

**An Inconceivable Indigeneity:  
The Historical, Cultural, and Interactional Dimensions of  
Puerto Rican Taíno Activism**

**by**

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## DEDICATION

Para Mami y Daddy  
Por el apoyo incondicional y por siempre creer en mi,  
aún cuando a mi misma se me hacía difícil.  
Por ser modelos de humanidad e integridad.  
Por ser mis padres, los quiero.  
También a Abuelito,  
Porque fuiste ejemplo  
y siempre te llevaré conmigo.

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## PREFACE

My dissertation research emerges out of a wish to understand (1) Taíno identifications on the terms of those who make such claims; and (2) why such claims can seem inconceivable to many people in Puerto Rico. As a linguistic anthropologist, I was intrigued by the several websites that indicated that many Taíno activists were involved in reconstructing the Taíno language—which made me ask: how do you (re)construct a dead language? For what purposes? In what contexts can you use it?

In the process of researching and writing, other, more specific, questions emerged related to how histories, memories, and the different sets of narratives that emerge from them intersect with social interaction, activism and self-presentation. During my two years of fieldwork among several Taíno activist groups in Puerto Rico, I encountered situations that forced me to reconsider and reformulate some of the questions I had previously asked as well as inspiring new questions: how do spiritual beliefs affect what kinds of narrations are made and how do they influence social integration and Taíno sociocultural organization? How are social identifications directly and indirectly policed? How are such acts of policing and surveilling complicated by bureaucratic structures and people's complex social alignments?

Though I expected my dissertation to explore Taíno language reconstruction efforts, once in the field, I realized that this was a project that only some activists were heavily invested in. I met people who were invested in protecting ceremonial sites, people who dedicated themselves to learning about cultural practices, others who wanted

to reframe Taíno history to school-age children, and some who largely devoted themselves to performing Taíno dance and song. Though from my perspective such differences led to a division of labor in terms of Taíno cultural emergences in the Puerto Rican public sphere, debates among Taíno groups over who was the most authentic and genuinely serving of the larger cause emerged. Such debates made navigating my research field complicated but also enriched my purview.

Prior research has mostly considered the Taíno as one group, and in doing so has homogenized Taíno activism as a singularly oriented organization. This is clearly not the case. Though I debated alluding to such contestations in writing about the Taíno, in the end I felt it was fair to show the complexity of the relationships among Taíno activists: Who tells the stories about who the Taíno are? Whose memories, recollections, and experiences are authoritative? How are these circulated and who takes them up?

I never expected my research to include debates about historical memories, but I could not tell the story of Taíno activism in Puerto Rico without explaining why it is so controversial—it is, in part, a historical controversy, one that has largely emerged from incongruous historical discourses and their interactional instantiations.



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

PPD	Partido Popular Democrático, <i>Popular Democratic Party</i>
PIP	Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño, <i>Puerto Rican Independence Party</i>
PNP	Partido Nuevo Progresista, <i>New Progressive Party</i>
ELA	Estado Libre Asociado, <i>Free Associated State Commonwealth of Puerto Rico</i>
DRNA	Departamento de Recursos Naturales y Ambientales, <i>Department of Natural and Environmental Resources</i>
ICP	Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña, <i>Puerto Rican Institute of Culture</i>
OECH	Oficina de Estatal de Conservación Histórica, <i>State Office of Historic Preservation</i>
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
GCT	General Council of Taíno
LGTK	Liga Guakía Taína-ké <i>Guakía Taína-ké League (The League of the Good Land/Earth)</i>
MIJB	Movimiento Indígena de Jíbaros-Boricuas, <i>Jíbaro-Boricua Indigenous Movement</i>
MOVIJIBO	Movimiento Jíbaro Boricua, <i>Jíbaro-Boricua Movement</i>
UCTP	United Confederation of Taíno People
TN	Taíno Nation
OLV	Oki Lamourt-Valentín

## TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

[ ]	Brackets around words or parts of word indicates overlapping talk
Wor-	A dash indicates a truncated word
=	An equal sign indicates latching
WORD	Word or part of word in all capital letters indicates loudness
((gesture))	Information between double parentheses indicates extralinguistic information
Wo::rd	Colon indicates lengthening of last sound – each colon is equivalent to about 0.1 seconds
<u>Word</u>	Underlining indicates emphasis
<b>Word</b>	Bolded words indicates the focus of transcript
{?}	A question mark between curly brackets indicates uncertain or unclear talk
.	A period indicates falling intonation contour
,	A comma indicates continuing intonation contour
?	A question mark indicates rising intonation contour
(#s)	Indicates seconds of silence

*Adapted from:*

*(Duranti: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/anthro/faculty/duranti/audvis/annotate.htm>) and (Ochs and Capps 2001)*

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the historical, institutional, and interactional dimensions of Taíno activism in Puerto Rico. Particularly, I consider how the presumed extinction of the Taíno in Puerto Rico has served to limit their claims to indigeneity as well as the role that they can play in public policy debates concerning the management of indigenous human remains and sacred sites. Drawing on two years of ethnographic research in Puerto Rico, I argue that Taíno activists address and reconfigure widespread historical narratives within everyday interactions. I propose that Taíno activists seek to reposition the histories that erase them by focusing particularly on three factors: (1) the incongruity between the life stories and documents that inform prevalent historical narratives premised on the Taíno extinction and the personal and filial trajectories that inform current claims to being Taíno, (2) the ensuing discrepant interpretations of ambiguous terms in historical documents, and (3) the repair of Taíno erasure through the active reclamation of Taíno identity in cultural and linguistic terms. I examine how these incongruities, ambiguities and repairs materialize at various levels of social action: within discursive and interactional realignments, through recruitment encounters, in the socialization of novices, in the course of creating a Taíno script, throughout the manufacture of Taíno speech forms, and in bureaucratic encounters. The dissertation shows how these social dimensions have been involved in the recent public emergence of Taíno as an increasingly visible social identification in Puerto Rico.



INTRODUCTION  
INDIGENOUS (IM)POSSIBILITIES?:  
AMBIGUITY, EMERGENCE, AND THE MATERIALIZATION OF  
TAÍNO ACTIVISM<sup>1</sup>

*Introduction*

I was at a local beach in Puerto Rico with friends in 2006, when Chaguito, a friend of my friend, asked me about my research. I told him about my research with the Taíno/Boricua groups that had been in the news recently.<sup>2</sup> After a hearty laugh, he asked me “Do you believe them?” I told him that it was not my role to decide; instead I wanted to study how they defined themselves and to understand their practices on their own terms. After looking at me confusedly for a moment, he said “But they are lying to you, and since you don’t say that you don’t believe them, all you are writing down are lies! You should go to Mexico or Peru where they have *real* Indians.” Trying to translate everything I had learned in graduate school about identity as a social construction, non-written histories at the margins, and social process and practice, all I could respond was “Well, I mean they are not crazy. They just have a different interpretation of Puerto

Rican history and look at the practices of our grandparents and great-grandparents

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<sup>1</sup> Not all persons who identify as indigenous Taíno/Boricua are involved in Taíno activism. I use the term because throughout the dissertation I focus on my research collaborations with self-identifying Taíno/Boricua social actors while they are involved in activities meant to bring about change in Taíno/Boricua related rights, histories, and sites.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the dissertation I use the more inclusive term “Taíno/Boricua” to refer to current indigenous activists in Puerto Rico, as some indigenous activists reject the Taíno label while others embrace it. Groups that reject being called Taíno often call themselves “Boricua” instead. When referring to a particular research consultant, I use the label that they use to identify themselves. In popular historical and linguistic documents Taíno is most used, and as such I often use the term Taíno when speaking in terms of relevant literature.

generation as indigenous. You know it's interesting that a lot of people will say they have an *abuelita india*, but never say they are *indios*." Then Chaguito looked at me and said, "It's true, my *abuelita* was *india*. She made *casabe* and *ditas* and she knew all the medicinal plants and everything."<sup>3</sup> But that does not make me *indio*. I mean you should go to Mexico or Peru."

This exchange made me remember the first time I was told that my great-grandmother was an *india*. I was probably around 11 or 12, a student at a small Catholic School in my town. I translated to myself, "yes, she does *look* like an *india*." Of course, having learned in school that our country's *indios* were long extinct, I never thought to connect her *looking* like an *india*, with her actually being *india*.

Years later, while conducting pre-dissertation summer research at home, in Puerto Rico, the news headlines were filled with stories about actual people currently claiming to be those very *indios* that were supposed to be long gone, people claiming to be Taíno. My mind flashed back to being about 10, when a classmate brought a rock with a petroglyph of the sun she found by the river near her house to class. I remember being fascinated by the idea that remnants of the Taíno culture surrounded us, but now, people? Claiming to be Taíno? I immediately called my best friend. We were nothing short of surprised. As Chaguito would later on ask, we asked ourselves, "are they crazy?!" We had lived in Puerto Rico long enough, we had read all about its history, no one in our families were *indios*, so if that held true for us, how could it be any different for anyone else?—the island is *so* small. I followed the news on this, as well as the commentaries that followed. And, surprising myself, I was uncomfortable with some of the news

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<sup>3</sup> Casabe is a type of flatbread made from yucca of Taíno origin. Ditas are cups made from the higuera gourd.

commentaries and editorials. Though the media's reactions were not very different from my own, seeing them circulating in print made me uncomfortable. How can one person's sense of history—as informed by their own family trajectories and education—speak for another person's? How can they claim that how the Taíno activists understand their past is impossible? This sense of discomfort would creep up again when writing my first seminar paper on the topic, when developing my interest into a dissertation project and even while I write this analysis. It is a sense of the shaky grounds on which the debate about the Taíno takes place that informs this project. Though the question is bound to come up for many, from the outset I wish to clarify that I have no interest in the truth or falseness of the Taíno claims in Puerto Rico. Though I delve into some historical data, I use it to show the ambiguities concerning the description and presence of indigenous peoples within it, regardless (and with attention to the difficulty) of wanting to prove particular kinds of continuity.

My research asks: What does it mean to claim to be an *indio* in Puerto Rico? Why is it so controversial? How is someone able to claim an ethnic affiliation that is thought, even expected, to be extinct? How can one speak as a Taíno person? What happens when they do claim to be *indio*? By attending to a case that presents a particular challenge to ideas of self-determination, my research offers a vantage from which to understand the constraints and challenges, as well as the potential and possibilities, for the transformation of social categories.

*Who can claim what? On contested claims to being indigenous*

The Taíno in Puerto Rico are among a number of contested cases of people that are understood to be making unwarranted claims to an indigenous identity. For example,

Haley and Wilcoxon (Haley and Wilcoxon 1997: 5-6) address the claims of the “neo-Chumash,” a group from California’s central coast. The authors argue that among those who claim Chumash ancestry, some people whom they refer to as “neo-Chumash” or “Chumash traditionalists” have tenuous links to any identifiable or documented Chumash heritage. Instead, they attribute the ethnogenesis of a traditionalist Chumash identity to its joint construction and negotiation “with anthropologists and other non-Indian participants” (777). In 2005, Haley and Wilcoxon published an article titled “How Spaniards Became Chumash and other Tales of Ethnogenesis,” where they argue that “The neo-Chumash pose a challenge: Their example appears to be a clear case of whole-cloth fabrication, yet the reasons for their ethnogenesis are rarely ascertained” (2005: 433). Looking at genealogical records of the people they designate the neo-Chumash, they trace “mobility between [ethnic] categories” to show how claims to a Chumash identity are part of what they argue to be a historically documented series of identity changes across ethnic boundaries. In fact, they argue that the neo-Chumash identity is the product of a “transformation of Santa Barbara families into neo-Chumash...a revision of history from whole cloth” that “also reflects the local social context in ascertainable ways.” Ultimately, they argue that:

Neo-Chumash ethnogenesis is a rejection of two viable alternative identities, whose origin stories also incorporate objective errors: (1) Spanish-Californio, which stresses the frontier as formative yet tends to romanticize and whiten history, and (2) Chicano or Mexican American, which racializes Mexican heritage and appropriates “the decline of the Californios” for later immigrants. The simultaneous existence of all three identities challenges assumptions that an association with Mexico dictates a unified identity (2005: 433).

They tie the Chumash claims to what they consider to be the more generalized phenomena of the indigenization of identity in the Southwest. They draw from a

constructivist perspective (as opposed to an essentialist one that views tradition, language and ancestry as dictating identity) to understand how “such seeming (Chumash) essences were actively produced” (432). In their effort to complicate Chumash traditionalists’ claims to being Chumash, they argue that though a constructivist perspective of identity-formation may assert that all identifications are to some extent manufactured, the very rubric of identity “maintain[s] the appearance of having essential and enduring qualities” (433), especially with respect to indigenous categories.

Strikingly, however, Haley and Wilcoxon’s argument seems to take for granted that such documented designations reflect the categories that Chumash traditionalists’ ancestors might have claimed outside of the census and other official reports. Arguably, while such reports may show what categories might have been both officially understood to be claimable and beneficial to claim at a particular time, they may not actually reflect whether or not a particular person may have understood him or herself to be Chumash. As one of Bonita Lawrence’s (2004: 267) interviewees shared with respect to their mixed race background:

So we couldn’t participate in the censuses, which are usually used to determine whether you are Cherokee of not, because we were in the Negro section of town. So we were always listed on the census as “Negro” and not Cherokee. It didn’t matter—I don’t need their laws to tell me who I am, anyway.

Considering the complicated histories of race, classification and censuses, Lawrence reminds us of other factors that may play into current increases in claims to being Indian, such as faulty censuses and silencing pressures.

Studies such as Haley and Wilcoxon’s (1997, 2005) fall within a larger body of literature that critically considers the complexities of current articulations of American Indian identity. From ideas of “playing Indian” (Deloria 1998) to “wannabe Indians”

(Green 1988) to accusations of “ethnic fraud” (Gonzales 1998) the question of who can claim to be Indian is highly debated/debatable. For example, Deloria (1998: 12) argues that the Indian persona has been donned in social protest by European Americans as part of a larger “misrule tradition” since the American Revolution. Green (1988) discusses not only how people have donned the Indian American mask for protest, but also looks at the increase in what she considers to be tenuous claims to an Indian identity, which she views as rooted in a larger racial politics, especially for Blacks and Hispanics in and outside the United States (46). Gonzales (1998) considers “individuals who, by virtue of being able to recall an Indian ancestor, are now identifying as American Indian” (200) as partially accounting for increases in the American Indian population since 1960. Gonzales argues that concomitant with ethnic pride and revival movements more broadly, some new claims to an American Indian identity were couched in an emerging understanding of race and ethnicity that “had become voluntary and a matter of personal volition” (203). She claims that:

Many of those newly identifying as American Indian do so based on an awareness (real or imagined) of Indian ancestry; their identification differs from others whose education and earnings, rates of unemployment, and standard of living are circumscribed by their identity as American Indian. For many of those newly identifying as American Indian, this “ethnic option” may be more a matter of personal choice, independent of tribal affiliation, cultural traditions, or community relations that are so vital to the Indian identity of others (218).

Though Gonzales’ argument is specific to the U.S. context, her critique of newly identifying American Indians is helpful in understanding the challenges made to the claims of self-identifying Taínos. As claims to being Taíno are often understood as a personal choice rather than as a product of other historically documented forms of affiliation and assessment of difference, some scholars understand their claims to be self-

interested and self-motivated (see essays in Haslip-Viera 2001).

Altogether, claims to indigeneity are a contested issue—one that is relevant worldwide. Hathaway (2010) states that “there are stark differences in how the term has been received throughout the world” (302). Surveying the literature in Latin America, Africa, Asia and China, he shows that the applicability of the term is understood to vary with respect to local socio-political contexts. In China, where his research is based, for example, “Beijing’s official stance is that all ethnic groups in China, including the majority Han, are indigenous; hence, the term does not apply” (302). Due to the variation in the use of the category “indigenous,” he regards—at least in terms of a transnational indigenous movement—“indigenous people not as a natural category, but as a social and political category...that repositions groups out of local and domestic struggles, and into a position of transnational solidarities, rights, and participation in a dynamic social movement” (303). In his own research, he considers the category a social fact, and explores “how and why indigeneity becomes relevant or even possible, and how it changes over time” (304). He proposes:

The rubric of emergence refuses to naturalize the concept, and instead encourages us to explore how different groups, in relationship to each other, invent, elaborate, and use this category. Whereas much scholarship on indigeneity has revealed the struggles and the success of various indigenous movements, it has paid less attention to the work that makes the concept of the indigenous salient, especially in places with less public and state sympathy, or the places where, despite great efforts, it had failed to gain a foothold (Van Cott 2003). Viewing indigeneity as a process of continuing emergence, rather than seeing it as reemergence, might allow us to better understand the difficulties for any group, even in the Americas to gain state recognition (Miller 2003), as well as confront everyday forms of racism and prejudice. (Hathaway 2010: 322)

Hathaway’s (2010) approach to indigeneity as a process of emergence is helpful insofar as it helps frame the processes as well as challenges that Taíno activists in Puerto

Rico confront with respect to designating themselves indigenous locally and throughout their affiliations with larger transnational indigenous networks.

*Engaging within a contested terrain*

Povinelli (2002) approaches the challenges of indigenous activism in Australia within what she calls the spirit of:

Durkheim's call for a sociological science of the ought in order to develop an ethnography not simply of existing states of mood and modality, of propositionality and obligation, and of moral possibility and necessity, but also of the conditions of their emergence and transformation as social phenomena (31).

A focus on process and emergence, and the ambiguities they involve, help us understand what is involved in claiming to be indigenous in Puerto Rico, where relationships to language, history and identity may change in time and be different from person to person. Here is a call for an ethnography of the trajectories of social phenomema, a study of emergence, materialization and transformation that attends to the heterogeneities, tensions and ambiguities that pervade any sociocultural context.

Povinelli delineates the tensions embedded in making claims to indigeneity within a multicultural context. She discusses how Belyuen people in Australia are pressured to produce forms of indigenous locality that are both moral and legal in their claims for land rights. These forms of locality are produced with attention to and in tension with their own social lives, the histories of the practices themselves, the transnational circulations of these customs, and their own ambivalences towards the meanings and interpretations wrapped up with these forms.

Other cases have shown similar constraints on the expression of indigenous claims. For example, Graham (2002) discusses the constraints on the self-representation of Amazonian indigenous leaders in Brazil and Venezuela. Graham focuses on how



indigenous leaders were caught between using their “authenticating” native languages which were ineffective in communicating with national governments who did not speak their native language, and between using national languages (either Spanish or Portuguese) and being accused of being inauthentic in their requests for rights. Her work is helpful for understanding how global and national indigenous language politics manifest themselves in the local selection among competing languages and the deployment of (legitimizing) language varieties.

In studies of Latin American indigenous activism, Warren and Jackson (2002: 4) call for anthropologists to engage with the communities they study considering “their contrasting subject positions as insiders or outsiders, indigenous or not, and as fellow citizens with indigenous nationals or not.” They note how the subject positions of the ethnographer vary with respect to the communities they engage with, and that also the “circumstance of ethnic formations and cultural practices” of different indigenous movements varies too in terms of agendas, constituencies, tactics, associations, practices, demographics, among other things (6). Noting how such variations and their interplay take place informs my understanding of the relationship between historical ambiguities, emergence and materialization. With respect to the Taíno, this is relevant with respect to the competing language reconstruction/manufacture projects I discuss in chapter 6.

### *Going Public or Inventing Pasts?*

The Taíno (and general Indigenous) resurgence has been documented throughout the Caribbean, challenging historical and national narratives premised on their extinction<sup>4</sup> (Forte 2005; Guitar 2002b). There has been recent work in anthropology and other

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<sup>4</sup> I go into further depth on the topic of presumed extinction in later sections of this chapter.

disciplines that critically considers Taíno resurgence throughout the Caribbean, namely Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Some of this work has considered the discursive aspects of the Taíno resurgence as it relates to racial and political paradigms in Puerto Rico (c.f Brusi-Gil De Lamadrid and Godreau 2007; Dávila 2001a; Duany 2001; 2002; Haslip-Viera 2001; Roberts 1997; Jiménez Román 2001). Other research has addressed surviving Taíno social and cultural practices and their relation to indigenous identifying populations (c.f Berman Santana 2005; Castanha 2004; Forte 2002; Forte 2005; 2006; Guitar 1998; 2002a; b; Yaremko 2009).

Most notable in this respect are the edited volumes *Taíno Revival: Critical Perspectives on Puerto Rican Identity and Cultural Politics* (Haslip-Viera 2001) and *Indigenous Resurgence in the Contemporary Caribbean: Amerindian Survival and Revival* (Forte 2006). Each, in general, has a radically different take on what the Taíno resurgence in Puerto Rico means, and how to evaluate it. *Taíno Revival* focuses exclusively on the phenomenon in Puerto Rico, whereas *Indigenous Resurgence* focuses on the Caribbean more generally.

The editor of *Taíno Revival* has included a larger number of essays that are critical and suspicious of the motives of what are alternately named neo-Taíno, or Taíno revival movements. Due to the dearth of scholarly attention to current claims to Taíno heritage in Puerto Rico *Taíno Revival* is an important contribution to the study of indigeneity in Puerto Rico. The papers included in this edited volume, however, are mostly critical of contemporary Taíno groups. The book offers insight into the current scholarly and political dilemmas that arise from claiming to be Taíno, especially in terms of its threat to popular theories of Puerto Ricanness that often celebrate the successful and

balanced racial multiculturalism of people in Puerto Rico as well as the scholarly theories that see the Taíno movement as a result of the commemoration of Taíno heritage by state-sponsored institutions that are argued to diminish the black presence in Puerto Rico. Taíno activists often complain that the scholarly discourse on Taíno ethnicity in *Taíno Revival*, presumes that the indigenous movement in Puerto Rico is either about the denial of African influence on the Island, “suggesting that the assertion of anything Taíno was simply a way for Puerto Ricans to deny or separate themselves from their African heritage” or an interested attempt at land recognition through the use of a nationally legitimated identity (Borrero 2001: 150; also Castanha 2004; cf. Haslip-Viera 2001, Duany 2001, and Jimenez Roman 2001). In response, the only Taíno activist with an essay in the volume argues, “We, therefore cannot enter into a discussion of Taíno identity without addressing and incorporating the indigenous perspective into the dialogue” (Borrero 2001: 156).

