

## Non-Compliance and the Outsider Within: Carla Cavina's *Extra Terrestres*

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In the 2017 film *Extra Terrestres*, directed by Puerto Rican filmmaker and poet Carla Cavina, normative non-compliance prevails to the point where gendered stereotypes are dismantled or Calibanized, as I will illustrate in this essay. A member of the Puerto Rican diaspora (Teresa, played by Marisé Alvarez) and a quiet young boy in the autistic spectrum<sup>1</sup> (Andrés, played by Mauricio Alemañy) are the film's main agents of non-compliance, though not the only ones. Teresa is the aunt who works at the Teide observatory in Tenerife, and Andrés is the nephew who is as well as an incipient scientist. Both are cultural outsiders within, and who re-signify any normative negativity attached to outsidership, thus reclaiming difference to create their own spaces of resistance. As Hilda Lloréns asserts: "colonial power and resistance to it have shaped representations of Puerto Rico and its people" (xx).

The intrinsic non-compliance of Teresa and Andrés goes further than the rejection of macho culture and patriarchal mores. Their resistance creates a space to survive the hostility embedded in a heteropatriarchal climate that cannot escape its unstable—and colonialist—foundations. Their cultural non-compliance clashes with normative gendered and familial expectations. Thus, Teresa and Andrés provide a Calibanesque disruption of the patriarchal Puerto Rican familial ontology, thus altering it through survival techniques. Considering their identity crossroads, this essay focuses on the film's agents of non-compliance, and how they enact and demonstrate alternatives to the sociocultural status quo.

The plot of *Extra Terrestres* is rooted in the preeminent crossroads between the diasporic experience and gendered expectations as experienced by the protagonist, Teresa who—as noted before—works as an astrophysicist at the Teide Observatory in the Canary Islands. While said location is significant for an astrophysicist, given the prestige of the Observatory, in a way, the Canary Islands also carry a certain outsidership in relation to Madrid, for instance. Researching space phenomena

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<sup>1</sup> The synopsis of the film mentions Asperger's Syndrome (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5005862/>). As Matthew David Goodman notes as well, the director "conceived of [Andrés] as having Asperger's Syndrome" (291). That name, however, can evoke trauma for neurodivergent individuals, which is why in this essay I choose to describe this character as being in the autistic spectrum.

directly positions Teresa looking beyond the immediate and familiar boundaries. As a Puerto Rican woman who is a scientist, a lesbian, a vegetarian, and diasporic subject, she disrupts heteronormative familial values both within and from the physical and contextual distance that being away grants her. Through these identity markers, Teresa unequivocally challenges the male-dominated and colonialist values expected and imposed on women, i.e., more traditional home-bound occupations, heteropatriarchy, consumption and domination of that which is not human, and observation of national(istic) constraints, albeit Puerto Rico's colonial status.

The transgression becomes evident in her visit to the family home in Coamo and her supportive rapport with her introverted and scientific-minded nephew, Andrés. He is constantly regarded as odd and alien by his grandfather, Arcadio Díaz (Emmanuel "Sunshine" Logroño), the family patriarch. The disruption embodied by aunt and nephew eventually entails coming out of the closet (for Teresa) and from "under the table" (for Andrés). Thus, a space for other ways of being is forged through the sociocultural non-compliance of these "extra terrestres" or outsiders within. Coincidentally, the one aspect of Teresa's professional and personal trajectory that Arcadio initially appears to connect to only is the fact that she resides in Tenerife, and he quips that many *canarios* immigrated to Puerto Rico in the nineteenth century. Perhaps that is his way to cope with the cultural disruption that Teresa embodies by making the Canary Islands seem less foreign.

To frame Teresa's disruption of culturally sanctioned heteropatriarchy, it is pertinent to consider that, as Consuelo López-Springfield maintains, "To Caribbean women, 'home' is both a site of communal wisdom and a place of sexual oppression" (xiii). This consideration must be accompanied with the reckoning of the repercussions of this tension in sociocultural matters. Therefore, when approaching cultural disruptors like Teresa and Andrés, we can appreciate how the spirit of Caliban rises to the occasion in those "striving to articulate meaning in a hostile world" (López-Springfield xii).<sup>2</sup> Caliban, here, functions as a trope that signals, Otherness, cultural margins, and that which colonialism and heteropatriarchy aims to suppress. Teresa and Andrés embody that Otherness.

