

# An Ecosophical Reading of “Las palmeras detrás”

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*We are not outside the ecology for which we plan –  
we are always and inevitably a part of it.*

Gregory Bateson

Given that the colonization of Latin America is marked by the ongoing depletion of natural resources that continues with contemporary global corporate colonization, which Eduardo Galeano refers to as the “bleeding veins of Latin America” (1978), Latin American ecological writing and ecocritical readings tend to intersect with postcolonial concepts that interlace social and ecological matters. Attuned with Latin America’s claim for social and ecological justice, in May 2015 Pope Francis proposed an “integral ecology,” suggesting that nature cannot be regarded as something separate from humans nor as a mere setting, but that we are part of it, included and in constant interaction with it (139)<sup>1</sup>. Nonetheless, a quarter of a century prior to Pope Francis’s recommendation, French philosopher and semiologist Felix Guattari claimed that traditional arguments that try to solve environmental problems fail to do so for the reason that the concept of environment is limited solely to the physical sphere. Reflecting on the ecological crisis, Guattari argues that humans have been unable to overcome this predicament because political and executive institutions have been unable to look at the physical, social and individuals’ impairment from an inclusive perspective. Therefore, he proposes an ethic and political integration that articulates these three axes. In this perspective, the environment is formed by three axes: the subject or individual (also referred to as the psychological axis), the social environment, and the natural environment. This scheme he called “ecosophy” or “the three ecologies” (1989).

Preceding Guattari’s scheme, and spinning further away from his fairly anthropocentric vision, in 1972, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess defined ecosophy as a philosophy of ecological harmony and equilibrium. Guattari’s somewhat less ecocentric proposal, as compared to Naess’s, is altogether consistent with the arguments offered by Gregory Bateson in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*

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<sup>1</sup> For further reference see the encyclical letter *Laudato Si’* (2015) by Pope Francis I.

(1972), referring to the existence of three subsystems within the ecosystem: that of the individual (“mind”), the ecosocial system, and the ecosystems commonly and ecologically referred to as such. In that sense, in an effort to avoid misinterpretations, Guattari fosters the terms “ecosophy” or “the three ecologies,” instead of “the ecology”, as Bateson calls it, regarding his terms broader and more inclusive than the conventional natural science outlook on ecology.

When contextualizing the need for an ecosophy, Guattari asserts that the loss of a metanarrative to identify with, contributes to individuals’ tendency to seek a sense of belonging by means of mass communication, which renders humans vulnerable to mass media’s influence in an ongoing spiral. Guattari blames postmodernism for human alienation and sense of orphanhood due to the loss of a unifying metanarrative with which individuals may identify. Nonetheless, Guattari’s proposal towards integration resonates with Jean Francois Lyotard’s idea of an emancipation fostered by changing the rules of the game step by step, that is, making one move or change at a time towards integration.<sup>2</sup> In this sense, Guattari proposes a change starting at the intimate sphere.

It is notable that writing during the Cold War, Guattari highlights the need to leave aside “old” dichotomies through which conflicts are looked upon and meant to be solved. Guattari denounces the futility of boxing options into two contraries—black-white, left-right, north-south, and progress-underdevelopment—thus excluding possibilities. According to Guattari, this way of understanding social and environmental problems has failed to offer a sustainable solution. For him, the relief obviously lies in articulating the three axes mentioned above. Consequently, this study will not only refer to the relationship between humans and nature, but also to the integration of the three axes proposed by Guattari. With these concepts in mind, I will analyze the short story “Las palmeras detrás” by Ronaldo Menéndez that is included in the anthology *Se habla español - Voces latinas en USA*, called “Las palmeras detrás.”<sup>3</sup>

*Se habla español - Voces latinas en USA* is an anthology of brief texts written by Latin American authors that have had some experience or contact with the U.S. Most of the authors in the anthology have lived in the U.S. or are permanent residents. As a whole, *Se habla español - Voces latinas en USA* is a challenging text that represents a

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<sup>2</sup> For further reference see “The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge” (1979) by Jean Francois Lyotard.