The editor of *Indigenous Resurgence* includes essays that tend to be sympathetic to the claims to indigeneity in the Caribbean. None of the essays, however, are specific to Puerto Rico. They focus on the Taíno in the Dominican Republic and Cuba who have not taken on the same activism as the Taíno in Puerto Rico. Although some work has been done on the formation of the Taíno community through internet forums and websites (Forte 2002), the legal repercussions of claims to sacred sites (Rivera 2003), questions of Taíno sovereignty (Berman Santana 2005), and the more historical aspects (Castanha 2004), I have not found sources that have followed the movement in interactionally grounded long-term ethnographic research. My research differs from prior scholarship through its attention to the communicative strategies employed by

members of Taíno groups in their interactions within several dimensions: institutions, bureaucracies, and within their own organizations.

In a context where Taíno identifications are contested and understood to be historically refutable, I draw from historical documents to accomplish “not a history” but a making of current claims and events “legible [as] read against historical stages” (Johnson 2002: 17). I explore ambiguity in historical documents, rather than understand them as historical facts. It is from a perspective of ambiguity that I consider the role played by the emergence and materialization of linguistic practices in creating and negotiating social bonds.

*Ambiguity of the past; emergence and materialization in language*

As the understandings of Puerto Rican history I held onto so dearly since moving to the Island became destabilized, as I started to take seriously the possibility that there could be histories other than those I had learned in school, I wondered, and then seriously explored, how could it be that people, today, identify as indigenous, as *indios*, as Taínos? Though skeptical, I began to delve into historical documents and to collect oral histories. Looking at the texts and talking to people, I realized how ambiguous and incongruous everything I was researching was. For example, the racialized and ethnic descriptions of the Island differ greatly with respect to mentions of the “native” population, an immensely ambiguous term whose referent differs from author to author. This was an ambiguity compounded by the differing contemporary readings of such terms, readings that vary in accordance with the reader’s understanding of historical trajectories in Puerto Rico. Given how incongruous the different accounts of Puerto Rican histories were throughout my fieldwork, and especially how personal and important many oral

recollections shared with me were, how could I reconcile it all? The short answer is: I couldn't. Instead it led me to analyze the sources that informed my present-day research collaborators' understanding of their personal histories and at the constellations they form as contested, ambiguous and incongruous—heterogeneous (on this approach to heterogeneity see Mannheim 1998; also see Philips 2004). The attention to Puerto Rico's colonial histories in the resurgence of the Taíno movement complements discussions at the juncture between history and social practices, especially in the ways in which alternative historical narratives may serve to configure alternate sets of social relationships (see Asad 1991; Chatterjee 1993; Dirlik 1996; Kenny 1999; Stoler 2008; Trouillot 1995). To situate these reconfiguring, I approach with respect to three theoretical areas: ambiguity, emergence, and materialization.

### *Ambiguity*

In William Empson's piece of literary criticism "7 Types of Ambiguity," he defines an ambiguity as "any verbal nuance however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language (Empson 1966 [1930]: 1). In my analysis, I apply this definition to the "alternative reactions" that may result from current readings of the ethno-racial terms in historical documents, due to the limited knowledge of what such terms might have referred to in the contexts in which they were written. Such ambiguities, I argue, result in discrepancies in how different social actors understand the past, affecting current incongruities in action. Since these discrepancies do not occur in a power vacuum, I explore the (hegemonic) processes and factors through which particular reactions or interpretations take hold, circulate and are imposed as the right one. In this respect, I consider a variety of interrelated social processes involved in

creating, maintaining and challenging the hold of particular historical interpretations and the trajectories they presume and entail.

With attention to governmental and scholarly institutions, I address questions of silencing and erasure as they relate to the management of alternate interpretations and understandings of Puerto Rican historical trajectories. As Irvine and Gal argue, “*erasure* is the process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible. Facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away” (2000:38). This rings particularly true with respect to the varieties of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism proposed by and maintained by the government since Puerto Rico’s incorporation as a commonwealth of the United States since 1952. Within this social field, I am interested in “the interplay of multiple perspectives,”—“seeing historically how effects of truth are produced within discourses which in themselves are neither true nor false” (Foucault 1980: 118; in Taussig 1986: 288; also see essays in Clifford and Marcus 1986). It is within this framework that I examine how Taíno activists articulate themselves and their historical trajectories in response to the institutionally (schools, government) sanctioned versions of the Island’s history, as well as how Taíno activists’ attempts at public visibility become problematized as inauthentic and interest motivated.

### *Emergence*

The discrepant understandings that emerge from these ambiguities are on an unequal footing with respect to each other: versions of history that claim that the Taíno are extinct are singularly circulated in schools and inform governmental policy. Taíno claims otherwise occur within a context that presumes them as extinct, and are, to some

extent, contingent upon the willingness of non-Taíno identifying Puerto Ricans to engage with their claims. The contingency of Taíno activists' efforts at interactional and institutional recognition foregrounds "...that every plan, scenario, and conception is always already situated in a social, political and historical moment..." (Tedlock and Mannheim 1995: 11). From this perspective, I analyze subject positions and the linguistic forms through which they become negotiated as dialogical and emergent in interactional situations. I mainly consider this with respect to two dimensions: in language reclamation projects and in social interaction.

In terms of language reclamation, I ask: How do different Taíno social-actors draw from the various semiotic and linguistic resources available to them to performatively build and index their identification with the movement? Work in language socialization is helpful in its attention to language as both a socially embedded and emergent phenomenon, where a speaker is bound by the conventions of language yet able to exercise a degree of creativity "by actively appropriating and manipulating pre-existing forms (from phonemes and morphemes to discourses and genres) to suit his or her own expressive and social ends" (Garrett and Baquedano-López 2002: 344). However, studies of adult language socialization have often addressed the entry of novice adults into pre-existing communities with regimented linguistic and social codes (Mertz 1996; 2007; Philips 1982), with the exception of work in emergent deaf communities (Monaghan and Senghas 2002; Senghas 2005). My research on Taíno activists, as discussed in chapter 5 and 6, adds important information on how individuals draw from pre-existing semiotic resources and reformulate and infuse them with new indexical values which in turn inform new linguistic varieties and framings, and how these forms

are then negotiated, learned, socialized, accepted, or denied by other speakers.

With respect to the emergent aspects of social interaction, I draw from Giddens (1976; 1977; 1993: 102) to consider:

the use of ‘interpretative schemes’ to make sense not only of what others say, but of what they mean: the constitution of ‘sense’ as an *intersubjective* accomplishment of mutual understanding in an ongoing exchange; and the use of contextual cues, as properties of the setting, as an integral part of the constitution and comprehension of meaning.

Giddens’ interpretive schemas, like Goffman’s discussion of frames, serve to foreground the negotiation and dialogism of interaction, given that they account for both the personal trajectories of interactions and the contexts in which such interactions take place. Giddens is helpful in his focus on the elements involved in the production of interaction, what he calls: “its constitution as meaningful; its constitution as a moral order and its constitution as the operation of relations of power” (1993: 103). That is, the role of uptake and understanding, of expectations, constraints, compliance and sanctions, and of the “resources or facilities which participants bring to and mobilize as elements of its production, thereby directing its course” in how social exchanges take place (111). This perspective allows us to consider the potential for discrepancies in worldviews and expectations for interaction among social actors, aspects my analyses center on in chapters 3, 4, and 7.

### *Materialization*

Meek (2010b) complicates understandings of emergence by considering how social reproduction and structures materialize from otherwise contingent and disrupted situations. In her work, she addresses materialization as it is accomplished through practices of extrapolation that erase moments of disjuncture and disruption in the



language socialization of younger generations of Kaska speakers. Attention to contingency and erasure in language socialization is essential to understanding the complicated role of interaction and social practice in the emergence of new conversational styles and routines, and arguably to the negotiation of identities and histories.

I draw from work on indigenous languages to address questions of language reclamation with respect to its materialization. This area of research has paid attention to the intersection between language ideologies and local socio-political contexts in the reconstruction, revitalization and maintenance of indigenous languages and its relationship to cultural and political claims more generally (Kroskrity 2000; Moore 1988; 2006). As different actors have distinct ideas about what an appropriate Taíno language would look like, speech varieties differing in their preferred lexicon, grammar, prosody, participant role structure and narrative devices have emerged. Additionally, since there are some efforts to consolidate and politically mobilize the Taíno into a cohesive indigenous movement, ideologically suffused debates regarding what the correct, authoritative, and legitimate versions of Taíno speech are have emerged (on issues of language legitimacy and standardization see Bourdieu 1991; Gal and Woolard 1995; Haugen 1972; Milroy 2001; Woolard 1985). This project notes how the power relations among speakers of different varieties affect the mobilization of distinct language ideologies and varieties.

There are relatively few sources from which the Taíno can draw to reconstruct the language. Due to this, I consider other ways in which self-identifying Taíno distinguish themselves as indigenous through other Taíno-inflected linguistic forms, to linguistically

indicate their ethnic alignments and claims. In this respect, the analysis of language and other socially interpretable modalities such as dress and performance is important in discerning how social alignments might be reinforced, complicated or destabilized (Eisenlohr 2004b; a; Gal 2005; Mendoza-Denton 1999; 2008). To do this, work on style (Eckert 1989; Eckert and Rickford 2001; Irvine 2001; Mendoza-Denton 1999) is helpful in its consideration of forms of social distinction that encompass other interpretable modalities of talk, including accent, word choice, as well as other language patterns. Thinking of language variability in terms of style, and the implication of distinctiveness contained within it, allows us to think of the processes involved as maintaining and constructing particular styles of speech as recognizable and reproducible, as well as the social meaningfulness in maintaining the boundaries between different socially recognizable styles of talk. Additionally, I consider the use of Taíno linguistic styles to unify, authorize and lend legitimacy to claims to indigeneity (see Conklin 1997; Graham 2002).

The centrality given to the lack of a continuous public Taíno cultural and linguistic presence in scholarly, governmental and general public discourse aimed at *not* recognizing the Taíno, makes understanding the forms in which linguistic and cultural reclamation take place essential to the Taíno movements' claims to legitimacy and authenticity in the national and transnational realm. In effect, in analyzing Taíno activism we witness a process of transforming, creating, and objectifying a recognizable Taíno identity through discursive deployments that allow for the recognition of social relations through the use of forms of language and practice that in turn indicate relations to larger social categories of indigeneity. The reclamation and manufacture of a Taíno

language constitutes a semiotic project that imbues Taíno and Taíno-inflected linguistic forms with indexical power in the public domain (see Silverstein 2003).

In this regard, work on entextualization is relevant in its attention to how patterns of speech expression become interactively and meaningfully crystallized in social practice (see Briggs and Bauman 1992; Silverstein and Urban 1996). These entextualized patterns of use emerge in everyday interactions. As the use patterns of Taíno language varieties emerge, these are replete with additional social meanings and effects upon the interactions among different Taíno people. In chapters 5 and 6, my dissertation considers how understandings of what it is to speak like a Taíno intersect with entextualizing practices in the revival of a generally unspoken indigenous language

In terms of the materialization of particular ethnic alignments in interaction, I am influenced by Bucholtz' and Hall's (2007) understanding of social identity. They argue that identity as a social category needs to be understood as an interactional achievement that can mark particular practices and people as similar to some and differentiated from others. This is accomplished through what they call the interpersonal tactics of identity, a series of meaningful practices and processes that serve to either establish resemblances or distinctions, to authenticate or denaturalize and to authorize or make illegitimate particular forms of social action. Through this focus identity is understood as an element of interactional situations rather than of individuals, thus compelling us to analyze subject positions as always socially and culturally located. This perspective informs much of my work in chapter 3 and 7. From this point of view, the manufacture of ethnic identity among social actors materializes as a form of relatedness reliant on the constant managing of discursive alignments in interaction.

In an indigenous context, such alignments often depend on the recapture and re-socialization of indigenous concepts, figures and practices. Analyses of interactions among Taíno activists reveal the linguistic practices involved in constructing social alignments and relatedness more generally. By thinking of the building of a common Taíno ethnic identification as creating relatedness among social actors, I link the social cohesion that ethnic identification entails, with the variable levels of social unity and disunity it may allow for in practice. This project, though focused on Taíno resurgence, applies to any context wherein people are redefining themselves by reconfiguring their relatedness to each other by institutionalizing or de-regimenting different modes of belonging. Considering the linguistic aspects of these processes, I account for the sorts of disruptions to which they are susceptible: historical disruptions, considering Puerto Rico's colonial histories; political disruptions, given the growing acknowledgment of indigenous rights; and interactional disruptions, especially in terms of the potential misunderstandings to which all interactions—locally or globally—are vulnerable.

#### *A note on Puerto Rican historical background*

The United States assumed sovereignty over the island of Puerto Rico from Spain. in 1898.<sup>5</sup> With their takeover, the American government instituted policies explicitly aimed at transitioning Puerto Rico towards the assimilation of the United States' political, cultural and linguistic framework. In 1900, the United States instituted a civil government on the Island through the Foraker Act (1900-1917). Under the Foraker Act, the United States named a colonial governor. In 1917, the U.S. conceded American citizenship to Puerto Ricans through the Jones Act. The Jones Act was the result of U.S.

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<sup>5</sup> The Treaty of Paris of 1898 ceded Puerto Rico to the United States because of the Spanish American War. However, when the treaty was signed, Spain had just given Puerto Rico governmental autonomy with the possibility of independence three months before.

national defense worries during World War I, when the American nation wanted to make sure that the population in its territories and protectorates would be loyal to the U.S. and able to participate in the American military (Negrón De Montilla 1975: 174). Although the Jones Act technically permitted people to decline U.S. citizenship, it also ensured that those who did not accept citizenship would lose political influence (176).<sup>6</sup>

Although Puerto Ricans were granted American citizenship in 1917, it was not until 1952 that Puerto Rico's political and economic relationship to the United States was temporarily settled. In 1952 Puerto Rico's constitution was ratified, making the Island a commonwealth of the United States. Politically, this meant that the Island was granted a relative amount of political autonomy while ultimately being accountable to the decisions of the United States Congress. The establishment of the commonwealth status was partly motivated by using Puerto Ricans as a cheap workforce in an increasingly industrial United States (United States Congress 1943).

This change in political status in 1952 was preceded by the incumbency of the first popularly elected governor of Puerto Rico in 1948—Luis Muñoz Marín. The *Estado Libre Asociado* (commonwealth) was the product of a project lead by Luis Muñoz Marín, founder of the *Partido Popular Democrático* (Popular Democratic Party,

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<sup>6</sup> During the time period between 1917-1948, attempts to teach students in English, as well as to impose U.S. models of decency upon the local population were met with disdain by different sectors of the population, leading to the rise of Nationalist and anti-U.S. movements in the thirties and forties. However, these movements resulted in much controversy, and the U.S. appointed governor's-ordered massacre of Puerto Rican nationalists on a Palm Sunday in the southern town of Ponce in 1937. While Muñoz Marín had been pro-Independence as well, his project can be understood as an attempt to reconcile the reality of the colonial relationship with the United States with local national identity and pride. The success of his project is apparent in that approximately half of today's voting population identifies as being part of the PPD, and in that even the pro-Statehood party has endorsed a version of statehood they call "estadidad jíbara" or Puerto Rican statehood, including the maintenance of Spanish as an official language of Puerto Rico.

PPD).<sup>7</sup> Muñoz Marín aspired to a status that would ensure a certain degree of economic stability, keep federal funding, and access to U.S. markets, while safeguarding the dignity of the people of Puerto Rico, and satisfying their yearning for self-government (Scarano 1993: 828). After being elected governor, one of Muñoz Marín's first projects was a response to a perceived need to sustain a Puerto Rican national cultural identity in the face of the new political relationship with the U.S. that he envisioned. This project was named DIVEDCO, the Division of Education of the Community, created through Law 372, which was approved on May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1949, unanimously by the House and the Senate. Muñoz Marín himself wrote the preamble to Law 372 to ensure that DIVEDCO's mission was satisfactorily expressed (Thompson 2005: 102):

The goal of community education is to impart basic teaching on the nature of man, his history, his life, his way of working and of self-governing in the world and in Puerto Rico. Such teaching, addressed to adult citizens meeting in groups in the barrios, settlements, and urban districts will be imparted through moving pictures, radio, books, pamphlets and posters, phonographic records, lectures and group discussion. The object is to provide the good hand of our popular culture with the tool of a basic education. In practice this will mean giving to the communities and to the Puerto Rican community in general the wish, the tendency, and the way of making use of their own aptitudes for the solution of their own problems of health, education, cooperation, social life through the action of the community itself.

DIVEDCO was directly influenced by the New Deal's philosophy, policies, and methods. Muñoz Marín had lived in the United States, and was familiar with the works and projects of the New Deal. Among the 'founding artists' of the program were Edwin Roskam, who presided over the Division of Cinema and Graphics, Jack Delano, who lead the film production within that Division, and Irene Delano, who was in charge of the

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<sup>7</sup> Before 1948, elections were held in the Island to designate legislators and senators but the United States president appointed the governor, and the heads of agencies.

graphic production. In the years following the institution of DIVEDCO, Delano directed a series of documentaries and short films.

Puerto was also granted commonwealth status at this time (1952). It was established as a temporary solution to the debate between statehood and independence for Puerto Rico. The Island was given the rights similar to those of a state, yet without federal taxes, without the right to vote for the President and without voting representatives in the federal legislature. Within this system, Puerto Rico would have a common market with the U.S., Islanders would be able to travel freely between both countries and be bound to U.S. declarations of war among other things (see Trías Monge 1997). In this new political system, the Island was able to organize itself according to how Puerto Ricans perceived their political, social and economic needs.<sup>8</sup> Since then, the Island's political scheme has reflected the Island's ambivalent relationship to the United States. The population disagrees on which political status would be most beneficial to the Island, both in terms of its national and socioeconomic demands: the commonwealth, statehood, or independence. These status options are popularly associated, though by no means co-terminous, with the three main political parties on the Island: the Partido Popular Democrático (Popular Democratic Party-PPD) which is popularly associated with the commonwealth status and other similar status options; the Partido Nuevo Progresista founded in 1967 (New Progressive Party-PNP) which is commonly understood to be a proponent of statehood; and the Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño founded in 1946 (Puerto Rican Independence Party-PIP) whose stated goal is Puerto Rican independence from the United States.

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<sup>8</sup> The Puerto Rican political system is modeled after the U.S. federal three-branch system.

During and after the establishment of the commonwealth status within Puerto Rico in 1952, the government made explicit efforts to restructure Puerto Ricans' sense of nationality in an attempt to reconcile political-economic goals that required a certain amount of U.S. dependency with Puerto Ricans' past efforts at an autonomous and independent government. These were explicitly addressed in two political projects. The economic efforts on the Island were structured through *Operation Bootstrap*, a series of economic policies and tax subsidies to attract U.S. companies to move their operations to Puerto Rico. *Operation Serenity* was its moral counterpart—an attempt to restructure Puerto Rican cultural ideas so as to better fit the industrialization efforts, to impel people to join the workforce and to restructure the Puerto Rican family and family geography, so as to better fit U.S. models of the nuclear family. DIVEDCO actualized the aims of this project through its community education mission, drawing from and celebrating selected aspects of Puerto Rican national culture. The discourse surrounding Operation Serenity made the maintenance of the morals and tradition that were understood to be the essence of Puerto Ricanness the responsibility of each Puerto Rican, in the face of rapid industrialization and change (Méndez Velázquez 2005). The following excerpt from the Luis Munoz Marín Foundation's website encapsulates this aim:

Este nombre [Operación Serenidad] proviene del énfasis del propio Muñoz de que el pueblo debería de reflexionar y serenarse ante el continuo desarrollo de la sociedad puertorriqueña y poder disfrutar de aspectos de índole culturales y educativos. Según el propio Muñoz por medio de la Operación Serenidad "se procura impartir al esfuerzo económico y a la libertad política unos objetivos armónicos con el *espíritu del hombre*, en su función de *regidor más bien que de servidor de los procesos económicos...el pueblo de Puerto Rico espera ansiosamente mantenerse bondadoso y tranquilo en su entendimiento, en sus actitudes*, mientras utiliza plena y vigorosamente todos los complejos recursos de la civilización moderna. *No quiere que la complejidad de esos instrumentos*



*de trabajo lo saque de quicio.*" (Fundación Luis Muñoz Marín, emphasis mine)

TRANSLATION:

This name [Operation Serenity] comes from Muñoz's emphasis that the people should reflect and tranquilize themselves and be able to enjoy aspects of cultural and educational matters as they confront the continuous development of Puerto Rican society. According to Muñoz himself, Operation Serenity "is intended to impart to the economic effort and political freedom objectives harmonic with the *spirit of man*, in his function of *master rather than servant of economic processes...*, the *people of Puerto Rico* anxiously hope to *maintain themselves* kind and calm in *their understanding*, in *their attitudes*, while they fully and vigorously utilize all the complex resources of modern civilization. *They do not want the complexity of those instruments of work to distress them.*<sup>9</sup>

Operation Serenity, and its materialization in DIVEDCO, fomented Puerto Rican cultural traditions in music, religion and other arts, but looked to restructure everyday life in homes, sanitation and eating practices. Describing her childhood during this era, writer Esmeralda Santiago notes in *When I was Puerto Rican* (1993: 64):

Our parents, Miss Jiménez told us, should come to a meeting that Saturday, where experts from San Juan and Jun-ited Estates would teach our mothers all about proper nutrition and hygiene, so that we would grow up as tall and strong as Dick, Jane, and Sally, the *Americanitos* in our primers.

"And Mami," I said as I sipped my afternoon *café con leche*, "Miss Jiménez said the experts will give us free food and toothbrushes and things...and we can get breakfast everyday except Sunday..."

She describes that meeting in great detail, including the foods that the families at the meeting were expected to eat in order to achieve good nutrition; that such foods were not available, that they were not the ones that people were used to eating. After considering the possibility of making substitutions with native food, the American speaker says "but it is best not to make substitutions for the recommended foods." After which each family was given a sack of "groceries with samples from the major food groups" (67). The

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<sup>9</sup> All translations throughout the document, unless otherwise noted, are my own.

sentiment behind this anecdote is resolved later when Santiago asks her father “If we eat all that American food they give us at the *centro comunal*, will we become Americanos?” Her father responds: “Only if you like it better than our Puerto Rican food” (74).

Puerto Rico’s relationship with the United States, as represented in the above excerpt, where American habits were imposed upon Puerto Ricans, influenced the forms of Puerto Rican cultural nationalism that became hegemonic in Puerto Rico—forms that romanticize the Taíno past as a common, yet past, heritage of the Island.

