A question of race: Ana Tijoux's álbum *Vengo**

Una cuestión de raza: el álbum de Ana Tijoux “Vengo”

Laurence De Backer**

ABSTRACT

This article hones in on the question of ‘race’ in hip-hop artist Ana Tijoux’s album *Vengo* (2014), which anticipates, in a musical format, the social demands which would emerge years later in Chile’s *Estallido Social*. More specifically, it dissects the ways in which this socially-engaged rapper *transcodes* (Hall, “The spectacle...” 270) the racialized categories of ‘indio’ and ‘the south’ from a position of colonial difference (Mignolo 61). I argue that, by adopting this subversive and historicizing semiotic strategy, she casts these oppressive labels into productive political subject positions from which to level received racial hierarchies rooted in colonialism and reinforced by neoliberalism. They offer the individuals who are classified as such a blueprint to mobilize themselves and enact alternative ways of being; to come up for their rights; and to resist the inequalities that are perpetuated and naturalized by a system of organization which ranks them as inferior.

Keywords: Ana Tijoux, social outburst, Chile, hip-hop, race, coloniality.

RESUMEN

Este artículo se centra en la cuestión de ‘raza’ en el álbum *Vengo* (2014) de la artista de hip-hop Ana Tijoux, disco que anticipa, en formato musical, las demandas sociales que emergerán años después en el Estallido Social de Chile. Más concretamente, analiza el modo en que esta rapera comprometida socialmente *transcodifica* (Hall, “The spectacle...” 270) las categorías racializadas de ‘indio’ y ‘sur’ desde una posición de diferencia colonial

Palabras clave: Ana Tijoux, estallido social, Chile, hip-hop, raza, colonialidad.

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** Belga. Magíster en Literatura, Ghent University; Magíster en Antropología Cultural, KU Leuven. Lovaina, Bélgica. laurence.debacker@student.kuleuven.be

(Mignolo 61). Sostengo que, al adoptar esta estrategia semiótica subversiva e historizante, convierte estas etiquetas opresivas en posiciones de sujeto político productivo desde las que nivelar las jerarquías raciales recibidas, enraizadas en el colonialismo y reforzadas por el neoliberalismo. Ofrecen a los individuos clasificados como tales un plan para movilizarse y promulgar formas alternativas de ser; para defender sus derechos; y para resistir las desigualdades que se perpetúan y naturalizan por un sistema de organización que los clasifica como inferiores.

I Come

This paper sets out to examine the way in which the concept of ‘race’ is dealt with in Ana Tijoux’s album *Vengo* [‘I come’]. Concerning the notion of ‘race,’ scholars Aníbal Quijano (2000), Umut Erel et al. (2016), Leith Mullings (2005), Walter Mignolo (2002), Stuart Hall (2021), Henry Louis Gates (2019), Nicholas De Genova (2017) and Franz Fanon (2008) have asserted the following. ‘Race’ can be conceived as an organizing principle of our contemporary world rooted in Western colonialism and imperialism (cf. Quijano’s 216; Erel et al. 1341; Mignolo 82-84) which has become globalized —albeit in different shapes— through Western (white) imperialism and modern nation building projects (Mullings 670-672). This classificatory system marks some cultural and physical characteristics as different and then ranks them hierarchically. What features are fashioned as racially different and inferior in opposition to others is strongly linked to power (cf. Foucault’s ‘power/knowledge’; Hall, “The spectacle...” 260), as the construction and naturalization of *Otherness* serves the interests of dominant groups¹ (De Genova 6). Importantly, given that the social institution of ‘race’ stratifies the way in which humankind is perceived, treated and evaluated (Gates 11-13), such discursive operations of racialization have a material impact (Hall, “Race, the floating signifier...” 359-360; Mullings 669). They give rise to diverging access to opportunities and conflicting lived experiences (Fanon 6). In view of the aforementioned considerations, ‘race’ is understood in this paper as a socially constructed and historically specific system of organization, imposed by power, that creates seemingly natural distinctions and rankings between humankind which are enacted in society and, hence, brought into being.