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<sup>2</sup> López-Springfield discusses these "everyday 'Calibans'" in the context of her commentary about Jamaican poet, Louise "Miss Lou" Bennett, whose poetry was trivialized when it was subversive in its use of Creole (xii).

## Calibans that adapt

In the film, the need to articulate meaning, to survive, and—especially—to adapt to ever-shifting economic and sociopolitical circumstances is not exclusive to aunt and nephew. The most notable example is when the family patriarch, Arcadio, must rethink his local chicken business, recent as decisions by local authorities benefit the cheaper product shipped from the United States. His reckoning with the need to adapt contrasts Teresa and Andrés's more flexible—and not at all spineless—predisposition. As the scientists in the family, they portray the skills to adapt, and thus transform, beyond contextual hostilities. According to Matthew David Goodwin, “in *Extra Terrestres*, the United States is just a source of brute force, having the raw power to economically push around Puerto Rican businesses” (294). The global and local circumstances that contextualize the Díaz family accentuate the need for adaptability, and as we see, the upheaval in the chicken business exemplifies that, when. The cultural insistence on *home* and *family* as idyllic entities in the Puerto Rican imaginary is challenged by not just Teresa and Andrés, but also, as we will see, by the various family members who also learn to adapt and survive. The ability to adapt brings about the possibility of a transformed reality, and thus, other possible futures for familial dynamics, and which the film does deliver. Before delving into the novum—to borrow Darko Suvin's term—of that possible transformation, it is important to understand the figure of a patriarch like Arcadio to fully appreciate the disruption of the non-compliant characters.

## The weight of the nineteenth-century

When establishing the primary contrast between the figure of the patriarch and the non-compliant subjects or agents, several considerations come into play. These are: 1) the reformulation of the Caliban myth, 2) the concept of the art of survival in the Caribbean, 3) what transpires in *Extra Terrestres*, and 4) what the narrative of Cavina's film offers in contrast with the stagnant conditions for women and the young depicted in the canonical nineteenth novel *La charca* (1894), by Manuel Zeno Gandía, a foundational narrative for understanding colonialist dynamics. Non-compliance and adaptability become the blueprint toward disentanglement for now ways of being and relating. There is a significant moment in the film which turns out to be ironic and which epitomizes the contrast between the hostile patriarch and the resistor and/or outsider within. It is when Arcadio tells Teresa that she should keep concerning herself with the heavens or skies while he is in charge of what is going on earth: “Quédate mirando al cielo que yo me encargo de lo que hay aquí en la

tierra," the father utters. Thus, he refers to the microcosm that his familiar environment represents, namely: his chicken business—Pollos Mi Tierra—and his physical home. This/his land is also a site for an enactment of the heteropatriarchy that seems completely outdated if not outlandish to Teresa and Andrés, and a site that requires strategies of survival for its non-compliant characters.

Aunt and nephew are the more obvious characters who counteract the patriarchal tenor of Puerto Rican cultural values that are regarded as sacrosanct. In this sense, Teresa and Andrés survive as they embark on projects of sociocultural liberation. Those projects are steeped in the art of survival, as these are Caribbean and Puerto Rican characters who inherently know not only that "identity is never fixed, but fluid" (López-Springfield xii) but also that there are, indeed, other ways of being beyond the scripted and the expected. Thus, enter the Caliban myth with its articulations and re-articulations.