*Whose history? Conventional and unconventional narrations of the nation(s)*

In conventional histories of Puerto Rico, the designation of Taíno is often reserved for the aboriginal inhabitants of Puerto Rico prior to Spanish conquest and colonization. In these histories, Taíno political, social and cultural organization was largely decimated in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century through the warfare, disease, slavery, and assimilation of the colonizing process (e.g. Alegria 1969; Picó 1986; Scarano 1993). Presumed extinct, the Taíno are often discussed either in terms of their material culture, a matter to be discussed by archaeologists (e.g. Curet 1992; Keegan and Carlson 2008; Rouse 1992) or in their roles as ancestors of all Puerto Ricans, presuming that all Puerto Ricans today are not themselves Taíno (e.g. Gómez Acevedo and Ballesteros Gaibrois 1975; 1993). For example, in a workbook aimed at elementary school students I found in several bookstores in Puerto Rico:

Hasta aquí hemos narrado la historia del origen, costumbres, creencias y forma de vida de un pueblo sencillo, pacífico y amante de la naturaleza. Con la llegada de los exploradores españoles a Boriquén en 1493 y el comienzo de la conquista por Juan Ponce de León a partir de 1508 la vida del pueblo taíno es trastocada. El “descubrimiento” para ellos significó enfermedades, la pérdida de la libertad o de la vida y su eventual exterminio como pueblo. Pero su herencia permanece viva en el puertorriqueño y cada día descubrimos nuevas evidencias que así lo confirman (Colón Peña 2001: 22).

## TRANSLATION:

Up to this point we have narrated the origin, customs, beliefs and form of life of a simple, peaceful and nature-loving people. With the arrival of the Spanish explorers to Boriquén in 1493 and Juan Ponce de León's conquest beginning in 1508 the life of the Taíno people is disrupted. The "discovery" for them meant illnesses, the loss of liberty or life and their eventual extermination as a people. But their heritage remains alive in the Puerto Rican and each day we find new evidence that confirms it is so (Colón Peña 2001: 22).

The above excerpt highlights the historical period in which the Taíno are often located—up to the phase of Juan Ponce de León's conquest of Puerto Rico for the Spanish crown. Upon Ponce de León's arrival to the Island in 1508 with the goal of establishing a settlement, he requested that King Ferdinand allow him to use the local Taíno population as a workforce. In 1509, Spain authorized Ponce de León to partition and distribute the Taíno among Spanish officials with the expectation that they mine rivers for gold and work in agriculture. The Taíno response was encapsulated in their drowning of the Spaniard Diego Salcedo, as described by the king's chronicler, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo. As taught in schoolbooks of my youth and currently, in 1511, the Taíno drowned Salcedo as he tried to cross river Guaorabo, under the orders of Cacique Urayoán. They did this to see if he, and any other Spaniard, was immortal or not. Upon seeing that he was mortal, they battled the Spanish in what is known as the Indian rebellion of 1511 organized by cacique Agüeybana II (Fernández Méndez 1973; 1976; 1995; Stevens Arroyo 1988). They were largely unsuccessful in their rebellion due to uneven discrepancies in martial technology—the Spanish had steel swords, pikes and armor while Taíno warfare depended on closer range weapons such as the hatchet—as well as the effect of disease and enslavement on the population. Following the Taíno loss

of the war, Spanish pacification of the Island took the shape of the further enslavement of the remaining indigenous population.



Figure 1.1 “Extermination of our Indians” in *Taínos de Borikén*, Láminas Latino, no 16.

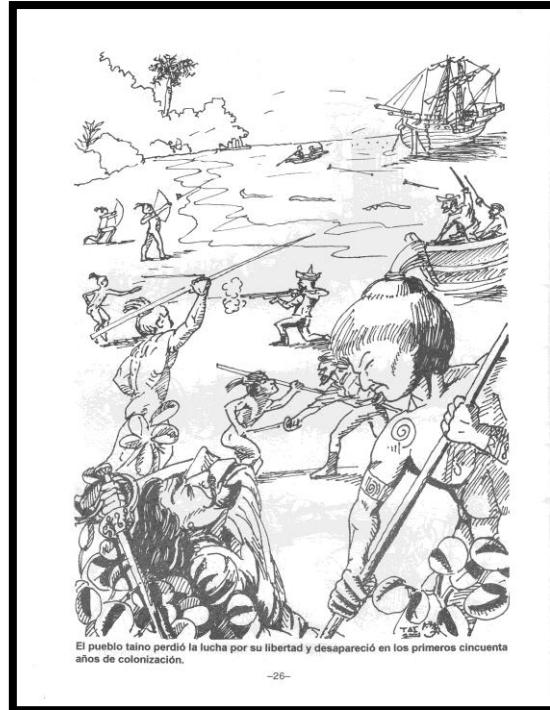


Figure 1.2 “The Taíno people lost their struggle for liberty and disappeared in the first years of colonization” (Colón 2001: 26)

The enslavement of the Indians was interrupted by the Spanish priest Bartolomé de las Casas. His description of the treatment of indigenous populations as written in 1542 and published in 1552 “A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies” was influential in Spain’s passage of the New Laws of 1542, which abolished Indian slavery in the Spanish colonies.

The population of Taíno that might have remained after these events remains unclear, and is debated among historians. The low number of Taíno in Spanish population censuses has been argued to have been affected by a desire to bring in new African slave labor once Taíno slavery became abolished (Figueroa 1971). Additionally, it is unclear who the numbers on the census represented, who counted as an *Indio* and what the concept of *Indio* may have referred to (Jiménez De Wagenheim 1998; Stevens Arroyo 1988). And there was always the possibility that some Indians did not want to be counted (Castanha 2004). As Steiner (1974: 16) writes “A man hiding in the hills from the swords of the Conquistadors was not likely to report his wife and his children to the census taker.”

In fact, even though the Taíno are often represented as having been decimated during the conquest, Indian populations were noted in Puerto Rico’s census of 1777 (1756 *indios*) and 1787 (2032 *indios*) (Brau 1983 [1917]; Fernández Méndez 1995). According to Figueroa (1971: 59) “Our country's natives seem to have been typed as Indians until the beginning of the XIXth century when Governor don Toribio Montes, faced with the difficulty of fixing ethnic origins, banded all the non-whites together under the title of free colored people (*pardos*).” Many Taíno activists debate the history of the Taíno after the conquest and subsequent enslavement. Whereas the books I have cited so

far are vague concerning what might have happened during the post-abolition period of Indian slavery, the Taíno activists and scholars I conducted my research with have their own rendering of those events.

### *Taíno versions*

*El verdadero genocidio es decir que no existimos, que estamos extintos, ¿no ven que estoy aquí? ¡Que no he muerto! (Katsí, August 2008)<sup>10</sup>*

*The true genocide is to say that we do not exist, that we are extinct; do they not see that I am here? That I have not died! (Katsí, August 2008)*

The Taíno claim that these institutionalized renderings of history erase their actual survival. This survival, they argue, was facilitated through religious, historical and cultural knowledge passed through oral histories and ceremonial practices in Taíno families. They maintain that this knowledge was kept secret due to the possible political and social consequences of asserting their indigenous background.

The conceptualizations of Puerto Rican history as proposed by members of the indigenous groups I researched (whom I will call Taíno, though not all groups consider Taíno to be their true name) are co-occurrences that may or may not intersect with the more generally held proposals of Puerto Rican history. The history of the Taíno in Puerto Rico has been most thoroughly expounded in the dissertation and forthcoming book of native Boricua activist scholar Anthony Castanha (2001, 2008, 2011 forthcoming; for similar arguments concerning the revision of Taíno extinction in Cuba see Yaremko 2009). In a conference paper delivered at a Taíno gathering, he argued that:

Thus, the African and Spanish people who fled to the interior of Borikén were often embraced by the Indian culture and people and assimilated through intermarriage as their numbers would have been quite small compared to the

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<sup>10</sup> Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity of research consultants, unless otherwise noted.

native population. This assimilation process occurred throughout the mountain regions (Castanha 2008).

The explanations and description of the methods of Taíno survival into the present found in Castanha's work often echoed and agreed with the descriptions given to me by my research collaborators.<sup>11</sup> Survival, they argue, was aided by the topography of the Island and the location of government centers away from the Island's mountainous interior. The Taíno argue that the Spanish, unknowledgeable of the Island's nooks and crannies, did not have the aid of roads and cars to access the center of the Island, thus leading to the colloquial naming of these areas, *las Indieras* (the place of the Indians) (see also Steiner 1974). Though now, *las Indieras* refers to a section of the Maricao municipality in the mid-western region of the Island, Castanha and other Taíno activists argue that in the recent past it referred to the totality of the central region of the Island. This, they also argue, is behind the high number of people with indigenous phenotypical features in this region as well as the high concentration of people that continue to make indigenous foods, the somewhat higher incidence of Taíno-derived vocabulary, and other practices often associated with Taíno culture. They cite as additional evidence the fact that few towns were founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century and most towns were not founded until the late 18<sup>th</sup> through the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

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<sup>11</sup> Though outside the scope of this particular project, future research will explore the connection between Puerto Rican Taíno/Boricua activists in Hawaii (as a result of a large migration of Puerto Ricans to Hawaii in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century) and the Hawaiian indigenous movements.



Figure 1.3 Map of the Indieras

*“Many fled to mountain regions where Indian people had already been living for hundreds if not thousands of years in the yucayekes of, for example, Guama, Otoa, Coabey, Jatibonico, Guaynabo, Turabo and Cayeco” (Castanha 2008).*

The Indieras are often cited as a stronghold of Taíno Indian presence in Puerto Rico; they are understood as the places where the Taíno organized their lives, where they hid and did not, at least for a while, want to be seen (Castanha 2008; Fernández Méndez 1976; Steiner 1974). The relevance of the Indieras appears in a newspaper article published in 1977 called “Where are our *indians*?,” Juan Manuel Delgado writes:

A partir del censo poblacional de 1800 se suprime la clasificación de los *indios* y estos se suman a la categoría de “pardos libres.” No obstante, los ancianos nacidos en el área de las Indieras – que desconocen la existencia de estos censos – aseguran que todavía en las décadas de 1850 al 1870 quedaban algunas familias *indias* en el área. También se encuentran ancianos que señalan que son nietos de *indios* puros de esa región y que algunos de esos *indios* participaron en la revolución de Lares de 1868 (Delgado 1977: 14-15).

TRANSLATION:

Beginning with the population census of 1800 on the Indian classification is suppressed and these are included in the category of “free pardos” [similar to category “colored”]. Nonetheless, the elders born in the area of the Indieras – who do not know of the existence of these censuses – assure [me] that even in the decades of 1850 to 1870 some Indian families remained in the area. One can also



find elders that indicate that they are the grandchildren of pure Indians from that region and that some of those Indians participated in the Lares revolution of 1868.

Here, Delgado reveals that in the oral narratives shared with him in Puerto Rico during his research in the seventies, elders corroborated that there were still people who were understood to be and classified as Indian in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many of whom lived in the Indieras. These histories, not documented in the same ways as more conventional ones, are the ones that the Taíno activists I researched told and drew from in talking about Taíno survival. Though these trajectories are also subject to critique, they are narratives that are told alongside, sometimes in contradiction to, more conventional ones and circulate among current self-identifying Taíno people.

### *Taíno as legacy*

The Taíno legacy is not usually contested in specific spheres of practice. Even though the survival of Taíno people is debated, the survival of Taíno practices is widely accepted and even celebrated. Words from Taíno that have been totally incorporated into Spanish (and English) include: Jamaca (Hamaca/Hammock), Juracan (Huracan/Hurricane), Canoa (Canoa/Canoe), Cacique (Cacique/Chieftan), among others. Additionally, there are other Taíno words that exist as idiosyncratic to Caribbean Spanish: macuto (knapsack), batey (yard), soberao (ground of the home), bejuco (vine), among others. These sorts of legacies are often promoted in the public media. For example, in this news show clip from 2008, the host of Boricuazo, a popular news segment which highlights Puerto Rican contributions to science, culture, and the media, emphasizes the Taíno legacy to the Spanish language as spoken today, see:



Figure 1.4 “Herencia Lengua Taína”  
(Boricuazo 2007)

Other practices which are understood to have been influenced by the Taíno are often domestic, such as cooking, gardening/farming, and the names of household areas. Such practices were highlighted in a series of films created and disseminated by DIVEDCO such as “La Buena Herencia,” where Taíno practices are cited as part of Puerto Rico’s good heritage:



Figure 1.5 “La Buena Herencia”  
(Divedco 1955)

In fact this focus on Taíno as a common heritage whose source is located in the past is apparent in books geared towards teaching Puerto Rican children about the Taíno:

1. Representing as common ancestor:  
“Vamos juntos a divertirnos y aprender sobre nuestros antepasados, los taínos.”  
“Let’s together have fun and learn about our ancestors, the taínos.”  
(Maldonado 2001 [1998])
2. Speaking of Taíno in past tense:  
“What kind of society did the Taínos have?”  
“What was their legacy toward our language?”  
“What were their religious beliefs?”  
(Muratti 2005)

This focus on the Taíno as common national heritage but not as a potential contemporary identification has been deployed in various versions of Puerto Rican nationalism, a deployment that has been criticized by both contemporary Taíno groups that criticize the assumption that they no longer exist, though their practices do, and also by Puerto Rican scholars that question the celebration of the Taíno heritage and the relative erasure of other presences, such as the African heritage on the Island. I discuss these issues in more depth within chapter 2.

### *Doing versus being*

So what is the difference between doing something (these practices) and being something (Taíno/Indian)? One day, sitting at a dining table with a Taíno elder, I asked the elder how she knew she was Taíno. She told me in Spanish, which I later tried to write out as fully as possible, and have translated below:

“Listen, and listen well. I don’t think there are pure *indios*, and I know that the *indios* now have changed, the *indios* now are a mix of different things, but...the world

has changed. When I was a just a baby, my mother died. Her sister, she took care of me and she was my mother then, she said that she was an *india*, that my mother was an *india*, and that I was an *india*. She walked barefoot. My father, he was not any good and he took me away from *my* mother and gave me to a wealthy family. I worked at a very wealthy family's home and they would tell people that they adopted me, but really they fed me less food than they fed their dogs. You know what it is that they feed better food to the dogs! That is why it is hard for me to read and write; I never did more than the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade. It was because I was not like them; I was an *india* to them." I asked her when this was, she said "Sometime in the forties." The elder had tears in her eyes. We didn't talk about it again.

How do we judge these stories against the more sanctioned histories? Is being something based on the feeling to be something? Is it about a lived history or a consciousness of being something? Can one be something and not know it? In an interview with a man named Don Pedro Matos Matos, Stan Steiner wrote (1974: 15):

"Our Indians did not die away the way some people think," the storyteller said. "If you look in the faces of the *jibaros*, you know somewhere the Indian history is living." The scholars did not agree with the storyteller. If "history is a fable, generally agreed upon," as Napoleon had said, the history of the Borinquén Indians was agreed upon by everyone but the Indians. It was said that the Indians had vanished from the island by the sixteenth century. They had left behind their language, their music, their architecture, their crops and fruits, their style of cooking their diet, their morality, their family life and structure, their belief in spirits and their gods. But they were gone.

Steiner follows up on this contradiction by interviewing Ricardo Alegría, who in Puerto Rico is regarded as an expert on Taíno culture and Puerto Rican anthropology. Alegría tells him that the Taíno population "disappeared as a cultural group in the first century of the Spanish conquest... Unfortunately, there are no more Indians on the island of Puerto

Rico” (1974:16). Steiner highlights the matter-of-fact writing that claims the Taíno as extinct (Lewis 1969; Wagenheim 1970; Wells 1969), at writings that claim their extinction one year and that decry their idolatry seventy-five years later (Morales Carrión 1974), and at the actual letters between colony and crown, where the Taíno disappeared and appeared depending on who was doing the writing (Steiner 1974: 17). Don Pedro, the storyteller, explains the contradictions to Steiner thus:

A man may not know he is Indian. A man may know and may not admit he is Indian. ‘But it does not matter. The ignorance of your father and mother does not change who you are,’ he said. ‘No matter what a Puertorriqueño decided he is, it has already been decided for him.’

‘So if I did not have Indian blood in my heart, my heart would not beat. Yes, it would kill me not to have the blood of an Indian,’ the old man said. (1974: 19)

An analysis of the Taíno resurgence often begs the question of what it is to be Taíno/*Indio*, and why these claims are being made public now. As discussed in Chapter 2 and 5 especially, the awareness of being *indio* is claimed to have been maintained in many communities located in the mountainous interior, and is understood to have been passed on to current generations within their families. Activism organized around a collective Taíno identity, however, is more recent, and often explained by my research collaborators as a result of the forms of nationalism and loss of traditional practices correlated with DIVEDCO and the U.S. takeover of Puerto Rico throughout the twentieth century.

Groups mobilizing around being Taíno gained some prominence in the seventies with cultural performances and informal meetings. In the eighties they united to protest potential mining in El Yunque, considered a sacred forest. In 2005 they contested the treatment of Caguana (a ceremonial grounds) as a park. In 2008, they decried the mistreatment of burial sites and human remains (see chapter 7). When I asked: why go

public now? The response often was:

Because we are losing our ways, people before they had the Taíno lifestyle and it had survived. It didn't matter that the history in the books was wrong, because our people did not go to school. Now we are losing those ways so we need to make people aware. So they save it and know and can pass it on. So it won't be lost.  
(Tito)

Many explained that these changes resulted from policies that went back to projects such as those of DIVEDCO and mistreatments of ceremonial sites starting with the archaeological research of the fifties.

My interviews with Taíno activists revealed extensive debates with regard to how current organizations came together. I reconstruct current organizations with the information given to me by those who I interviewed, with full awareness that such a reconstruction is necessarily incomplete, contested and fraught. The activists I spoke with agreed that early meetings in the sixties among elders, such as Abuela Serita (I discuss her in further depth later in the dissertation) in Puerto Rico prompted discussions and activities about being Taíno beyond their immediate families. They sought to protect sacred ceremonial and burial sites as they understood them to become appropriated by the Puerto Rican government. In the seventies, Cacica Caona (who I also discuss later) began a Taíno cultural performance troupe to bring awareness of Taíno music and dance to a larger audience. Through her public performances she became acquainted with Abuela Serita and the other elders, beginning discussions of officially incorporating their organization—the GCT.

Around this time, groups also began to form in the United States, largely in New York City where large segments of the Puerto Rican population had moved since the forties. The emergence of Taíno activism is often correlated with Puerto Ricans in the

United States, specifically with the first waves of return migration from the U.S. urban centers in the late 1960s, a time when civil rights movements in the United States aimed at recognizing and politically legitimating ethnic diversity were gaining strength (see essays in Haslip-Viera 2001). Many Taíno tribal councils were founded between the seventies and eighties in both Puerto Rico and the United States. Given the nature of circular migration between Puerto Rico and the United States, present day Taíno tribal councils and organizations exist in places like New Jersey, New York and Florida, as well as on the Island itself.

One Taíno activist based in New York City told me that the Taíno alliances and councils resulted from a large grassroots movement in the eighties. Guitar, Ferbel-Azcarate, and Estevez (2006: 62) state, with respect to the U.S.-based groups:

The Taíno restoration movements began in the late 1980s, when individuals of Puerto Rican descent began gathering at cultural events to discuss family oral histories and historical inaccuracies about our ancestors....Some of us began researching and disseminating information, and the numbers grew. This is how the *Asociación Indígena de Puerto Rico* (Indigenous Association of Puerto Rico), or AIPR was born.

However, the NYC Taíno activist also told me that such alliances and associations were threatened by religious differences, disagreements over how to organize, differences over whose authority to follow, among other—sometimes more personal—disputes.

The AIPR started out well, but almost as soon as it was created it became obvious that its focus varies from individual to individual. Some members were more interested in spiritual aspects, others with academic, and still others with the politics of asserting native identity. The groups splintered and became two separate entities: The Maisiti Yucayeque Taíno (MYT) and the Taíno Nation. Within the MYT there were family units or subgroups focusing on culture, such as the ARAwak Mountain Singers...Soon after the formation of the Taíno Nation and its splinter groups, people of Cuban and Dominican extraction in the U.S. also began joining, bringing with them aspects of Taíno culture that had almost disappeared from Puerto Rico due to American assimilation. (Guitar, Ferbel-Azcarate, and Estevez 2006: 62)

In Puerto Rico, similar disputes created breaks in organizational structure that led to the creation of two major organizations. Other organizations which have their own particular trajectories formed along the same timeline but only now have allied with the more publicly known organizations in protest of the treatment of ceremonial sites.

Some U.S.-based Taíno organizations have allied with P.R.-based ones. The two U.S.-based organizations that I interviewed were not allied with each other, and, in fact, were allied with P.R.-based groups who were also in the middle of a large disagreement. The terrain of current Taíno organizations is laden with disputes over who has the right to represent the Taíno overall, whose organization precedes others and whether newer organizations respect elder organizations in establishing themselves. A few organizations formed after Taíno activism became more publicly oriented through the 2005 protest at a Taíno ceremonial site in the central mountainous region of Puerto Rico. These new organizations, though not required to ally with older ones, were expected to pay respect to them and their accomplishments.

In considering the multiple representations of and discourses about the Taíno within the Puerto Rican ideological landscape of belonging, it is important to keep in mind that Taíno peoples and the organizations some of them form, however, are neither completely cohesive nor interconnected. The goals of the movement's 'spokespersons' may not articulate with the goals of those that identify as indigenous in Puerto Rico. This may lead to further divisions that may obliterate the recognition of the movement's authenticity and legitimacy among the non-Taíno Puerto Rican populace.



*Where, how many?*

The most recent released U.S. census (2000) shows the Island's population to be 3,808,610, of which 0.4% (13,336) identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. The total of people that claim to be American Indian or Alaska Native both alone and in combination with other categories is 26,871—0.7% of the general population. It is not clear how many of these persons identify specifically as Taíno, other indigenous Caribbean and Latin American categories, or with U.S.-based Native American affiliations. Partially in response to this inability to pinpoint what such numbers mean with respect to the local Taíno-identifying population, for the 2010 census, some groups have made efforts to push self-identifying Taíno to complete the census and mark the category of “American Indian or Alaska Native” and to write in “Taíno” for “principal tribe.” The UCTP is also conducting their own census where they ask people to mark a box for how they identify (including various subcategories of Taíno related to their geographical and historical leanings and trajectories). Additionally it asks whether the person traces their indigenous lineage through their maternal side, paternal side, or both. Other details concerning family history including grandparents, spouses and children are also asked. The information on the form is expected to be notarized and include support materials. The UCTP hopes that this project both promotes the Taíno cause while also allowing them to account for the number of people of Caribbean descent more generally that identify as Taíno.

