

Rebecca Fuchs (University of Mannheim)

Decolonizing the Plantation Machine as the Curse of Coloniality in Caribbean Theory and Fiction

Abstract:

Starting with the machine concept by Deleuze and Guattari, the Cuban critic Antonio Benítez-Rojo develops a Caribbean machine concept that he calls the 'plantation machine.' It designates the diverse plantation economies across the Caribbean that have strongly influenced its different societies. Manifesting itself in the plantation machine, coloniality is not a matter of the past but still influences the present in the Caribbean and beyond. Based on Aníbal Quijano's concept of *colonialidad* and Walter D. Mignolo's border thinking, this paper links these theoretical conceptions with Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and examines its strategies to decolonize this oppressive machine's manifestation in the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in the Dominican Republic.

Keywords: plantation, decolonization, Caribbean, Deleuze, Benítez-Rojo, Quijano,

Caribbean fiction is written in the border space between European, American, African, and Asian knowledges, which have creolized into a Caribbean epistemology. One of the common elements of works of Caribbean literature is 'coloniality,' a metaphor for that which is the plantation machine. First of all, it is essential to distinguish colonialism as a historical period from coloniality, an ideology of colonialism. Aníbal Quijano's concept of 'coloniality' emphasizes that, "in spite of the fact that political colonialism has been eliminated, the relationship between the European - also called 'Western' - culture, and the others, continues to be one of colonial domination" (Quijano 169). Coloniality, above all, keeps up Western domination in the field of knowledge and epistemology "as a very efficient means of social and cultural control, when the immediate repression ceased to be constant and systematic" (Quijano 169). Therefore, coloniality expresses European and US-American cultural and epistemic universalism and Eurocentrism as the norm that has been abused to repress other modes of knowledge and is prevalent as racism until the present day.

This paper looks at the plantation machine, a concept by the Cuban critic Antonio Benítez-Rojo that he has based on Deleuze and Guattari's machine concept, as a manifestation of coloniality that is still dominant in Caribbean history, theory, and literature. Firstly, it is necessary to acknowledge and unmask the plantation machine's presence. Secondly, this paper shows how it can be resisted in both Caribbean theory and literature. By using Antonio Benítez-Rojo's critical work *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (1992; Spanish original, *La isla que se repite*, 1989), and Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar*

Wao (2007), this paper demonstrates that Caribbean theory and literature complement each other by challenging and resisting Western notions, as in this case Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's machine concept, and appropriate it for the Caribbean by means of creolization. The Caribbean thus introduces a decolonial perspective that neither denies Western theory nor mimics it, but creolizes it into a Caribbean epistemology. Thereby it resists a dominant Western position of universality and reduces it to one local perspective among many others, while raising its own voice. After explaining the French poststructuralists' machine concept, this paper will show how it has been appropriated by Benítez-Rojo for the Caribbean. Finally, the shortcomings of this theoretical approach will be complemented by the curse and countercurse of coloniality in Junot Díaz's novel, which results in decolonizing the plantation machine.

1. (De)Colonizing Deleuze and Guattari's Machine

In the work of the French poststructuralists Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, everything is part of a machine of flows and interruptions (cf. Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus* 6). Processes connect Man and Nature, subject and object, and erase any strict separations between opposites. Rather, everything is linked in production processes, in which production and producer are one (cf. Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus* 2-5). They also include literature into these machinic assemblages since “[a] book itself is a little machine [...]” (Deleuze, *Thousand* 4) that is coupled, for instance, to a war machine, a love machine, or a revolutionary machine. Thus, literature cannot be considered as ‘art for art’s sake,’ “[b]ut when one writes, the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work” (Deleuze, *Thousand* 4). The same is true for historical ages or periods that cannot be regarded separately as one following the other in an evolutionary, linear way. Rather, “[t]hey are assemblages enveloping different Machines, or different relations to the Machine. In a sense, everything we attribute to an age was already present in the preceding age” (Deleuze, *Thousand* 346). History as becoming “is like the machine: present in a different way in every assemblage, passing from one to the other, opening one onto the other, outside any fixed order or determined sequence” (Deleuze, *Thousand* 347).

In their *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), Deleuze and Guattari argue against the universality of Freud’s Oedipus complex that has become repressive of what they call the desiring machine. Freud elevated his model to a norm that applies to all individuals, regardless of culture. The French poststructuralists, however, reduce its applicability to capitalist societies, in which “[p]sychoanalysis as a therapeutic institution therefore operates, in this account, as a policing agent for capitalism” (Young, “Colonialism” 81). Furthermore, Deleuze’s and Guattari’s desiring machine emphasizes that desire is not subjective but rather separate from the individual, intersubjective, and social, thereby refuting Freud’s opposition between the psychic and the social, materialism and consciousness (cf. Young, “Colonial Desire” 168; cf. Young, “Colonialism” 81). In Deleuze and Guattari’s view, the individual production of desire and the social production are inseparably linked, coupled machines that cannot be reduced to a single source. Rather “desiring-production is pure multiplicity, that is to say, an affirmation that is irreducible to any sort of unity” (Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus* 45).