In the particular context of Chile, this historically specific system of organization that ranks individuals based on notions of ‘race’ has likewise been forced upon its inhabitants during the colonial encounter (Zapata w/p). Moreover, due to subsequent developments such as the rise of the Atlantic commercial circuit (Mignolo 59) and Augusto

1 According to De Genova (2017), ‘race’ is a ‘socio-political fact of domination’ which, on a global scale, reproduces “historically specific hierarchies of social power, wealth and prestige . . . through violent and oppressive regimes of (European/colonial) white supremacy” (p. 6).

Pinochet's reformation of the economy according to the tenets of Chicago school neoliberalism (Klein 7, 76-90), these racial rankings have deepened and transformed in today's age. This continued presence of racial hierarchies in relation to Chile is visible on at least two scales. First, in Chile itself, the racial category of 'indio' —whose inception can be traced back to (white, European) settler colonialism— has been historically constructed as inferior to the segment of Chilean society fashioned as "white" (Zapata w/p). Second, this system operates on a global level, where Chile —and the so-called '(global) South' more generally —is deemed inferior to the '(global) North' in the hegemonic, Western imagination (Said 1; Mignolo 83).

It is within this situated context that I will examine the ways in which Ana Tijoux's *Vengo* explicitly overturns these received racial hierarchies by *appropriating* and *re-signifying* the categories of 'indio' and 'the south' into positive identities. This discursive strategy for decolonizing knowledge and negative representations about 'race' can be captured under what Stuart Hall ("The spectacle..." 270) —following Bakhtin—referred to as 'transcoding'. In line with Hall, 'transcoding' is understood here as a semiotic strategy by means of which an existing meaning is re-appropriated for new meanings ("The spectacle..." 270).

While Hall signals that a potential pitfall of trans-coding old racial categories into positive signifiers (e.g., "Black is beautiful"; Hall, "The spectacle..." 272) is that it does not undermine the racial binaries itself, I contend that erasing a constructed racial dichotomy is not always desirable to begin with. In particular, I argue that —in the context of Ana Tijoux's political ideal of decolonization— the strength of her contestation strategy resides precisely in the fact that she recognizes the persistence of colonial categories such as 'indio' and 'the south,' and gives validity to the fundamentally different experience of the people labeled as such. By doing so, she departs from what Mignolo would have called 'a standpoint of colonial difference'² (61). This entails con-

2 'epistemic' colonial difference' is described by Mignolo as "a connector that, in short, refers to the changing faces of colonial differences throughout the history of the modern/colonial world-system and brings to the foreground the planetary dimension of human history silenced by discourses centering on modernity, postmodernity, and Western civilization" (p. 61).

structuring knowledge from a ‘different starting point’ that “builds on the ground of the silence of history” (Mignolo 67) of the individuals classified as such³.

By trans-coding the labels of ‘indio’ and ‘the south’ from this position of colonial difference, I maintain, Ana⁴ reconfigures them into political subject positions that allow the people whose history has been silenced to challenge racism from “the exteriority” (cf. Mignolo 62, 71, 75, 78). That is, to deconstruct the labels of ‘indio’ and ‘the south’ by historicizing them as the product of a specific, local (Western) system of thought and organization that is imposed on the world via operations of power.

As a whole, *Vengo* foreshadowed, in a musical format, many of the social demands —particularly those related to the question of race— which would emerge years later with Chile’s *Estallido Social* (‘Social Outbreak’). Fueled by the desire for a dignified life for all, Ana uses her music to denounce the racial disparities which mark the country, and to articulate a vision of a radically different future.

The structure of this paper has been organized as follows. First, I will highlight some key aspects of Ana Tijoux’s personal background as well as cover the reception and context of her album *Vengo*. Then, I will briefly discuss the social and political themes which this album touches on, foregrounding how they are presented as strongly intertwined. In the subsequent section, I will analyze the ways in which the rapper’s songs appropriate and resignify the racialized labels of ‘indio’ and ‘el sur’ [‘the South’] into positive identities from a position of colonial difference. Finally, I will offer some concluding remarks on the political potential of these trans-coded categories.

3 Indeed, as Mignolo (p. 63) highlights, even when defending the rights of marginalized groups throughout history, “Black Africans and American Indians were not taken into account when knowledge and social organization were at stake. They, Africans and American Indians, were considered patient, living organisms to be told, not to be heard”.