Controversial in the discussion of who is Taíno, are recent mtDNA studies conducted by Martinez-Cruzado in Puerto Rico (Ho-Fung, et al. 2001) of the University of Puerto Rico-Mayaguez Campus. His study found that 61.1% of his sample (n=800) had Native American mtDNAs (especially Haplogroups A, B, C, D) (also 26.4 Sub-

Saharan African, 12.5 Caucasian). Of these Native American mtDNA's, the majority corresponded with a probable Taíno origin. These studies have been problematically taken up by members of groups, who in trying to prove their claims in the face of skepticism may over interpret the significance of such studies—and by scholars who may read a sort of eugenic project as an outcome of such studies. Part of the difficulties lie in the translation of such scientific information onto an exclusive notion of race, where people might claim “if I have Taíno mtDNA, I must be Taíno”; rather than “If I have Taíno mtDNA, I must have had a Taíno ancestor.” While mtDNA evidence may serve to indicate a longer period of contact than suggested by many present historical interpretations, it does not on its own serve as evidence of Taíno cultural survival, especially as many self-identified Taíno may not have such mtDNA, and many who do not self-identify as Taíno may have such mtDNA. In fact, more than a few Taíno take the position that these genetic studies are not validation of their survival:

While recognizing the importance of genetic studies, I feel that we Taíno, as a people, validate the DNA evidence, not the other way around. This journey of self-discovery that I and many others are undertaking is about culture, not genes, for genes say little about as a people. In fact at the beginning of the Taíno restoration movements (through which we mean to restore the Taíno to their proper place in the histories and societies from which their supposed extinction has erased them), we did not have DNA to back up the claims to native ancestry that were made. All we had were oral traditions and staunch native assertions. The movement took off from this, not from a laboratory (Guitar, Ferbel-Azcarate, and Estevez 2006: 62).

Recognizing the complicatedness of mtDNA evidence, many Taíno activists differed in their response to genetic testing. While some people were eager to be tested, and some held their results with pride, others rejected such testing, because they did not need a test to tell them who they knew they were. Overall, there are different ways to make claims to indigeneity in Puerto Rico.

During my own research, such self-identifications as indigenous were marked by the use of several denominations. Though many, indeed the majority, of my more active research consultants designated themselves Taíno, not everyone who considered themselves indigenous used the term Taíno to describe themselves. Some preferred the more generic *Indio* (especially rural persons not affiliated with any organization or group), some used the term Boricua, others Jíbaro, and some Caribe. Throughout the dissertation I explore how such different terms may index different loyalties and historical trajectories. Such differences in self-designation complicate accounting for who considers themselves Taíno. Throughout my research I encountered, overall, around five-hundred persons within approximately eight organizations that actively claimed an indigenous Caribbean identity. However, the numbers of people who might consider themselves indigenous does not necessarily correspond to this figure. During my research, many people claimed to be *Indio* without necessary affiliating with activist organizations or calling themselves Taíno. The release of the 2010 census numbers will hopefully shed light upon the scope of indigenous self-designation in the Island.

### *Methods*

Given this context—both heavily charged and controversial—I decided to go out and ethnographically research the contemporary Taíno/Boricua peoples and organizations. I had to keep my own assumptions and ideologies in check when researching among the Taíno, who shared their knowledge, and opened their daily lives to me. I had to ask myself: What are my assumptions about the relation between purity, authenticity, and indigeneity? What are my own suppositions about what constitutes the relations between ethnic identifications? Does claiming to be Taíno, somehow entail

denying having African or other heritages? Are these mutually exclusive, especially according to the people making the claim? Does cultural change equal extinction? Does “mixture” make someone not “something”?

My analyses are based on research conducted between August 2006 and August 2008 through participant-observation and interviews with members of four indigenous groups in Puerto Rico and interviews with the leaders of two indigenous organizations in New York City. Data collected includes sixty hours of audio recordings, forty-five hours of video recordings, field notes, and pictures. I focused on various groups on the Island that claimed Taíno/Boricua (and/or Jíbaro) indigenous ancestry and organized around these claims. These groups varied in their assertions, goals, and ideas about what it meant to be indigenous and how to demonstrate this publicly, although they may have agreed in their right to claim this ancestry. I selected several Taíno organizations dedicated in different ways to the maintenance and transmission of Taíno culture in Puerto Rico. Using audio and video recordings, as well as fieldnotes from participation in group events, I trace conversations and dialogues across different contexts to show how these are embedded within and in tension with widely circulating ideologies of the relation among language, religion and group identity in Puerto Rico.

I explore how interactions play out when people contest a history that each participant may feel they have an equal right to make claims about. What debates, silences and agreements result from holding on to specific configurations of history, and understanding your personal trajectory as rooted within it, as you engage with persons that defy your own articulations of historical events and figures?

## *Overview*

Ambiguity is at the root of contemporary historical debates in Puerto Rico. I argue that the crux of the Taíno debate is primarily a result of historical ambiguities with respect to whether the annihilation of the indigenous people of the Caribbean was a total one or not, and following this, whether anyone has a right to claim that they are Taíno. In order to better understand the bases of this debate, in chapter 2 I delve into the roots and historical trajectories of such ambiguities as well as trace how they have influenced current understandings of race, ethnicity and nation in Puerto Rico. Here, memory and history are intertwined and their different contemporary entailments are contended. Conventional historical discourses and people's memories of the past can, to some extent, be mutually constitutive. But, such remembrances of the past, and their relation to the present, may significantly differ depending on a person's readings of standard historical discourses, of historical recollections passed on through oral traditions and practices and a person's own memories. In the case of the Taíno, the struggles that result from such differences often map onto discussions of the conceivability of an indigenous presence on the Island. By contrasting historical documents, oral narratives and various contemporary analyses, I locate various versions of histories circulating and implicit in constructing contemporary Taíno peoples as an impossibility.

Chapter 3 further develops the theme of ambiguity by considering how it influences current interactions—the struggles and negotiations that result from such incongruities. Additionally, I consider how Taíno peoples themselves have addressed these constructions, which have, in effect, both depended on their image and erased them as an extant people. I analyze these discourses and their entailments within an interaction between a Taíno activist and a non-Taíno identifying person, as well as among a Jíbaro-

Boricua activists and rural elders. As such, I elucidate the relationship between potentially incongruous historical discourses and everyday interactions. I ask: How do such differences in the understanding of history affect current conversational exchanges between people who self-identify as Taíno and those who don't? What sorts of debates ensue, or not? What sorts of evidence can self-identifying Taíno people offer?

Chapter 4 is concerned with the consequences of living in the world projected by prophecy. The analyses of current debates about the validity of Taíno claims beg this question: Why are Taíno activists making their claims public now? What sorts of narratives do they draw from in justifying, framing and understanding their projects? A prophecy said to have been made in 1511 is the focus of this chapter.

Extending the understandings of time and causality that underlie the prophetic frame, chapter 5 investigates ways of making meaning in the world that some Taíno elders and leaders claimed to be a more important aspect of communication than linguistic forms. I analyze how such forms of understanding are communicated to newer Taíno organization members, and how these forms are implicit in structuring authority within the group. Within this area of inquiry, this chapter traces how incongruities influence the ways in which Taíno people are interactionally and bureaucratically recognized, as well as how Taíno activists draw from, contest, regiment, and produce their own texts, scripts and discourses to assert themselves in Puerto Rico. I engage with discussions about the role of cultural and language ideologies and valuation in the production of textual emblems of linguistic (in the case of the Taíno language activists, mainly cultural) differentiation by looking at the processes involved in the production and circulation of scripts (Bender 2008; 2010; Field 2010).

Not all groups, however, limit Taíno language use to a form of understanding. Some groups are currently working to reconstruct and reclaim the Taíno language. But, how do you reconstruct a dead language? What challenges do you encounter? What sources do you use? Who do you consult and what authorizes your project? Why? For what purpose? These are questions explored in chapter 6, with attention to the debates about linguistic origins among indigenous organizations in Puerto Rico.

Ultimately, what is at stake in the Taíno project, in Taíno activism? Chapter 7 brings together the debates in the prior chapters, by considering Taíno struggles over burial and sacred sites in Puerto Rico. How can/do the Taíno attempt to interrupt narratives of their extinction in their interactions with government bureaucrats so as to position themselves as custodians of Taíno burial and sacred sites?

Overall, my research investigates the ways in which social actors manage, transform, and challenge normative social categories and identities through their linguistic practices. In my analysis, I attend to the differing epistemologies and ambiguous discursive formulations that buttress a social actor's expectations, understandings and framings of an interaction to consider why specific linguistic choices are (sometimes unintentionally) made and how they are evaluated. I demonstrate how these choices and their evaluations, in turn, are important in understanding how social actors synchronize to build common ethnic identifications.

### *A note on the journey*

Waiting at a bus stop during a cold Chicago winter with my mom when I was seven or eight—I can't quite remember—someone asked me what I was. I remember saying with pride "I am Puerto Rican." My mother smiled at my response, and still

retells the story with pride. When I was in Chicago as a young child, I didn't quite know what it was to be Puerto Rican, but I knew it was something that I should be proud of. My mother seemed to know what it was; she had moved to Chicago from Vieques not long before I was born there. Even my dad had an idea, though growing up mostly in Chicago, part of the migration of people from his town—San Sebastian—to Chicago (as told in Gina Pérez's *Near Northwest Side Story*: 2004) he was still part of the Puerto Rican community and deeply involved with the rest of his family there. I remember how our home had framed posters from each year's Fiestas Patronales (Patron Saint Festivals) in Humboldt Park, the place where I ate *bacalaítos* (codfish fritters) and heard Spanish and Spanglish being spoken around me. When I moved to Puerto Rico at age nine, I got a better idea of the Island, a place where I could find *bacalaítos*, but also real people with real lives and real attachments to the Island itself. It was a place where some families had lived in the same *barrio* since their grandparents can remember and where I was now a *gringa*, external, from elsewhere. Maybe that was why I became fascinated with social studies lessons of the Island's history. Having arrived from the U.S., I felt only a vague right to the Island's stories, grasping onto anything I could to understand it, with a sense that it was something I could do to belong.

Walking and moving among the Taíno, among the self-aware *Indios* for two years, among those who were not only sure they belonged, but knew that the Island was their heritage, their place, I became self-aware of my own background, seeing how my own family trajectories danced around the documented histories and the histories the Taíno themselves told. Often asked if I identified as Taína, my answer was a most sincere "I can't." I couldn't for many reasons; I was too comfortable in the space of ambiguity to



ever identify as anything other than woman, Puerto Rican, and, occasionally, nerd. But these too were broad categories that I could be vague within. And even though I was told I had an *India* grandmother, I also knew that one of my great-grandfathers was a *mulato* from Guadeloupe, and that my father has blue eyes. That was my story, my family trajectory. The narratives of my past that I felt most comfortable in were the vague, ambiguous, multi-threaded ones that resulted in the story of my family.

The stories my family tells aren't, for the most part, documented, and there are stories my family doesn't tell, as well as ones that they don't even know. For example, no one knows much about my paternal great-grandfathers. My grandfather's father was Papá to my family; everyone else called him *Don Chilo* because his name was Cecilio; they even named their youngest son after him, now *tío Chilo*. Papá was born in 1890 and was thirty-five when he started his life with my great-grandmother. He was forty when he had my grandfather, and in his sixties when he had his last child. Everyone always remembers him as an elder, as a family patriarch, but no one knows anything about the years before he started his life with Mamá. In fact, when Papá died, they found out that his given name was Juan Desiderio. My family still wonders, who was Juan Desiderio—the man they think he might have been—before Mamá?

These sorts of stories are not at all uncommon. Finding out these stories, for me, enriched and complicated the sense of what my family's past and my own ancestry might have been, resulting in a deeper understanding of my family's struggles, their choices, and of why they are the way they are. But they are my family's stories and they differ from those that other families tell. And for me, there isn't a sense of whether my family stories are true or not. There are stories I know, stories I don't know and stories I will

find out. And I know that the stories I know might change, but does that make them untrue? After all people still call Papá *Don Chilo*.

What follows in the dissertation is my own attempt to grapple with family stories, with undocumented threads of history that are not my own. As Behar (2007) suggests, throughout the dissertation I push myself to be critically reflexive about the stories I tell and how I share them. The stories and life experiences that have been shared with me influence the ways in which the Taíno activists understand themselves and their family trajectories, as well as the ways in which they interact in and make a place for themselves in the world. I do not seek to deny the larger stories told about the Island, the documented ones, the ones that you can verify in the archives. That is why I try to uncover the ambiguity and heterogeneity—to show how they play out, emerge, and materialize in interaction. I want to take for granted that the larger histories, like the family ones, are positioned, even if they enjoy the luxury of being documented. Because, this project, ultimately, comes out of a desire to understand.

## CHAPTER 2:

### DIVERGENCE AND CONFLUENCE IN A HISTORY'S TELLING: A CONSIDERATION OF DISPARATE HISTORICAL DISCOURSES IN TRACING PUERTO RICO'S INDIGENOUS TRAJECTORY

*The Taínos of the Caribbean islands are extinct.*

Anthony M. Stevens-Arroyo, author of *The Cave of the Jagua*, (2006: 3)

*We recognize their right to associate and practice every type of ritual that they want; of course, always in accordance with the laws and order of our Puerto Rican society and the rules regarding the use of ICP installations, which applies to all. Well if among the 'Yorubas' they accept polygamy that could not be tolerated in Puerto Rico. Nor will the practice of cannibalism or the sacrifice of enemies captured in combat be permitted... these so-called "Taínos" maintain an attitude of supremacy over the other Puerto Ricans. They consider themselves the only authentic "Boricuas." They want to be conceded privileges and prerogatives that would be denied to everyone else. They assume an attitude of rejection and confrontation toward those, who with valid reasons, do not recognize their allegations of 'ancestral Taíno heritage'...we cannot, nor should we recognize what they are not, nor give legitimacy to a claim that has no foundation.<sup>12</sup>*

Teresa Tió, Director ICP July 2005 (in Kuilan-Torres 2005)

*My mother, indisputable descendent of the Taínos, who with her every day practices discredited the official history that spoke of extermination. Our very surroundings, the foods with which we grew up, our house a bohío (hut) of straw, shrubbery, and yagua (refers to the large leaf of a type autochthonous tree), the containers in which we took our food, spoke to me more of the Taíno Indians and of the Blacks than of the Spanish. The writings of Juan Manuel Delgado, Aurelio Tió, Estela Sifre and other historians that scrutinized the theory of a survival more than of an extinction, had more logic than the other history we learned and had pounded/mashed.<sup>13</sup>*

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<sup>12</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Les reconocemos el derecho asociarse y a practicar todo tipo de ritual y ceremonia que deseen. Claro está, siempre todo ello sujeto a las leyes y el orden de nuestra sociedad puertorriqueña y de los reglamentos sobre uso de las instalaciones del ICP que aplican a todos. Pues si entre los 'yorubas' es aceptada la poligamia, ello no podría tolerarse en Puerto Rico. Como tampoco se les permitiría la práctica del canibalismo ni el sacrificio de los enemigos capturados en combates... estos llamados taínos mantienen una actitud de supremacía sobre los demás puertorriqueños. Se consideran ser los únicos 'boricuas' auténticos. Quieren que se les concedan privilegios y prerrogativas que se les negarían a todos los demás. Asumen una actitud de rechazo y confrontación hacia quienes con razones válidas, no les reconocen sus alegaciones de 'herencia taína ancestral...no podemos ni debemos reconocerles lo que no son, ni dar legitimidad a un reclamo que no tiene fundamento."

<sup>13</sup> Original quote in Spanish: "Mi madre, indiscutible descendiente de taínos, con su quehacer diario iba desacreditando esa historia oficial que hablaba del exterminio. Nuestro propio entorno, los alimentos con

Tina Casanova, Writer of “El último sonido del Caracol” (2005), responding to journalist Jorge Rodríguez (2005: E4), who asked “how much of this topic (referring to indigenist studies) influenced the author in the novel..?”<sup>14</sup>

### *Introduction*

The history of Puerto Rico is contested particularly as it relates to the Taíno. This chapter focuses on two interrelated yet distinct threads of the Island’s history, one that claims that the indigenous Island population survived and another that considers such a survival is impossible. Both of these threads circulate, though unevenly and largely among different sectors of the population. An excavation into these two discourses reveals the ambiguities in currently dominant historical narratives of Puerto Rico, exposing the frame within which contemporary claims to being Taíno/Boricua becomes possible. Taking a somewhat Gramscian view of hegemony, I explore how the dominance of particular versions of Puerto Rican history became historically established, the script from which common sense notions of history became conventionalized. My goal is to denaturalize the value imputed to particular versions of history and to analyze the historical processes and relations of power that entrench particular worldviews. Publicly circulating denials of Taíno/Boricua survivals have not succeeded in extinguishing Taíno/Boricua activists’ claims, though they have impeded their access to institutional resources and/or particular forms of sovereignty. Instead, Taíno/Boricua activists’ historical claims may exist alongside, cross-cutting or sometimes in opposition to the more widely circulating taken for granted, common-sense understandings of Puerto Rican history concerning Taíno/Boricua survival. Here, I hope to move away from

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los que crecíamos, nuestra casa (un bohío de pajas, matojos y yagua), los envases en los que tomábamos los alimentos, me hablaba más de *indios* taínos y de negros que de españoles. Los escritos de Juan Manuel Delgado, Aurelio Tió, Estela Sifre y otros historiadores que escudriñaban la teoría de una sobrevivencia más que de la extinción, tenían mayor lógica que la otra historia aprendida y machacada.

<sup>14</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “¿cuánto de este tópico [estudios indigenistas] hubo de influir en la autora en la novela”

questions of truths or falsities concerning history. I specifically focus on two figurations of Puerto Ricanness that many Taíno/Boricua interpret in ways that are different from more conventional ideologies: the Jíbaro and the racial tripartite model of the Island's population. In exploring the Jíbaro concept and the processes by which it has become a national archetype for some and a link to contemporary Taínoness for others, I want to emphasize that these narratives are varieties, neither right nor wrong. I want to focus on each version as the product of different historical trajectories that coexist on asymmetrically ratified terms. These alternative hegemonies (Gramsci 1992) can be seen to reflect the indigenous epistemologies that inform them.

To do this, I examine how many Taíno/Boricua activists and others recount memories of their indigenous upbringings, contrasting their narratives with more conventional interpretations of historical events and figures in Puerto Rico. Many of the Taíno/Boricua activists I interviewed considered larger historical accounts too distant and too broad to tell the Island's stories, and they are understood by many to stand in the way of achieving interactional and bureaucratic recognitions of indigeneity in Puerto Rico. The reminiscences shared by many Taíno/Boricua activists interrupt and expand the interpretations available to others for understanding their past. Drawing on Meek, I consider Taíno/Boricua sociocultural revitalization as a process that, like language revitalization, "attempts to repair the rips and tears, the disjunctures, resulting from an enduring colonial history focused on termination" (Meek 2010b). For my indigenous consultants, such repairs depend upon sharing their own recollections and in doing so, potentially reconfiguring expectations and representations of Puerto Rican histories. Such an analysis requires a consideration of the role of memory and politics in the

construction and contestation of historical discourses, of the spaces that remain when nation-level processes of erasure take place, and of how sign relations embedded in local cultural categories and histories become maintained in such spaces.

*Memory and politics in constructing and contesting historical discourses*

Discrepancies between more conventional and Taíno/Boricua historical threads are the consequence of long occurring processes in Puerto Rico involving unequal distributions of power and access to economic resources, and variable distances from sites of knowledge production, which resulted in a diversity of life experiences that could not be collapsed into a singular narrative. Accordingly, there are many overlapping yet distinct social practices and discourses in and through which the exclusion of many Taíno/Boricua indigenous viewpoints in widespread Puerto Rican historical accounts has been accomplished. This exclusion results neither from a coherent set of goals nor from a single ideological standpoint. Yet, these practices all serve to discursively erase and in practice silence the historical perspectives proposed by persons claiming to be indigenous in Puerto Rico. As such, incongruities and disjunctures are key components of social practice, well-suited to describe the day-to-day effects of inconsistent historical, social, cultural and linguistic paradigms in interaction.

As Meek (2010b) argues, however, these incongruities, and the concomitant interactional disjunctures they precipitate, “create opportunities for re-setting patterns, for re-schematizing some system of semiotic value, for transforming everyday communicative practices and expectations” (95). I connect this insight to the historical processes of erasure, silencing and banalization that have led to such inconsistencies (on erasure see Irvine and Gal 2000; on silencing and banalization see Trouillot 1995).

This chapter considers how processes of constructing state sponsored and disseminated accounts of Puerto Rican history, though complicit in encouraging the erasure and silencing of particularly situated voices, were not successful in every respect. Though effective in creating Puerto Rican master narratives and informing public policy, such accounts have not equally permeated every sector of the Puerto Rican population. By studying such permeations through the image of the *Jíbaro*, I briefly illustrate how attempts to absorb Puerto Rico's rural populations have served to discursively erase the Island's indigenous population. Furthermore, by contemplating how ideologies of racial democracy, as circulated within particular political campaigns around mid-twentieth century, precluded claims to being *indio* while making banal any African contribution to Puerto Rican culture, I elucidate complications in making claims to being *indio* in Puerto Rico.<sup>15</sup> I also show how these processes are always partial, positioned and problematic. By contrasting such discourses with the Taíno/Boricua recollections of Puerto Rican history I encountered throughout my field research, I clarify the gaps or spaces for re-schematization that remain and within which many Taíno/Boricua activists may respond to discourses that endeavor to erase them.

In this chapter, I specifically consider two articulations of Puerto Ricanness that can preclude or enable Taíno/Boricua claims to survival: the archetypal Puerto Rican as the *Jíbaro* and the typical Puerto Rican as a product of the racial triad. In the last section

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<sup>15</sup> A related set of issues emerges with respect to the Cherokee. Though the Oklahoma-based Cherokee nation is federally recognized, the state-recognition of six Cherokee groups in Tennessee on August 15<sup>th</sup>, 2010 was heavily contested by the Oklahoma-based Cherokee Nation. Claiming that the Tennessee groups were heritage clubs as opposed to indigenous tribes, the Communications officer for the Cherokee Nation said: "When people do genealogical research, they find all sorts of ethnicities and may take a particular interest in some of them. . .you can't make up your own tribe just because you found a Native ancestor" (Woodard 2010) Such debates reveal a common theme surrounding claims to being Indian—that is the complexity of making such claims as well as the ambiguous trajectories that have created a necessity for such boundary protection. Their state recognition was voided on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010.