Robert J. C. Young extends Deleuze’s and Guattari’s theory of capitalism to the discourse of colonialism and coloniality, which he describes, referring to David Trotter, as a text or a signifying system without an author (cf. Young, “Colonialism” 80; cf. Young, “Colonial Desire” 166). Since, as

a discourse, it cannot be reduced to a single source, he concludes that “[c]olonialism [...] becomes a kind of machine” (“Colonial Desire” 166). As a social process, colonialism and coloniality are closely entangled with the economic, political, and historical machines. The colonial machine[1] especially extends into the field of writing as the production of knowledge and thus becomes a violent writing machine, which first erases the indigenous discourse and then writes its own upon the colonized (cf. Young, “Colonial Desire” 170). As a consequence, it is important to emphasize the entanglement of the colonial machine and the capitalist machine with the writing machine as the production of knowledge (cf. Young, “Colonial Desire” 170). Connecting all of them, the machine constitutes a theoretical paradigm for analyzing coloniality not as separate histories of colonizers and colonized, but rather as the complex entanglement of territories and bodies, materialism and consciousness (cf. Young, “Colonialism” 86), which strongly influences the production of knowledge as well as its acknowledgment.

The notion of coloniality as a machine of the Eurocentric production of knowledge is the argument of the modernity/coloniality/decoloniality research project. One of its leading members, the Argentinian critic Walter D. Mignolo, argues that the West during the modern age, from about 1500 to the current stage of globalization that he calls “colonial modernities” (Mignolo 13), has built a frame and a universal conception of knowledge that subalternized other forms of knowledge (cf. Mignolo 13). Thus, a decolonial machine becomes necessary to transform this process of subalternization of knowledge by turning former objects of study (for instance, ethnological, Third World cultural knowledges) into new loci of enunciation, into subjects with the aim of generating “an energy and a machinery to transform differences into values” (Mignolo 13). Therefore, the Caribbean becomes a locus of enunciation that produces theory and literature as a decolonial machine. Mignolo calls this perspective ‘border thinking,’ which “erase[s] the distinction between the knower and the known, between a ‘hybrid’ object (the borderland as the known) and a ‘pure’ disciplinary or interdisciplinary subject (the knower), uncontaminated by the border matter he or she describes” (Mignolo 18). A border thinker knows both Western and his respective non-Western cultures and knowledges, which enables her to make use of both traditions instead of silencing or marginalizing non-Western knowledges, as well as to criticize both as a double critique. Therefore, Caribbean theory and literature as border thinking constitute a decolonial machine that exposes and resists the plantation machine.

Historically, the colonial machine produces and is produced by the slavery machine (cf. Deleuze, *Thousand* 457-58).[2] This idea constitutes the basis of a Caribbean concept, the ‘plantation machine,’ for “colonialism operated through a forced symbiosis between territorialization as, quite literally, plantation, and the demands for labour which involved the commodification of bodies and their exchange through international trade” (Young, “Colonialism” 85). As Young criticizes, Deleuze

and Guattari's machine simplifies "the complexities of the way in which cultures interact, degenerate and develop over time in relation to each other" (Young, "Colonialism" 85). Additionally to simplifying complexities, Deleuze's and Guattari's model criticizes modernity from within. Since Eurocentrism has worked as "a powerful machine for subalternizing knowledge [...], and the setting up of a planetary epistemological standard" (Mignolo 59), a perspective from outside of modernity can help to gain a broader perspective. A Caribbean perspective in both theory and literature provides a critique of Eurocentrism from outside of modernity. The Cuban critic Antonio Benítez-Rojo's conception of the plantation machine and its manifestations in the Dominican American Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* offer a way of understanding the plantation machine from within by interpreting and modifying Deleuze and Guattari's machine concept in the Caribbean context.

2. Caribbean Theorizing: Benítez-Rojo's Plantation Machine

In his study *The Repeating Island*, Antonio Benítez-Rojo employs Deleuze's and Guattari's machine concept, theorizing it into a Caribbean machine (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 6). He depicts the concept as the "machine of machines, the machine machine machine machine; which is to say that every machine is a conjunction of machines coupled together, and each one of these interrupts the flow of the previous one [...]" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 6; cf. Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus* 39). By describing the Caribbean as a machine coupled to the colonial machine, he emphasizes the complexity of its historical emergence, the multiplicity of factors that have come together and produced it. Through the conjunction of the mining machine, above all in South America, the fleet machine (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 8), and the plantation machine, colonialism became the "Grandest Machine on Earth" (Benítez-Rojo 6), a machine that produced European wealth and power, since

it is possible to defend successfully the hypothesis that without deliveries from the Caribbean womb Western capital accumulation would not have been sufficient to effect a move, within a little more than two centuries, from the so-called Mercantilist Revolution to the Industrial Revolution. In fact, the history of the Caribbean is one of the main strands in the history of capitalism, and vice versa (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 5).