### **Calibans surviving as extras**

Perhaps the most widely known representation of the Caliban myth in Western-bound societies is William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (ca. 1610). In Latin American literature, it has been revisited by several writers and thinkers, such as Uruguayan José Enrique Rodó and his essay *Ariel* (1900). Grosso modo, Rodó's quintessential modernist work exalts the virtues of Ariel with its noble and aesthetic inclinations in Latin American culture, vis-à-vis the barbaric ways of Caliban, at the time looming with the rise of the United States as a world power. With its utilitarian approach toward material goods over lofty pursuits, the United States is feared for its grotesque adherence to capitalism, thus representing the barbaric. *Extra Terrestres* portrays that capitalistic push in its more contemporary neoliberal iteration in the case of the chicken business. In associating Caliban with the menace represented by the United States, according to Juan Flores, Rodó offers an "inversion of the myth in its original conception" (39). Generally, it is Cuban Roberto Fernández Retamar who, as Flores also remarks, is credited with "reverting the figure of Caliban to its original etymological identification with 'Canibal' and 'caribe'" (41).

Dichotomies feed off each other. For instance, the lofty is defined by the barbaric and vice versa; Eurocentric heteronormativity is defined by cultural Otherness and other ways of being beyond gendered norms. In addition, identities are subject to conceptual shifting and reframing. It could be said that Caliban is, in its many facets, a fascinating—extra-terrestrial—mode of being. The Caliban that shines in Cavina's

film is the non-compliant, the outsider within. Indeed, there are more than two of those Calibans in *Extra Terrestres*. Within heteropatriarchy, everyone learns and needs to survive on one level or another, be it by the need to conform to the norm or by the resignification of outsidership as a vantage point from which to envision and adapt to new possibilities, paving the way for a novum in which non-compliance is actually the norm.

Carmen Centeno Añeses rightfully calls the Caribbean the home of the versatile survivors who left an important legacy in the “arte de sobrevivir” (21), given the region’s history of colonialism and slavery. For Antonio Benítez Rojo, the Caribbean is a “meta-archipelago” with neither “a boundary nor a center” (4). Combining the skills embedded in the “arte de sobrevivir” within a boundary-less meta-archipelago conceptual landscape, the title of the film—*Extra Terrestres*—describes not just Teresa, but her nephew, Andrés who is a thoughtful introvert. A queer scientist concerned with the cosmos and a circumspect young boy with a remarkable intelligence need to articulate new meanings in order to survive due to the fact that they do not conform to gendered norms and expectations.

By contrast, following the script of the patriarch, Arcadio represents a “terrestrial” entity who adheres to the cultural myth of the man as the head of the household. As Luisa Hernández Angueira maintains, “Puerto Rican culture has fed this myth [...] forcefully through its mass media and educational system, both of which reproduce the male-dominant (*machista*) ideology” (106).<sup>3</sup> Proving to be a reliable embodiment of this ideology, Arcadio frowns upon Andrés’s tendency to sit under the dining table to focus on carrying out scientific experiments or to feed his pet chicken, Pulsar. Hitting the limit of his uneasiness with Andrés’s sensibility, there is a scene in which Arcadio violently picks his grandson up from under the table to sit him in a chair like everyone else and order him to behave like a man: “compórtate como un hombre.” This is followed by Arcadio telling his other daughter, Andrea, that the boy is not even behaving like an “animalito” but as “un extra terrestre.” Andrea, who has not been immune to the heteropatriarchy around her, refers to her son being “raro” and in need of treatment. In the midst of this hostile, emotionally violent, and myth-driven home environment, Andrés learns to survive “under the table,” thus creating his own safe space.

Mary Daly points out that “structures of patriarchy have been developed and sustained in accordance with an artificial polarization of human qualities into the

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<sup>3</sup> Hernández Angueira’s essay addresses the topic of Dominican migration to Puerto Rico, highlighting socioeconomic and gendered contrasts.

traditional sexual stereotypes,” adding how the aggressive “eternal masculine stereotype” is a “caricature of a human being” (2). Polarization brings us to the Caliban trope, as caricaturization reminds us that the macho archetype of the *pater familias* can be made vulnerable by the resistance of those who claim and re-signify difference as part of a broader and more compassionate cultural repertoire. Andrés’s behavior represents another way of being—male and perhaps non-binary—beyond the cultural expectations around him.

