NOTES TOWARDS DECOLONIAL READINGS: A CLOSE READING OF ÁNGELA MARÍA DÁVILA'S POETRY AND THE DECOLONIAL TURN

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis delves into Ángelamaría Dávila's poetry in adding her poetic voice to the black Caribbean artist producing art with a decolonial turn. It examines how her poetic works can be harnessed in educational contexts to nurture a profound understanding of Caribbean and Puerto Rican culture and identity. By integrating Dávila's poetry into teaching practices, the thesis advocates for radical solidarities and decolonial love, aiming to break away from conventional educational systems that often overlook marginalized perspectives. This approach seeks to empower learners with knowledge and values deeply rooted in Caribbean traditions and decolonial thought.

This thesis is dedicated to all ancestors, dead and alive, older, and younger, who have loved me through and through. Thank you for keeping me alive.

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In the face of formidable challenges, the unwavering love and guidance of my family have been my sanctuary and strength. Despite the insidious racial capitalist hierarchies, despite pervasive structures of white supremacy that shapes our existence, and despite the intimate knowledge of hunger that often accompanied our days, their love never wavered. Raised in Puerto Rico, a land marred by colonial legacies and systemic racism, my family chose to embrace love—love for each other, love for the land, and love for our people. They instilled in me the hope and the vision for a life beyond the confines imposed upon us, teaching me to see the beauty and potential where others only see despair, because through love we have survived and we keep surviving, despite. Thank you: Nichy, Toño, Toñito, Ernesto, Doña Eddy, Doña Gladys, Don Josean, Millianie, Carolie, Cristina, Roberto Carlos, Enrique, Enzo, Tito, Minerva, Migdy, Joselito, Beni, Mota, Morfea, Tyrion, Moises, Negrita and Pelusa.

I owe a special gratitude to Melanie Rodriguez, whose friendship has been a beacon of light in my life. In our home, which we've made a sanctuary, Melanie's approach to living is a profound act of activism. Through critical discussions that challenge the norms and through everyday acts of kindness and understanding, she teaches praxis on decolonial love. Melanie's dedication to nurturing love as activism, as a pedagogical tool, and as a survival strategy against the capitalist

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

ante tanta visión

ante tanta visión de historia y

prehistoria,

de mitos,

de verdades a medias —o a cuartas—

ante tanto soñarme, me vi,

la luz de dos palabras me descolgó la

sombra; animal triste.

soy un animal triste parado y

caminando

sobre un globo de tierra.

lo de animal lo digo con ternura,

y lo de triste lo digo con tristeza,

como debe de ser,

como siempre le enseñan a uno el

color gris.

un animal que habla

para decirle a otro parecido su

esperanza.

un mamífero triste con dos manos

before such a vision

before such a vision of history and

prehistory,

of myths,

of half-truths – or quarter –

after so much dreaming, I saw myself,

the light of two words drew the

shadow: sad animal.

I am a sad animal standing and

walking

on a globe of earth.

about the animal I speak with

tenderness,

and about the sadness I speak with

sorrow,

as it should be since they always teach

you about the color gray

an animal that speaks

to tell another about its hope.

a sad mammal with two hands

metida en una cueva pensando en que amanezca.

con una infancia torpe y oprimida por cosas tan ajenas.

un pequeño animal sobre una bola hermosa,

un animal adulto,

hembra con cría,

que sabe hablar a veces

y que quisiera ser

un mejor animal.

animal colectivo

que agarra de los otros la tristeza

como un pan repartido,

que aprende a reír sólo si otro ríe

—para ver cómo es—

y que sabe decir:

soy un animal triste, esperanzado,

vivo, me reproduzco, sobre un globo de tierra

tucked into a cave thinking of a sunrise.

with an awkward childhood and oppressed by such

alien things.

a small animal on a beautiful ball,

an adult animal,

a breeding female,

that can speak sometimes

and would like to be

a better animal.

collective animal

that takes the sadness of others like

shared bread

learning to laugh only if others laugh

— to see how it is —

and that knows how to say:

I am a sad, hopeful animal,

I live, I reproduce, on a globe

of earth

In the vibrant panorama of Caribbean literature, Ángelamaría Dávila's poetry is a profound declaration of decolonial thought and cultural identity, weaving a narrative that transcends the conventional boundaries of artistic expression. This thesis delves into Dávila's poetry, placing her within the constellation of black Caribbean artists dedicated to challenging and deconstructing colonial legacies through their art. It explores the transformative power of Dávila's poetry as a medium to foster radical solidarities and decolonial love, aiming to disrupt the prevailing narratives that often marginalize subaltern voices. By spotlighting her contributions, we seek not only to honor the rich cultural and identity tapestries of the Caribbean and Puerto Rico but also to champion a movement towards a more inclusive and decolonized discourse, where Dávila's poetic voice acts as a critical instrument in this global dialogue.

The significance of Ángelamaría Dávila's poetry in decolonial discourse cannot be overstated. By bringing her voice to the forefront, we challenge the historical erasure and marginalization of black Caribbean artists, illuminating the intricate ways in which their work interrogates and reimagines the legacies of colonialism. Dávila's poetic expressions serve as a vital conduit for understanding and articulating a shared Caribbean and Puerto Rican identity rooted in resistance, resilience, and a profound connection to one's heritage. Engaging with her poetry allows us to reconceptualize identity and culture in an emancipatory way, offering pathways to solidarity that transcend geographical and historical divides. In an

Archipelago where dominant narratives often overshadow counter-discourse voices, Dávila's work emerges as a critical tool for decolonization, inviting us to envision a future where all voices are heard and valued equally, fostering a more just and equitable global community.

Sitting at the edge of a private beach on the island of Tobago, a place made private by a hotel and three private mansions, we could be reminded of the unique beauty of the Caribbean. Grateful for the clean water, the wind that rushes into all lungs present, we might continue this grounding exercise with a tinge of sadness, as scholar M. Jacqui Alexander writes, "What we can say for sure is that empire makes all innocence impossible." (Alexander 18) As we take in the evidence of this manufactured interruption of the coast with giant rocks and awkward ravines stopping the natural curve of what should be a continuous beach shore, we are asked to answer how we, Caribbean islanders, navigate the complexities of home.