The capitalist machine is coupled to the colonial machine, which is again coupled to the Caribbean machine, "[a] machine of the same model [...], with an extra bolt here and a bellows over there, [which, RF] was installed in Puerto Rico, in Jamaica, in Cuba, and in a few miserable settlements on terra firma" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 6). Thus, all machines coupled to the Caribbean machine

are, in Deleuze's and Guattari's manner, seen "in terms of production (flow and interruption)" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 8). Spatially, the Caribbean machine is "coupled to the Atlantic and the Pacific" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 7) and thus to the global realm of imperialism and coloniality produced by Europeans. Colonialism, which Benítez-Rojo also designates as "Columbus's machine" (*Repeating* 6), has produced the Caribbean machine, which in turn "usually produces the Plantation, capitalized to indicate not just the presence of plantations but also the type of society that results from their use and abuse" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 9). In turn, the Plantation produced and was produced by the slavery machine and, as a product of imperialism, in turn again produced imperialism (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 9).[3] The reason for the plantation machine's resilience is the diversity of plantation models which differ from island to island and "it is precisely these differences that confer upon the Plantation its ability to survive and to keep transforming itself, whether facing the challenge of slavery's abolition, or the arrival of independence, or the adoption of a socialist mode of production" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 74). The Plantation machine has been highly adaptable to the proper local conditions. However, the regularity, the rhythm of violence is a commonality of all plantation machines in the Americas whose ruins "have affected American cultures all around" (Glissant, *Poetics* 72). Therefore, the rhythms of the plantation not only establish a link between colonial histories in the Americas, but also between their societies today and exist as what Glissant calls the "second Plantation matrix [...] after that of the slave ship" (Glissant, *Poetics* 73).

The Caribbean machine, however, goes beyond the poststructuralists' machine, since it exposes the dominance of the colonial machine, here the plantation machine, against which it produces the decolonial machine. It is "a technological-poetic machine" or "a metamachine of differences" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 18) with its own logic, its own codes, its own manual. Benítez-Rojo links the machine to his own conception of polyrhythm, influenced by chaos theory, which he defines as "rhythms cut through by other rhythms, which are cut by still other rhythms" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 18). While poststructuralism is a postindustrial discourse, "Caribbean discourse is in many respects prestructuralist and preindustrial, and to make matters worse, a contrapuntal discourse [...]" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 23), since rhythm as a Caribbean code is "something very ancient and dark" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 18), in which traditional and foreign rhythms interact. The main idea of polyrhythm is its displacement of a central rhythm by others' interactions, which results in a de-centered "state of flux" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 18). This decolonial aspect of de-centering does not permit a machine such as coloniality or imperialism to dominate other

machines. As a polyrhythmic metamachine, “[t]he Caribbean rhythm is in fact a metarhythm which can be arrived at through any system of signs, whether it be dance, music, language, text, or body language, etc.” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 18). The poetic as rhythmic interruption serves as a means of decolonizing the dominant machine of coloniality, which will be explored with a literary example below as a means of “defusing violence, the blind violence with which the Caribbean social dynamics collide, the violence organized by slavery, despotic colonialism, and the Plantation” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 23). Thus, Benítez-Rojo’s Caribbean machine transcends the machine’s negative aspect of exploitation and emphasizes its poetic productivity as its potential to decolonize the colonial machine’s universal epistemology and power in line with Brathwaite’s anticipation “that the pessimistic/plantation view [...] may very well not be the last word on Caribbean society” (4). [4]

Benítez-Rojo’s Caribbean machine becomes an alternative perspective to interpret history (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 5). He argues that the Caribbean machine “exists today, that is, it repeats itself continuously. It’s called: the plantation” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 8). As a manifestation of coloniality, it has not stopped to exist with the end of colonialism, but rather, “the plantation machine, in its essential features keeps on operating as oppressively as before” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 73). The plantation as the Caribbean machine’s main manifestation has become “a central leitmotif in Caribbean thought” (Bogues 169) and the subject of Caribbean thinkers such as Kamau Brathwaite from Barbados and Lloyd Best from Trinidad (cf. Bogues 169).[5] Just like his fellow Caribbean critics, Benítez-Rojo’s merit is his theorizing of the Caribbean from within, which explores “new knowledges at sites which are not formally and conventionally considered as knowledge repositories [...]” (Bogues 171). He thereby criticizes modernity/coloniality from an outside perspective, a non-Eurocentric position, which can add new insights to understanding the Caribbean as “an important historico-economic sea [...]” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 9) and as a locus of theoretical enunciation with global relevance.