The title of Cavina’s movie conveys much more than what aunt and nephew’s cultural dissonance represents. Teresa and Andrés not only share a fascination for the sky and the cosmos, but also their love of animals. Despite their generational difference, they find common ground in the very notion of being survivors in a cultural climate that at best marginalizes them and at worst stifles them. They are the Calibans—the cultural others, the non-compliants—and the survivors within a culture that has not only been Othered but also commodified by neoliberal economic practices and familial dynamics. Puerto Rico’s colonial status permeates these practices and dynamics. Arlene Dávila considers the impact of neoliberalism and the push of pro-statehood governors (specifically, New Progressive Party governor: Luis Fortuño (2009-2013) for more of these economic practices while considering a key aspect in the case of Puerto Rico: cultural nationalism. According to Dávila: “Cultural nationalism has historically provided Puerto Rico, as a colony of the United States, a central domain of local sovereignty, a space in which to counter its continued political and economic dependency on the United States” (8). As I will note later, Teresa has a Puerto Rican flag on her desk at the Teide Observatory. Thus, the non-compliance of the “extra terrestres” in this film is one of aiming toward the novum, that is, the possibility of going beyond the limiting confines of colonialist heteropatriarchy, and the possibility of resisting the impact of neoliberalism in everyday life.

Teresa’s situation exemplifies what López-Springfield remarks about the tension between wisdom and oppression that ‘home’ often represents for Caribbean and Latin American women. In her first conference call to her girlfriend, Daniela (Prakriti Maduro), after her return to Puerto Rico, Teresa quips about the “inhospitable atmosphere”<sup>4</sup> of her family home. Thus, the Díaz family in the southern town of Coamo functions as a microcosm of a version of the Puerto Rican experience; one that has been normalized by sociocultural factors connected to the colonialist legacy that pervades the Caribbean region and beyond. The normalized

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<sup>4</sup> As the English subtitles read.

version of the family is the one anchored in the husband and father as the authoritative figure. As such, it is the one that—as is the case of the traditional Puerto Rican nation—must confront its patriarchal foundations in order to adapt to new challenges.

### **A plot of non-compliance**

Briefly, *Extra Terrestres* tells the story of Teresa and her unannounced visit to her family after being estranged for seven years while researching about pulsars and other space phenomena in Tenerife. During her stay in Coamo, she struggles to find the perfect time to tell her family about her wedding to Daniela, as the pressure to close the Pollos Mi Tierra plant intensifies due to discrepancies between laws at the local and federal levels. When Daniela shows up at the Díaz household, the coming out occurs without hesitation, even if to Arcadio's chagrin. A series of crucial events transpire within a short period of time soon afterwards. One of these events or moments is that Arcadio discovers that his other daughter, Andrea (Laura Alemán), is not interested in Princeton-educated Angel (or the *niño-bien* approved by him), but in her secret lover who is a mechanic, and thus not quite from the social class to which he would rather marry her off. In other words, Andrea chooses what in the binary and colonialist (and classist) eyes of her father is the Caliban over the Ariel. In her own way—from within the home—Andrea subverts the patriarchal order.

The other crucial moment is when both Arcadio and the audience realize that meaning of Genoveva (Arcadio's wife, played by Elba Escobar) saying she is going to the "parish house" or *casa parroquial*. While everyone thought this was a testament to her religiosity, it turns out that she is going to a bar actually called Casa Pa'Rockial to sing her heart out. This humorous take, however, does not dissuade Arcadio from calling his wife a "whore," thus confirming his proneness to dichotomies; in this case: the homely wife he thought he had, versus the "damaged," independent, and bar-attending singer that she is. When Genoveva confronts him after her musical set, Arcadio begins to face the truth that he has never had any control over anything. At any rate, Genoveva has been resisting all along, in the way she can, by having the opportunity and the space to embrace the liberating effects of singing and performing.

As owner of Pollos Mi Tierra, Arcadio must grapple with new laws concerning his business, laws with a neoliberal imprint that jeopardizes the local product. He has no control; not even over the chickens that, as all this unravels, Andrés liberates by

putting himself in harm's way in order to free the birds and try to find again Pulsar, his pet chicken. Indeed, Andrés embraces his noble spirit—or his Ariel-ness—by being a cultural Caliban in his lofty pursuit of freedom (in this case, for the chickens). Thus, he is doing away intuitively with the dichotomy in a most Calibanesque (and in turn Arielesque) fashion.