I explore how many Taíno/Boricua manage the tensions inherent to these discourses by making explicit the contradictions within the figure of the Jíbaro and the racial triadic model of Puerto Ricanness.

*Jibaridad, the making of a national icon*

An analysis of the use of the term Jíbaro as a designation for a sector of the Island's rural population and of Jibaridad as a flexible concept loosely based on this population goes far in allowing us to understand the multiple, and sometimes contrasting, connotations the term can suggest. I briefly track the concept from its early documented use to the present in order to highlight some of the debates which involve the Jíbaro and Jibaridad.

The lexical origin of the word is highly debated. Some argue that Jíbaro is derived from ancient Castilian (giba {hump ~ arguably hill} + ero = gibaro {man of the hills}) (Roberts 1997). Others maintain that it was imported from the Spanish corruption of the name of the Shuar people in South America and then used by the Spanish to designate Puerto Rico's "savages" (Córdova 2005; Torres-Robles 1999; Scarano 1996; 1999), while others contend that it is an indigenous Taíno term (Alvarez Nazario 1996). Debates about the origin of the term often go hand in hand with ideas about the ancestry of the people described by it, as well as the goals they may have in describing and/or deploying it politically.

Some insight is lent by an 18<sup>th</sup> century painting depicting Spanish castes found in Mexico. The Spanish caste system was a mechanism meant to sort, organize and classify the results of what was understood as racial mixing largely among Africans, Spanish and Indigenous peoples in Spanish colonies. There were regional and temporal variations on



the specific classifications, but in the following painting one of the possible classifications was that of the Gíbaro (see number 9). The image depicts the Gíbaro as the child of a “Lobo” with a “China.” Both the Lobo and the China were understood as resulting from other “interracial” couplings. Below the illustration I diagram the various combinations that were understood to result in a Gíbaro person.<sup>16</sup>

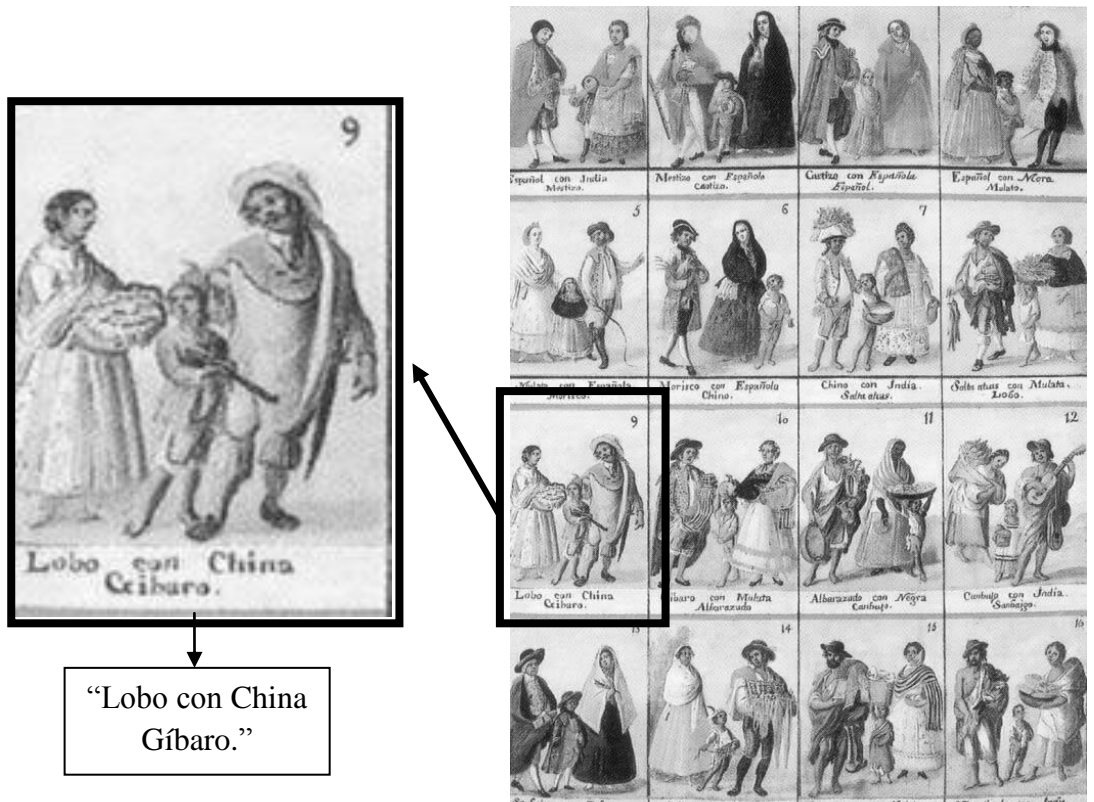


Figure 2.1 Anonymous, *Las Castas*, 18th century.  
 Oil on Canvas, 58 1/4" x 40 15/16".  
 Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, Mexico

<sup>16</sup> Though fascinating in itself, a discussion of the Spanish caste system here is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

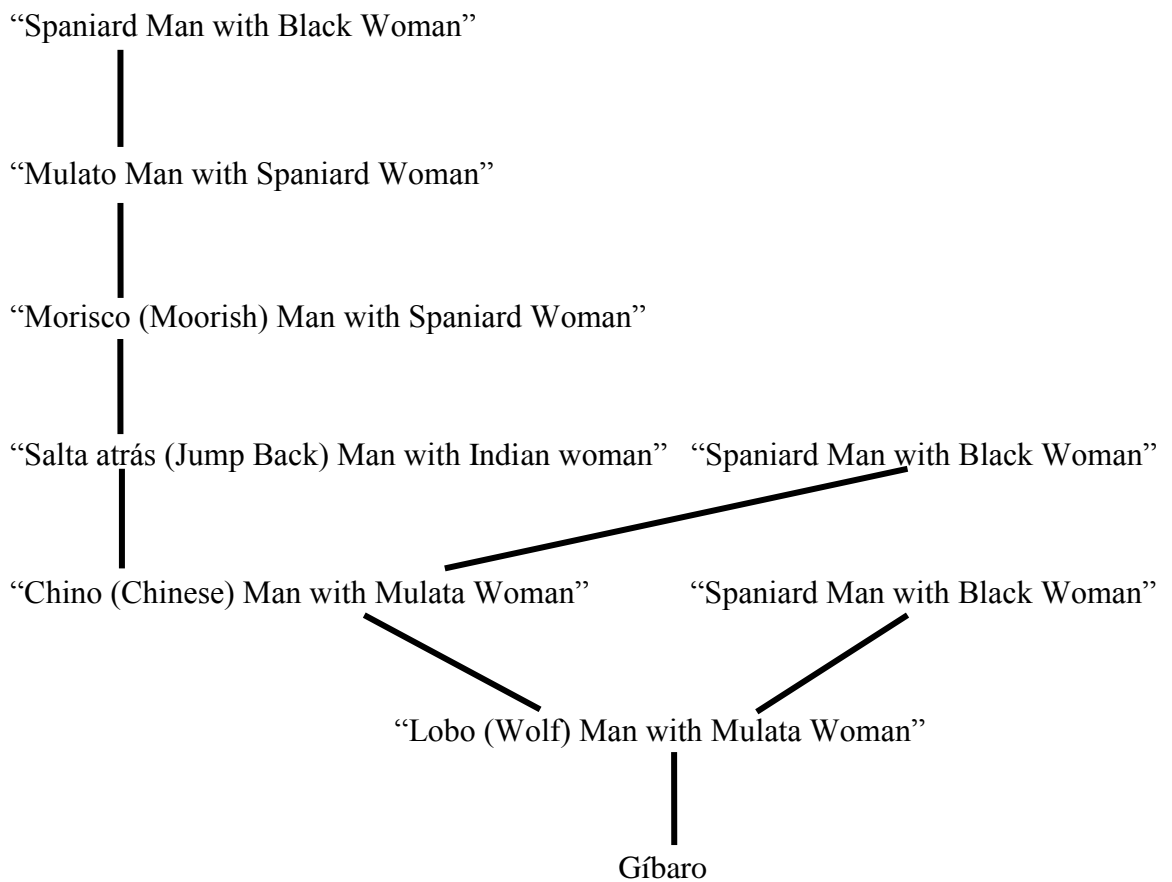


Figure 2.2 Diagram of Gíbaro according to caste classification system in the 18th century painting above.

Though this diagram provides a few clues on the early applications of the term Jíbaro, it is still unclear what the scope or circulation of this particular use was during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Puerto Rico.<sup>17</sup> In early documentation of the Jíbaro in Puerto Rico itself, the term was used as the designation for the Island’s rural inhabitants or peasantry, often highlighting what were perceived or put forth as the negative aspects of these

<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, the term as it was used in this image does capture how many understand the Island’s current racial makeup, as a mixture of African, Spanish and Indian ethnracial heritages. This is a concept I discuss later in this chapter.

populations.<sup>18</sup> For example, in a 1745 travel account by an anonymous source compiled by Manuel Moreno Alonso (1983: 21, 37), the Jíbaros are described as follows:

A las doce nos anclamos, y a las tres de la tarde saltamos en tierra, que dimos muchos cariñosos obscuros, sumamente alegres. Toda ella está llena de intrincadas arboledas, que fructifican plátanos, cocos, tamarintos, zapotes y otros semejantes, faltándola el principal, que es el pan, pues el que tienen aquellos infelices moradores, llamado casave, no es capaz comerles los europeos, y querían supliere los plátanos asados que ellos acostumbran comer.

Los hombres llamados givaros [sic] son amulatados, y las hembras propiamente agitanadas; no traen éstas más ropas que camisa y guardapiés muy largos por su descalzas, gastando solo los zapatos para bailar el zapateado que es su estilo y lo hacen bizarramente. Yo noté la gran devoción que tienen a las ánimas los más de estos habitantes, prueba de ser buenos cristianos, manifestándola en que rogavan [sic] y daban a por fía a los padres misioneros que venían en el navío, sus cortos bienes de limosna para que dijese misas por ellas que me admiró bastante. Sus habitaciones son de quatro lados, y tablas que tienen dispersas entre las arboledas.

#### TRANSLATION:

We anchored at twelve, and we jumped onto the ground at three in the afternoon, such that we gave many affectionate kisses, very happy. All of it/her [Puerto Rico] is full of intricate woods, that give fruit to plantains, coconuts, tamarinds, sapotas, and other similar [fruits], the most important thing was missing though, which is the bread, as what those unfortunate inhabitants have, called casabe, Europeans are not capable of eating, and wanted to supply with the roasted plantains they accustom to eat.

The givaro men are mulatto-like, and the women properly gypsy-like; they wear no clothes but shirts and long skirts as they are barefoot, using their shoes only to dance the zapateado [rhythmic shoe dancing] that is their style and they do it bizarrely. I noted the great devotion they have for the souls [in the purgatory] these inhabitants, proof of being good Christians, manifesting it in that they pleaded and tenaciously gave the missionary fathers that came in the ship, their few goods as alms so they could say mass for them which caused me considerable admiration. Their rooms are of four sides, and boards they have dispersed in the woods. (37)

This was the earliest travel account of Puerto Rico I found that mentions the Jíbaro population, describing them as eating casabe, dancing bizarrely and sleeping in what are probably bohíos—all of which current Taíno/Boricua activists claim are

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<sup>18</sup>Before the 18<sup>th</sup> century there is a dearth of written documentation on this topic specifically and concerning Puerto Rico more generally. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century the social and physical distance between Island elites and the rural populations already becomes apparent.

indigenous practices. Other eighteenth century travel accounts of the Island also mention this peasantry, which according to Scarano (1999) were already probably commonly known as Jibaros. These accounts focus on their perceived indomitability, generosity, humility, and the laziness enabled by the richness of nature in Puerto Rico.<sup>19</sup> Their day-to-day customs are ascribed to an indigenous heritage, and depending on the writer, their “racial” composition is depicted as either white, indigenous or mulatto (e.g. Abbad Y Lasierra 1959 [1788]; Ledru 1957 [1797]).<sup>20</sup> The groundwork for the term’s racial ambiguity and later debates about who it designates was already laid as early as the 1700s. Scarano (1999: 66) also notes the ambiguities with respect to descriptions of the jíbaros:

La ambigüedad reviste distintos matices: físico-médicos, raciales, morales, familiares, y sexuales, entre otros. Para algunos, los jibaros son pequeños y enjutos, pero fuertes; para otros, endebles y anémicos, palabra esta última que adquiere un significado central en los debates finiseculares...; son de una vivereza singular, pero comprometida por la alimentación; son blancos, negros, mulatos, o mestizos, dependiendo de quién los describe...si bien de un autor a otro la inconsistencia es notoria, no faltan casos en los que la contradicciones son vertidas en un mismo texto.

TRANSLATION:

The ambiguity imbues different aspects: physical-medical, racial, moral, filial, and sexual, among others. For some, the jíbaros are small and gaunt, but strong; for others frail and anemic, this last word acquiring a central meaning in turn of the century debates...; they are of a singular liveliness, but compromised by their eating habits; they are white, black, mulatto, or mestizo, depending on who describes them...if the inconsistency is apparent from one author to another, there is no lack of cases in which the contradictions are dispersed within the same text.

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<sup>19</sup> Berkhofer in *The White Man’s Indian* (1978) discusses early Spanish encounters with the Taíno Arawak Indians and exposes how the trope of the noble savage image of the Indian was already planted early on in the process of conquest. Sometimes both, sometimes either virtuous and/or deficient in civilization, the descriptions of the Taíno, and later Jíbaro, were drenched with the image of the noble savage, lacking civilization, somehow both innocent and immoral.

<sup>20</sup> For more on the travel writing genre in the colonial Caribbean, see Peter Hulme (2004).

Regardless of the ethnoracial ambiguity of the Jíbaro, the 18<sup>th</sup> century Jíbaro is already commonly described as distinct from the elite populations of the city in their speech, habits and living environment. Their way of speaking is marked as uneducated, their habits are considered rustic, and their clothing is described as consisting of a wide-brimmed hat (often called a pava), a machete, and comfortable cotton ‘*indianas*.’



Figure 2.3 Self-portrait of Luis Paret y Alcazar dressed up as a Jíbaro (1777). This image illustrates what would become a popular 19th century practice, though already occurring during the late 18th century—donning the dress and voice of the Jíbaro.

During the nineteenth century, coinciding with the increased documentation of the state of affairs of the Island, the term “Jíbaro” (alternately spelled xivaro, jivaro, givaro, or gibaro) became commonplace. Descriptions in travel accounts go into great detail about the Jíbaro population, Fernández Méndez’ *Crónicas de Puerto Rico* (1973) includes several of these descriptions.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Travel accounts including descriptions of the Jíbaro were relatively common in the late 1800’s and the 1930s: (Haas 1936; W.L. 1899; Henderson 1935; Schoenrich 1898; Hull 1936). Future research may explore the increase in writing about Puerto Rico for U.S. audiences at these times.

In 1849, Manuel Alonso's, who is often understood as the father of Puerto Rican literature, *El Gibaro* is published and widely circulated. Alonso uses poetry and prose to offer a detailed account of local customs and rustic practices. By way of example, I include representative excerpts from *El Gíbaro*. These often take the form of descriptive prose in Alonso's voice and verse written in a Jíbaro voice as revealed by how the spelling represents what are often typed as Jíbaro speech features.

PROSE:

Los bailes de *garabato* son, como he dicho, varios, y traen su origen de los nacionales españoles y de los *indígenas*, de cuya mezcla ha resultado un conjunto que revela claramente el gusto de unos y otros...(Alonso 1970 [1849]: 37).

TRANSLATION:

The garabato dances are, as I have said, many, and they originate from the Spanish nationals and the indigenes, from whose mixture an ensemble has resulted that clearly reveals the tastes of one and the other...

VERSE:

*Original in jíbaro style:*

Ey jueves a eso e la una,  
Poquito menos o más;  
Cuando yegó primo Sico,  
Que me diba a combial  
Pa un baile, que aqueya noche  
Jasian en la besinda,  
En caje de una comae (41)

*In conventional standard Spanish:*

El jueves a eso de la una;  
Poquito menos o más;  
Cuando llegó primo Sico,  
Que me iba a convidar  
Para un baile, que aquella noche  
Hacían en la vecindad,  
En casa de una comadre

TRANSLATION:

Thursday around one  
Little less or more;  
When cousin Sico arrived,  
That he was going to invite me  
To a dance, that that night  
They were going to have in the neighborhood  
In the house of a neighborhood friend

The Jíbaro in this text is considered to be “native”—referring probably, however, to a natively produced ethnicity rather than to an indigenous one. However, the everyday practices of the Jíbaro—linguistic, cultural, and domestic—are described as traceable to the indigenous Taíno, though the survival of these practices is divorced from the continued existence of the Taíno themselves— instead they are understood as remnant practices from a people who existed long ago. Through this piece, Alonso solidified the role of the Jíbaro as *the* local figure in national folklore.

This fascination with the Jíbaro led to a widespread deployment of the Jíbaro as a metaphor for a Puerto Ricanness distinct from Spain, and later, the United States. As scholars have argued elsewhere, the Jíbaro embodied notions of stubborn resistance which became useful for local elites when expressing discontent with Spanish rule beginning in the early 1800s and maintained through contemporary times (Córdova 2005; Scarano 1999; Torres-Robles 1999). As Scarano (1996) has pointed out, local elites often donned the metaphorical mask of the Jíbaro figure when making critiques of the government in public forums such as newspapers as early as in 1820 (El Gíbaro Paciente 1814).<sup>22</sup>

In spite of the fascination with the Jíbaro archetype, and the concomitant celebration of Jibaridad which became synonymous with the essence of Puerto Rican nationality, a tension with the population who identified as Jíbaros emerged. Though celebrated as an archetype, and often utilized as a locally legitimating personage by locally powerful economic and political figures, the persons who were identified as Jíbaros were hardly celebrated. For example, in answer to a question posed by readers to

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<sup>22</sup> One can compare this to how Native American figures in the U.S. were deployed in “misrule traditions” as a mode of social protest (Deloria 1998: 12)

the Puerto Rican newspaper *El Mundo* in 1932, a preeminent lexicologist in Puerto Rico,

Augusto Malaret Yordán responds:

¿Por qué llamamos jíbaro a nuestro campesino?

No sabemos de otros países americanos en donde existe el uso de este vocablo, con excepción, claro está, de Puerto Rico, donde por antonomasia llamamos jíbaro al campesino y, por extensión, a la persona agreste, rústica, incivil (Malaret Yordán 1932).

#### TRANSLATION

Why do we call our peasants jíbaros?

We do not know of other American countries where this word exists in use, with the exception, clearly, of Puerto Rico, where by antonomasia we call the peasant jíbaro and, by extension, the rural, rustic, uncivil person.

This tension became further exacerbated as the jíbaro became mobilized as a national icon that embodied the essence of the Island's national character—a symbol that defined the Island against the U.S. Antonio S. Pedreira (1935), a canonical Puerto Rican intellectual, critiques the extension of Jibaridad to the whole Puerto Rican population.

En la reciente monografía de Don José C. Rosario titulada: *Desarrollo del Jíbaro Puertorriqueño, y su Actual Actitud ante la Sociedad*, dice en la página 8, con sobrada pero equivocada razón, que el nombre de jíbaro es el que se le da al nativo de Puerto Rico que vive en el campo. Si en el siglo XIX esta definición servía con bastante lealtad para limitar el tipo que nos ocupa, en el momento actual nos parece insuficiente por lata y engañosa. De acuerdo con el último censo un 73 por ciento de nuestra población vive en el campo, y no podemos aceptar que tres cuartas partes de nuestra población esté compuesta de jíbaros genuinos. (Pedreira 1935: 16)

#### TRANSLATION:

In Don José C Rosario's recent monograph titled: 'Development of the Puerto Rican Jíbaro, and their Contemporary Attitude towards Society,' it says on page 8, with excessive yet wrong reason, that the name of the Jíbaro is that given to the native of Puerto Rico that lives in the countryside. If in the XIX century this definition served with much loyalty to limit the type that occupies us, in the present moment it seems insufficient due to its being a nuisance and misleading. In accordance with the last census, 73 percent of our population lives in the countryside, and we cannot accept that three quarters of our population is composed of genuine jíbaros.



In this excerpt, Pedreira is suspicious of how Rosario's definition of the Jíbaro has the potential to extend the concept to all Puerto Ricans. Instead, Pedreira proposes to break down what he considers to be the various categories or types of Jíbaro in order to more fully capture what he imagines to be the social makeup of the Island in relation to Jibaridad. These are the:

jíbaro ciudadano, que a la larga es cada puertorriqueño nazca donde nazca, y el jíbaro-jíbaro que nació en la montaña y conserva casi intacta, mejor que nadie, la herencia psicológica de sus antepasados [también como el] grupo intermedio que lleva y trae de unos y de otros, que aunque vive en el campo, ha sido arrollado por La Realidad Actual, y ha sufrido la erosión del cambio hasta el punto de quedar escindido, en dos claras parcelas, ese setenta y tres por ciento de nuestra población. (17)

TRANSLATION:

jíbaro citizen, who in the long run is each Puerto Rican born where he or she may be born and the jíbaro-jíbaro that was born in the mountain and conserves almost intact, better than anyone, the psychological inheritance of their ancestors [as well as the] intermediate group that brings and takes from one and the other, that although he may live in the countryside, has been hit by the Present Reality, and has suffered the erosion of the change to the point of becoming divided, in two clear parcels, that seventy three percent of the population.

Pedreira's explanation makes two parallel moves. He ascribes a Jíbaro citizenship status to all Puerto Ricans, while commenting on the dilution, and potential loss of actual "jíbaro-jíbaro" peoples, which he later calls the historical jíbaros. In doing this, Pedreira echoes the discourses that allow for the deployment of the Jíbaro as a shared national symbol. As Scarano argues:

..el cuadro multicolor de la Jibaridad, compuesto este de por lo menos dos figuras contradictorias entre sí: una, la que condena al Jíbaro como incivilizado y subversivo, y otra, la que lo exalta como depositario de la mayor autenticidad de la tierra. (Scarano 1999: 66)

TRANSLATION:

...the multicolor frame of Jibaridad, composed thus by at least two figures contradictory to each other: one, that condemns the Jíbaro as uncivilized and

subversive, and another, that exalts him as the major depository of the land's authenticity.