4 Note that, when I refer to the artist by her first name (Ana) or nickname (Anita), I do so because it reflects the way in which she is known in Chile. It is meant to signal proximity (cf., footnote 5).

Ana Tijoux's *Vengo*

Ana (or Anita⁵, as she is known in Chile [Agencias]) Tijoux was born in France to Chilean parents who were forced into political exile during the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Growing up in the France of the 1980s, she faced various kinds of racism (Tijoux, "Chile: Ana Tijoux, una voz en la revuelta"; Musicapopular.cl) an experience which made her conscious about this issue from a young age. Being socially and politically engaged, Tijoux's parents educated her in Latin American and global politics, introducing her to critical works on the enduring impact of European imperialism and colonialism, such as Eduardo Galeano's *Open veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* (Tijoux, "Chilean musician ..." 3:31-5:24). As Ana acknowledges, both her upbringing in France and her political education left a profound mark on her music, as her lyrics are shaped in dialogue with these critical thinkers and the world (Tijoux, "Chilean musician ..." 01:54-02:56).

Anita entered the Chilean music scene in the late 1990s, after she moved to Santiago de Chile once the dictatorship was lifted. She started out as a member of the hip-hop group *Makiza*, but her rise to fame only reached its peak during her solo career. To date, she is one of the most admired rappers of the country (Bergwerf w/p; Tapia w/p). The deeply political nature of her oeuvre, which, in her own words, represents the "DNA of [her] work and what [she] do[es]" (Tijoux, "Chilean musician..." 2:51-2:54), transformed Anita into one of the icons of the student-led social movements against neoliberal capitalism, patriarchy, extractivism and neo-colonialism, which have taken up a center-stage position in Chile's public life since the start of the second decade of this century (Tijoux, "Chile..."). Songs like *Shock* (inspired by Naomi Klein's *Shock Doctrine*), *Cacerolazo*, and *Antipatriarcha* are only three of the war hymns that resonate in Santiago's streets during these protests (Spencer 31; Tijoux, "Chile..."; Musicapopular.cl).

Vengo is Ana's fourth studio album. Produced by *Nacional* and released on March 18th of 2014, the record was enthusiastically received in Chilean media for its innovative style and political content (Tapia

5 In this instance, the Spanish mitigation marker -ita signals endearment ('our Ana').

w/p; Neira w/p). Internationally, *Vengo* was hailed as “virtually flawless” (Garsd w/p) and as “the most slept-on indigenous album of 2014” (RPM), receiving praise for the way in which it blended the sounds of her “Aymara roots” with elements of hip-hop, jazz and funk (RPM). In 2015, the album was nominated for the Grammy Awards for “Best Latin Rock, Urban or Alternative Album” (Guerrero w/p).

The album’s release coincides with a moment in Chile’s history marked by rising demands for profound structural changes and a collective search for more egalitarian modes of societal organization, concerns which largely sprung from la *Revolución pingüina* in 2006 and the student mobilizations against the privatization of education of 2011 (Bioletto & Spencer 7-8; Spencer 31). The seemingly unrelated social mobilizations which were gaining traction in those days—for the reformation of the pension system, the struggle for Indigenous rights, the fights for water, the feminist movements, the battles for public education, the sexual dissidence movements, among others—gradually started to unite forces but would only truly come together with *El Estallido* in 2019 (Mare 296).

Vengo touches upon a wide range of social and political themes, ranging from the general dissatisfaction with neoliberal capitalism, neo-colonialism and racism to the persisting unequal gender relations and the Big Industry extraction practices that harm the *Madre Tierra* [‘Mother Earth’]. However, while the social issues that Ana raises are various, they are not dealt with in isolation; they are presented as strongly *intertwined*. As the MC proposes in her tracks, many of the ills that disproportionately affect certain groups of people and their territories—both in Chile and in the world at large—can, in fact, be traced back to a single origin: (European/white) settler colonialism and imperialism. The hierarchizing ideas and inequalities introduced at the colonial encounter (e.g., through the social institutions of slavery [“masters”], patriarchy [“patriarchs”], imperialism [“empire”], religion [“crosses”]; Tijoux, “Oro negro”), Ana reflexively notes in her songs, are being reproduced and legitimized up to this day, albeit in different guises (e.g., by transnational corporations [“oil”], the political elite [“suit and tie with laws”], the State [“state terrorists”], and dressed up in a rhetoric of “security”; Tijoux, “Oro negro”):