### About a “gran familia”

In some ways, *Extra Terrestres* is yet another twenty-first adaptation of Manuel Zeno Gandía's *La charca* (1894), given the prevailing gendered dynamics at play.<sup>5</sup> Cavina's film, however, presents a thoughtful alternative to the stagnant nineteenth-century environment of *La charca*. In a different context, it allows for Teresa and her nephew to embody possibilities that a Silvina and or Pequeñín would never achieve. Those possibilities surface through Teresa's natural lack of judgment toward Andrés in his caring and methodical curiosity for the world around him. Why would that make him “raro”? Only a patriarchal mindset would go that route. Her lack of judgment also emerges through her impact on her parents in helping them confront the “inhospitable atmosphere” in their own household. While Zeno Gandía's novel decries the colonialist environment—the *mundo enfermo*—of the late nineteenth century, Cavina's film approaches that environment highlighting the identity crossroads of Teresa as the protagonist, as they fit the context of twenty-first century Puerto Rico.

Certainly, the astrophysicist's voyage home elevates Teresa's trajectory. She has successfully gone beyond what would have been her other choice: the traditional parameters ensconced in the metaphor that, as Juan Gelpí points out in his discussion about canonical Puerto Rican letters, fuses Puerto Rico with the image of “una gran familia” (22). That “gran familia” is a family structure anchored in colonialist heteropatriarchy. The trajectory of going beyond<sup>6</sup> terrestrial confines also highlights Teresa as an “extra” or disruptor who, in her own words, had to leave for Spain to study and make her own life. Once again, an enactment of the art of survival and the diasporic trends, and as Jorge Duany notes in his 2002 book *The*

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<sup>5</sup> It is not as explicitly so as in the case of Gean Carlo Villegas's 2013 “novela-instalación” *Osario de vivos*, which follows the canonical novel's remark of the “tumba de vivos” to describe the deeply hierarchical colonial society of late nineteenth century Puerto Rico and its similarities with the narco-run economy of the twenty-first. See Bird-Soto, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> In his discussion of the concept of the “in-between” Bhabha refers to the “beyond” as “neither a new horizon nor a leaving behind of the past” (1-2).



*Puerto Rican Nation on the Move*, so prevalent in the Caribbean experience since at least the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

As a non-compliant character, Teresa does not reproduce ideological constructs of womanhood. She forges her own path by going and looking beyond and in the wider context of the universe. In fact, and as argued in the discipline of film, “looking and dreaming” have been generally “gendered (as male) activities” (Natarajan 79).<sup>8</sup> Almost un-gendering or, better yet, post-gendering these activities, Teresa is not merely looking and dreaming; she is observing beyond everything that is immediate to her as a Puerto Rican woman and an inhabitant of earth. On his part, Andrés’s observant nature encourages him to look and dream, and he does so beyond the gendering of these activities as well. He will not grow to embody the ways of the patriarch, certainly not in the way that his uncle Junior angles as Arcadio’s only son. Andrés is uninterested in the chicken business; he wants to free them from the trap that the plant represents. Neither Teresa nor Andrés adhere to or perpetuate the hierarchical gendered dynamics of their culture upbringing. Neither conforms to the metaphorical trap that the heteropatriarchal “gran familia” constitutes. Even if “extras” in the eyes of their relatives, they are not limited by what others project onto them.

According to Argentinean philosopher María Lugones, the colonial/modern gender system ends up “subjecting us—both women and men of color—in all domains of existence” (1). While men predominantly (at times, exclusively) hold positions of power in colonialist systems, all those within that system are confined by the straightjacket of the norms by which they must abide: the expectation for the woman to acquiesce to the man, and for the man to follow the script of the patriarch. This dichotomy is deeply entrenched in patriarchal and paternalistic environments. In these environments, men and women are both are required to comply with what Adrienne Rich denominates as compulsory heterosexuality. Therefore, conceptualizations of national values—like identities in general—require periodic reassessments in order not to be petrified and/or continue to maintain a colonialist sociocultural order, gendered dynamics included.