This tension becomes further exacerbated when the Jíbaro image becomes projected onto the Puerto Rican population as a whole, most notably in the political campaign of Luis Muñoz Marín and the PPD (Popular Democratic Party) in Puerto Rico's transition to electoral politics in the early 1950s (Córdova 2005). Jibaridad, as embodied in the Jíbaro and as a metaphor for the shared essence of Puerto Ricanness, again proved to be a fruitful national icon. In fact, the iconic pava-wearing profile of a Jíbaro became the symbol of the PPD—still in use to this day. Flanked by the words “Pan-Tierra-Libertad,” or “Bread-Land-Liberty,” the image contains what made, and still makes, the Jíbaro such a productive emblem of Puerto Ricanness.



Figure 2.4 Official Symbol of the Partido Popular Democrático (PPD)  
(image PPD website)

By highlighting what were understood to be the preoccupations of the Island's potential voters, a concern for food, land ownership and freedom, the PPD was securing a cross-class political base. As Córdova (2005: 175) argues in his analysis of the founder of the PPD:

The PPD's emblem boldly asserted a "people." It directly addressed jíbaros while also inviting Puerto Ricans from all walks of life to identify with the cultural myth it mediated...the PPD's emblem allowed for a simple reading and recognition of its elements. The arrangement of the elements of the image established a hierarchy and conveyed an inherent order that highlighted the centrality of the jíbaro as the "subject" of the campaign, further facilitating identification with the myth of a people.

In highlighting the "Jíbaro" as a subject of the PPD campaign, Muñoz Marín secured the vote of the peasant rural class that identified as jíbaros, as well as folded the non-peasant class into being able to claim a Jíbaro background insofar as the Jíbaro became a celebrated national archetype. As Scarano (1999: 68-69) has argued:

Es decir, que lo que más animó a sus autores fue el propósito de convencer a otros integrantes de su misma clase y partido de la necesidad de incorporar políticamente a las masas campesinas al proyecto democrático de los primeros...La creencia, difundida ya por varias generaciones, de que aún los más educados y finos entre los puertorriqueños tienen algo de jíbaros en su interior, y que como ellos nadie puede "leer" el alma del campesino isleño.

That is, what most animated its authors was the purpose of convincing other members of their same class and party of the necessity of politically incorporating the rural masses to the democratic project of the first...the belief, divulged already for several generations, that even the most educated and sophisticated among the Puerto Ricans have something of the jíbaro within them, and that like them no one can "read" the soul of the Island peasant.

By the time the Jíbaro was re-worked to represent the essence of a politically compromised Puerto Rican nation, the Jíbaro had come to be consistently represented as *white*, a native peasant with Spanish heritage who had acquired some indigenous rustic practices in their interaction with the land. In several instances, even contemporary authors define the Jíbaro as white. For example, López (2008: 174) writes: "Jíbaros, or the White rural peasants living in the interior region or "the heart" of the Island, who were considered "authentic" Puerto Ricans (Duany, 2002; Torres-Robles, 1999)." In fact, images of the jíbaros reflect this:

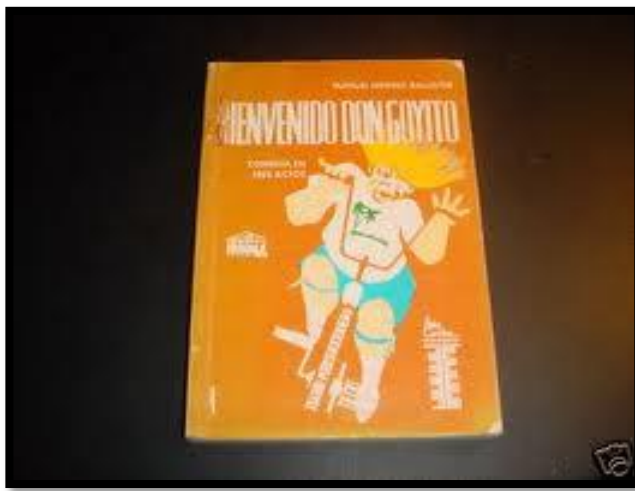


Figure 2.5 Cover of *Bienvenido Don Goyito* (1965). A satire written by Miguel Méndez Ballester about a jíbaro who moves from the country to the city. Note that he is represented as white.

Between the forties and sixties, DIVEDCO created a series of state supported education programs aimed at the Island's rural populations. Using films, pamphlets, books, posters, and presentations in local communities, the programs were meant to educate the Island's Jíbaros in terms of hygiene, alimentation, and the technological progress brought on by the Island's industrialization. In the films, for example, some everyday elements of Jibaridad are understood to stand in the way of modernization and progress. Representing daily habits of the Jíbaro as unhealthy, while celebrating the spirit of the Jíbaro, served to further justify governmental intervention in Jíbaro daily routines while further extending the metaphor to all Puerto Ricans.

This promoted a situation in which being identified as a Jíbaro might be understood as insulting and as a justification for state intervention. Even though the spirit of the Jíbaro was honored as an icon of the national essence, the rural peasants who

were identified as jíbaros were not equally celebrated. Esmeralda Santiago's summarizes the ambivalence in her memoir, *When I Was a Puerto Rican*:

If we were not jíbaros, then why did we live like them? Our house, a box squatting on low stilts, was shaped like a bohío, the kind of house *jíbaros* lived in... (12) Our neighbor Doña Lola was a jíbara, although Mami had warned us never to call her that. Poems and stories about the hardships and joys of the Puerto Rican *jíbaro* were required reading at every grade level in school. My own grandparents, whom I was to respect as well as love, were said to be jíbaros. But I couldn't be one, nor I was to call anyone a jíbaro, lest they be offended... (13) I was puzzled by the hypocrisy of celebrating a people everyone looked down on. (Santiago 1996: 12-13)

Santiago remembers the wavering around the Jíbaro as an icon celebrated in the school, as a role model represented by her grandparents, and as what surrounded her. But she herself could not call her family or others, Jíbaros—it was offensive. The contradictions concerning the term are understood by Soto-Crespo (2006: 725) to result from generational differences with respect to the readings of the jíbaro:

Contrary to Negi's [Esmeralda's] reading of the *jíbaro* as an historical identity that should be imitated, her mother inserts the diametrically opposed cultural reading: the *jíbaro* represents not what one should become but what one leaves behind in the process of becoming something else. If the state proposes the *jíbaro* as an iconic identity, then Santiago's point-counterpoint technique counters the official reading by presenting the *jíbaro* as a transformative becoming... Thus, this passage reveals a fundamental ambiguity in the structure of national belonging, where the ideals advocated in a nationalist logic are undermined by the everyday life of a people.

Whereas Santiago's mother lived through a time where being a Jíbaro had a negative socioeconomic class connotation, one with little class mobility, for Santiago, the Jíbaro was both an everyday fact and a historical icon. The ambiguities and ambivalences concerning the Jíbaro designation are the backdrop against which Taíno/Boricua counternarratives are told. It is within these very ambiguities and ambivalences that Taíno/Boricua activists tell the stories that testify their survival. In the

next section, I address another conventional national discursive formulation questioned by the Taíno/Boricua activists whom I interviewed.

### *The Racial triad*

In a film by DIVEDCO, “La Buena Herencia,” (1967) Taíno practices are cited as Puerto Rico’s good heritage. This focus on the Taíno as ancestral heritage but not as a contemporaneous identification has been deployed in various versions of Puerto Rican nationalism which celebrate the Puerto Rican cultural makeup as resulting from three legacies. The Puerto Rican racial triad, where the heritage of all Puerto Ricans is represented as the composite of three distinct cultural heritages: the Spanish, the African and the Indigenous Taíno, became especially mobilized in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century through state institutions such as the Puerto Rican Institute of Culture (ICP for its initials in Spanish), DIVEDCO, and the Department of Public Instruction. As anthropologist Arlene Dávila argues, the ICP became the:

main disseminator of the blending myth in Puerto Rico, or the idea that Puerto Ricans are made up of three ancestrally distinct cultures that, long extinct as separate populations, have merged into a unique whole: the Puerto Rican culture. Yet...racial syncretism has amounted to an “inclusive ideology of exclusion” that hides the unequal valorization of its racial components under the trope of racial mixture (Dávila 2001a: 69).



Figure 2.6 ICP seal.  
On the right a Taíno Indian man, on the left an African man, and in the center a Spanish man.

In her discussion of the racial triad, Dávila explains that the triad was, in part, a response to a need to define Puerto Rico against a commercial U.S. “other;” which resulted in the construction of a national myth of homogenized diversity that emphasized Puerto Rico’s unique cultural heritage as the shared essence of all Puerto Ricans. Implicit in this national myth was that somehow the racial triad applied equally to all Puerto Ricans. However in the assessment of the components of the triad, greater attention tended to be placed on the Spanish and indigenous heritage. The indigenous heritage, however, was only valued insofar as the extinction of the actual indigenous peoples was presumed. That, as Dávila has argued, is what made the Taíno an especially productive national symbol: that it was “officially treated as an extinct heritage, of which only traces remain[ed].”(70) Treated as an extinct heritage, no one could claim to be Taíno or claim authority over how to best represent the Taíno, but all Puerto Ricans could claim to have traces of Taíno heritage.<sup>23</sup> In bureaucratic discourses the Taíno became mythologized as Puerto Rico’s unclaimable ancestral legacy, a legacy to which all cultural practices not identifiably Spanish were attributed.<sup>24</sup> Though inhabitable and

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<sup>23</sup> The Taíno, constructed as mythological ancestral figures, were an effective national symbol. National and patriotic feelings in the Island were most often represented through and embodied in Taíno figures and symbols. Resulting from this patriotic association with the island’s indigenous population, Boriquén—the indigenous name for the Island prior to Spanish contact—became constructed as an ancestral paradise, “It was the repository of all cherished values, the wellspring of resistance, and the object of nostalgic remembrances. In poems, novels, paintings, and pronouncements, Boriquen... was held up as the promised land of hope” (Klor De Alva 1989: 155). This association with an ancestral Boriquén is relevant in the use of Boricua as an alternate national designation for all Puerto Ricans. To call oneself Boricua, or others Boricuas, often carries a nationalistic cultural tone.

<sup>24</sup> Green (1988) discusses such issues largely with respect to playing Indian in the United States, where she argues that “the living performance of ‘playing Indian’ by non-Indian peoples depends upon the physical and psychological removal, even the death, of real Indians. In that sense, the performance, purportedly often done out of a stated and implicit love for Indians, is really the obverse of another well-known cultural phenomenon, ‘Indian hating,’ as most often expressed in another, deadly performance genre called ‘genocide’” (31). She argues that a relationship of appropriation of Indian customs is combined with a desire to remove actual Native Americans resulting in a cult of the vanishing American that is at the root of much of American primal myth.

claimable, the African root was devalued in relation to the other two “roots” as not making significant contributions to the Puerto Rican essential character, as envisioned in the racial triad. This deployment has been criticized by both contemporary Taíno/Boricua groups who attack the assumption that they no longer exist, though their practices do, and also by Puerto Rican scholars who question the celebration of the Taíno heritage and the relative erasure of other presences, such as the African heritage on the Island. Jorge Duany (2002: 277) links this racial triadic notion of Puerto Ricanness to a larger governmental policy of cultural nationalism, which became mobilized by the ICP:<sup>25</sup>

As cultural nationalism became state policy, the Institute of Culture enshrined the organic metaphor of the three roots: “From the beginning we defined national culture as the product of the integration that in the course of four centuries and a half had taken place in Puerto Rico among the respective cultures of the Taíno Indians that inhabited the Island at the time of the Discovery, of the Spaniards who conquered and colonized it, and of the black Africans who since the first decades of the sixteenth century began to incorporate into our population” (Alegría 1996b: 9; see also Babín 1986: 36). This long quote from Alegría reveals the chronological and ideological ranking of the three main ethnic groups on the Island—first Indians, then Spaniards, finally Africans (Duany 2002: 277).

The mythological racial triad, however, presumed that the integration of the three roots was harmonious and equally applicable to all Puerto Ricans. In practice, this was complicated by the reality of racialization and discrimination. Though, in theory, all Puerto Ricans could claim all three ancestries; in practice, specific persons unequally laid claims to particular ethnic heritages. A physically white person could claim to be Spanish, and even to have African ancestry, cultural and otherwise. But a phenotypically

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<sup>25</sup> One can compare this sort of cultural nationalism as related to the racial triad to discussions of *mestizaje* in Mexico. Pérez-Torres (2006: 5-6) elaborates: “The discourse of *mestizaje*”, as Juan E. de Castro notes in his study tracing the history of *mestizaje*, has served to celebrate “miscegenation or cultural mixture as the basis for conceiving a homogenous national identity out of a heterogeneous population...Advocating *mestizaje* served to effectively erase the presence of a contemporary indigenous identity in Mexico, relegating the Indian to the mists of a tragic and oblivious past, and it helped to erase the constructed nature of both racial and national identity.”



black person would have a harder time making claims to being Spanish. Claiming to be indigenous, however, was an entirely different kind of assertion, since it involved declaring to be someone who was understood to be extinct. Though no one could claim to be Taíno, people with an indigenous phenotype could claim or would be told that they “look like an *indio*.” During my fieldwork it was apparent that claiming to be Taíno was met with either skepticism or interrogation. In part, this might be due to a commonplace understanding that no one in the Island knows their exact ancestry, and as such people’s ancestry and heritage should be within the bounds imposed by the ideological ranking (including whether particular categories are claimable or not) contained within the racial triad and visible assessments of physical features.

The national trope of the racial triad is understood to apply to all Puerto Ricans both in terms of genetic and cultural ancestry, delineating an ideological ranking of desirability and inhabitability (affecting acceptable ancestry claims) for each root. This ideological ranking privileged Spanish ancestry as desirable and appreciatively inhabitable; African ancestry was considered undesirable and inhabitable, while Taíno ancestry was desirable and uninhabitable. Ultimately, though the racial blending myth was supposed to espouse racial equality as an essence contained within the ancestry of each Puerto Rican, in effect it delineated a hierarchy of racialized heritages with different levels of desirability and inhabitability. Such contradictions have resulted in a disjuncture between idealized discourses of racial harmony and practical relations of racialization and racism in Puerto Rico (for an extensive discussion of these issues see Brusi-Gil De Lamadrid and Godreau 2007; Torres 1998; Yelvington 2006). This representation of Puerto Ricanness has complicated how claims to being Taíno in Puerto Rico are currently

interpreted, as they are often understood as a rejection of racial blending, and as claiming exclusive rights over an indigenous identity. In the following section, I complicate the ideologies of Jibaridad and the racial triad by considering the responses to these discourses as proposed by three men who claim to be indigenous Taíno/Boricua in Puerto Rico.

*The spaces that remain when nation-level processes of erasure take place*

Taíno/Boricua indigenous activists challenge contemporary narratives of what it means to be Puerto Rican by contesting the figurations of Puerto Ricanness that have become contained in the image of the Jíbaro and in local myths of racial democracy. Though scholarly literature concerning Puerto Rico has often described the figure of the Jíbaro as a problematic archetype of Puerto Ricanness, for the indigenous activists with whom I worked the Jíbaro was an indigenous figure, not just a national myth. For many indigenous activists in Puerto Rico, the national Jíbaro archetype represents a folkloricized appropriation of local indigenous lives. This historical appropriation, and the concomitant erasures it allows, has repercussions upon contemporary interactions between those who identify as indigenous and those who cannot even conceive of claims to an indigenous identity on the Island.

The accounts and recollections presented by my indigenous research consultants obtain some of their argumentative force by drawing on what Hill (1998) calls “characteristic formulas” that “develop a small set of major rhetorical themes” (69). The rhetoric and expertise of elders, or depending on the social context, of scholars, is understood as authoritative, as the taken for granted knowledge can go unquestioned. The characteristic formulas embedded in such accounts and the linguistic features that

instantiate their coalescence, “permit speakers to move from one of its elements to the other without bridging argumentation” (72). One might consider the common formulation of Puerto Ricanness in terms of the *Jíbaro* archetype as one characteristic formula. The other is a common formulation among persons that claim indigenous descent, that of the *Jíbaro* as an indigenous figure. For many Taíno/Boricua activists, successfully representing the *indio* aspect of the *Jíbaro* means reconfiguring what they perceive to be the characteristic formulas of the *Jíbaro* as national archetype, and reanalyzing these formulas to show how the *Jíbaro* is indigenous. This reanalysis aimed at non-Taíno/Boricua addressees, in turn, requires drawing links between discourses of the past and the present; between institutionally authorized and disseminated ideas about race and Taíno/Boricua ideas about it; and, between distinct versions of Puerto Rican history.

The Taíno/Boricua activists I researched with were suspicious of written histories for several reasons including a belief that historians might have had an interest in not writing in indigenous voices, that historians lacked knowledge of the existence of an indigenous population, and that Taíno/Boricua voices may have been taken for granted or not yet articulatable (on the issues of what gets left out of the archives that inform much historical work see Stoler 2009; Wolf 1982). Taíno/Boricua activists were aware that there were different ways of knowing and sources of knowledge in constituting the value of a claim. Juan Manuel Delgado, a Puerto Rican oral historian, writes about his own work conducting oral histories among rural populations in the seventies as a response to what he considers the denials of Taíno survival in Puerto Rican history:

Los textos de historia general de Puerto Rico han propagado esa visión, sobre todo los textos que se basaron en la histografía que se desarrolló a partir de la

Constitución del Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico (1952) y que han logrado mantenerse vigentes...mayormente generada por antihispanófilos, curiosamente se armó de las fuentes de los cronistas españoles para negar la supervivencia *indígena*. Tomaron al pie de la letra cada información, cada opinión, cada especulación, cada censo de almas; tomaron todo lo dicho sin cuestionamiento de clase alguna, sin una actitud crítica ante lo que el conquistador escribió sobre el papel. En cierta medida estos historiadores enterraron a los *indios*...La historia de los pueblos, sean colonizados o no, pero con más fuerzas en los del primer tipo, siempre cargan a cuesta con una historia contestataria que se enfrenta a la oficial...Por su propia naturaleza es subterránea, es decir, no se encuentra por ahí en cualquier anaquele de archivo público y por carecer del sello oficial es considerada subversiva. Entonces, ¿dónde podemos encontrar esa historia o parte del rompecabeza de esa historia que es nuestra y que nos sirve para contrarrestar la versión oficial? La respuesta es sencilla, la podemos encontrar en la historia oral, en la historia narrada por nuestra propia gente (Delgado 2001: 41).

#### TRANSLATION:

The texts of general Puerto Rican history have propagated this vision, especially the texts that were based on the historiography that was developed after the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico (1952) and that have been able to stay valid...mostly generated by anti-hispanophiles, it was curiously armed by the sources of the Spanish chroniclers to deny the indigenous survival. They took each piece of information, each opinion, each speculation, each census of souls literally; they took all that was said without any kind of question, without a critical attitude to what the conquistador wrote on paper. By some measures these historians buried the Indians...The history of peoples, colonized or not, but with greater force in the first type, always carry uphill with a protest history that confronts the official one...By its own nature it is subterranean, that is to say, it is not found on just any shelf of the public archive, and for its lack of an official seal it is considered subversive. Then, where can we find that history or part of the puzzle of that history that is ours and that serves us to counter the official version? The answer is simple, we can find it in the oral history, in the history narrated by our own people (Delgado 2001: 41).

As this excerpt from Delgado indicates, persons that identified as indigenous in Puerto Rico contrasted their personal experiences and recollections with historical narratives of the Island that they have encountered in school or other institutional settings—considered by my research consultants to be where the discourses that erase the indigenous presence in Puerto Rico are largely circulated.<sup>26</sup> These contrasts are

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<sup>26</sup>As Clifford argues in terms of the Mashpee, in my own research the Taíno were also to some extent “trapped by the stories that could be told about them” (Clifford 1988).

significant insofar as they explicitly highlight which events and interpretations are understood to obfuscate the indigenous presence on the island.

In an interview conducted with Guaraguao, a middle-aged New York based Taíno activist and leader, I asked him about how he reconciled his indigenous self-awareness with historical narratives that claim the Taíno are extinct. Growing up in a largely Puerto Rican neighborhood in the Bronx, he responded in English with a recollection from his experiences in elementary school:

And when there was a discussion it was just in passing to say that Columbus was there and in fifty years the Indians were all wiped out, you know? And, you know I remember listening to that and saying how can that be when everybody, my grandmother, my grandfather, my mother, everybody is saying that we have native heritage? But if the Indians got wiped out, then how could I be Indian, you know, are they lying?...when I was faced with “okay, my grandmother who is somebody I respect”, ...you know I always considered her a very intelligent person, and, and so now but all of a sudden something she told me is being actually said that it's a lie, you know? So, do I accept her word as a-an elder in my family, like a matriarch, right? Or, do I accept the, the teacher's word as an authority figure that I'm told to listen to when I go to school? You see so this set up a, a very weird situation, for me and I'm sure that that tension existed for many many people, you know going to school. And some people probably opted to say well, “probably my grandmother was crazy you know, ‘inventando’ (inventing) you know, she's a little touched you know”. But, um, I kind of opted to say no, I don't think the teacher is right...and there was a couple of instances in school where you know where I said “we're not, they're not called dead, because I'm there”, and it wasn't really, I, I don't think it was really something that teachers at that time really wanted to argue.

In fact, this is not the only time I heard this sort of response to the role of schooling in the erasure of an indigenous presence in the Island. Guaraguao's narrative recollection indicated a tension between his own family histories, represented most poignantly by his grandmother, and those he encountered in school. His grandmother's experienced knowledge and direct testimony are considered and contrasted with that of what he was taught in school, where the teacher mostly serves as a mediator of state-sponsored

knowledge. For Guaraguao, his teacher was less of an expert on the Island's history than his grandmother, who lived in Puerto Rico.