In this reflection on the altered landscapes of our Caribbean homelands, we find ourselves at the intersection of loss and resilience, which are resisted through remembering, reimagining, and creativity. The stark modifications to our natural environments serve as poignant reminders of the ongoing impacts of colonial legacies. However, they also beckon us to ponder our roots and the essence of belonging deeper. This contemplation on home, mired in the complexities of 20th-century Caribbean reality, raises fundamental questions about identity and resistance. How do we, as Caribbean islanders, reconcile the belonging in our

surroundings while inheriting and resisting “cosas tan ajenas” / “such alien things” (Dávila 16), the structural oppressions of empire? How do we navigate the dualities of our existence, where the very essence of home is both a sanctuary and a site of structural unbelonging? This is the crux of our journey—a quest for understanding and reclamation that leads us toward embracing a decolonial turn. The insights from black and indigenous feminisms illuminate this path, offering us a prism through which we can envision a future that is not only possible but necessary. Within this framework, we begin to see the power of radical acts of love and the transformative potential of our collective imaginations as tools for survival and flourishing.

If we follow the trajectory of black and indigenous feminist scholarship, engaging with decolonial turn[1] and radical acts of love are the praxis we carry and leave for the ones behind us. The goal is the future that must come. Nevertheless, radical imaginations have always been needed to decipher and deepen the practices we need today for the future that must happen. However, we are just some of the ones trying to decipher it.

In this article, we explore Angelamaría Dávila’s poetry as a ground of wisdom where we are prompted to question what is “human” in a similar

[1] As stated by Dr. Nelson Maldonado’s article “On the coloniality of being”: “The Decolonial Turn is about making visible the invisible and about analyzing the mechanisms that produce such invisibility or distorted visibility in light of a large stock of ideas that must necessarily include the critical reflections of the ‘invisible’ people themselves.”

questioning line as Sylvia Wynter[2]. Through her poetry, we also explore her poetic voice arguments on how we should imagine our present and future, grounded in the realities of solidarity and collective work "without there being a job owner." (Davila 53) Last but never least, her poetry also calls upon a sensitivity only possible through the decolonial turn1 philosophers and scholars Franz Fanon, Nelson Maldonado, Xhercis Mendez, and Yomaira C. Figueroa-Vazquez allude to in their works. A decolonial turn that is grounded on advocating for acknowledgment, community, and care.

Let us think about the past, present, and future as a spiral, always moving closer to our core. If that is true, then there is one thing tying us all together after all the inherited coloniality and violence of our past: the healing that must happen, that we are enabling, that our foremothers and ancestors started. Therefore, this thesis revisits Angelamaría Dávila's poetry to gather her planted seeds for the future that we must remember, hold, and nourish into the future.

This thesis aims to critically examine and elucidate how Ángelamaría Dávila's poetry is part of the Puerto Rican decolonial project. By fostering a sense of communal solidarity and envisioning a collective future grounded in empathy and understanding of each other and oneself, this thesis aims to demonstrate how

[2] In her article, Sylvia Wynter's "The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism" calls for a radical reevaluation and rewriting of human knowledge and the definition of the human subject, challenging the exclusionary foundations of the current episteme to embrace a more inclusive understanding of humanity.

Dávila's poetic works, through their intricate exploration of identity, existence, and resistance, serve as a medium for challenging colonial legacies and reimagining new paradigms of being and relating. The thesis seeks to highlight the significance of Dávila's poetry for anyone developing engaged pedagogies as described by bell hooks to promote practices of freedom, drawing on the insights of decolonial theorists Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Xhercis Méndez, and Yomaira Figueroa. By analyzing Dávila's poetry through a decolonial lens, this study attempts to showcase literary art's role in shaping perceptions, nurturing radical forms of love, and guiding us toward more just and equitable communities. The goal is to underscore the importance of Afro-diasporic literary contributions in the broader discourse of decolonization, demonstrating how they offer valuable tools for material, intellectual, and emotional liberation.

Ángelamaría Dávila, born in 1944 in Puerto Rico, lived through a tumultuous period marked by the island's political and cultural upheaval[3]. Her upbringing coincided with the uprising of the socialist and communist movement in Puerto Rico[4], as the American occupation of the archipelago required bodies for the Korean and Vietnam wars, where the University of Puerto Rico at the former town of Río Piedras had students fighting bullets with rocks as they were trying to

[3] From Dr. Milagros Dennis-Rosario's Drops of Inclusivity "In the 1940s, Puerto Rico's insular government took steps to implement a formula of modernization, nation-building, and economic development."
[4] Partido Socialista Puertorriqueño (1974). La alternativa socialista. Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico: Ediciones Puerto Rico. pp. iv

move the ROTC out of campus[5] while witnessing the evolution of racial and labor relations and the rise of cultural nationalism. This era, characterized by a strong sense of Caribbean identity and feminist and anti-colonial/anti-capitalist sentiment.

Influenced Dávila's poetic themes and involvement in Grupo Guajana[6], reflecting a commitment to social justice and decolonization.

Dávila's upbringing and experiences in a politically charged Puerto Rico deeply informed her poetic expressions. These experiences, such as her identity as a black Puerto Rican woman and a mother, her questioning of labor structures, and her exploration of our relationship to

nature and our nature, shaped her poetic talents. This personal perspective, rooted in the complex interplay of colonial legacy and self-preservation, is a powerful medium for the pedagogical practice of solidarity, understanding, and collective liberation. It resonates with bell hooks' engaged pedagogy and offers a unique lens through which to view the Puerto Rican decolonial project.

Ángelamaría Dávila's poetry is not just a form of artistic expression; it embodies a profound journey of self-exploration and a daring confrontation with the multifaceted realities of her existence.

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[5] As stated by "The Militant" newspaper in its April 1976 issue: "The police invasión grew out of an attack by ROTC cadets on pro-independence students in the campus cafeteria. The sub sequent clash left two police and a ROTC cadet dead, with hundreds wounded."