Excerpt 1. Fragment from the song *Oro negro* [*'Black Gold'*]

They don't stop, they shoot, they decide and they kill⁶
Suit and tie with laws are devastating
Patriarchs and chiefs or *presidents*
Masters, and masters and *landowners*
In the name of God, of security
In the name of calm and tranquility
Of empire, procmas, crosses
Crowns, creeds, oil, they devour everything
They are *state terrorists*
Criminals on the loose
They drown life from their office
Sending his troops to a fixed death
Guilty of making the earth bleed
Guilty of killing communities
Guilty, guilty of crying children
Life's culprits bury
How many brothers will you have to kill?
How many nations will you have to occupy?
The land that cries will bleed
By your power you cannot satiate (31-50; my emphasis)

Because of the continuation of such implicit hierarchies on local and global scales, she argues, the first step to undo them consists in “free[ing] the thinking” (Tijoux, “Delta”) from these inherited ideas. The way to go about this, according to Ana, is by first actively “resenting” this colonial legacy and then consciously “resignifying” received ideas (Tijoux, “Delta”). Only then can an alternative political program for a more equal society be formulated.

6 All the lyrics presented in this essay were translated from Spanish by the author of this paper.

Excerpt 2. Fragment from the song *Delta*

...resenting, resignifying

All as a mechanism. First manifesto to *free the thinking* (26-27; my emphasis)

In this sense, *Vengo* can be thought of as political blueprint for reaching a more just world for all the parties involved, human and non-human alike. Rather than merely rejecting the aforementioned hierarchies and inequalities based on moral grounds, which would run the risk of re-naturalizing them, it presents all these contemporary problems as the continuation of a particular colonial history, whose hierarchizing logics is still being reproduced today. This historicizing move, in turn, opens up the possibility for change. If these structuring ideas have once been *made* by people in power and have been passed on ever since, they can also be *unmade* by forming alliances and by collectively imagining and enacting alternative, “beautiful routines” (Tijoux, “Creo en ti”). Indeed, these ideas are at the heart of songs like *Creo en ti*, *Somos Sur*, *Delta*, *Antipatriarcha* and *Vengo*.

Excerpt 3. Fragment from the song *Creo en ti* [*I Believe in You*]

I think it is possible

Making this world

A sensitive world

I believe in our dreams

As a spearhead

The perfect weapon *to level the scale*,

I believe in actions, *everyday actions*

They fill you with life, they fill you with hope

In the small lies the strength

With your love I will walk

Imagining beautiful routines

To turn the world upside down

Start with our house first

Breaking all our fears

Be consistent

Of body and mind

To take flight on new paths (12-28; my emphasis)

Figure 1

*Visual representation of Ana's political ideal of a world without hierarchies. Cover art of *Vengo* by Gráfica Diablo Rojo.*

While the intersectionality between different social ills is key in Anita's work, for the purposes of this paper, the next section will exclusively focus on the way in which this album consciously subverts received racial hierarchies that are imposed on Chile and on the world at large from a position of colonial difference.

Trans-coding racial categories from a position of colonial difference

This section will look at the way in which Ana's album *Vengo* trans-codes the racial categories of 'indio' and 'the south' from a position of colonial difference. Concretely, I will highlight how her songs explicitly link these categories and the similar experience of the people labeled as such to a silenced history of colonialism and imperialism. Subse-

quently, I will show how, from this position of colonial difference, Ana appropriates and resignifies both racial categories into positive signifiers.