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<sup>7</sup> As Jorge Duany remarks: “At least since the early nineteenth century, Caribbean people have moved frequently in search of jobs and better living conditions, first within the region and later outside the region. [...] Today, most Caribbean circulators move between their home societies and metropolitan countries in North America and Western Europe...” (209).

<sup>8</sup> Nalini Natarajan’s discussion focuses on the concepts of “woman” and “nation,” and heteronormativity in the context of India and its cinematic production.

Seamus Deane, in his discussion about how “all nationalisms have a metaphysical dimension” (9), comments also on nationalism’s connection to the “interiorization of stereotypes” (12). In *Extra Terrestres*, Teresa and Andrés have a better chance at survival than a Silvina or a Pequeñín in *La charca*, precisely because of what their disruption of normative behaviors represents. Both characters are shortchanged by the colonialist imprint of the late nineteenth century, and the heteropatriarchy of the sociocultural ethos leads to young Silvina’s tragic death. In the twenty-first century, even as the weight of coloniality lingers, the characters of Cavina’s film do find options to disrupt—often from within—in the face of the new iteration of that coloniality: neoliberalism.

According to Arlene Dávila, neoliberalism is generally concerned with “state deregulation” while “coinciding with a rise of social democratic discourses” (7-8). She also highlights that the cultural politics of neoliberalism can be contradictory (20). *Extra Terrestres* tackles this socioeconomic imprint within the context of a nation—Puerto Rico—that does not have an independent jurisdiction due to its status as a U.S. territory. The metaphysical dimension—borrowing from Deane—of the Puerto Rican sense of nationhood is very present in the film and is at the centerstage of its post-colonialist novum.

Neither Teresa nor her nephew fulfill any recognizable materialization of so-called traditional and national values. Teresa does not abide by subservience. Andrés does not suppress his thoughtful sensibilities. While their disruption makes them “raros” to a more restrictive perspective in terms of the idyllic “gran familia,” theirs is a refreshing offer which makes for a transformed Puerto Rican ontology. The cultural outsiders—the cultural Calibans—are core to the Puerto Rican spectrum of identity. Cavina’s film does not resort to the reductive types/stereotypes of the Caribbean or Puerto Rican subject who is exoticized, hyper-sexualized due to the very interiorization of stereotypes as they are recycled over and over through colonialist optics. The lens of *Extra Terrestres* humanizes its characters, wherever stage they are at in their process of disentanglement from colonialist constraints.

### **Transforming through disruption**

Transforming a colonialist culture requires noncompliant characters who magnify their resistance and defiance through a lens that goes beyond the petrified values like those Arcadio embodies. Teresa’s apparently quiet yet sustained challenge of the heteropatriarchy and Andrés’s “under the table” demeanor fuel the necessary

disruption or Calibanization. The film itself frames the disruption in broader terms as it begins with the image of the neighboring galaxy of Andromeda, thus marking the wonder and importance of looking beyond the immediate or familiar. The image of Andromeda is followed by silence, and then by reaching our galaxy, the Milky Way. The sequence continues to zero in toward earth until focusing on the specific image of the Puerto Rican flag on Teresa's desk at the Teide Observatory. That image is not a coincidental item, but a significant cultural marker in the context of a subject of the diaspora. Being away to investigate the cosmos does not equal erasing identity-affinities.

About the film, Lawrence LaFountain-Stokes remarks that in the context of Puerto Rican cinema, *Extra Terrestres*, may seem to dwell on a nationalist narrative, yet, as a feminist and queer film it tries to invert and question it (104, 2018).<sup>9</sup> It is not uncommon for those living in the diaspora to display cultural markers for visibility and also as a means to resist contemporary neoliberal erasures. With the Puerto Rican flag on her desk abroad, the diasporic experience is at the forefront as do Teresa's cultural affinities. While Teresa's return allows her to experience being the cultural outsider within,<sup>10</sup> Andrés has been living that experience at home as his everyday setting. Eventually, when Arcadio finds his being a figure of authority punctured by the nonconformity of the women around him, it turns out that the patriarch has also been an outsider blinded by his pretense of control. The feminist and queer bent of the film does not go unnoticed by the audience.