According to Benítez-Rojo, who sees himself as “a child of the plantation” (Benítez-Rojo, “Three Words” 162), the plantation machine unified and founded the Caribbean in spite of its inherent diversity and constitutes the common origin of the Caribbean region, since without it, the parts of the Caribbean might have become simple foils of their European colonizers (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 38-39). The Caribbean’s complex syncretism that he calls ‘supersyncretism’[6] “arose out of the collision of European, African, and Asian components within the Plantation [...]” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 12). Thus, the title of his book of criticism, *The Repeating Island*, points to a repetition, a rhythm, which provides a structure of order in the chaos of the Caribbean meta-archipelago which was founded by the plantation and, thus, by coloniality (cf. Benítez-Rojo,

Repeating 2). The omnipresence of the plantation machine in Caribbean literature and theory reveals the writers' need to come to terms with the violence in their pasts in order to understand and finally improve the present situation of Caribbean peoples in their home countries and in the diaspora. As mentioned above, Deleuze and Guattari argue that machines produce and are produced at the same time. Thus, Caribbean writers who might to a certain extent be produced by the plantation machine, are empowered to produce a decolonial machine through their writing.

3. The Plantation Machine's Dominance

In his epilogue of *The Repeating Island*, Benítez-Rojo writes that “[t]he objection could be made that my work does not encompass all of the Caribbean” and justifies himself that “due to the area’s extremely complex cultural spectrum (a soup of signs), no one could really claim to be a full specialist in Caribbean culture” (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 269). In spite of the Caribbean’s complexity, he uses the plantation machine as a central, defining feature of the Caribbean. This is problematic for the plantation machine as a Western concept of coloniality is “the master’s creation, figure of power and exploitation, apparatus of discipline and violence, [that] is converted into a representation of Caribbean identity” (Muñiz Varela 108).[7] But Benítez-Rojo avoids drawing parallels between the colonial past and the post-colonial political situation in the Caribbean, or in Cuba in particular.[8] This silence more fixedly anchors the plantation machine in the past and complicates the act of knocking it off its central position. As a result, the plantation machine runs the risk of becoming itself a universal, absolute, fixed point of reference that defines the Caribbean machine, unites its differences, and becomes central in discourse about the Caribbean. In Kamau Brathwaite’s words, “[t]he plantation model [...] is in itself a product of the plantation and runs the hazard of becoming as much tool as tomb of the system that it seeks to understand and transform” (4).

This, as the critic Miriam Muñiz Varela argues, results in the closing in on itself of the discourse (cf. 106; also cf. Russ 4). She traces the concept of the plantation system back to dependency theory and anthropology in the 1950s, which formulated it as a totalizing concept, in which “the subject at least reached the rank of an interesting object of study [...]” (Muñiz Varela 106).[9] As a colonial machine, “the plantation presents itself as a ‘machine’ that determines, constructs, and neutralizes its own opposition. The ‘outside’ [...] is in the emancipated slave, in the peasant, the palenque (palisade), in racial hybridity [...]. But, these spaces of escape do not succeed in de-centering the plantation; it persists as a backdrop, a phantom, arrested in the same binary logic” (Muñiz Varela 109; also cf. Bagues 171). Thus, the plantation machine continues to objectify the people in the

Caribbean, while becoming the subject of representation of the Caribbean rather than, as a Caribbean concept, empowering the Caribbean from within. Furthermore, it is important to emphasize that the plantation is not the origin of the Caribbean. All of the peoples and cultures brought together on the Plantation have their origin in Africa, Europe, or Asia. Even if Caribbeanness is a creolized, syncretic new culture that cannot be reduced to its original elements, it does not constitute a beginning but has always been a process (cf. Sprouse 81).

Therefore, the oppressive presence of the plantation machine both in Caribbean histories, cultures, and societies as well as in the discourse about the Caribbean render it essential to find strategies of resisting this machine and challenging its negative aspects of exploitation from within. While Muñiz Varela proposes to destroy the plantation by examining the Haitian Revolution (cf. 109), this paper pursues a different strategy, namely challenging the plantation machine in literature by first acknowledging its existence and then finding means of resistance that turn Caribbean literature into a decolonial machine that gives voice to silenced subjects, a resistance “where the possibility of identity lies” (Muñiz Varela 109), a Caribbean identity that is not reduced to the plantation machine.

Thereby it becomes obvious that the plantation machine as such is not a thoroughly negative concept. Certainly, it includes the violent establishment of the colonial exploitation system and coloniality. Yet, it can also be regarded as forming relations between connected elements. Any machine connects to other machines and forms relations, not a synthesis (cf. Schwieger Hiepkö 143). In terms of his poetics of relation, Glissant asks:

How could a series of autarkies, from one end to the other of the areas involved, from Louisiana to Martinique to Réunion, be capable of kinship? If each Plantation is considered as a closed entity, what is the principle inclining them to function in a similar manner? (Glissant, *Poetics* 64).

