to co-create freedom, Figueroa's engagement with dispossession, marronage, and her "worlds/otherwise"—the imagination of unimaginable worlds—, Lebrón Ortíz's maroon "afuera ontológico," and Rolón Collazo's Boricuir epistemic commitment to "*una ontología imposible*" that cannot be contained, like water, like sand.

Invoking "radical resurgence" we name the ways in which we understand Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies as an essential component of hemispheric decolonization; as well as recognize how both Boricuir and US Native experiences of dispossession are shaped by ongoing structures of, not only Christian coloniality, but also US settler colonialism and US imperialism. We situate Borikén—and Boricuir—within a hemispheric experience of Indigenous dispossession, Black death, and *quí*r elimination. These colonial-imperial processes and structures seek to continuously uproot and eliminate Boricuir people from the island and across the peripheries of "cities that disappear their difference within the hierarchies that keep our capitalist relations in place" (Million 2018, 22).

The stories of Boricuir healers serve as entry points into imagining freedom rooted in Afro-Indigenous, *quí*r, land-based, trans-territorial knowledges and practices, and transcolonial kinship that refuse the categories of colonial personhood and that enable radical possibilities for cimarronaje, for resurgence, and for centering the ancestral history and epistemic potential of the palenque, the maniel in the Caribbean and elsewhere in the Americas. A Boricuir trans-territorial ecology articulates Simpson's concept of radical resurgence as connection, as love, and as possibility that is rooted in practices of "expansiveness in the territories of our psyche and our embodied awareness; it's movement, it's thinking, it's feeling, it's memory, it's the things that come back to us when we least expect it" (Anderson 2020).

Lastly, we use the term *ecologies* as a way to signal multiple, overlapping concepts. We understand Boricuir ecologies through *cimarronaje* as survivance, recuperation, revitalization, and adaptation. On the one hand, the concept of ecology we are using does not fully encompass the deep, intergenerational relationships between non-human and human entities articulated within the stories documented here, or in Afro-Indigenous traditions more broadly. How can a concept that emerges within a colonial context actually capture the multi-millennial relationships that exist between the land and its beings, including its waters, plants, animals, spirits and the humans who have cared for them since time immemorial (or at least before Columbus even smelled achiote in the air)? And, how can this concept even begin to speak to the ways in which Afro-Indigeneity is inherently imbued with multiple ruptures in relationship between people, plants, animals, and land? In this sense, the concept of ecologies signals how “colonialism is inextricably entwined with environmental degradation and global climate disruption” (Onís 2018, 189). It also signals the conditions that have produced multiple waves of mass emigration from Borikén to the United States, and that, as we write, produce the very real conditions of crisis that Boricuirers on the island are navigating every single day.

### **By way of return...**

The stories we have shared here speak to the possibility of reconciliation across generations, about the ways in which our bodies refuse white supremacist violence and Christian coloniality, about the ways in which listening to ancestors keeps us strong in the face of crisis, and about the ways in which refusing colonial categories of knowledge enables a seemingly impossible, unimaginable, articulation of life as something that is realized in conjunction with human and non-human communities, the living and the dead. In these stories, we find examples of the ways in which Indigenous and Black people have survived together and how our continued existence is rooted in stories about Afro-Indigenous mutual support, love, and kinship. We see the radical power of these Boricuir stories in that they are rooted in freedom. Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies are decolonizing practices shaped by an archipelagic, *quí* *cimarronaje* deeply committed to a hemispheric, resurgent, project that renders Boricuir archipelagic subjects, plants, traditional medicines, and the sacred as legitimate sites of knowledge production for the worlds we wish to create together. Boricuir ecologies empower us to imagine the worlds possible from within and beyond the colonial wound, building from within transcolonial kin relations across the islands and the continent.

We come to understand Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies as another model of living that actively ruptures colonial hierarchies, power structures, and epistemic assumptions. Boricuir trans-territorial ecologies grounded in Afro-Indigenous knowledge systems recognize the capacity of non-human living beings, of plant and animal life, of land, water, air, and ancestors to co-create, heal, and communicate with living human beings the value of *quí* approaches to environmental and climate justice; and the power of acting from a place of love to enact social and ecological transformation embodying a maroon, archipelagic, *quí* trans-territorial consciousness, and transcolonial solidarity.

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**NOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> Soon to be renamed as "The Healers Project" so as to more accurately reflect the non-Caribbean, Afro-descendant, and Indigenous healers in the Pacific Northwest, as well as the gender non-binary/transgender people and men who are part of the project (healers.uoregon.edu).
- <sup>2</sup> For an archive on digital resources about the RickyRenuncia movement, see The RickyRenuncia Project site: <http://bit.ly/RickyRenunciaProject/> by Joel A. Blanco Rivera, Marisol Ramos, and Irmarié Fraticelli-Rodríguez. To learn more about the Boricuir initiatives led by Espicy Nipples, visit <https://www.escpynipples.com/single-post/1er-carnaval-cuir-la-bella-crisis/>.
- <sup>3</sup> Abya Yala is the Guna name for the American continent. It has been adopted by Indigenous political organizations and movements throughout the hemisphere.
- <sup>4</sup> While Ana-Maurine Lara is the only non-Boricua, Dominican, in this article, she is still included in the "we," our collective voice. We understand that trans-territorial Boricuir ecologies are not a reality pertinent only to Boricua healers. Our experiences in archipelagic and hemispheric Indigenous and Afro-descendant spaces of healing and ceremony have shown us that there is an increasing visibility of queer Antilleans engaging together in the revitalization of traditional Afro, Indigenous, and Afro-Indigenous ecological healing practices that challenge colonization and modern national boundaries. Here we examine more closely the Boricuir experience after Hurricane María, while acknowledging how it is co-constituted by Boricuir transcolonial kinship with other Antilleans.
- <sup>5</sup> All stories and interviews have been edited for clarity.
- <sup>6</sup> POC stands for people of color, and QTPOC stands for Queer/Trans people of color. QTBIPOC refers to queer and trans Black, Indigenous, People of Color.
- <sup>7</sup> See Teish (1988).
- <sup>8</sup> To learn more about Toi Scott's work, visit <https://www.afrogenderqueer.com/>.
- <sup>9</sup> Visit CEPA, <https://www.decolonizepr.com/>.

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