Judith Butler considers the idea and act of disruption "not as a permanent contestation of social norms condemned to the paths of perpetual failure, but rather as a critical resource in the struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility" (3). Applying this to Teresa's circumstances, it is evident that she rearticulates her own cultural intelligibility at her identity crossroads. Having a Puerto Rican flag on her desk at the Teide may very well signal the *transfronterizo* context that LaFountain-Stokes theorizes about in his book *Queer Ricans* and which he describes as follows: "a reality located between the national and the international, local and global, autochthonous and foreign, insular yet simultaneously *transfronterizo*" (xiv, 2009). Even if Teresa has to imperiously

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<sup>9</sup> In LaFountain-Stokes notes: "la redundancia en cierta narrativa nacionalista [...]. Al ser una película feminista y queer, se podría argumentar que *Extra Terrestres* trata de invertir o cuestionar este paradigma" (104, 2018). While Teresa's return allows her to experience being the cultural outsider within

<sup>10</sup> Shane McCoy approaches the topic of the "outsider within" in the context of black women's fiction, explaining that it functions as a lens that "exposes the limits of singularity in gender analysis and allows for distinctive analyses of 'nation'" (57).

listen to her father's remarks about her choice of wardrobe and, therefore, his confusion between sex, gender, and sexual orientation, she nonetheless confronts lesbian invisibility.

As LaFountain-Stokes asserts: "Same-sex sexual attractions and practices [...] have existed in Puerto Rico in similar ways to those of the United States and of many Latin American societies: as an essential, [...], and abject Other or necessary marginal figure in the construction of masculinity and femininity" (xvi). While heteronormativity takes over the family members' curiosity about the "groom" or "el novio" for the impending nuptials, Teresa avails herself of the opportunity to refer to her significant other as "Dani." Leaving the gender aspect ambiguous at first—part of the art of survival—buys Teresa time to get her family to accept Daniela, who also happens to be Venezuelan like Genoveva.

While a vegetarian, Teresa decides to support her father when his chicken business faces peril. It is a significant decision because it magnifies her layered identity in its multi-faceted complexity, much like the cosmos she researches. In her reality as a *transfronteriza* subject/agent, she understands the colonialist economic practices that are stifling locally-run enterprises like Pollos Mi Tierra. In fact, this storyline in *Extra Terrestres* is connected to the reality of the chicken plant businesses at the end of the twentieth century in the area of Coamo and Salinas, and an important enactment of the global vs. local dichotomy. Locally-run brands, governed by sensible regulations that require the date on the product to assure freshness, have to contend with the cheaper product, brought in from the U.S. mainland. As Deborah Berman Santana notes, the president of the Puerto Rican company *Pollos Picú* offered the tightening of regulations that allow for "inferior grades of chicken from the United States" as a solution, as well as considering sustainable alternatives (146).

Even as she had decried the plant when she was a child as "concentration camps" for chickens, Teresa is aware of the political double-standards at play. As Amy Lind and Jessica Share explain in the context of Latin American queer experiences, "cultural struggles over self-definition among LGBT people are an important part of their broader struggles to end US and other forms of imperialism" (59). Arcadio, like in the real-life case of *Pollos Picú*, sides with consumer protections, defending the local rule that requires a date on the product. Otherwise, Tydue—wanting to sell cheaper and vanquish local competitors—would be taking advantage of federal law and nefarious neoliberal agreements done at the insular government level. This is an instance in which Arcadio's position as a type of outsider within emerges. Even as a

patriarchal figure, neoliberal economic practices weigh harshly on him. He needs to take a stand, and in doing so, not only keep his business afloat, but keep with workers employed.