Though his own response to this difference of opinion was to say "*no, I don't think the teacher is right,*" Guaraguao also indicates an alternate response that can be had, to say: "*probably my grandmother was crazy you know, 'inventando' (inventing) you know, she's a little touched you know.*" In voicing a response that he rejected, Guaraguao also posits a theory as to how others, in a position like him, might have selected the other voice of authority: the teacher as representative of the schooling system. This sentiment is echoed in another interview, in a rural setting on the Island itself, where a middle-aged indigenous activist, Tito, noted in Spanish:

...tú dices, "*¡Caramba! Este hombre es extraordinariamente inteligente, ¿Por qué se salió? ¿Por qué no tiene chavos pa' ir pa' la escuela?*" No, al contrario en la escuela había comida, un atractivo, las, las escuelas, son un sistema de colonización, sabes, cuando, cuando Estados Unidos entro aquí, le dijo a las mamas "*Les podemos dar escuela a tus nenes, pero no me los traigas con la ropa indígena, toma 'army surplus' ropa sobrante del ejercito de los gringos. Vístemelos así entonces yo te les doy escuela. Ok.. ¡Ah! No me hables en español, y mucho menos la lengua indígena.*" Ya la lengua indígena había sido proscrita por los españoles, luego los ingleses gringos, eh proscriben el español. Eh, pero la lengua indígena y el acento indígena, (?) es atacado vilmente, si tu hablabas jibaro, tu venía, "*Mihter, mihter, aquí le traji al neni pa' que me le de clasi, que yo quiero que el aprendah.*" "*Está bien, señora, váyase tranquila que yo se lo educo.*" Entonces le dice al nene "*Ven acá, no me hables como esa señora madre tuya que te trajo aquí, que ella es bruta, tu no, yo no quiero que tú seas bruto.*" Empiezan a crear separación entre padres e hijos. Étnica. Separación en el respeto, porque el nene va pensar "*aquí al que hay que respetar es al que tiene el poder, y mi madre no tiene ningún poder.*"

#### TRANSLATION:

... you say, "*Darn! This man is extraordinarily intelligent, why did he leave, because he didn't have money to go to school?*" No, to the contrary at school there was food, an attraction. The, the schools are a colonization system, you know, when, when the United States entered here, they said to the mothers "*We can give school to your kids, but don't bring them with the indigenous clothing. Take 'army surplus' clothes remaining from the gringo army. Dress them up this way for me and then I will give them school. Okay. Ah! And don't speak to me in*

*Spanish, and much less in the indigenous language.*” The indigenous language had already been proscribed by the Spanish, and then the English gringos, eh, proscribe Spanish. Eh, but the indigenous language and the indigenous accent, they are attacked vilely, if you spoke Jíbaro, you came, [in stereotypical Jíbaro Spanish] “*Mister, Mister (Mihter, mihter), here I brought (traji) the kid (neni) for (pa’){me} you to give classes (clasii), because I want him to learn (aprendah).*” “*It is alright mam, go calmly, for I will educate him (for you).*” And then he says to the kid, “*Come here, don’t speak to me like that Mrs. mother of yours that brought you here, because she is dumb, not you, I don’t want you to be dumb.*” They begin to create a separation between parents and children. Ethnic. Separation in the respect, because the kid will think “*here the one to respect is the one who has the power, and my mother has no power.*”

Similarly to Guaraguao, Tito sets up a tension, a choice to be made between familial and institutional authority, which reflects the political change of command occurring in the Island between the 1930s and 1940s. In presenting this opposition and the choices that children and parents would have been obligated to make, Tito’s narrative offers an explanation for why so many people in Puerto Rico do not consider indigeneity an option. In effect, for Tito, the schooling system is at the heart of the circulation of an anti-indigenous discourse, calling it a “*sistema de colonización.*” For Tito, the story of the double colonization is reflected in the discipline surrounding everyday speech on the Island.<sup>27</sup> First, the Spanish limit the indigenous language on the Island, and, later, the U.S. schooling system scorns what he considers to be the remnant of an indigenous way of speaking, Jíbaro speech. Tito’s narrative representation of the exchange between the mother, child/student and teachers draws from stereotypes of rural Puerto Rican talk, particularly the raising of word final /e/ to /i/, to voice the mother as a Jíbara, contrasting her speech with the teacher’s whose representation lacks these features. Further, he uses

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<sup>27</sup> Lomawaima and McCarty (2002), Adams (1995), and Szasz (1999) discuss similar educational practices in American Indian education beginning in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, underlying educational efforts among both American Indians in the U.S. and Puerto Ricans in the new Puerto Rican colony was an explicit policy of standardizing and assimilating Native Americans and Puerto Ricans into becoming “Americans,” though such efforts were often fraught with ambivalence.

this difference in speech to represent the Jíbaro way of talking as indigenous. Tito's narrative connects the indigenous to the Jíbaro, where the Jíbaro is understood as the figuration of indigeneity threatened through U.S. schooling. This understanding of the Jíbaro stands as an alternative (and for Tito it is the only acceptable alternative) to the more widely circulating archetype of the Puerto Rican Jíbaro. The discussion of education which comes to stand for a broader set of colonial tensions is the backdrop to my discussion with Willy, a farmer in his fifties who grew up and presently lives in the rural northwest foothills of Puerto Rico, who continues:

Porque aun eso mismos jibaros, aunque tú no lo creas, decían que eran americanos, porque eso eran lo que habían escuchado y eso era lo que le habían enseñado. Y cuando tu ibas a la escuela el primer grado, que veías un libro de Cristóbal Colón, y de que si los *indios* eran malos, que don Cristóbal Colón vino y los mató, que si Juan que si Pedro, eso era los que lo que veíanos. Siempre nos enseñaban el lao contrario de la verdad. O sea, el bueno era Cristóbal Colón y los *indios* eran los malos. Quizás yo no, no, como te digo, yo no lo vi nunca de esa manera, porque a mí me interesó bien poco la historia.

TRANSLATION:

Because those very Jíbaros, even if you don't believe it, said that they were American, because that is what they had heard and that is what they had been taught. And when you went to school in the first grade, that you saw a book about Christopher Columbus, and that the Indians were bad, that Christopher Columbus came and killed them, that if John that if Peter, but that is what we saw. They always taught us the side contrary to the truth. That is, the good guy was Christopher Columbus and Indians were the bad guys. Maybe I didn't, how do I say, I never saw it that way because I was very uninterested in history.

Willy states that his lack of interest in history was because it seemed untrue to him, a version of Puerto Rican historical events that did not match up with his own experiences. Because his grandmother was indigenous, and a primary source for his own concept of history, his recollections and interpretations inflect a logic that destabilizes widespread narratives about indigeneity in Puerto Rico. He continues:



Mi abuela era más, Tito llevo a conocer a mi abuela. Era una *india*, pero *india india*, pero *india* completa. Esto no es *india* de decir que “*yo tengo unos ideales, que soy indio porque tengo esos ideales.*” Aquella era *india* de verdad. Y ella era una persona bien humanitaria. Si tú pasabas por la casa de ella, tenías que entrar a tomar café. No podías pasar porque eso eran desprecios para ella. Se sentían mal que tú pasase y le dijese “*no, no, no quiero.*” Tenías que decirle que sí, o tomarte un vaso de agua y se acostumbraba a- en lo que era el fogón. No sé si tú sabes lo que es un fogón, pues ella tenía el fogón todo el tiempo prendido, o sea tenía comida todo el tiempo en ese fogón, y antes era mucho los ñames, yautías, batata y guineo. Se comía todos los días allí, no podía faltar eso.

TRANSLATION:

My grandmother was more, Tito got to meet my grandmother. She was Indian, but Indian Indian, but completely Indian. This is not Indian to say that “*I have some ideals that I am Indian because I have those ideals.*” She was Indian for real. And she was a very humanitarian person. If you passed by her house, you had to go in to drink coffee. They felt bad if passed and said “no, no, I don’t want.” You couldn’t pass because those were scorns to her. You had to say yes, or drink a glass of water, and there was the custom of the fogón. I don’t know if you know what a fogón<sup>28</sup> is, well she had one on all the time, that is she had food all the time on that fogón, and before it was a lot the ñames, yautías, batata and guineo. It was eaten everyday there, that could not be missed.

As Willy describes his grandmother, he depicts her as people often describe the Island’s Jíbaros, cooking in a fogón, eating food that a person could grow in their home garden and being hospitable. By drawing on common and circulating descriptions of the Jíbaro to describe his Indian grandmother, Willy folds the category of indigenous onto the Jíbaro, effectively defining Jíbaros as *being* the Island’s indigenous population. This becomes relevant when considering how many Taíno/Boricua trace their indigenous ancestry through their Jíbaro family members. In this excerpt from an interview with Guaraguao, he argues implicitly against the nationally-circulated and institutionally-sanctioned image of the Jíbaros as white peasants and explicitly against the claim that although indigenous practices remain, indigenous people do not:

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<sup>28</sup> A fogón refers to an outside cooking fire, typically consisting of three rocks that sustain a large pot and wood carbon to fire the pot.

My family is Jíbaros, you know what I'm saying, from Guayanilla, and were very strong in that, you know, and being that Jíbaro we know that that's also the native you know for us, you know, ...yes we have, you know all kinds of traditions, you know everything from hammock making to basket making to, there's things in our language, there's things in our religion, the Catholic religion that's practiced in the Island, you know, how, it all retains these indigenous elements, but yet, even biologically there's some, um, continuity, right, but they're not Indians, in other words they can do all this Indian stuff, they even have some, um, biological connection, but they're not Indians, you know? So, and I was like "how can that be, you know how could you, you know, have a biological connection, and a cultural connection, but not be those people?"

In explaining his family's oral traditions and their Jíbaro lifestyle, he draws attention to the inconsistencies of claiming that there are no indigenous peoples on the Island. A 2008 book, self-published by a local indigenous group entextualizes these arguments:

Es tan obvio que no han podido eliminar nuestra cultura básica, la *indígena*. Y que aunque practicamos tradiciones africanas y españolas, y la lengua que hablamos hoy sea una mezcla y no una pura, aún somos, en mayoría, étnicamente un pueblo *indígena* jíbaro boricua (Báez Santiago and Martínez Prieto 2008: 125).

TRANSLATION:

It is so obvious that they have not been able to eliminate our basic culture, the indigenous culture. And that though we practice African and Spanish traditions, and the tongue we speak today is a mix and not pure, we are, in our majority, ethnically a indigenous jíbaro boricua people.

Here, in addition to claiming the Jíbaro as indigenous, they use the term Boricua and explain the appellation's indigenous basis: "The inhabitants of Borikén are known as Boricuas, which means Son of the Sun, but amongst ourselves we call each other Jíbaros" (32).<sup>29</sup> This understanding of the Jíbaro and Jíbaro culture as indigenous, in opposition to being part of a white peasantry, is common to many Taíno/Boricua groups that I researched.

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<sup>29</sup> Original in Spanish: "A los habitantes de Borikén se les conoce como Boricuas, que significa, Hijo del Sol, pero entre nosotros nos decimos Jíbaros."

The discourses surrounding these divergent contents differ radically in their understanding of Puerto Rican historical events. In Puerto Rico, then, at least two distinct concepts and images of the Jíbaro are in circulation—one constructed through memories and recollections and another built through larger institutional national narratives. This difference is relevant in the following chapter, where I analyze an interaction between indigenous Taíno/Boricua and non-indigenous identifying Puerto Ricans as they discuss the Jíbaro, especially as they lay claim to the same national figure, while layering different and conflicting understandings and recollections of who it is and what it means.

Additionally, Taíno/Boricua activists are aware of the impact that the ideology of the racial triad has upon understandings of Puerto Ricanness in Puerto Rico, including arguments made against claiming to be indigenous, for example: “On the other hand, the revitalization of the Taíno Indians has helped to erase symbolically the racial and cultural presence of blacks in Puerto Rico” (Duany 2002: 276). By pitting the Taíno heritage against the African heritage, such analyses obfuscate the complex ways in which Taíno/Boricua activists attempt to make sense of their heritage. Though scholarly attention has focused on this issue in their critiques of Taíno/Boricua activism and claims more generally, in practice, many Taíno/Boricua are aware of having distinct racial heritages. Such critiques of Taíno/Boricua activists in Puerto Rico presume and serve to reinforce the hierarchies embedded in the racial triad. By contrast, Guaraguao indicates his own understanding of mixing:

Just on a personal note, I was also fortunate that my parents brought me back to Puerto Rico when I was very young, so, I remember going to Guayanilla and uh, seeing the rural lifestyle, you know, people, that, you know, had chickens and you know, my c-un-uh, my tío Mingo you know lived in a little shack, that he called a bohío, you know, so he would use that-that term, you know I remember that very clearly, take us, tell us stories, all kinds of stories by the river, he had, pigs

running around and you know the first time I went on a horse and everything was, was over there, you know, so being introduced to that rural lifestyle and also being introduced you know to that side when they were first saying that, you know, yeah we have native blood, you know. Obviously we have a mix of other things too, but, I think that it was important for our family to stress that we do have native blood and that the mixing isn't, you know, isn't our fault it's just part of the process that happens you know it's not something that we have to feel bad about, it's just the way it is, but, to always remember that we had this native heritage, you know.

Such comments illustrate that the discussion of the racial triad among many Taíno/Boricua often does not reject the idea of racial blending itself. What seems to be rejected is the organization of it. That is, many Taíno/Boricua reject the notion that mixture obviates their claims to being indigenous or that “mixture” assimilated the indigenous contribution into the other two “roots.” Instead, they propose that the Jíbaro is Taíno because the Jíbaro maintained the indigenous practices, because they have an awareness of the native heritage and because the Africans and Europeans were integrated into an indigenous way of life in the mountains, where they adopted indigenous or Jíbaro culture. Thus the indigenous root becomes not only claimable, but also primary in relation to the others as the heritage that encompasses and integrates all others (see also Castanha 2008).

### *Conclusion*

By reconfiguring and interrupting larger state-disseminated categories of national identity as contained within the figure of the Jíbaro and ideas about racial blending, Taíno/Boricua activists also reconfigure contemporary social relationships. One way that they are able to accomplish this, in what I have shown so far, is by sharing personal recollections which contribute to the constitution of specific kinds of subjectivities that

over time may configure and code a Taíno/Boricua indigenous ethnic identity category.<sup>30</sup> Such recollections make apparent the incongruities between the widely circulating discourses of Puerto Ricanness often put forth by government and educational institutions and their own life experiences and local interpretations of what it means to be from the Island.

The sharing of such recollections not only reorients listeners towards the incongruities among discourses, they also position the interactants as they align themselves with a historical trajectory that maintains Puerto Rican indigeneity. In *Silencing the Past*, Trouillot (1995: 16) argues that such recollections of the past, sometimes beyond the lifespan of those making claims to remember, is part of the very process of subject constitution; "...their constitution as subjects goes hand in hand with the continuous creation of the past. As such, they do not succeed such a past, they are its contemporaries." In considering the positions regarding the past that are currently emerging among Taíno/Boricua activists, one must take seriously how the "ambiguities of history" are currently interpreted and deployed in interaction. Implicit in Guaraguao's, Tito's, and Willy's narration of history on the Island is a different perspective from that presented in conventional Puerto Rican histories. Guaraguao, Tito and Willy maintain that the Taíno were never extinct and that current Taíno/Boricua practices are attached to current Taíno/Boricua peoples. Such varied expectations regarding the current Taíno/Boricua affects the ways in which interactions and exchanges take place in Puerto Rico. Additionally, it is within this field that memories and recollections take on a particular value, precisely because they weren't written or don't seem to conform with

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<sup>30</sup> The analytic of identity is relevant in discussions of the mobilization of Taíno/Boricua ethnic categories insofar as the social processes I analyze among the Taíno/Boricua themselves relate identifications, ethnic categories and identities to each other.

what is understood as a colonial project of imprinting and creating a national sentiment on the Island, at the expense of local indigenous narratives.

In the following chapter, I trace the incongruities between indigenous and Puerto Rican historical discourses of Jibariness as they color everyday interactions and assumptions in Puerto Rico. I consider how in sharing alternative, yet parallel and sometimes overlapping visions of the Island, Taíno/Boricua activists attempt to fold those who are skeptical of their claims into a Taíno/Boricua worldview. Specifically, this is accomplished through attempts at interactionally re-creating the semiotic connections between specific common national signs and their various iconic, indexical and symbolic links. These recreations and reconfigurations are persuasive due to their ability to be entextualized, emblemized and taken on by others. This, in turn, affects the possible spread and projection of the Taíno/Boricua activists' contestation and re-configuration of Puerto Rican history. It considers the responses that result when holders of these distinct yet overlapping concepts, sharing the same label, encounter each other.

## CHAPTER 3:

### INTERACTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF HISTORICAL INCONGRUITIES

#### *Introduction*

Based on recordings of interactions made between 2006 and 2008, this chapter considers the interactional consequences of the incongruity between most indigenous historical narratives and popular historical versions in Puerto Rico. To do this, I examine how Taíno activists recount their own histories, often contrasting them with more widespread interpretations of historical events in Puerto Rico—especially with regard to the role of the *Jíbaro* and the racial triad in Puerto Rican cultural history. As I discussed in Chapter 2, for example, the *Jíbaro* figure in widespread cultural national imagery is portrayed as an archetype of Puerto Ricanness, most commonly represented as white, Catholic, rural, heterosexual and male (see Dávila 1997; Guerra 1998; Negrón-Muntaner 2002; Scarano 1996). For the Taíno, however, the *Jíbaro* is an indigenous figure that links the contemporary indigenous population to the Island's pre-Columbian population. Drawing from what prior authors (Boyarín 1992; Debouzy 1990; Pitcher 2006) have called a “politics of memory,” I want to elucidate some of the interactional, institutional and personal factors involved in challenges to widespread historical narratives involved that erase an indigenous presence in Puerto Rico (on memory see also Daniel 1993; Strassler and Stoler 2000; Lemon 2000).

Work in the fields of anthropology, history, and cultural studies have brought much attention to the role of historical narratives in creating national subjects and in

erasing or obscuring a polyphony of voices marked by their generation, class, region, ethnicity, race, gender, and sexuality (e.g. Chatterjee 2004; La Fountain-Stokes 2009; Pitcher 2006). Relatively recent work in linguistic anthropology has sought to unpack how this occurs through language and interaction (e.g. Inoue 2004; Irvine 2004).

Drawing from these insights, I consider the distinct contemporary interdiscursive links made between past and present in both Taíno and other popular historical narratives (see Agha 2005a; Wortham 2005). In Chapter 2, I analyzed the distinct historical ontologies of the Jíbaro signifier in terms of what it might mean to people with different personal trajectories. This analysis thinks of, for example, the “Jíbaro” in terms of what Inoue (2004: 46) drawing from Levi-Strauss (1969) calls “empty signifiers” which are “mobilized to index...shifting historical condition(s)...” and which can be analyzed in terms of what Stoler (2009: 4) calls “historical ontologies,” or the “mutating assignments of essence and its predicates in a specific time and place.” I consider the distinct historical ontologies which signifiers like Taíno and Jíbaro have, such that they not only mutate over time, but also in terms of what they might mean to people with different personal trajectories. In this chapter, for example, I consider how terms like Jíbaro are prone to disagreement among some audiences since the sign itself is considered by most in Puerto Rico to be a very important historical archetype, and thus fully figured and static, while others accentuate and rely on the ambiguity inherent in the sign to discursively link it to the Island’s indigenous population.

In evaluating responses evoked by controversial interdiscursive links, Riskedahl (2007: 312) shows how in Lebanon, reactions to such links may range from rejection to either a resigned or a retaliatory affirmation. In considering how Taíno accounts have



linked particular past events and national characters to the present, as well as the sets of responses they may encounter in presenting such accounts to a broader Puerto Rican public, this chapter elucidates the interactional consequences of discrepancies between national and more localized histories.

Taíno indigenous responses to these national myths are often intertwined with narratives of their lived experiences. The narrations of these experiences often highlight practices that are expected to be common to the addressees of such narrations. By re-defining these practices as indigenous and partially deconstructing the logic of the national myths as posed by the government and cultural agencies, the Taíno activists I interviewed and observed are successful in weaving their addressees into their own understandings of the Island's historical indigenous trajectory.

Current Taíno struggles focus on particular interpretations of events of the past as not only linked and relevant to the present, but also as remaining—in their own way—continuously chained to the present. As such, local indigenous activists seek to use their own sense of historical discourses to intercept and broaden the interpretations available to how others in the Island understand their past, effectively altering a social collective narrative through the sharing of what and how they remember. It is through interactional exchanges, then, that such realignments are sought, performed, and enacted; where sociohistorically embedded voices seek to reposition a larger collective narrative (Agha 2007). Bucholtz' and Hall's (2005) work on the interactional emergence of identity is useful for considering how such realignments occur within social exchanges. They argue that "...identity emerges in discourse through the temporary roles and orientations assumed by participants...such interactional positions may seem quite different from

identity as conventionally understood; however, these temporary roles, no less than larger sociological and ethnographic identity categories, contribute to the formation of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in discourse” (591). I particularly attend to how they propose the concept of adequation insofar it “emphasizes the fact that in order for groups or individuals to be positioned as alike, they need not—in any case cannot—be identical but must merely be understood as sufficiently similar for current interactional processes. This, differences irrelevant or damaging to ongoing efforts to adequate two people or groups will be downplayed, and similarities viewed as salient to and supportive of the immediate project of identity work will be foregrounded” (2005: 599).

The potential for alignment and non-alignment in the sharing of a Taíno person’s non-canonical recollections makes the analysis of such interactions particularly productive for understanding the management of interactional disjunctures. In the following data I consider interactions where different points of view on the Taíno and Jíbaro link are made. The interactions I analyze explore the alignment, or lack thereof, between two social actor’s understandings of who the Jíbaro historically and contemporarily represents. In these analyses, I also consider non-Taíno/Boricua responses to the depiction of the Jíbaro as an *indio*. I focus on the techniques that Taíno activists draw from in order to adequate themselves and their interlocutors such that future social alignments between them could become possible.

### *Reconfiguring sign relations embedded in local cultural categories and histories*

I focus on an exchange between the leader of a Taíno organization and a group of teachers in a small public elementary school in the rural southeast region of the Island. This exchange highlights some of the challenges that Taíno people in general confront

when attempting to interrupt commonly held ideas about their extinction. Yarey, the founder of the *Liga Guakía Taína-ké (LGTK)*, meets with the teachers of a small public elementary school with the aim to implement a free Taíno heritage education program<sup>31</sup>. Through this program, members of the League intend to educate elementary, middle and high school students about (their) indigenous heritage through weekly coursework in Taíno language, culture and history. In order to teach in a school, Yarey must convince the director, teachers and parents of each school to support her.

These teacher and parent meetings serve the purpose of convincing the parents and teachers to investigate their own indigenous roots as well as to make them complicit in the overall project of Taíno revitalization. For Yarey, participating in these meetings provides an opportunity for some of the participants to temporarily align with an alternative version of Puerto Rico's history—one where indigenous people have survived through the continued practice of indigenous ways of life. For others, especially institutionally legitimated teachers, such potential realignments may pose a threat to their authority by calling into question their institutionally-sanctioned knowledge. Yarey herself had to leverage the authority of her doctoral degree in order to compel others into reconsidering their stances.