<sup>3</sup> This story is a revised version of a previous story called “Mientras se agoniza,” published in the collection *Alguien se va lamiendo todo*, which was awarded the Premio David de Cuba in 1990.

political stance. In this sense, it complies with the characteristics described by Deleuze and Guattari in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, primarily because language is deterritorialized: the book is published in Spanish in a context where most people speak English and where even many Latin authors prefer to write in English. Moreover, the book itself has a challenging name, announcing: “*aquí, en USA, ¡se habla español!*” This is a proactive political act from the editors Edmundo Paz Soldán and Alberto Fuguet, which proclaims that “Latinos, we are here to stay!” In addition, it is a collective book: it includes various Latino voices that differ from each other dramatically, each one representing a given personal experience. All the same, as a collection, these separate voices reach a certain representation of what it means to be a Latino in the U.S.<sup>4</sup>

“Las palmera detrás” was written by Ronaldo Menéndez, born in Cuba in 1970.<sup>5</sup> The story narrates the journey of three Cuban rafters migrating to the coasts of the U.S., which stimulates an allegoric reading where each one of three men may represent one of the axes proposed by Guattari. “Las palmeras detrás” is a re-writing of a traditional Cuban legend about *la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* (Our Lady of Charity). The legend says that in 1612 an image of this virgin appeared before three enslaved boys who were travelling to a nearby island to fetch salt. Two of them were indigenous and the other one was of African descent. They became part of the local history known as “los tres Juanes” since the Afro-Cuban boy and one of the two indigenous boys were called Juan (though the third one was called Rodrigo). During the colonization period, the effigy of *la Virgen de la Caridad* had been originally taken to Cuba by a Spanish Army officer in 1597. At present, *la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre* is the Catholic patroness of Cuba and has been syncretized with the goddesses Orisha and Oshún as part of the Afro-Cuban Santería tradition. On September 8th Cubans celebrate her festivity.

The story begins with three men that set out to sea with no further planning than the urgency to leave. Similarly to Stephen Crane’s story “The open boat” (1897), the sea becomes their indomitable antagonist. Other than being cautious with the amount of fresh water they sip at a time, the voyagers possess no skills for survival on the open sea: they lack sailing competencies, they lack knowledge on the position

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<sup>4</sup> It would be interesting to further demonstrate that the book fulfills Deleuze and Guattari’s description of minor literature, though that is not the objective of this analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Menéndez graduated in art history and has an academic career in journalism. He was awarded the Premio David de Cuba (1990), Premio Casa de las Américas de Cuba (1997), and Premio Lengua de Trapo de Narrativa (1999). At present he lives in Madrid. For further information, see: [www.ronaldomenendez.com](http://www.ronaldomenendez.com)

of the sun or stars to guide them, and they do not seem to have any notions of self-care or sun exposure prevention habits. Overall, the story presents nature as a powerful antagonist, mightily determining the protagonists' destiny. In order to elaborate further in this ecocritical exercise, the ecosophical reading that follows explores beyond the relationship between the protagonists and nature, with questions such as: how are the three axes proposed by Guattari present in the text? Do these axes integrate, offering a solution to the voyagers' problems? What are the consequences of the integration or disarticulation of the three axes in the text?

I contend that that Guattari's three axes are totally disarticulated in the text and therefore the voyagers are doomed. In the first place, there is a metaphor of isolation, represented by the voyagers' home that alludes rather directly to the impossibility of any integration. Geographically, Cuba is an island and although there are few references to the island itself, the foregrounded image reminds the reader of the opening verse in Virgilio Piñera's poem "La isla en peso:" "La maldita circunstancia del agua por todas partes." Besides the evident geographical isolation, since mid-Cold War (1960) Cuba has suffered many difficulties to establish social and cultural exchanges or commercial trade with other nations. That is, Cuban isolation is far more than merely physical. In terms of its internal political system which restricted migration and the international restrictions blocking external commercial trade, if we think of the island as a breathing organism within an ecosystem, it is evident that the island has had limited possibilities, becoming vulnerable in the same way as any living organism that does not interact with its environment, in the long run perishes.