The chicken plant, as an inhospitable environment for what eventually will become a product to be consumed, plays a significant role in Andrés's development as a scientist and compassionate individual. There is a tender scene when Andrés asks Teresa if he can turn into light as they lie on the ground looking at the night sky. This is not just poetic, but also meaningful for the eventual execution of his thoughtful plan. He methodically devises a machine with the purpose of finding Pulsar who gets lost inside the poultry plant, thus freeing the chickens that would otherwise be slaughtered. This is one of the main instances that unravel right after Teresa and Daniela's coming out moment. As Andrés recovers from the shock that he puts himself through, he shows no regrets; he is a subject and agent of innate non-compliance.

Interestingly, there is a Puerto Rican flag on the machine he crafted, even if the image is cut from the screen version.<sup>11</sup> Whether purposefully modeled or not after actual rocket ships sent into space by powerful countries—most notably, the United States—this detail adds another layer of significance to Andrés's quest. It is the quest of a boy completely disentangled from the machismo of his environment. He is sensible, thoughtful, and undeterred in concerning himself with both his immediate surroundings and the heavens or skies above. His Calibanism is Arielism as his Arielism is Calibanism, being both, being neither, and more importantly, being more than that, thus embodying the possibility of existing beyond colonialist heteropatriarchy.

Andrés feels a natural affinity with the universe, even if he appears to be so detached and hyper-focused on particular observations, for instance, what happens at the chicken plant every three weeks or so. From his “under the table” experiments, he magnifies his attributes of high intelligence and compassion through this grand project of liberation. If outside interests are driving his grandfather out of business, the fact remains that the source of the business are the hormone-fueled chickens, or “clones” as Arcadio himself calls them. Eventually, akin

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<sup>11</sup> I would like to thank Director Carla Cavina for kindly giving me feedback and this particular piece of information when I spoke to her about the panel discussion inspired by the conference version of this paper, titled: “*Extra Terrestres: A Look at the Puerto Ricans Beyond*” and read at the Calibanidades Caribbean Conference at Marquette University in April 2018. A version of this paper with a focus on the cultural outsiders within was read at WisCon 42 in Madison, Wisconsin, a conference that centers around feminism and science fiction.

to what was going on with the chicken farms in the south of Puerto Rico, the openness to adapt to new challenges and consider sustainable solutions beings to make way. Via a business phone call, we learn that Arcadio is open to Teresa's suggestion of switching to organic chicken farming. On one level or another, it becomes increasingly more evident that these characters are all well-versed in strategies of survival.

Aside from Teresa as the diasporic protagonist and Andrés as close heir to his aunt's non-compliance, the outsidersness of other characters in the film become evident, mainly through the non-compliance of the other two women in the Díaz household: Genoveva and Andrea. What "under the table" represents for Andrés is the Casa Pa'Rockial for Genoveva, a place where she says she goes to find solace. Andrea, on her part, subverts from within, meeting with her "unapproved" lover in her room. It is no coincidence that as Teresa arrives at the family home at the beginning of the film, she sees the mechanic escaping Andrea's room through the window. Genoveva's forays into the Casa Pa'Rockial and Andrea's encounters with her lover convey the subversion of control from within, as carried out by the women who live closest to Arcadio.

## Conclusion

*Extra Terrestres* not only makes people like Teresa and Andrés visible, but also centers alternative ways of being Puerto Rican—of being—by their non-compliance with heteropatriarchy and its impositions and expectations. Positing local and familial dynamics within a global and cosmic context underscores the space between the fragment and the whole that LaFountain-Stokes describes when talking about the *transfronterizo* mode. In the end, Teresa helps her father with the "terrestrial" matters he thought he controlled, and toward the end of the film, they are all—the Díaz family, the mechanic, and Daniela—looking up at the evening sky to witness a supernova. This moment—the beginning of the novum, if we will—proves fruitful for the aspiration that the home atmosphere ceases being inhospitable and is therefore infused with new possibilities.

In *Extra Terrestres*, non-compliants emerge from out of the closet, from under the table, from restrictive sociocultural entanglements. They adapt, under and beyond colonialist, under and beyond neoliberalism. The outsiders within are centered, thus resigning the possibilities of being "raros" or "extra terrestres."

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