Indio

In her album *Vengo*, Ana talks about the material impact of the racial category of ‘indio’⁷ for the people who are labeled as such (e.g., Hall, “Race, the floating signifier...” 359-360; Gates 11-13). The singer touches upon the unequal treatment and evaluation that both she and her racialized peers have received compared to the segment of society constructed as “white”. This can be seen, for instance, in the following lines of her song *Mi verdad* [‘My Truth’]:

Excerpt 4. Fragment from the song *Mi verdad* [‘My Truth’]

Because of my *brown skin* they *erased my identity*
I felt *trampled on by all society* (1-2; my emphasis)

However, rather than talking about such kinds of racialized violence in a historical vacuum, Tijoux consistently links the physical and cultural features that have been constructed as markers of the racial category ‘indio’ (e.g., “black hair”, “marked cheekbones”, “slit eyes” and “tattoos”; Tijoux, “Vengo”) to Chile’s silenced history of colonialism and imperialism. In her song *Vengo*, for instance, she does this by alluding to Galeano’s *Open Veins of Latin America* (Tijoux, “Chilean musician...” 3:31-5:24), which talks about the impact of settler colonialism and imperialism on the development of the continent (e.g., “I come in search for answers, with a full bundle and *open veins*”; Tijoux, “Vengo”, my emphasis). The artist also hints at the colonialization of knowledge which resulted from imperial domination (e.g., “eager to learn *the history not told about our ancestors*”; Tijoux, “Vengo”, my emphasis) and the need to decolonize these received ideas (e.g., “wake up the blind eye”, “let’s decolonize what we were taught”; Tijoux, “Vengo”).

7 Note that the label ‘indio’ (or, alternatively, ‘indígena’) is not explicitly mentioned by the artist. Rather, it is consistently hinted at by alluding to physical features which, in the context of Chile, are constructed as markers of racial difference (e.g., “marked cheekbones”, “slit eyes”, “tattoos”, “black hair”; Tijoux, “Vengo”). I chose to use the term “indio” here for heuristic purposes. When deploying the notion of “indio” in this paper, I refer to racialized markers which index this colonial category.

Excerpt 5. Fragment from the song *Vengo* [*I Come*]

I come in search of answers
With *a full bundle and open veins*
I come as an open book
Eager to *learn the history*
Not told about our ancestors
With the wind that the grandparents left
And who lives in every thought
From this beloved land
Earth, who knows how to take care of it
It's the one who really loves her
I come to look again
To see the' places and to *wake up the blind eye*
Without fear, you and I
Let's decolonize what we were taught
With our black hair, with marked cheekbones
With the pride fled in the tattooed soul (1-16; my emphasis)

By explicitly talking about 'race' in relation to the continent's silenced colonial past, Ana simultaneously *recognizes* and *denaturalizes* the unequal treatment and evaluation that people classified as 'indio' receive up to this day. This historicizing approach to 'race' represents, in the words of Enrique Dussel, "a different starting point" (*'un punto de partida diferente'*; cf., Mignolo 63-64). It is from this alternative point of departure that new types of knowledge and social organization can be constructed that are tailored specifically for the local context of Chile, which, moreover, do not end up involuntarily reproducing the same Western, hierarchizing epistemologies they seek to undermine.

Building on this colonial difference, Ana appropriates the category of 'indio' and resignifies it into a positive identity of "dignity", "solidarity" and "community" (Tijoux, "Mi verdad"). In her song *Mi verdad* ['My Truth'], for instance, she achieves this by establishing an explicit opposition to the political (white) elite of Chile, which is constructed as lacking all of the aforementioned qualities:

Excerpt 6. Fragment from the song *Mi verdad* [‘My Truth’]

I just want to *walk with dignity*
 And conquer my freedom
 Where you see fear, we see truth
 You create anger in the name of authority
 You are the poor, *you lack dignity*
 You know, we don’t want charity
We don’t have their houses, we have the neighborhood
We don’t have their guards, we have community
 They need our music to see the reality
 But *you will never know solidarity* (23-32; my emphasis)

Moreover, the label of ‘indio’ is also trans-coded into a desirable subject position that is fashioned as the antidote to the post-colonial condition of Chile, which is wrought with hierarchies of different kinds (of race, gender, class and anthropocentrism, among others). In the title track *Vengo* [‘I Come’], for example, the category of ‘indio’ (indexed here by the mention of “slit eyes”) is portrayed as “the new (wo) man” who rediscovers (e.g., “come to see the world *again*”; my emphasis) its connection with the earth (e.g., “with the earth in the hands”; “I come with the world and I come with the birds) and its sisterhood with people of various backgrounds (e.g., “I come looking for an ideal, for a *classless world* that can be lifted”; my emphasis), who takes as its new (old) “point of departure” an attitude of “gratefulness” (i.e., not taking anything for granted). Interestingly, this relational ideal of humanity embodied by the ‘indio’ is at strife with the neoliberal subject, whose subjectivity has been molded in accordance with values of autonomy, individualism, self-enhancement and (market) competition (Türken et al. 2; Ganti 94).