Instead of perceiving each Plantation system as a single entity, it is more helpful to see the commonalities and connections among them and regard the Plantation as “one of the focal points for the development of present-day modes of Relation. Within this universe of domination and oppression [...] forms of humanity stubbornly persisted” (Glissant, *Poetics* 65). As it is important to face the past, this humanity and forms of resistance must be remembered and celebrated as tactics of survival. The rhythm connecting all Caribbean cultures aims at sublimating the plantation’s violence transhistorically by ritually coming to terms with it in literature (cf. Schwieger Hiepkö 165-67). As a literary example that connects the plantation during colonial times and the post-colonial, dictatorial aftermath, Junot Díaz’s novel focuses on the Dominican Republic under the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1961). The following analysis exposes the

machinery's prevalent power structure in order to relativize it as a part of the violent Caribbean history rather than as constitutive of Caribbeanness. In Caribbean fiction as a poetic decolonial machine, the power of the plantation machine is not only made visible but at the same time limited, which results in the uncoupling of the plantation machine as central Caribbean discourse and its politicization as an option of border thinking.

4. The Plantation Machine in Literature as the Curse of Colonialism

In Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the plantation machine becomes manifest in what he calls the “[f]ukú *americanus*, or more colloquially, fukú – generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World” (Díaz 1). The curse of colonialism and coloniality has haunted Dominicans in the Dominican Republic and in the US diaspora from Columbus's time to the present. The designation ‘fukú *americanus*’ hints at the fact that the curse is not only a Dominican or Caribbean phenomenon, but a problem of the Americas as well as a global one, turning the fukú into a global machine.[10] The fukú has not stopped at the Dominican border, but transcends it (cf. Díaz 4) and stands for “US and Eurocentric structures of hegemonic thought and representation that continue to dominate the globe today” (Saldívar 133). As the curse of colonialism as well as of coloniality, the fukú is also called “the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims [...]” (Díaz 1). The machine of coloniality was launched by Columbus and has been in effect “within the matrix of the fukú and the coloniality of power” (Saldívar 126). Consequently, it is a temporal and spatial machine that is fed by the coloniality of power and Eurocentrism, above all to dominate subaltern knowledges and influence decisions, since “[w]hat curses do is punish certain choices severely [...]” (Díaz qtd. in Jay 8), above all choices that contradict the coloniality of power, here the Trujillo dictatorship. [11]

In the novel, all Dominicans are designated as Trujillo's children,[12] since the dictator has been “a local version of the legacy of the New World, which all of us who live in this hemisphere carry upon our heads” (Díaz qtd. in O'Rourke n.p.). Trujillo who “treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master” (Díaz 2) is a carrier of the curse that makes him omnipresent for Dominicans in

the Dominican Republic and in the diaspora across time and space. The time of his reign

becomes a force neither temporally contained in the thirty-one years of Trujillo's rule, nor bound by the geographic limitations of the Haitian-Dominican border and the Caribbean Sea. Instead, the spectral dictator is an omnipresent malevolence that marks Dominicanos/as, even those who were born after Trujillo's assassination on continents of thousands of miles removed from the island. (Cox 108)

As Columbus's heir, Trujillo has become the curse's "high priest" (Díaz 2) and thus the one who ensures the continuation of the fukú as the colonial machine that has repeated itself with a difference across the Caribbean and Latin America and constitutes a rhythm in Caribbean fiction (also cf. Mahler 120). As a manifestation of the plantation machine, the fukú "ain't just ancient history, a ghost story from the past with no power to scare" (Díaz 2). Rather, it has been passed on in silence trans-generationally from colonial times to the era of the Dominican dictatorship from 1930 to 1961, and even to the following generations, namely to the novel's protagonist Oscar in the 1990s.

The act of theorizing the fukú allows the novel's narrator Yunior "to think of knowledge and history in terms of dominant and subaltern positions in the field of knowledge (or epistemology)" (Saldívar 127). The machine of coloniality has been used to "Admiral Colón's unleashing the hegemony of Eurocentrism as a mode of both producing and controlling the Global South's subjectivity and knowledge" (Saldívar 127), as the novel testifies. In this context, Díaz states,

the real issue in the book is not whether or not one can vanquish the fukú - but whether or not one can even see it. Acknowledge its existence at a collective level. To be a true witness to who we are as a people and to what has happened to us. That is the essential challenge for the Caribbean nations - who [...] have been annihilated by history and yet who've managed to out themselves together in an amazing way. (Díaz qtd. in Danticat, "Junot" n.p.)

The invisible fukú continues to haunt Oscar's mother Beli and her children because she never talks about it and thus perpetuates its hidden power. She "[e]mbraced the amnesia that was so common throughout the Islands, five parts denial, five parts negative hallucination. Embraced the power of the Untilled" (Díaz 258-59). By completely repressing, silencing, and trying to undo her past, Beli has started a new life in America where she "forged herself anew" (Díaz 259). But the fukú cannot be ignored since "no matter what you believe, fukú believes in you!" (Díaz 5). Díaz's novel shows that silencing the past and denying one's violent heritage does not solve the dilemma since "[t]hese are strategies that add to the legacy's power, that guarantee its perpetuation" (Díaz qtd. in O'Rourke n. p.). Thus, the fukú as the machine that controls knowledge and memory has to be un-

silenced and acknowledged first. Then, a decolonial machine can be coupled to it to de-centralize the colonial machine's dominant position in discourse.