[6] Revista Guajana, Enero-Marzo 1967 issue "Se ha dicho en pasados editoriales que no pretendemos hacer de la poesía discurso político ni menos. Pero creemos que la poesía tiene su realidad en la tierra y no en las nubes. Somos parte de un pueblo y tenemos conciencia de lo que en él sucede. No podemos cerrar los ojos ni taparnos los oídos a lo que nos rodea. Para eso están los cobardes, no los poetas."

This introspective voyage is pivotal for recognizing and embracing one's sense of self, a process that resonates deeply with Audre Lorde's discourse on the uses of the erotic.

Davila's work intricately weaves the tumultuous landscapes of her desires, aspirations, and challenges. Through her reflections on motherhood, her identity as a black woman in Puerto Rico, and her critiques of labor structures, she navigates the chaos of living within a framework that often seeks to marginalize and silence. Her poetry becomes a space of resistance and reclamation, where questioning the status quo and envisioning alternative realities becomes an act of personal liberation and a radical form of political activism. Davila's engagement with these themes aligns with the erotic as a source of power and knowledge, as outlined by Lorde, highlighting the transformative potential of acknowledging one's deepest feelings and desires.

Her literary brilliance and political activism underscore the urgency of dismantling the colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal paradigms that shape our world, offering instead a vision of what could be through the lens of her unique poetic voice.

Therefore, what are the seeds of liberation praxis we have inherited?Firstly, the uses of the erotic[7] or the dismantling of the colonial self through decolonial

[7] "The Uses of the Erotic" is the title of the acclaimed essay by Audre Lorde which can be found at Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches

love[8]. In weaving together, the threads of her narrative with the broader tapestry of political and cultural resistance, Ángelamaría Dávila's poetry emerges as a beacon for the decolonial praxis of liberation. Her life's journey, marked by her active involvement with Revista Guajana, her partnership with José María Lima, and her unwavering commitment to exploring the depths of her identity, sexuality, and aspirations, illuminates the inseparability of the personal from the political. Dávila's poetic explorations reflect her experiences as a black woman navigating the complex societal structures of Puerto Rico and the United States and as a call to dismantle the oppressive paradigms that define our existence. Her poetry, rich with the acknowledgment of her desires, the anxiety of motherhood, and the critique of labor as commodified under capitalism, challenges us to envision a society where individuals are not reduced to mere cogs in the economic machine but are recognized as fully realized beings, capable of transcending the "costs arenas / alien things" imposed by the ruling class. Through Davila's lens, we are invited to reclaim our sense of self and community in a world that often seeks to silence dissent and homogenize identity. Her legacy, then, is a powerful testament to the capacity of decolonial love and the erotic as transformative forces, guiding us toward a future where liberation is not just a distant dream, but a tangible reality

[8] Maldonado writes: ""Decolonial love" is a concept coined and developed by the Chicana theorist Chela Sandoval. It gives priority to the trans-ontological over the claims of ontology. Decolonization and 'des-gener-acción' are the active products of decolonial love and justice. They aim to restore the logics of the gift through a decolonial politics of receptive generosity."

cultivated through the radical act of living authentically and resisting the constraints of colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal world order. economic machine but are recognized as fully realized beings, capable of transcending the "costs arenas / alien things" imposed by the ruling class. Through Dávila's lens, we are invited to reclaim our sense of self and community in a world that often seeks to silence dissent and homogenize identity. Her legacy, then, is a powerful testament to the capacity of decolonial love and the erotic as transformative forces, guiding us toward a future where liberation is not just a distant dream, but a tangible reality cultivated through the radical act of living authentically and resisting the constraints of colonial, capitalist, and patriarchal world order.

Secondly, the understanding that we must learn the built the cartographies of the future our radical imaginations are given birth to, or the ceremony must be found[9]. Wynter elucidates the vital role of ceremonial reconstructions in challenging and transcending the limitations imposed by conventional modernist thought, suggesting that our quest for liberation is intrinsically linked to our capacity to envision and create new forms of collective being and knowledge. Drawing from Wynter, it becomes evident that Ángelamaría Dávila's poetic engagement with her identity, activism, and the erotic, as articulated by Audre Lorde, represents a critical intervention in this ceremonial reimagining. Dávila's life

[9] "The Ceremony Must be Found: After Humanism" is the title of the acclaimed article by Sylvia Wynter.

and work, deeply intertwined with her socio-political context—her involvement with the Revista Guajana, her relationship with José María Lima, and her poetry that dares to explore and express the complexities of selfhood, desire, and resistance—offer a vibrant tapestry of decolonial love and radical imagination. Her poetry not only contests the oppressive structures of coloniality, capitalism, and patriarchy but also invites us to engage in the essential work of acknowledging and honoring our sense of self. This engagement is crucial for crafting the future we yearn for—a future where our collective

liberation is realized through a profound connection to our identities, histories, and desires, paving the way for a society that transcends the "cosas ajenas / alien things" of existing power dynamics to embrace a more just, equitable, and interconnected existence.

Thirdly, pedagogies. Pedagogy, especially in the realms of decolonization and feminism, is crucial for dismantling traditional educational structures that perpetuate colonial legacies and gender biases. It provides tools to hone the skills to start naming, acknowledging, giving agency, healing, and caring in community.

But specifically, engaged pedagogies.

Engaged pedagogy, as conceptualized by bell hooks, is an educational approach that emphasizes well-being, mutual respect, and a holistic view of learning. It encourages teachers to be fully present and engaged with students, fostering an environment where both can contribute and learn from the educational

experience. This method prioritizes critical thinking, promotes active participation, and empowers students by connecting academic learning to their personal lives and social realities. It aims to transform the classroom into a space of liberation and growth for all participants.

bell hooks's concept of engaged pedagogy emphasizes teaching as a practice of freedom. This pedagogical approach advocates for an educational practice rooted in empathy, respect, and a commitment to collective well-being, paralleling Black and Indigenous American feminist teachings. Dávila's work deeply explores identity, resistance, and community solidarity.