Second, echoing Guattari's judgment that the current environmental crisis cannot be solved based on "old" dichotomies, the voyagers' solution to their hopeless situation is either Cuba or the U.S., implying the mutually exclusive systems of Marxism and capitalism. At the beginning of the story, alluding to Piñera's poem, the protagonists hope for someone to save them and take them away from what they call the "damn island." In their despair, their only possibility seems to be to go "there," that is, the U.S., since they believe they could become millionaires overnight, even if they had to be beaten up: "allá [en EEUU, donde el Yoni antes pensaba que] linchaban a los negros, aunque después de lo de Los Ángeles dice que ojalá hubiera sido él: [ahora sería] millonario por dejarse dar unos palos" (28). Their comments refer to Rodney King's beating in March 1991 and the \$3.8 million dollar grant he later received from the City of Los Angeles for damages in the police attack. Just like the migrant crisis the world has been witnessing for the past months, where Syrian families struggling to reach European coasts embark on hazardous journeys in hope for

peace and safety, between 1964 and 1994 the Cuban rafters or “balseros,” mostly in disagreement with Fidel Castro’s regime, risked their lives crossing the Gulf of Mexico in pursuit of better opportunities. However, in the story Yoni’s not very promising idea of what life was like in the U.S.—where you could be beaten up—foreshadows and symbolizes the migrants’ dramatic on going journey.

Third, the voyagers in “Las palmeras detrás” set out to sea in a raft made of three tires, that is, three separate compartments. In other words, the voyagers navigate together, but they are rather apart in the raft, each one isolated in an individual circular space. This image seamlessly invites us to analyze the short story under Felix Guattari’s proposal of the three ecologies. Moreover, together with the symbolism of the island and the separate compartments on the rafts, the narrative structure of the story reflects isolation and closure with regards to one and other, which reinforces the idea of disintegration. Despite the fact that the text is written in first person, the narrative is tripartite, polyphonic. Every other paragraph, the narration changes from one character to another, each character reporting on his own insulated experience of the journey. The reader knows who speaks because of the inclusion of square brackets, as if it were a play or film script. By means of these brief intertwined fragments, each individual reports on the voyage from his personal point of view. In other words, we are actually dealing with three stories running parallel, in which each character on board is keeping his personal experience to himself. The disarticulation of the three spheres that Guattari denounces is represented in the miscommunication that the three men experience.

Beginning with the title of the text, and consistent with Guattari’s idea of ineffective dichotomies as a solution, a hopeless adventure is anticipated as the action drives in one direction while the eyes of the travelers seem to look back at what they are deserting. The title focuses on what has been abandoned: the palm trees as a symbol of the Cuban coast; in other words, all that is well known and familiar is left behind. The impossibility of the journey and the dichotomy of the options suggest that everything that is known to them and everything that is to come is equally threatening given the vulnerability of the subjects.

Following Guattari, the first axis is that of the individual. A subject’s individual ineptness, however, may be understood as a symptom or consequence of the system of social control in which they live, which castrates individuals as Guattari’s second axis suggests. Moreover, their lack of understanding of nature, which is presented as untamed and unpredictable, though they totally depend on it to fulfill their journey, represents the third axis proposed by Guattari. The paradox that comes forward is

## Polifonía

that in the story Guattari's three axes merge, acting seamlessly as a deterrent to self-fulfillment. At the intimate level, the individuals are vulnerable and unprepared for the journey and they lack communication skills, outdoor survival and sailing skills, yet their personal disadvantaged situation and helplessness appear to have been fostered by the system they are trying to escape. That is, the social sphere evidently impacts the personal level. Likewise, the voyagers esteem the ocean solely as a means to transport them to the "promised land," disregarding the treacherous nature of an open sea venture. When analyzing the failure of their endeavor, following Guattari's argument, the indispensable interconnectedness of the three spheres manifests itself. Though Guattari's concludes that the problem lies in disarticulating the axes, or rather overlooking the need to articulate them, it is evident that the three spheres affect one another. In the story, the social axis castrates the individuals and they, in turn, reduced their perception of nature to a surface to navigate on, a mere commodity.

From another angle, each one of the three voyagers, el Yoni, el Indio and Juan, may be regarded as a separate representative of one of the three complementary axes proposed by Guattari. As we have seen, given the three independent narrative voices as well as their overall lack of communication, the men are engaged in the same journey but remain isolated in their own compartments on the raft. The text opens with Juan's voice explaining the final details prior to the trip. Juan has planned and organized the voyage, revealing himself as the leader of the group. He seems to have some know-how, nevertheless the information he possess comes from indirect sources. This is implied in expressions such as "presillas innombrables," "hemos averiguado," "dicen," "no sé si es cierto," and "los partes meteorológicos:"