The hidden power of the fukú becomes visible as soon as open resistance against the dictator and his system of power and control is articulated, since “[i]t was believed, even in educated circles, that anyone who plotted against Trujillo would incur a fukú most powerful, down to the seventh generation and beyond. [...] Which explains why everyone who tried to assassinate him always got done, why those dudes who finally did buck him down all died so horrifically” (Díaz 3). The insurgents are captured by the dictator's henchmen and driven to the dreaded canefields, which happens to both Beli and later to her son Oscar. Here, the plantation machine as the curse of coloniality manifests itself in a space, where during colonial times slaves were forced to work, suffered, and died. The cars in which the dictator's henchmen and his postcolonial heirs drive their victims to the canefields turn into time machines with which the victims are literally driven back to slavery times. During Beli's drive, “the urban dropped off, as precipitous as a beat, one second you were deep in the twentieth century [...] and the next you'd find yourself plunged 180 years into rolling fields of cane. The transition between these states was some real-time machine-type shit” (Díaz 146). The plantation machine becomes a time machine, synchronizing the post-colonial present with the dictatorial past and with slavery times, which becomes a recurrent rhythm in the text. Furthermore, the beatings in the canefields remind of the violence on sugar plantations. The thugs beating Beli and Oscar become overseers abusing disobedient slaves when they beat Beli “like she was a slave” (Díaz 147). Even for Oscar who grew up in the US and had never seen a canefield before, the scenery of the canefields “seemed strangely familiar [...] he had the overwhelming feeling that he'd been in this very place, a long time ago. It was worse than déjà-vu [...]” (Díaz 298). In the time machine drive to the canefields, Oscar dives into a collective memory of slavery and violence, in which the fukú becomes a painful reality in the present.[13]

The plantation machine as the curse of coloniality entangles the present and the past by creating a rhythmic pattern of violence, another result of which is Beli's scar that she received as a child. After her parents' death who were killed by the dictatorship, she was sold by her mother's family to become a ‘criada’ or ‘restavek,’ a child slave, and almost killed by her foster parents who scarred her back with hot oil (cf. Díaz 253). The scar she wears for the rest of her life is a physical reminder of her own enslavement.[14] In an interview, Díaz describes Beli's scar as a sea (qtd. in Lannan Foundation), which evokes images of the Middle Passage and the transatlantic slave trade. The scar symbolically forms a relation across time and space, a map, connecting slavery, dictatorship, and diaspora across the Americas to the present.[15] The continuing acts of violence demonstrate the enduring power of the plantation machine in the Caribbean and its diaspora. Not even Beli's escape to the United States could save her and her children from the fukú, which turns haunting

memories of slavery, violence, and death into physical reality. Still haunted by the plantation machine as a time machine, the past and the present become, at times, indistinguishable in the Caribbean, which emphasizes the urgency of coming to terms with it by acknowledging the power of the machine of coloniality.[16] However, in its manifestation as a curse, the machine's power is limited by a countercurse that de-centers the concept from its dominant position in discourse and has the potential to sublimate its violence.

5. Decolonizing Fukú: Remembering and Writing as Countercurse

After acknowledging the existence of the fukú and unsilencing its implications as the plantation machine, a decolonial machine can be coupled to it that begins with confronting and remembering the past and, as a second step, writing against the amnesia of the 'Untilles.' The countercurse to fukú in Díaz's novel is called 'zafa.' The Spanish verb 'zafar' means to loosen, to untie, to get free of something (cf. "Zafar"), in this case from the fukú and its machinery that still haunts the people in the Caribbean and its diaspora. Zafar in Urdu means victory and is the pen name of Bahadur Shah II., "the last Mughal Emperor, and the direct descendant of Genghis Khan [...]" (Dalrymple 2) (1775-1857) during the time of British colonialism in India. Zafar was not only an emperor but also a mystical poet in the Sufi tradition who was a great supporter of the arts (cf. Dalrymple 2). Even though he never was an anti-colonial hero or revolutionary leader, Zafar "remains [...] an attractive symbol of Islamic civilisation at its most tolerant and pluralistic" (Dalrymple 483). Thus, the word zafa is connected to coloniality, liberation, and writing, which turns it into the perfect countercurse against the fukú.[17]

In contrast to Beli and the narrator Yuniór, Oscar finally consciously faces the horrors of the canefields that he constantly has to endure in his dreams, in which it is not only him who is beaten up but also his mother and his sister in an endless perpetuation of violence (cf. Díaz 306; also cf. Mahler 128). In the beginning, he runs away in his dream when the violence does not stop until finally, he "forced himself to do the one thing he did not want to do, that he could not bear to do. He listened" (Díaz 307) – to the screams and this subaltern story of violence. There is no escape from his nightmares, since "you can never run away. Not ever. The only way out is in" (Díaz 209). Thus, Oscar's only option is to face his destiny, the confrontation with the fukú, which means returning to the Dominican Republic and to his lover Ybón even though he knows some thugs could kill him because she is the lover of a 'capitán.'