Engaged pedagogies are essential for collective liberation because they prioritize critical thinking, personal growth, and social responsibility within the learning process. This educational approach fosters an environment where students and teachers collaboratively engage in dialogues that challenge oppressive structures and explore transformative actions. People relations are the grounding base of engaged pedagogies, which require a fostering of trust, openness, and respect. Therefore, we as educators must be mindful of the needed teaching practices and skills the people need for the expansive future, we black feminist scholars long for. I go into indigenous feminist teachings to try and gather ways of doing so.

The journey from engaged pedagogies to a decolonial feminist praxis compels us to scrutinize the frameworks within which we situate our scholarly and pedagogical endeavors.

This imperative leads us to the critical work of Maile Arvin, Eve Tuck, and Angie Morrill, who in their examination of "Decolonizing Feminism: Challenging Connections between Settler Colonialism and Heteropatriarchy" (Feminist Formations, Spring 2013), provide a foundational touchstone for this exploration. Their analysis elucidates the intertwined nature of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy, challenging us to consider the educational spaces we navigate and create not merely as neutral grounds but as territories imbricated in the legacies of colonial and patriarchal dominion. Considering their insights, the poetic oeuvre of Ángela María Dávila becomes a resonant field where the decolonial struggle and the affirmation of self are inseparably entwined. Dávila's introspective journey through her poetry—an exploration of identity, labor, and the natural world—reveals a profound engagement with the chaos of desires and possibilities that define her existence as a black Puerto Rican woman, mother, and worker. This personal and collective reckoning with the forces of coloniality and patriarchy embodies the necessary labor to honor and understand our multifaceted selves, advocating for a decolonial feminist praxis that recognizes the interdependence of personal liberation and the dismantling of oppressive structures. By integrating Dávila's work and the critical perspectives of Arvin, Tuck, and Morrill into our

educational and interpretive practices, we commit to a process of learning and unlearning that honors the complexities of identity, culture, and resistance. This approach not only enriches our understanding of the decolonial project in Puerto Rico and beyond but also aplifies the call for radical imaginations and solidarities that can envision and enact futures of decolonized being and belonging.

Therefore, we look at “Land as Pedagogy” by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson as an example of what engaged pedagogies could look like. Based on Simpson’s work, educators can think of pedagogies outside the Eurocentric Knowledge Validation Process by embracing land-based, cross-generational, across-being learnings that center on Indigenous ways of knowing. This approach involves learning from the soil, ecosystems that surround us, and the inherited practices of the natural world to understand our existence, to look for inspiration, and to solve the problems students and teachers will inevitably face and try to solve when engaged pedagogies are enabled. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's "Land as Pedagogy" offers a profound way to re-envision education through the interconnectedness of knowledge, being, and the natural world, aligning closely with Ángela María Dávila’s poetic exploration of identity, existence, and resistance.

In the ensuing section of this thesis, “ante tanto soñarme, me ví”, we embark on an in- depth exploration of Ángelamaría Dávila’s poetic brilliance through a meticulous close reading of two seminal poems from her debut collection, “Animal Fiero y Tierno” / “Fierce and Tender Animal.” This analysis seeks to illuminate the

intricate layers of Dávila's work, underscoring her significance within the realm of literature and as a pivotal site of knowledge for Puerto Rican and Caribbean studies. By delving into these selected poems' thematic, stylistic, and symbolic facets, this section aims to unravel how Dávila's poetry joins the black Caribbean and diaspora scholars, philosophers, and artists questioning "the human," its modernist hierarchies and reimagining ways of being beyond it through the quest for decolonial love and liberation. Through her poetic expressions, Dávila articulates a profound connection to her Caribbean roots while engaging with universal themes of humanity, resistance, and the transformative power of the erotic. This close reading endeavors to showcase Dávila's contributions to the intellectual and cultural tapestry of the Caribbean, affirming her role as an indispensable voice in the ongoing discourse on decolonization, identity, and the forging of radical solidarities within Puerto Rican and broader Caribbean contexts.

DISCUSSION

As so often happens, I started this research when I saw these poems. Ángelamaría Dávila's words washed over me, knowing I knew what she meant even if I didn't have the map, even if I couldn't explain the route, the tracing of her voice raining down on me, asking me to flow from the top of El Yunque into its rivers until finally arriving at the oceans that hold us all, knows us all. And as soon as I was given the tools to think critically about her words, the map came quickly together.

The first poem I would like us to dive into from her first poetry book is "before such a vision." Taking the verse "fierce and tender animal" from this poem to name this collection, Dávila let us know she is both thoughtful and grounded when giving life to the voice of this poem as they explore how they see and understand themselves and what they mean by that.

A close reading with a decolonial turn of the text is necessary to understand the poem's weight of meaning.

"before such a vision of history and [prehistory,"

For vision, let us use both the ability to see and the experience of having a mental image, seeing someone or something in a trance or a dream, to extract meaning from the verse. This double meaning is helpful as the rest of the verse introduces us to the terms "history" and "prehistory". I argue its significance from the corners of a progressive academia of scholars who have identified how memory

is transfigured, the archive can opacite, and the production of canonical discourses of History, and Pre-History is weaponized for the benefit of the state or the nation, or the empire, or the elite powerful, etc. Historians and theorists like Sadiya Hartman, María J. Fuentes, Jessica Marie Johnson, Vanessa M. Holden, and Joan Flores- Villalobos, have done the intense and incredible work that has cleaned many ways, a machetazo limpio, on how to engage with the dissonance oppressed people experience when engaging with their lived vision of history, and the empires History. And I argue this is exactly what Ángelamaría Dávila is engaging with when the voice of the poem states:

"before such a vision of history and

[prehistory," because then she continues with

"of myths,

of half-truths – or a quarters of it– after so much dreaming, i saw myself,

the light of two words drew the

sad animal.

i am a sad animal."

Therefore, this creative retelling on how they engaged with questions of the self and existence is evidently grounded on the poet's understanding of the realities she swam through. As the voice is shown visions of the lies, and the lies dressed in sparkles of truth, and gets to know embodied truth, they finally can see themselves; name themselves as "a sad animal."