Excerpt 7. Fragment from the song *Vengo* [‘I Come’]

I come with red blood
 With my lungs full of rhymes in my mouth
With the eyes slit, with the earth in the hands
 We come with the world and we come with its song
 I come to build a dream
 The glow of life that lives in *the new man*
I come looking for an ideal

Of a classless world that can be lifted
I come with the world and I come with the birds
I come with the flowers and the trees, their songs
I come with the sky and its constellations
I come with the world and all its seasons
I come grateful as the starting point
I come with the wood, the mountain and the life
I come with air, water, earth and fire
I come to look at the world again (43-58; my emphasis)

At this point, it is worth reflecting on Tijoux's use of the colonial category of 'indio' to articulate an alternative model for Chile's future more generally, as this could be perceived as problematic. Why would the MC *go back* to the past and fetishize tradition (e.g., "come to see the world *again*"; my emphasis)? Is she essentializing 'the indio' as a pristine figure who is connected to nature and is inherently good? However, the rapper's recuperation of the label of 'indio' could be cast in a different light. Instead of *going back* to the past and *idealizing* tradition, this practice could be interpreted as a way to exploit an existing form (i.e., the label of 'indio') in response to a sense of cultural alienation. Put differently, rather than recurring to and idealizing a traditional past that is *out there*, Ana actively *invents* tradition as a reaction against and an alternative to the alienating values imposed by Chile's (neoliberal) capitalism (e.g., autonomy, individualism, self-enhancement, self-interestedness)⁸. Indeed, as Paul Rabinow (1975) rightly observes:

Tradition is a *moving image of the past*. When a culture stops moving, when its structures of belief no longer offer a means to integrate, create, and make meaningful new experiences, then a process of alienation begins. *Tradition is opposed not to modernity but to alienation*" (1; my emphasis).

8 Note that I do not claim that Tijoux consciously intends to 'invent' tradition. The analysis proposed in this paragraph seeks to make sense of the way in which the artist draws on the category of indio (indexed by allusions to the racial markers of "slit eyes", "black hair", "marked cheekbones", etc.) to articulate an alternative blueprint for the future. This analysis, moreover, seeks to counter a reading of Tijoux' semiotic operation as merely romanticizing the past.

El Sur

A second racialized label that is trans-coded from a position of colonial difference is that of 'the South'. This semiotic process can be observed most notably in her song *Somos Sur* ['We're the South'].

In this song, Ana establishes equivalences between the situation of diverse countries in Africa and Latin America often referred to as 'the (global) south'⁹, whose inhabitants are presented as "silenced", "subjected" and "invisible". The listing of these different countries goes accompanied by the explicit recognition of the cause of their similar conditions: both Africa and Latin America suffered pillage and colonial domination (e.g., "pillage, trampling, colonization, a thousand times over...") and still face neo-colonial forms of (capitalist) exploitation and militarization that keep the power imbalances between (former) imperial powers and the 'South' in place. The continued presence of empire in Latin America and Africa is hinted at, for example, in the following line: "*Get out of Latin America, Yankees, French, English and Dutch! I want you free, Palestine*" (my emphasis):

Excerpt 8. Fragment of the song *Somos Sur* [*We're the South*]

Come on,

All the silenced (ones), all the subjected (ones), all the invisible (ones)

Nigeria, Bolivia, Chile, Guatemala, Puerto Rico and Tunisia

Algeria, Venezuela, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Mozambique, and Costa Rica

Cameroon, Congo, Somalia, Mexico, Dominican Republic, Tanzania

Get out of Latin American, Yankees, French, English and Dutch

I want you free, Palestine

All the silenced (ones), all the subjected (ones), all the invisible (ones)

Pillage, trampling, colonization, a thousand times over

From the sky to the ground and from the ground to the sky we go, za za za (15-24; my emphasis)