Oscar is not left alone by the “Ancient Powers” (Díaz 315), the power of the fukú coupled with the love machine and the decolonial machine, writing. While he chased Ybón, he researched and wrote almost three hundred pages (cf. Díaz 320). Therefore, in contrast to his mother’s suppression of the horrors of the past, Oscar risks a second drive to the canefields (cf. Díaz 320-21) for his love to Ybón, which is stronger than his fear. However, his second encounter with the plantation machine in the canefields results in his death. But Oscar becomes a true decolonial hero and tells his tormentors that “if they killed him they would probably feel nothing and their children would probably feel nothing either, not until they were old and weak [...] and then they would sense him waiting for them on the other side and over there [...] he’d be a hero, an avenger” (Díaz 321-22). The fukú thus also turns against the dictator’s men since even though Trujillo and the fukú have a sort of arrangement, “[n]o one knows whether Trujillo was the Curse’s servant or its master [...]” (Díaz 2-3). Mahler writes that Oscar’s writing is anticolonial and also mentions *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) as a “discussion of the way in which post-colonial writing attempts to wrest power and authority from the colonial culture [...]” (137). In contrast, this paper reads the novel as decolonial and Oscar as a decolonial character. The fukú as an ambiguous force cannot be stopped by an anticolonial countercurse, which is why it is necessary to move on to a more complex and productive critique by using both Western and non-Western knowledges in border thinking as a decolonial double critique. The plantation machine as a Western construction can nevertheless be displaced from its central discursive position by creolizing Caribbean and Western knowledges.

After listening to the memories, the second step against the plantation machine’s manifestation is writing about it and breaking the silences around the fukú, which was “like all the most important things on the Island, not something folks really talked about” (Díaz 2). The most efficient zafa is literature about Caribbean history from within Caribbean epistemology. Both Oscar and the narrator Yuniór are writers who try to come to terms with their heritage of violence as chroniclers of Caribbean history. In a metafictional sense, the novel that Yuniór narrates represents a counterspell against colonialism and its aftermath and above all against silencing Caribbean history. Since Oscar’s manuscript is lost (cf. Díaz 334), Yuniór writes down the story and asks himself and the reader “if this book ain’t a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell” (Díaz 7). Even if Oscar dies, his story is not lost and his niece Isis has to be protected from the fukú, which is Yuniór’s self-imposed task. He collects everything, Oscar’s writing and writes his own account, in order to give her all the knowledge he and Oscar have gained, “add her own insights and she’ll put an end to it” (Díaz 331), dreaming of a final victory, a zafa through literature and knowledge even though he also knows that the world cannot be saved, not even in a comic book (cf. Díaz 331).

Nevertheless, Caribbean literature provides a means of starting to decolonize knowledge and of de-centering the plantation machine as a concept of coloniality. The novel as “a fukú story” (Díaz 6) constitutes a zafa and thus breaks the spell of the fukú, which in this case turns against coloniality. The plantation machine thus loses its central position in Caribbean discourse. As a curse, the colonizer from outside of the Caribbean imposed it, but it can be resisted from the inside, by using memory and retelling history in Caribbean fiction as a countercurse. The act of remembering the fukú and acknowledging its power reminds of what Edouard Glissant wrote about South American and Caribbean writers who, in contrast to most European writers, have “a tortured sense of time” and are occupied with “the haunting nature of the past” (*Caribbean* 144). While Europeans write about history as a single moment, writers of the Americas and the Caribbean regard time differently, as something that continues as “a kind of future remembering” (Glissant, *Caribbean* 144). Thus, Caribbean literature constantly finds new ways of dealing with the plantation machine and the ongoing influence of coloniality, which Derek Walcott explains with the following words:

The Caribbean sensibility is not marinated in the past. It is not exhausted. It is new. But it is its complexity, not its historically explained simplicities, which is new. Its traces of melancholy are the chemical survivors of the blood which remain after the slave’s and the indentured worker’s convalescence. It will survive the malaria of nostalgia and the delirium of revenge, just as it survived its self-contempt. (Walcott 54)

Due to the Caribbean’s newness and complexity, the plantation machine is only one aspect of Caribbeanness, not its founding principle. In its ambiguity the discourse about the plantation machine can also turn against coloniality and become decolonial.

Furthermore, it is essential to stay aware of the danger of the colonial machine’s truth and authority claims, which the narrator Yunion falls prey to, when he admits openly that he does not know the full story about Beli’s father Abelard’s imprisonment (cf. Díaz 243) and thus ignites doubts about his sincerity and trustworthiness in the reader. Thus, it is the reader who has to decolonize the machine of coloniality in the end. Even if the narrator undermines his truth claims by providing evidence in his footnotes, the reader should always be suspicious of any authority since any story can become authoritarian and any writer runs the risk of becoming a dictator. In an endless act of reading, interpreting, and always critically questioning, the novel asks the reader to read anything with caution since the fukú cannot be eliminated, “[n]othing ever ends” (Díaz 331). The machine of coloniality keeps on working, which is why the decolonial machine has to continue as well.