In the striking verse "I am a sad animal," Dávila not only embodies her existential reflections but also resonates profoundly with Zakiyyah Jackson's discourse in

"Becoming Human: Matter and Meaning in an Antiblack World." Jackson's seminal work argues that African diasporic cultural production "does not coalesce into a unified tradition that merely seeks inclusion into liberal humanist conceptions of 'the human'" but rather, it frequently alters the meaning and significance of being (Jackson 1). This alteration, as Jackson posits, is a creative response to a history of blackness's bestialization and thingification, which imagines black people as ontological zeros - as nonbeings or nothingnesses, subject to colonial myths and racial hierarchies (Jackson 1).

In this context, Dávila's self-proclamation as a "sad animal" can be seen as a powerful act of reclaiming and redefining identity. This declaration is not a mere capitulation to the dehumanizing forces described by Jackson; instead, it is a nuanced acknowledgment of the complex interplay between human and animal distinctions, especially within the framework of radicalized and gendered individuals in the U.S. Colony, Puerto Rico. Her poetic voice, infused with a melancholic yet defiant acceptance of this 'sad animal' identity, becomes a site of resistance against the oppressive narratives that seek to define and confine African diasporic identities. Just as water can carve new paths and reshape landscapes,

Dávila's poetic language flows through and beyond the boundaries of race, species, and identity, offering a new vision of being that defies traditional categorizations.

Therefore, Dávila's poetic voice stating “I am a sad animal" is not just a statement of self- identity; it is a profound engagement with an African diasporic struggle that is translating embodied understandings into philosophies of relating, to redefine the human in a world that has persistently denied them this status to millions. It is a poetic affirmation of existence and resistance in the face of a dehumanizing history, echoing Jackson's assertion of the unruly and transformative potential inherent in African diasporic cultural productions. And as a teacher who trust, Dávila let’s the reader into a current of understandings. The poem continues with:

> about the animal i say it with tenderness, and about the sadness i say it with sorrow, as it
> should be
> as it is always taught
> [standing and walking [on a globe of earth.
> [the color gray

This passage, when read through the lens of Zakiyyah Jackson's "Becoming Human," resonates with the idea of an "unruly sense of being/knowing/feeling existence" that disrupts the conventional frameworks of understanding 'the human' (Jackson 2). Jackson argues that African diasporic cultural productions articulate

being (human) in ways that neither depend on the debasement of the animal nor reify liberal humanism as the ultimate arbiter of what it means to be human (Jackson 2). Jackson argues that African diasporic cultural productions articulate being (human) in ways that neither depend on the debasement of the animal nor reify liberal humanism as the ultimate arbiter of what it means to be human (Jackson 2). Dávila's verse, in this regard, echoes a similar sentiment. Her acknowledgement of the animal with tenderness and the sadness with sorrow reflects a holistic and empathetic approach to existence, one that transcends traditional human-animal binaries and embraces a more integrated and compassionate understanding of being.

Moreover, Dávila's reference to 'the color gray' symbolizes the ambiguities and complexities of identity and existence. It challenges the binary oppositions often found in discussions of race, species, and emotion, suggesting a more nuanced and inclusive approach. This aligns with hooks' concept of education as a liberating practice, where learning is not just the accumulation of knowledge, but a transformative process that involves grappling with complexities and contradictions.

Dávila's poetry, through its nuanced exploration of identity and existence, provides a valuable framework for engaging with practices of relating with our bodies, one that embraces the unruly and transformative potential of being, as articulated by Zakiyyah Jackson. This pedagogical journey is not just about

understanding the self, but about reimagining and reshaping our collective understanding of what it means to be.

Ángelamaría Dávila's poetic voice continues to allow the reader to see visions of how they seems themselves, in which she hones the ability to ground the reader into both being present and letting themselves be caught into the currents of their thoughts.

"an animal that speaks

to tell another one similar

a sad mammal with two hands tucked into a cave thinking

with a childhood clumsy and oppressed a small animal on a ball

[about its hope. [of the sunrise.

[by such alien things.

[beautiful,

In this section of the poem, the verse begins by situating the speaker as an "animal that speaks," immediately challenging conventional human-animal distinctions. This phrase, while simple, encapsulates the essence of communication and the inherent nature of being a part of the living world. The ability to speak and to convey "hope" signifies a shared experience, a commonality that transcends species, suggesting a deeper, more universal connection among all sentient beings.

The phrase "a sad mammal with two hands tucked into a cave thinking of the sunrise" is particularly evocative. It paints a vivid picture of introspection and

solitude, where the mammal, which are usually creatures that move in collective, retreats into a metaphorical cave – a space of contemplation and self-reflection, but also a space of ignorance and isolation. The act of thinking about the sunrise symbolizes hope, speculation, and the anticipation of a new beginning. This imagery conveys a sense of longing and a deep-seated connection to the natural world, reflecting their condition of being in what could be their most raw and unadulterated form.

Dávila further delves into the complexities of human experience with "a childhood clumsy and oppressed by such alien things." This line highlights Dávila's understanding of unnatural cruel things, hereditary colonialism and the violences it forces generation after generation to inherit. These marked by a sense of awkwardness and the challenges imposed by external forces. The use of the word "alien" suggests a sense of otherness, a feeling of being out of place or at odds with the surrounding environment. This could be interpreted as a commentary on societal norms, expectations, and the often-overwhelming nature of the world that seems so foreign to the innocence and simplicity of childhood. It could also be signaling the very beginning, of history and prehistory, of half-truths and myths.

Finally, the phrase "a small animal on a ball beautiful" encapsulates a sense of wonder and humility. It positions the human as a small entity in the vastness of the universe, symbolized by the "ball" – perhaps Earth itself. This line evokes a

sense of awe and respect for the world, coupled with an acknowledgment of one's own smallness and the beauty inherent in that realization.

Dávila masterfully crafts a narrative that resonates deeply within the experiences of many afro diasporic communities. She invites readers to reflect on their own existence, to see themselves as part of a larger tapestry of life, and to acknowledge the beauty and complexity of their own humanity. Her words encourage a profound introspection, urging the reader to consider their place in the world as sentient beings with hopes, fears, and dreams.