*Saldremos antes de medianoche; Yoni, el Indio y yo. Tres cámaras ensambladas con sogas, cáñamo, presillas innombrables que inventó un pescador . . . Hemos averiguado y un bote es peor embarcación; cuando se sale a alta mar las olas cambian y no tienen dirección estable . . . Las tres cámaras bien infladas es más seguro, por debajo, una red tensa para que las piernas no cuelguen, ni quede el redondel vacío pues dicen que los tiburones meten la cabeza; no sé si es cierto pero preferimos no tentarlos. Los partes meteorológicos son favorables y se ha mantenido el secreto.*

*Ahora camino para casa de Yoni a hacer el censo de los bártulos. Está solo, su familia trabaja: toda preocupación es poca. (27)*

In the above quote we can see that there is extreme caution to avoid capture: they will escape at night, sheltered by darkness, and not even their families are acquainted with their plans. From this quote we may assume that Juan represents the social axis. He enunciates himself as a group member (“[nosotros] saldremos”) and not as an individual. With the scarce resources at his disposal, Juan organizes the voyage and supervises the last arrangements. Further in the text, it is revealed that Juan makes the decisions on what role each one plays, and at the same time the other two men rely on him, asking for his opinion and hoping that he will assume the responsibility.

Openly alluding to the “three Juanes legend”, the actual names of the story’s protagonists are highly symbolic, prompting a postcolonial interpretation. In this particular short story, Juan is a given name that has roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition inherited from the Spaniards, which underscores the idea that Juan represents Western rationality. In other words, he is the one chosen by his peers to guide them and make decisions because among them, he “appears” to be the most “civilized” one.

The second character to emerge is Yoni, who I will argue may represent the individual according to Guattari’s logic. The following quote reveals that Yoni is pure sensitivity and emotion: like a child before Christmas, the evening previous to their journey he can hardly wait and his anxiety is driving him mad.

*Por ahí viene Juan, tremendo tipo; solo a unas horas y anda con su paciencia de piedra . . . . Sonámbulo estoy yo que anoche me tomé dos diazepanes para calmarme, sólo así cerré los ojos. Estoy loco por verme remando, perdiéndome de la costa hasta el más allá, partiendo el horizonte y resistiendo la marea. Quisiera que llegara la noche, sombras invisibles, vamos a burlar la vigilancia.*  
(27)

Expressing himself in contrast with Juan, Yoni perceives Juan as calm while he was absolutely restless. He evidently admires Juan and relies on him blindly. However, in Juan’s next passage we discover that the two characters’ perception of each other is not equivalent. For Juan, Yoni is the motor and brute force in the team: “El gran Yoni. Casi no cabe en su balsa que será la primera. Él con su fuerza irá marcando el ritmo y dándonos el mayor impulso” (27). Yoni is valued as the team’s working capital, which reminds the reader of the deep histories of slavery and racism in the Americas and the Caribbean. The text has revealed that Yoni has a dark complexion—he used to think that in the States negros were beaten up (“allá

linchaban a los negros”)—and therefore used to fear venturing there. Later, in a moment of despair, Yoni seeks help from syncretic indigenous-Christian-African goddesses, reinforcing his mixed blood and multicultural heritage.

It is thought-provoking to note that the name Yoni is a hybrid Spanglish name, the Spanish version of Johnny, John, or Juan. Just like the original myth about *la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, in this story there are two Johns, but one seems to be a mimicry of the other. His name doesn't even have a proper root and it is only the parody of another name. As an alienated subject, he defines himself in contrast to another, Juan. In other words, Yoni represents the estranged individual in a society that produces dependent personalities, and as a subordinate individual it is difficult for him to express himself assertively.

The third traveler is introduced by Juan. The first thing he says is: “Es una suerte que el Indio viva a menos de cien metros de la costa” (28). In this essay I propose that “el Indio,” who lives close to the shore, corresponds to the natural world. El Indio is represented in opposition to rationality: he possesses intuitive but also chaotic understandings of the world, he improvises without measuring consequences, and he tends to go backwards. On the other hand, el Indio is the one who looks after his companions, offering himself as a shelter for others. But he is also injured at the very beginning of the journey. When el Indio introduces himself, he expresses himself in motion, through a fragmented and chaotic stream of consciousness and he is the only one of these three Juanes that is somewhat aware of the signs of nature, he knows, for example, that the moon won't shine on them all night.