9 It stands to reason that Tijoux employs the generalizing category of 'the south' here in the same way as many Latin American scholars such as Enrique Dussel and Mignolo do, using it as "a metaphor for human suffering under global capitalism" (Dussel cited in Mignolo 63) rather than as a reference to a geographic location

From this explicit recognition of the countries' similar colonial past and its continuation in the present (i.e., a position of colonial difference), the category of 'the South' is appropriated (e.g., "We are Africans, Latin Americans. *We are the South and we put our hands together!*"; my emphasis) and resignified into a positive identity capable of resisting further exploitation (e.g., "Standing up to say enough is enough. Neither Africa nor Latin America is auctioned off!") by former colonial and imperial oppressors (e.g., "We dream big, let the *empire* fall"; my emphasis). These oppressors are, moreover, explicitly fashioned as white (e.g., "I sing: '*White people*, return to your village! We are *not afraid of you*. We have life and fire, fire in our hands, fire in our eyes, we have so much life and this red force"; my emphasis).

Excerpt 9. Fragment from the song *Somos Sur* [*We're the South*]

We are Africans, Latin Americans.

We are the South and we put our hands together! (31-32; my emphasis)

Excerpt 10. Fragment from the song *Somos Sur* [*We're the South*]

This is not utopia, it is *joyful dance rebellion*

One of the leftovers from the dance that exists today

Standing up to say enough is enough

Neither Africa nor Latin America is auctioned off (9-12; my emphasis)

Excerpt 11. Fragment from the song *Somos Sur* [*We're the South*]

We dream big, let the *empire* fall! (7; my emphasis)

Excerpt 12. *Fragment from the song Somos Sur* [*We're the South*]

I sing: '*White people*, return to your village!

We are not afraid of you, *we* have life and fire

Fire in *our* hands, fire in *our* eyes,

We have so much life and this red force (25-28; my emphasis)

A Discussion

This paper examined the way in which Ana Tijoux's album *Vengo* deals with 'race', which can be seen as an instance of 'trans-coding'. Concretely, I have attempted to foreground how the rapper's songs appropriate the racialized categories of 'indio' and 'the south', and resigni-

fy them into positive identities from a position of colonial difference. First, it was shown how the racialized category of ‘indio’ —which, to date, exercises a material impact on the people who are labeled as such—is fashioned into an identity of dignity, solidarity and community. Moreover, I illustrated how the figure of the ‘indio’ is cast into a model for overcoming not only the racial hierarchies (white > indio) riddling Chilean society, but for conquering other kinds of inherited rankings as well (e.g., humans > nature). Second, I illustrated how the label of ‘the south’ —whose members are presented as suffering similar forms of (capitalist) exploitation by former (white) imperial powers— is fashioned into a powerful alliance across national differences capable of resistance.

Even though this way of dealing with ‘race’ does not undermine the constructed racial binaries of indio/white and north/south themselves, I argue that this is not necessarily desirable. Indeed, in the context of Ana’s political program to rid the world of hierarchies originating from imposed Western systems of thought, the strength of her approach resides precisely in the fact that she departs from a position of colonial difference. Rather than simply wishing away the continued presence and nefarious impact of the constructed categories of ‘indio’ and ‘the south’ by imagining a utopian alternative, she owes up to their present reality and builds her solution on this.

By trans-coding these categories from a position of colonial difference, I maintain, Tijoux casts them into productive political subject positions from which to level received racial hierarchies rooted in colonialism and reinforced by neoliberalism. They offer the people who are classified as such a blueprint to mobilize themselves and enact alternative ways of being; to come up for their rights; and to resist the inequalities that are perpetuated and naturalized by a system of organization which ranks them as inferior.

In the light of its attempt to transform the hierarchical relationships that mar Chile and the world at large, *Vengo* can be said to have anticipated, in a musical format, the social demands —particularly those related to race and its intersection with other social differentiators including class, gender and anthropocentrism— which would emerge years later in the country’s *estallido social*. Similarly to the social outburst’s concern with achieving profound structural changes, *Vengo*

embodies a call to arms: to wake up, to stop taking these inherited pedagogies for granted, and to imagine a more just, equal, and dignified future for everyone.

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