Therefore, in the same way Dávila's voice shines its thoughtfulness in the poem, they conclude it by showcasing a shift from their individual process of understanding to the understanding that I can only be because we are, and we can only be because I am. Meaning, Ángelamaría Dávila's conclusion to the poem, as highlighted in the preceding analysis, marks a significant transition from a personal journey of self-discovery to a collective understanding of existence, encapsulated in the idea that "I can only be because we are, and we can only be because I am." This shift from individuality to collectivity is a powerful testament to the interconnectedness of all beings.

"an adult animal,

a female with offspring,

who knows what to say sometimes and would like to be[SEP]a better animal.
collective animal

that takes the sadness of others

learning to laugh only if others laugh

— to see how it is —

and that knows how to say: i am a sad, hopeful animal,

i live, i reproduce, on a globe

[like shared bread,

[of earth."

In the final verses, Dávila poetic voice identifies themselves as "an adult animal, a female with offspring," which not only acknowledges their role as a mother but also universalizes the experience of caregiving and nurturing in the animal kingdom.

This connection between the personal and the universal is a recurring theme in Dávila's work. The poetic voice self-description as someone "who knows what to say sometimes and would like to be a better animal" reflects a conscious acknowledgment of one's imperfections and the continuous pursuit of understanding how we could be better from an antiracist and feminist perspective.

The term "collective animal" further extends this notion. Dávila uses it to convey the idea of shared experiences and emotions, as seen in "that takes the sadness of others like shared bread." This metaphor of shared bread, a fundamental and communal sustenance, symbolizes empathy, solidarity, and the communal sharing of both burdens and joys. The concept of learning to laugh only if others

laugh is a poignant reflection on empathy and shared experiences. It suggests a deep sense of connection and the idea that our emotions and experiences are not solely our own but part of a larger, shared experience.

And as she proudly shared through out her life, as a socialist and member of the “Grupo Guajana” (Vázquez 97), a collective known for its commitment to social and political issues in Puerto Rico, I argue that her verse “a better animal” also highlights that her poetic voice understood that not only we are “collective animals” but that through embracing so and learning to live in solidarity and community is how we are “a better animal”. Her poetry does not exist in a vacuum but reflects her engagement with the political and social issues of her time.

Dávila’s poetic voice self-identification as "a sad, hopeful animal" keeps highlighting an understanding of experience that are gray, that merge in the shoal of life— of sorrow and hope.

The acknowledgment of living and reproducing "on a globe of earth" ties her personal existence to the larger context of life on this planet, emphasizing a connection to the Earth and its cycles.

Therefore, these concluding verses serve not only as a personal testament of Dávila's identity and experiences but also as a universal message of interconnectedness, empathy, and collective existence. Her poetic journey from individual self-reflection to a broader understanding of collective identity teaches

us that our unique experiences and particularities contribute to the rich tapestry of life, where care and solidarity are the threads that bind us together.

In conclusion, the analysis of Ángelamaría Dávila's poetry, particularly through the lens of Afro-diasporic experiences, not only reveals the depth and complexity of her work but also underscores the broader significance of such literary contributions in the context of engaged pedagogies, as championed by bell hooks. Dávila's poetic exploration of self-identity, her seamless transition from personal introspection to collective understanding, and her poignant reflections on the interconnectedness of all beings, resonate deeply with the themes of empathy, self-awareness, and communal solidarity that are central to hooks' educational philosophy. Through Dávila's verses, we encounter a powerful tool for reflection and learning, one that challenges us to consider our place in the world not just as individuals, but as part of a larger, interconnected community. Her work exemplifies the transformative potential of poetry in fostering a deeper understanding of our collective human experience, encouraging readers to engage in a more empathetic and inclusive approach to education and life. By delving into the rich tapestry of Dávila's poetry, we are reminded of the vital role that Afro-diasporic poets and philosophers play in shaping our perceptions and helping us craft engaged, liberating pedagogies that speak to the core of our shared humanity.

Further the reflection from the first poem analyzed, Dávila poetic voice situates us again in a trusting dialogue that knows we know about:

“when they are paired

all the few things that are known I know that we are animals”

But in these instances, the voice draws us the map of the rivers that end up in the ocean. Now, is not only a brook of water following the shape of a mountain into a vastest deeper blue, but the tracing of all of us stretch marks of a Caribbean Island.

“that we passionately detest that to build ourselves we have and that we have hands that transform

the fruits,

the other animals, the mountains a brain that coins history

[loneliness,

[to get together. [the trees,

[Water,

[millennial

Now, instead of highlighting the state weaponizing memory through institutions that carry violent silences in order to benefit a way of telling our story above other ways, and needing to do embodying practices in order to dissipate dissonance, Dávila poetic voice is reminding us of who we are.Nevertheless, in order to continue our close readings, it is also important to explore and understand (1) from where I am reading from when a write about being (2) how is her poetry part of the legacy afro diasporic culture created innadvertibly giving us the

decolonizing tools to think about hope and future. These two poems situate an example on how decolonial thought translated into engaged pedagogical exercises could be tools for us to engage in practices of freedom.

Part 1: Notes Towards a Close Reading, with a decolonial turn1

In this analysis of Ángelamaría Dávila's poetry, it is important to consider the lens through which the poetry is read and interpreted. This lens is shaped significantly by the works of Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Xhercis Méndez, whose writings offer profound insights into the decolonial perspective on being and gender.

Nelson Maldonado-Torres, in "On the Coloniality of Being," emphasizes the importance of understanding the concept of 'coloniality of being' as a response to the effects of coloniality in lived experiences beyond just the mind. (Maldonado 244) He distinguishes between colonialism as a political and economic relation and coloniality as a long-standing pattern of power affecting culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge production.

Maldonado-Torres highlights the vertical nature of social classifications in coloniality, where some identities depict superiority over others based on the degree of humanity attributed to them. This perspective is critical in understanding Dávila's poetry as it foregrounds the historical and ongoing impacts of coloniality on identity and existence as people inheriting colonial structures.