Endnotes

[1] With 'colonial machine,' I refer to the 'machine of coloniality.'

[2] Deleuze and Guattari distinguish machinic enslavement from social subjection. Slavery is a machine that consists of bodies and turns them into *parts of* the machine, while social subjection just subjects human beings *to* the machine. Both machines, however, symbolize the triumph of the modern state and capitalism (cf. *Thousand* 457).

[3] For a closer interpretation of the plantation machine as coupled to the 'sugar discourse machine,' see Schwieger Hiepko (142-44).

[4] In her interpretation of Benítez-Rojo's machine concept, Andrea Schwieger Hiepko only focuses on the technological aspect of his Caribbean machine, but does not extend it into the poetic realm as a polyrhythmic space, see below. Even though she argues that his machine transcends the negative aspects of the exploitation machine of colonialism, by valuing the high productivity of the Plantation Machine, which paradoxically constitutes the basis of the globality of Caribbean culture in the present (cf. Schwieger Hiepko 131), she does not further explain this productivity. This, in my opinion, constitutes the main point of Benítez-Rojo's machine conception.

[5] Brathwaite's concept of the 'inner plantation' (1975) emphasizes the necessity of further dealing with the plantation concept in cultural life and expression, above all the creative arts (cf. 9). He bemoans the dominance of the outer plantation, "the concern with our constitutional and economic relationship with the metropolises, and our reaction for/against the norms and styles of the (former masters)" (Brathwaite 6). For an overview of Best's models of plantation economy, see Best.

[6] An example of supersyncretism is the cult of the Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 12-16).

[7] Furthermore, as Efraín Barradas notes, the plantation "can also be found in areas outside of the geographic Caribbean" (85).

[8] Elizabeth Russ writes that aside from comparing Cuba to other Caribbean states as products of the plantation, he almost completely avoids political commentary, and "[a]s a Cuban living in exile since 1980, Benítez Rojo's opinion of Castro's regime is encapsulated in the phrase, 'unfree' [...]. Yet, even though *The Repeating Island* consistently privileges Cuban cultural production, it touches only briefly on the theme of post-1959 Cuba [...] and never refers to Castro by name" (98). The second silence in Benítez-Rojo's work is the almost complete absence of the United States from his work (cf. Russ 98-99), thus ignoring the plantation machine's neo-colonial manifestation.

[9] Benítez-Rojo borrows the concept of "the Plantation" from the American anthropologist Sidney W. Mintz who employs the Plantation as a source of modernization and occidentalization (cf. Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating* 38; cf. Muñiz Varela 106, 108).

[10] In a footnote, the narrator Yunior explicitly mentions the US occupation of the Dominican Republic in 1916 as a potential origin of the curse (cf. Díaz 211), extending coloniality from Spanish colonization to US imperialism as different manifestations of the fukú (cf. Mahler 121).

[11] Trujillo's takeover was supported by the US (cf. Suter 23).

[12] About Dominicans, Lola says: "Ten million Trujillos is all we are" (Díaz 323).

[13] Silvio Torres-Saillant writes that "[b]lack and mulattoes make up nearly 90% of the contemporary Dominican population. Yet no other country in the hemisphere exhibits greater indeterminacy regarding the population's sense of racial identity. [...] Dominicans have for the most part denied their blackness" (1086), which is why a direct link between Dominicans and their slavery past is often ignored in public discourse.

[14] Beli's scar on her back reminds of Sethe's scar in Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* (1987). Anne Garland Mahler also associates the scar with the fukú since "it remains a constant reminder of the suffering she endured and of the unleashing of the curse [...]" (126).

[15] In Edwidge Danticat's novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998), the protagonist Amabelle describes her body as "a map of scars and bruises" (227).

[16] This idea of history reminds of Deleuze's time concept in film studies (cf. Rodowick's *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*, 1997), since "[t]he direct presentation of time is fundamentally paradoxical. Because time passes, and cannot do otherwise, the present will coexist with the past that it will be, and the past will be indiscernible from the present it has been" (Rodowick 82). Even though this time concept would be very interesting in the context of this article, since, as will be explained below, the plantation machine also coexists in the past and in the present, this paper cannot deeply look into Deleuze's filmic conception of time. This topic could be the focus of a future paper.

[17] In my research, I could not find an etymological meaning of the word 'fukú,' even though some critics maintain it derives from 'fuck you' (cf. Mahler 123; cf. Flores-Rodríguez 103) because Oscar, says "Fukú. He rolled the word experimentally in his mouth. *Fuck you*" (Díaz 304; emphasis orig.). But in an interview, Díaz says that fukú does not mean 'fuck you,' but is a real Dominican word meaning bad luck.

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