*Nos apuramos y tiramos la balsa. Aquí vamos. El Yoni a la cabeza. «¡Rema, socio!» Aquí vamos. La luna está ahí que brilla pero se va a esconder. «¡Rápido, Yoni!» Eso es, yo también. Dice Juanci que con calma, no estamos coordinando bien, en la cautela está la velocidad . . . «¡Para!» . . . Ahora me doy cuenta: «Olvidé la mochila allí».*

*Con el apuro figúrense ustedes, con el apuro y con el nerviosismo. No es fácil. Un momento. (28)*

When el Indio jumps off the raft to go for his backpack, he injures his leg and from then on, as it slowly becomes gangrened, he feels as if his leg belonged to someone else. Because he has been unrooted from his native land, the bodily pain will become a symptom of his alienation which foreshadows the outcome in an almost

masochistic countdown. If el Indio represents the natural axis, then, his injured leg serves as a metaphor for the wounds inflicted upon nature such as pollution and depletions—Galeano’s bleeding veins—in the race towards “development” and economic growth.

Contributing to the argument that el Indio represents the natural sphere, even though he is evidently impaired, he is the only one of the three men who doesn’t get seasick, as he seems familiar with the natural nonstop movement of the raft. Moreover, alluding the image of the “giving mother Earth”, despite his accident, he is still able to look after his companions, holding Juan’s head in his hands while he vomits, recalling how his grandmother used to do the same for him when he was a child. El Indio often recalls his grandmother and her herb teas, as if he were trying to reach for his indigenous and natural heritage in the same way that he jumped overboard to retrieve his bag in order to take a keepsake from Cuba with him. El Indio is native from the island, and in his reminiscence for his grandmother, he suggests a need for remembrance in order to make his roots present. El Indio, in his bodily restlessness, untamed stream of consciousness, and observation of nature, may be regarded as the representative of the natural sphere described by Guattari. As well, together with the analogy I am proposing, el Indio’s caring attitude and his name, solely “el Indio”, foreground the problematic metaphor of the ecological Indian (Garrard 2004). Furthermore, taking into account that at present, official data estimates that Cuban aboriginal population is less than 1%, in this story el Indio represents an ethnic group that is either ignored by the official discourse or is actually extinct. Either way, the incapacity of the other two Juanes to name el Indio with a proper name, echoes the official dismissal. Likewise, el Indio’s own attitude to hold on to ancient traditions proves futile in a context where he is only a nostalgic echo of the peoples he represents.

The disarticulation of the three spheres that Guattari denounces is represented in the miscommunication that the three men experience. Considering el Indio as representative of the natural sphere, the inability of the other two men, Juan and Yoni, to actually see, name and value el Indio and his origin, marks the impossibility to overcome the ecological crisis given its invisibility. El Indio even lacks a proper name; he is simply named after the incorrect gentile term, Indian. Assuming that el Indio represents the third axis, the natural sphere, we may confirm that from the perspective of the other two axes, embodied in Juan (the social axis), and Yoni (the individual), nature is neglected, just as in this story el Indio is the Indian with no name.

At dawn Juan discovers that there are some things that he had not taken into account. Without the artificial glow of the city lights behind them, he loses his sense of direction and has no idea how far they have gone or what direction they are taking. He does not know how to interpret the movement of the sun above the open sea. He is overwhelmed by the vastness of the sea and perceives it as an antagonist: “el mar redondo es como una sábana fija que ondula para sorprendernos: nos convierte en puntos indefensos, casi nulos, luego nos sustituye la sensación de desplazamiento por otra de impotencia, de infinitud” (29). Once more Virgilio Piñera’s poem is echoed: “Si no pensara que el agua me rodea como un cáncer / hubiera podido dormir a pierna suelta.” In Juan’s case the death sentence seems inevitable, making his longing for safe ground even more dramatic. His use of the word “infinitud” implies his desperate outlook on the sea’s overwhelming vastness and the titanic journey that lies ahead. Sunlight makes other threats evident: el Indio’s leg hematoma is alarming, the company of sharks is menacing, and the sun itself is merciless. Again, the idea that as individuals they are helpless, lacking in communication and navigation skills, ignorant of basic self-care or first aid practices, is confirmed together with the fact that none of them were prepared for a voyage at sea. That is, though I claim that each one of them may symbolize one of Guattari’s axis, as individuals, they are represented as defenseless and isolated creatures who navigate on the surface of the ocean, but are never really part of the environment. The more evident their alienation comes to be, the prospect of an emancipation beginning at the individual level becomes less plausible.