Maldonado-Torres also discusses the 'non-ethics of war' in coloniality, suggesting that for colonized and racialized subjects, the encounter with death is not extraordinary but a constitutive feature of their reality, leading to the emergence of decolonization, deracialization, and 'desgeneracción. This perspective of quest for authenticity in a colonially structured world of 'being' aligns with the poetic strides in Dávila's poetry, where the quest for self- understanding and existence is not isolated from the colonial history and its ongoing effects, and that it finds solace in solidarity; love.

Maldonado-Torres, after meditations on Frantz Fanon, also introduces the reader idea of 'trans-ontological difference' in the context of coloniality, underlining the importance of these concepts in understanding the existential conditions of the colonized and racialized subjects. This framework is essential in analyzing Dávila's poetry, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the decolonial and resistance strategies she is using in her poetry when having to face and decolonize from her understanding the layers of existence and identity formation under coloniality.

Additionally, Xhercis Méndez, in "Notes Toward a Decolonial Feminist Methodology," stresses the importance of historicizing gender from multiple histories and bodies, expanding the meanings of 'sexual difference' to include racialized meanings produced through various colonial institutions and practices. (Méndez 47) She argues for a practice of mapping out relational power dynamics between variously racialized bodies, acknowledging the oppressive relationships

and the material conditions underpinning these relationships. This approach to understanding gender as a category shaped by colonial relations of power resonates with the themes in Dávila's poetry, where the experiences of gendered bodies are not isolated from the broader socio-historical context.

Méndez also highlights the simultaneous operation of being oppressed and oppressing, especially in the context of gender and race, challenging the binary logic that often simplifies these relationships. This perspective is crucial in analyzing Dávila's work, as it emphasizes the complexities and intersections of various forms of oppression and the need for a more nuanced understanding of these dynamics.

Finally, Méndez's call for a political investment in using gender to denounce oppressive relations of power and move towards anti-racist and decolonial struggle is particularly relevant. This aligns with the reading of Dávila's poetry through a decolonial lens, where the understanding of gender and identity is deeply intertwined with colonial history and its ongoing impacts, providing a pathway to re-imagine our communities in liberatory ways.

The writings of Maldonado-Torres and Méndez offer essential frameworks for understanding the coloniality of being and the decolonial feminist methodology, which in turn provide valuable insights for reading and interpreting Dávila's poetry. These perspectives highlight the importance of considering the historical and social

contexts of coloniality in the formation of identity and existence, underscoring the need for a decolonial approach to understanding and engaging with literary works.

Part 2: Vanguards, Decolonization and the Africa Diaspora

The movements within this paper follow the tide in rhythm with the moon, which means, it follows the way creatives and scholars Audre Lorde, bell hooks, M. Jacqui Alexander, Yomaira C. Figueroa-Vasquez, and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson all are the constellations that guide this paper towards light. These scholars, creative writers and artists have learned how to hone their storytelling skills to breath into their decolonial turn, which means, that teach how to love and weave hopeful possibilities to birth radical solidarity and new epistemologies that move beyond the inheritance of coloniality being pushed on us all.

Thus, I am learning how to swim, to hold my breath and gracefully rise and breath, and I follow the cues that signal love, know more about yourself to love yourself better, know more about your community to learn to love better, learn about the world and love better. But these signals have always caught my eye, and I argue, when love reaches you from whenever is being crafted, in its full verb form, all of us fall into it, wether it is from fear, hope, skepticism, etc.

Specifically, I want to highlight the tools Dr. Yomaira C. Figueroa-Vazquez crafted and honed in her book "Decolonizing Diasporas: Radical Mappings of Afro-Atlantic Literature" for us to keep expanding and answering: how do we map relations? we map relations by studying our cultural productions, noting shared

preoccupations, and being aware of the innate nature our diasporic cultures relationship with revelations.^11 She uses “faithful witnessing” to explore geographies of things presumably lost, to highlight art and culture a site where we find truth against the omissions and lies of History and the Archive.

As I sit and clean/clear my mind feeling meaning in Dávila’s poetry, I think of her as another ancestral voice channeling through with her love to join the diasporic voices urging us to love more, to love better, illuminating the path onward.

These scholars and creatives, through their diverse and powerful voices, have not only charted a course towards understanding and confronting the colonial legacy but have also shown how to transform it into a source of strength and empowerment. Their collective wisdom encourages a deeper engagement with our cultural heritages and a more profound appreciation for the complexities of the Afro-Atlantic experience. Dávila, as part of this constellation, adds her unique voice to this chorus. Through her work, we are reminded of the legacies of resistance we have inherited in redefining our relationships with history, culture, thus each other. Her poetic expressions serve as a beacon, guiding us towards a future where love, in its most radical and transformative form, becomes the foundation for building communities rooted in mutual respect, understanding, and solidarity.

Now to continue our analysis of the poem, we continue our close reading into the last part of the poem.

“I also know that we are looking for paths so we can get together

as in the remote before that we sense where we built ourselves without loneliness, without disturbing children's eyes transforming everything for everyone.

“I know too

that in a blow and a whack

but not in a sudden blow nor a

whack we remove the weeds

to take the path we

want, so simply

how to work together without there

being a job owner

that feeds on all misery;

how to change everything with your

hands so that your caress is free

to be able to love looking into each other's eyes without necessarily having

to ask ourselves: What will this take away from

us? What do we eat tomorrow?

and then we will

know and we will

have time

to be able to know all

things that we still don't

know”

The concluding part of Ángelamaría Dávila's poem, examined through a decolonial lens, resonates with themes of communal solidarity, collective effort, and the aspiration for a more equitable and harmonious existence.

“I also know that we are looking for paths / so we can get together" signifies a collective search for ways to unite and collaborate. This quest reflects a decolonial aspiration to move beyond the imposed separations and hierarchies of coloniality. The phrase "as in the remote before that we sense / where we built ourselves without loneliness" harks back to a time or state, possibly pre-colonial or outside colonial influences, where community and togetherness were integral to existence, emphasizing a return to or a reimagining of these communal values.

The lines "without disturbing children's eyes / transforming everything for everyone" suggest a deep concern for the impact of current societal structures on the younger generation. The poet envisions a transformation that is inclusive and beneficial for all, resonating with the decolonial goal of creating a world where exploitation and oppression are absent, and every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

"I know too / that in a blow and a whack / but not in a sudden blow nor a whack / we remove the weeds" metaphorically speaks to the gradual and deliberate process of decolonization. It's not about abrupt, violent change, but rather a steady, thoughtful effort to clear away the 'weeds' - the lingering effects and structures of coloniality.