As representative of the personal or intimate sphere, Yoni, who spontaneously speaks out his mind and expresses his feelings, is the first one to reveal his fear for el Indio’s injured leg and of the sharks surrounding them: “Esto no es un juego, los del acuario son más prietos y parecen limpiapeceras. Estoy asustado aunque Juanci diga que es normal, desde que uno sale a alta mar comienzan a dar vueltas” (29). It is interesting to note that Yoni is still dependent on Juan’s opinion. However, at this point, as Juan’s social power over Yoni and el Indio diminishes, Yoni perceives himself with somewhat more autonomy. For the first time Yoni doubts what Juan says and acknowledges he is frightened even though Juan says being chased by sharks at open sea should be expected. Nonetheless, as the story progresses and the travelers move on, away from their home, Juan begins to lose his authority. In spite of the alarm caused by el Indio’s injured leg, all Juan can do is give el Indio a pain killer, only concealing the symptoms but not actually healing him. If in the analogy el Indio represents nature, then the pain killers are “light green” ecofriendly acts that barely offer any relief to the current environmental crisis. However, in Guattari’s

argument, more orthodox positions that tend to drive apart appear unsuccessful as well. El Indio's accident occurred while trying to hold on to some part of his Cuban heritage, as if hoping to take some Cuban identity with him to the U.S., but his efforts prove futile. El Indio seems to be seeking an in-between alternative, beyond the Cold War dichotomy that triggers their journey. All the same, as Guattari suggests, any solution to the environmental crisis that is constructed in terms of the binary caricature of development versus preservation—that is, production and consumerism versus avoiding any environmental impact whatsoever at the expense of underdevelopment and paralysis—is doomed to fail. In this light, “Las palmeras detrás” shows that there is no conceivable solution when the possibilities are mutually exclusive.

Aware of his feelings and emotions, Yoni—the individual—is the first of the voyagers to report on his fatigue and to blame Juan—the social structure—for not talking to him anymore. “Juanci,” the friend and leader who talked him into this adventure, now shrugs his shoulders while Yoni, the individual who has been castrated by the authoritarian regime, still demands guidance from Juan. Yoni needs Juan to talk to him, to tell him what to do, but the fatigued Juan can no longer offer his support, although Yoni does not know this since there is no communication between them. Juan, the captain, and Yoni, the work force, lose strength as they are driven deeper into the wild, and their disarticulation becomes ostensible and devastating. Following Guattari, the disintegration of the three ecologies weakens each axis, threatening any possibility of overcoming the global environmental crisis.

At dusk el Indio—the natural sphere—does not perceive his own leg anymore, feeling as if it belonged to someone else. He wonders if he might be dying from the leg up, but, in the same way we deny an inconvenient truth, he quickly dismisses this hypothesis by saying to himself that it was only a bad joke. In his despair, el Indio seeks supernatural comfort. He observes his companions and realizes that the only one who is still rowing is Big Yoni, their brute force, and that he has a little medal clasped in his hand with the saints that are helping them, “los santos que nos están ayudando” (31). At this point, as the tension increases and accelerates, the narration becomes a whirlpool where voices overlap. Yoni calls for help from the syncretized Yemayá and Oshún and asks himself whether this situation is a challenge cast upon them by the gods. Composing the Cuban Santería tradition, Yemayé and Oshun were introduced in the Caribbean by African slaves. Both, Yemayé and Oshun are associated with water. While Oshun has been syncretized with *la Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre*, Yemayé is regarded as the ocean queen and protector of seamen. Though Yemayé is a protective figure, if infuriated, she can

become a destructive entity, and Yoni knows this. For Yoni, in his incapacity to take responsibility for his own decisions, his destiny is determined by external forces: Juan talked him into this journey, and now that Juan cannot help him out, he seeks assistance from the supernatural world. In his despair, el Indio regrets the adventure and wants to go back once more, now believing he shouldn't have left home at all: "allá tan seco que estaba todo, y mi abuela con sus manos calientes y una taza con algo" (32). Note that in the beginning of the story "allá" was the U.S., and now "allá" is Cuba, as if the promised land were always out of reach. Next, el Indio reports on his hallucinations. He does not perceive the sea as such, but as a green prairie where he rides on a black apocalyptic horse that someone, "Él," wants to take away from him. At this point, the word "Él" is written using upper case, though it is not clear who "Él" is: it could be Juan, or God, the sea, a shark, or a merged image of all of them. However, in Spanish, "Él" with an upper case usually stands for God, supporting the Judeo Christian authority or Western rationality that Juan embodies. In a contrasting image of comfort and healing, he dreams of his grandmother who wipes the sweat off his forehead. She, who would offer him warm cups of herbal tea, represents ancient indigenous wisdom. Just as he strained to go back for his bag, in this moment of despair, el Indio seeks relief from his cultural roots. But again, parallel to the disarticulation of the three ecologies, the disconnected voyagers cannot save the wounded natural sphere—el Indio—nor return to an ancient harmony with nature. Following, Juan reports on his hallucinations. He imagines the sun is a lamp hanging from the center of a hospital room where a servant removes litter. Strangely enough, in Juan's imagination the servant is Yoni, "Gran negro de corta imaginación" (33); the phrase is pejorative. At this point, Juan reveals that he only values Yoni as a working force. Analogous to an abusive production system that reduces workers to their function, unconsciously, Juan does not recognize other merits in Yoni. If in the moment of greatest tension el Indio seeks native wisdom, Juan shows his true nature as a social puppeteer, embodying the social axis and a system of control that leads all to a catastrophic outcome.

With these prophetic hallucinations, the three partners foretell their deaths consequently with the axis they represent. Juan, the social axis, navigates on a hospital bed in a flooded institution where a black servant sweeps litter out as in an urban, sick and hierarchical society, in which we depend on others to remove waste for us. Thus, Juan visualizes himself immersed in a social and constructed environment, surrounded by manmade artifacts. El Indio, the natural ecosystem, visualizes himself galloping on a black horse over green prairies, immersed in a natural habitat. The images are confusing and they merge with what occurs in the

raft itself: “Él,” apparently Juan, is eaten by a shark. On the other hand, Juan reports that he is getting off the bed—is he falling overboard? Then Juan announces that he sees a light that shows a female figure above them and calls out for Yoni so that he can also see her. Yoni happily responds: “«Oigan la música! ¿No oyes, Juanci? . . . ¿y tú, Indio? Ya viene llegando con su coro y sus trompetas . . . ¡Mira cómo se tranquiliza el mar y ella nos salva! ¡Ya nos está sacando de aquí . . .!»” (34).<sup>6</sup> At this point, Yoni, the castrated individual who cannot make his own decisions nor save himself, dreams that he is being saved by a goddess. Ironically, it is only at the moment of death when Juan and Yoni finally communicate; as they share the same images and the same destiny, they finally become equals. Escaping the racist and classist rationale of dystopian narratives, this story proposes that when the end of the world comes, all will be doomed. Though at the threshold of death, we are equal, the story also reveals that under pressure, our true nature is uncovered.

Neither Yoni nor his travel companions could save themselves because they are all equally alienated. In the impairment of the three axes proposed by Guattari (represented by Juan, Yoni and el Indio), the disarticulation among them and any possible solution seen as opposites that exclude each other—neither the Cuban system they come from nor the U.S. horizon they pilgrimmed to—could offer them an actual opportunity. And the sea they clumsily navigated—as the *oikos* we ineptly inhabit—could not become their travel partner since they did not know how to sail as part of the sea.

To conclude, this ecosophical reading of Menéndez’s story demonstrates one of the many possibilities of environmental literary criticism. An ecosophical reading of “Las palmeras detrás” may seem somewhat manipulated since the story easily adapts to the theory: three axes, three men, three names, three rafts, plus two polarized alternatives. Thus, this is an invitation to go on exploring how an ecosophical understanding may enlighten the reading of other texts as well. Nevertheless, we may argue that through an ecosophical lens, “Las palmeras detrás” demonstrates that the journey was bound to fail given the disintegration and lack of communication among the three characters who represent the three ecosophical axes proposed by Guattari. This adventure was also bound to fail given the fact that from the beginning there were only two mutually exclusive options, Cuba, “la isla de mierda,” or the U.S., “donde uno se puede hacer rico por dejarse linchar.” The metaphor is eloquent: we can see that the factors that interfere with the protagonists’ achievement of their goals are not only natural (the sea, the sun, the

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<sup>6</sup> Dialogue in the original text is in italics.

sharks), but also social, cultural and individual. Belonging to an authoritarian system, being subordinated and precarious individuals with limited communication skills, possessing hardly any information on the risks their adventure would entail, they relate to nature as if it were something outside, regarding it only as a means of transportation and not as a system of which they—we—are also a part.

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