The desire for egalitarian collaboration is expressed in "how to work together without there being / a job owner / that feeds on all misery." This line critiques the exploitative labor relations fostered by colonial and capitalist systems, advocating for a communal approach where work and its benefits are shared, and exploitation is absent.

"How to change everything with your hands / so that your caress is free" conveys the idea of transformation through collective labor, where the fruits of labor are not commodified or controlled by a few, but freely available for communal benefit. This reflects the decolonial goal of dismantling oppressive economic structures that prioritize profit over people.

The questions "What will this take away from us? / What do we eat tomorrow?" highlight the anxieties induced by a system that prioritizes individual gain and survival over collective well-being. These concerns are antithetical to the decolonial vision of a society where basic needs are met without the constant worry induced by economic insecurity.

The poem concludes with a hopeful vision of the future, "and then we will know / and we will have time / to be able to know all things / that we still don't know.“ This embodies the decolonial ethos of continuous learning, growth, and the pursuit of knowledge that is not constrained by the limitations and distortions of colonial frameworks.

Thus, he final part of Dávila's poem, through a decolonial lens, offers a powerful critique of the existing colonial and capitalist systems while envisioning a future that is rooted in communal solidarity, collective well-being, and a continuous quest for knowledge and understanding.

In conclusion, the poetry of Ángelamaría Dávila, with its meticulous articulation of solidarity and care, serves as an essential component of the decolonial project. Her work not only helps us imagine tender and inclusive ways of envisioning ourselves as a collective in the future but also emphasizes the role of love as both a shield and a disarming tool in this endeavor. Dávila’s poetic narratives offer profound insights into the transformative power of solidarity and compassion in dismantling the entrenched structures of coloniality. They teach us that love, in its most genuine and selfless form, can be a radical force for change, challenging the status quo and nurturing a sense of communal responsibility and togetherness. This perspective is vital for developing engaged pedagogies that foster practices of freedom.

Such pedagogies, inspired by Dávila's poetic wisdom, encourage us to explore and embrace new ways of thinking, being, and interacting that transcend colonial legacies. They guide us towards a future where freedom is not just an abstract concept but a lived reality, characterized by mutual respect, empathy, and a deep commitment to collective well-being. In essence, Dávila's work illuminates the path towards a decolonial future, where love and solidarity become the cornerstones of a more just and equitable world.

CONCLUSION

This conclusion aims to underscore the unique and significant contribution of Dávila's work to Caribbean and Puerto Rican studies. It will succinctly highlight the impact of her work on education and society, emphasizing themes of decolonization, collective understanding, and empathy, which are crucial for fostering more profound interpretations and reading exercises among scholars across our communities in the Archipelago and the Diaspora.

Ángelamaría Dávila's poetry is a powerful conduit for decolonial thought, weaving a narrative transcending conventional artistic expression and cultural discourse boundaries. Her work, deeply rooted in the Caribbean and Puerto Rican contexts, illuminates the pathways toward understanding and articulating a shared identity that is resilient, resistant, and profoundly connected to one's heritage. This thesis has underscored how Dávila's poetic voice is critical in challenging historical erasure and marginalization, inviting us to reconceptualize identity, culture, and solidarity in emancipatory ways.

The analysis has further revealed Dávila's poetic expressions as a powerful tool for nurturing radical forms of love and guiding us toward more equitable communities. By embedding her poetry within engaged pedagogies, educators can harness its potential to promote practices of freedom, drawing on the insights of decolonial theorists.

This approach not only enriches the educational experience but also empowers learners with knowledge and values deeply rooted in decolonial thought, fostering a learning environment that is inclusive, empathetic, and transformative.

Dávila's poetry, characterized by its introspective journey and exploration of identity, embodies a profound engagement with the complexities of existence. Her work, through its nuanced examination of personal and collective narratives, challenges us to envision alternative realities. This engagement resonates deeply with the essence of decolonial pedagogies, advocating for a future where all voices are heard and valued equally, fostering a more just and equitable global community.

The transformative power of Dávila's poetry extends beyond the literary realm, inviting us to engage in radical acts of love and collective imagination as tools for survival and flourishing. Her poetic legacy, enriched by its decolonial ethos, offers a blueprint for reimagining our present and future. Through her work, we are reminded of the importance of solidarity, empathy, and the relentless pursuit of a decolonized discourse that honors our shared humanity and interconnectedness. This call to action is a theoretical proposition and a practical guide for all of us to contribute to the discourse and shape a more just and equitable global community.

In conclusion, Ángela María Dávila's poetry and analysis in this thesis illuminate the path toward a decolonized understanding of identity, culture, and community. By integrating her poetic insights into decolonial pedagogies, we are

offered a visionary approach to education and societal engagement. This journey pays homage to Dávila's contribution to the Caribbean and Puerto Rican cultural landscapes and champions the broader movement towards a world that embraces decolonial love, radical solidarity, and collective liberation as its guiding principles.

Building on the critical analysis of Ángela María Dávila's poetry presented in this thesis, future research directions will deepen our understanding of literary works through a decolonial lens. This could include comprehensive studies that scrutinize the oeuvre of her literary production and those of other poets and writers from the Caribbean and beyond, highlighting how decolonial themes are woven into diverse literary traditions. Such research could expand to examine the intersections of decoloniality with gender, race, and class within literary analysis, thereby offering nuanced insights into the multifaceted nature of decolonization as it is reflected in global literary expressions. Comparative literary studies could also be valuable, placing Dávila's work in dialogue with contemporaneous movements and figures worldwide to trace the transnational currents of decolonial thought. Furthermore, exploring the reception and interpretation of decolonial literature among different audiences could reveal the transformative potential of such works beyond academic circles. By pursuing these avenues, future research will contribute to a richer critical discourse on literature and underscore the pivotal role of decolonial perspectives in challenging and expanding our understanding of global literary landscapes.

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