I was introduced to Yarey by my sister, who had taken an anthropology class with her at the University of Puerto Rico. My sister told me that her professor was Taína and would like to meet me. I was quite a bit surprised to hear that a university professor in cultural anthropology identified as Taíno, which seemed especially fortunate at the time given that I was writing grant applications and about to begin my fieldwork. I immediately called the number Yarey had given my sister and set a meeting. I met Yarey

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<sup>31</sup> Yarey is a real name, and the name of the organization is *Liga Guakía Taína-ké*.

at the Río Piedras Campus of the University of Puerto Rico and observed one of her classes. Yarey had an imposing presence, and shared much of her understanding of Taíno activism and dynamics on the Island. She offered to introduce me to other Taíno people and include me in her projects. I began to observe Yarey's classes and go on her classes' weekly field trips. With Yarey, I traveled throughout the Island's rural communities, and met with many families that may not have been Taíno activists, yet considered themselves *indios*. Over time, as Yarey became more entrenched in Taíno activism in the southeast rural communities that her own family was from, she also became more interested in thinking about how to involve the community in her project of reclamation. Concerned with how the Social Studies curriculum was one of the culprits of what she considered the myth of extinction, she began to design a program that emphasized Taíno heritage and survival that could supplement the current public school offerings. Since the "functional unit" of the Puerto Rican Public Education System is the *Escuela de la Comunidad* (Community School), schools in Puerto Rico have relative autonomy in deciding on and implementing new educational programs. After meeting with school directors at various schools on the southeastern coastal towns of the Island, she arranged for a few presentations aimed at garnering the support of enough teachers and parents at each school to implement the programs of what had become the *Liga Guakía Taína-ké*.

One of the first places we visited was an elementary school in a very rural setting, three small buildings arranged in a "U"-shape on the top of a hill with limited parking spaces. Yarey parked on the side of the road, and as a de facto assistant /participant-observer I helped her carry the books, posters, laptop and indigenous artifacts to the classroom. We prepared the classroom for the presentation, placing the posters on a

table, piles of books nearby, placing the artifacts—maracas and other musical instruments, gourds, rock figures—so as to showcase them.



Figure 3.1 Common setup of poster with books for presentation (Feliciano-Santos 2007)

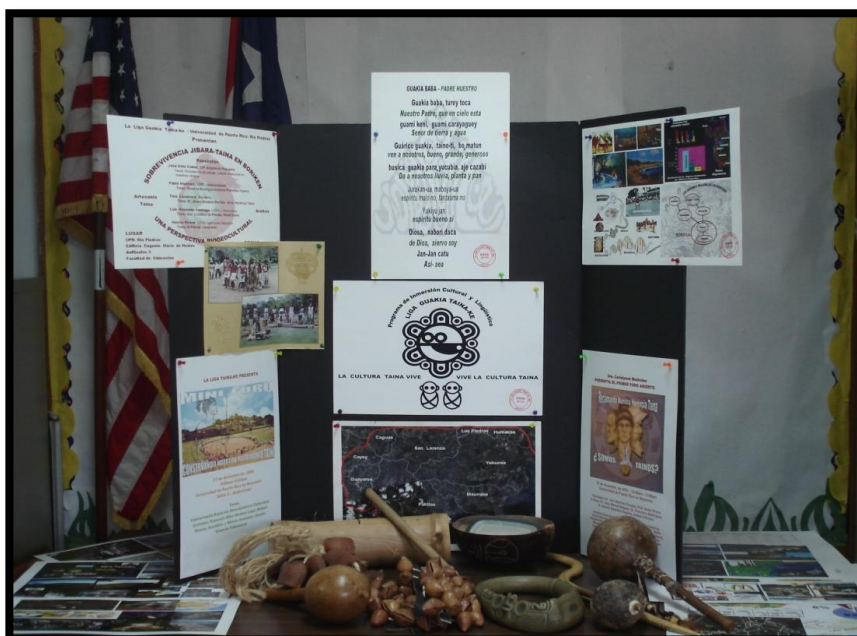


Figure 3.2 Common setup of poster with artifacts for presentation (Feliciano-Santos 2007)

The teachers came in after the school day was over and the last few students had left. They sat in the desks of the small classroom, taking notes while Yarey commenced her presentation. First, she introduced me, which was usual, so that I could explain my project and ask the audience for permission to record and take pictures of the event. With their permission, the transcripts I analyze are based on a video of Yarey's presentation, and ensuing exchange with the teachers. This transcript focuses on mainly four teachers, whom I identify as Teacher A, B, C, and D. What I know about these teachers is mostly limited to this exchange in this classroom, so my analyses of the interaction are informed by what emerges in the conversations I analyze. I chose this particular exchange as it highlights the concerns about Taíno heritage teachers generally shared in the several school presentations I witnessed Yarey give.

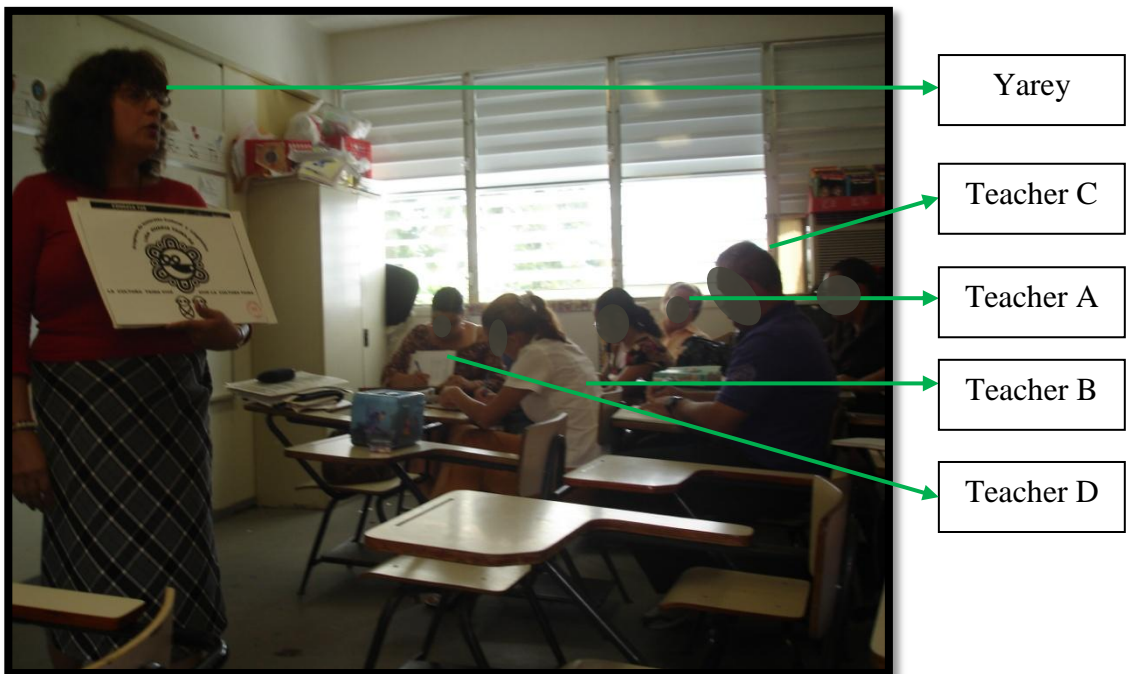


Figure 3.3 Classroom setting in including Yarey and Teacher A (Feliciano-Santos 2007)

The following exchange highlights the resistance posed by Teacher A in her uptake of Yarey's presentation. Yarey had just shared her own path toward being indigenous, as well as the reasons why she decided to give up teaching at the university and to organize this program for pre-college students instead. With a PowerPoint presentation prepared, Yarey was about to reveal her research findings based on sociological surveys and interviews with people throughout the Island who considered themselves *indios*. What follows, is Teacher A's response.

*Excerpt, "I know a lot about the Indians"*<sup>32</sup>

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| 1  | TA: <b>DIGAME, yo sé <u>mucho</u> de los <i>indios</i>, a mi me enca::nta la historia.</b>                        | TA: <b>TELL ME, I know <u>a lot</u> about the Indians, I lo::ve history.</b>                            |
| 2  | Y: <u>Excelente.</u>  | Y: <u>Excellent.</u>  |
| 3  | TA: <b>Yo parezco una española de ojos verdes</b> yo no sé, yo no tengo nada de los in=                           | TA: <b>I look like a Spanish woman with green eyes</b> I don't know, I don't have anything from the in= |
| 4  | Y: =No pero, estas equivocada=  | Y: =No but, you are mistaken=   |
| 5  | TB: =¿Pero el pelo? Es lacio.   | TB: =But the hair? It's straight.   |
| 6  | Y: <u>Estas equivocada=</u>   | Y: <u>You are mistaken=</u>   |
| 7  | TA: =No, este pelo no es lacio.   | TA: =No, this hair is not straight.   |
| 8  | Y: Puedes tener el=   | Y: You can have the=  |
| 9  | TA: =No, mentira, mi hermano tiene el pelo kinky, uno.  | TA: =No, a lie, my brother has kinky hair, one.   |
| 10 | Y: ¿Pues kinky? Puedes tener el pelo kinky=   | Y: Well kinky? You can have kinky hair=   |
| 11 | TA: =No, yo-yo me di un-un Tratamiento=   | TA: =No, I-I gave myself a treatment=   |
| 12 | Y: =Pero eso no importa, el pelo kinky no importa, <b>lo que importa es el espíritu=</b>                          | Y: =But that doesn't matter, the kinky hair doesn't matter, <b>what matters is the spirit=</b>          |
| 13 | TA: = Los ojos verdes son de mi mamá y mi papá. Mi mamá-mi papá tiene los ojos azules. Mi mamá tiene ojos verdes. | TA: =The green eyes are from my mom and my dad. My mom-my dad has blue eyes. My mom has green eyes.     |

<sup>32</sup> For the purpose of analyzing the interactions represented in these transcripts, I have transcribed the talk in mostly standard Spanish. Future research will attend to the non-standard realizations of Puerto Rican Spanish produced by speakers (including rural/Jíbaro Spanish), and its relation to jibaridad and Taíno indigeneity.

In this excerpt we witness how Teacher A, from the outset, challenged Yarey's claims to authority as respects identifying "*indianness*" in others—to read people she hardly knows as being Indian or not. She loudly addressed Yarey, directing an imperative form of address to specifically "tell her" something (rather than using *Díganos* (pl) "tell us," she uses *Dígame* (sing) "tell me"). Yet, she never told Yarey what she wants to be *told about*, instead she told Yarey what she, Teacher A, *already* knew. In effect, Yarey's authority to expound on the "Indians" was challenged by Teacher A who herself was claiming authority on the subject. In fact, as one can note in the above picture, Teacher A's head was tilted differently from other teachers during Yarey's presentation. Whereas other teachers were taking notes, Teacher A had no paper or writing instruments on her desk. Her body language may have even suggested a level of defiance to Yarey.

Second, in the context of the presentation that Yarey was about to share, Teacher A's next statement, that she "loves history," displaced the subject of the Taíno to a historical past in opposition to the contemporaneous indigenous presence Yarey hoped to reveal for the teachers. Implied in the structure of the statement "*I know a lot about the Indians, I love history*" was an embedding of the 'subject' of the Indians within the field of history. By relegating the Taíno to a form of historical knowledge, she further challenged Yarey to claim and talk about the Taíno as a contemporaneous and historically continuous, as opposed to a past, historical group.

Third, Teacher A constructed herself as not (potentially) Taíno by focusing on her physical appearance as an index of her racial/ethnic heritage, and thus as not convinced or able to be convinced by Yarey's approach. The teacher claimed to look like a Spanish



woman because of her green eyes. Her statement implied that this supersedes any claim to having an indigenous heritage. Saying that one “looks like” something in Puerto Rico is a common device for potentially claiming—or, if used for another person, interrupting one’s ability to claim—specific heritages. Arguably, it does so without challenging local ideologies of being Puerto Rican by saying though you/I look like something, you/I are not something, because you/I are Puerto Rican. For example, no one would contest the statement that someone *looks like* an *indio*, but they would certainly challenge the assertion that someone *is* an *indio*. Considering the manner in which the racial triad hierarchizes and precludes claims to specific racial heritages, in spite of its purported portrayal of a racial democracy, making a claim to looking like one has a specific ethnic heritage in Puerto Rico is quite common. Since indigenous groups in Puerto Rico claim to be inclusive of persons of any physical appearance—not just limited to persons who look stereotypically indigenous—Yarey, did not consider Teacher A’s “Spanish look” an impediment to her inclusion. For Yarey, and many other indigenous groups on the Island, Puerto Rico’s history of creolization was not mutually exclusive with claims to indigeneity. By appropriating and redefining popular understandings of creolization, cultural and racial mixture on the Island, they conceptualized their ancestry as potentially shared by the entire Puerto Rican population and not to any discretely defined group of people in Puerto Rico.

While Teacher B attempted to read a stereotypical indigenous trait in Teacher A’s straight-looking hair, Yarey attempted to disrupt Teacher A’s rejection of having any indigenous heritage by locating indigeneity within a person’s spirit rather than within a

person's physical traits.<sup>33</sup> Yarey's multiple attempts to interrupt Teacher A's reasoning on how looks can be mapped onto and read as indicative of ethnic heritage were largely unsuccessful. In fact, Teacher A ultimately dismissed Yarey by going back to her initial statement concerning her having green eyes, making it abundantly clear that she was not aligning with Yarey on this topic.

In the following excerpt, I consider Yarey's continued attempt to disrupt Teacher A's reasoning. To do this, Yarey drew upon the *Jíbaro* national icon. Drawing on literature suggesting that the *Jíbaro* term may have been an appropriation from the Taíno language, Yarey tried to discursively bring together the concept of the *Jíbaro* and the *indio*. In other presentations with teachers, the embedding of the *Jíbaro* within an indigenous Taíno framework had been a crucial step in convincing teachers of the significance of her program and in updating the indigenous presence in Puerto Rico. If Yarey succeeded in this embedding, she was able to achieve a common ground on which to adequate her and the teachers' incongruous understandings, and ultimately the teachers' identifications as indigenous. Since the *Jíbaro* is often correlated with rural Puerto Rico and the school is in a rural area, discussions of the *Jíbaro* also served to create a shared identification with her audience, the school teachers.

***Excerpt "The word Jíbaro, where does it come from?"***

- |   |     |  |     |   |
|---|-----|--|-----|---|
| 1 | Y:  | ¿La palabra <u>jíbaro</u> , de donde viene? ¿Jíbaro? | Y:  | The word <u>Jíbaro</u> , where does it come from? Jíbaro? |
| 2 | TB: | ¿De los-de los <i>indios</i> no es?                  | TB: | From the-from the <i>indians</i> isn't it?                |

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<sup>33</sup> The indexical links between specific physical traits and particular ethnic heritages are reinforced by Social Studies schoolbooks in Puerto Rico. Anecdotally, for example, the fourth grade textbook used in public and private schools when I was a child included pictures of an African, an Indigenous and a Spanish person, with a list of physical traits under each image. The class exercise accompanying it asked students to identify these traits amongst themselves. For example, the Spanish person is associated with fair skin and light eyes, the African person with curly hair and dark skin, and the Indigenous person with straight hair and copper colored skin.

- |   |    |   |    |   |
|---|----|---|----|---|
| 3 | Y: | ¿Jíbaro?                                | Y: | Jíbaro?                                 |
| 4 | T: | ¿De los <i>indios</i> no es?            | T: | From the <i>indians</i> isn't it?       |
| 5 | Y: | <u>Muy bien</u> , un aplauso para ella. | Y: | <u>Very good</u> , an applause for her. |
| 6 | T: | ((aplausos))                            | T: | ((applause))                            |

To begin her argument, Yarey asked the teachers to help her re-construct the lexical origin of the word ‘Jíbaro.’ Teacher B responded twice that the word originates from ‘the Indians’. It was only after the second response that Yarey took up the reply and instructed all the teachers to applaud their colleague. Yarey had heard the first response (in the video she nods in agreement with Teacher B after the first response), but by having Teacher B respond twice “from the Indians, isn’t it?” she made sure that all audience members heard the response given, not by Yarey, but by Teacher B. In asking everyone to applaud for Teacher B, she in effect secured a temporary collusion of agreement between herself and the teachers. In answering the question, Teacher B implicitly allowed Yarey to take a first step toward a reconfiguration of the Jíbaro. In this simple exchange, Yarey restricted the lexical origin of the word Jíbaro to an indigenous etymology, and as she continued her presentation, she mapped this lexical origin onto other cultural and social relationships. For Yarey, the indigenesness of the term Jíbaro served as an index of the continuity of a people.

Following the ‘agreement’ that the Jíbaro was an indigenous term, Yarey attempted to share with the teachers other indexes of the contemporary indigenous presence in Puerto Rico. However, Teacher A interrupted her again:

***Excerpt “And the kids know nothing about traditions”***

- |   |     |  |     |  |
|---|-----|--|-----|--|
| 1 | TA: | pero <b>esa historia de los <i>indios</i></b> también este le voy a decir, {?} | TA: | but <b>that history of the Indians</b> as well este I will tell you, {?} I |
|---|-----|--|-----|--|

- a mí me encanta la historia,  
 PERO lo que estoy dando yo en  
 mi clase de estudios sociales la  
 estoy dando de las  
 TRADICIONES, y los niños no  
 saben na:da de las tradiciones
- 2 Y: ¿Y cuáles son las tradiciones?  
 3 TA: Porque, ya se perdieron esas  
 tradiciones.  
 4 Y: ¿Pero cuáles?  
 5 TA: Ah, pues las de {?} que se daba  
 antes, el Día de Reyes, ya se  
 olvidó ese Día de Reyes que es  
 tan importante pa' los niños,  
 ahora es *Santa Clos*. ¿Cuántos  
 de los estudiantes que hay en  
 segunda unidad y en *high*  
*school* escuchan música típica  
 jíbara de [nosotros?  
 6 Y: [Qué bien]  
 7 TA: una] música tan bonita.
- love history, BUT what I am  
 giving in my social studies class,  
 I am giving it about the  
 TRADITIONS, and the kids they  
 know no:thing about  
 traditions.  
 Y And which are the traditions?  
 TA: Because, they have already been  
 lost those traditions.  
 Y: But which?  
 TA: Ah, well of the {?} that were  
 given before, the three kings day,  
 it has already been forgotten that  
 three kings day that was so  
 important for the kids, now it is  
 Santa Claus. How many of the  
 students that are in middle school  
 and in high school listen to  
 typical Jíbaro music of [us?  
 Y [Very well]  
 TA: Such] a pretty music.

Again, Teacher A attempted to redirect and contest Yarey's approach by stating that though she loves history, including 'the history of the *indios*', what *she* was teaching her students was about traditions. Here, the structure of her statement implied a difference between indigenous history (which could connote a past that has not been maintained in practice) and the knowledge of Puerto Rican traditions (which could imply the past as maintained in practice). In stating this, Teacher A presented another challenge to Yarey concerning what students should know about—for Teacher A, students should know about traditions tied to ideas of Puerto Ricanness, which were not necessarily *just* Taíno. In response, Yarey asked Teacher A which traditions she was referring to, which, as we see in the next excerpt, was an attempt to re-adequate Jíbaro traditions with contemporary indigeneity. At first, the teacher evaded (or misunderstood) the question, and responded that the traditions are lost. Yarey asked Teacher A a second time what

traditions she was referring to and Teacher A responded providing two examples: Three Kings Day and Jíbaro music. Teacher A's use of "nosotros" ('us') was ambiguous with regards to whether she was reclaiming these Jíbaro traditions **from** the Taíno origin Yarey reveals, or whether she had potentially (at least in part) acceded to Yarey's framework. Yarey, however, used the ambiguity of this "us" as a point of departure in her argumentative thread. As she continued her presentation, she asked the teachers what the source of various traditional Jíbaro practices were, aiming to align the Jíbaro with a Taíno indigenous heritage and to ultimately reconfigure the Jíbaro as an indigenous figure.

In the following excerpt, all of Yarey's questions followed a similar format of presenting a practice, and then asking what the cultural source of the practice is. However, Teacher A continued to present some resistance to the presentation as she attempted to work out her and Yarey's conflicting conceptualizations:

***Excerpt "And reggaeton?"***

- |    |     |  |     |   |
|----|-----|--|-----|---|
| 1  | Y:  | Ok. [y el reggaetón  | Y:  | Ok. [and reggaeton  |
| 2  | TA: | [NADIE ni esto, el reggaetón   | TA: | [NOBODY not even this, el reggaeton   |
| 3  | Y:  | ¿Y el reggaetón? ¿De dónde viene el reggaetón? (4 sec) ¿La raíz del reggaetón? | Y:  | And the reggaetón? Where does reggaetón come from? (4 sec) The root of reggaeton? |
| 4  | TB: | Ah, el deso de los <i>indios</i> porque eso es más o menos=                    | TB: | Ah, the thing of the Indians, because that is more or less=                       |
| 5  | Y:  | =¿El rosario cantao? [¿Católicos aquí? ¿Católicos? ¿Cuántos aver? ¿Católicos?] | Y:  | =The sung rosary? {Catholics here? Catholics? How many let's see? Catholics?}     |
| 6  | T:  | [{talking}]  | T:  | [{talking}]   |
| 7  | TA: | Yo.  | TA: | Me.   |
| 8  | Y:  | ¿Católicos?  | Y:  | Catholics?  |
| 9  | TC: | Yo.  | TC: | Me.   |
| 10 | Y:  | ¿Católica? ¿Católica?  | Y:  | Catholic? Catholic?   |
| 11 | TB: | Yo también.  | TB: | Me too.   |

12	Y:	Ok. ¿El baquiné?	Y:	Ok. The baquiné?
13	TA:	El baquiné ya eso no se ve...	TA:	The baquiné you don't see that anymore...
14	Y:	Muy bien. ¿Rosario Cantao?	Y:	Very well. Sung rosary?
15	TC:	De los, de=	TC:	Of the, of
16	Y:	=¿Pero de dónde viene?	Y:	But where does it come from??
17	TC:	De los de antes	TC:	Of those from before
18	Y:	¿Pero de dónde?	Y:	But where from?
19	TD:	<b>De los indios</b>	TD:	<b>From the Indians?</b>
20	TA:	<b>De los africanos.</b>	TA:	<b>From the Africans.</b> <sup>34</sup>
21	Y:	El rosario cantao=	Y:	The sung rosary=
22	TA:	=Es PREcioso.	TA:	=Is PREcious.
23	Y:	es un areito. Es un areito.¿No?	Y:	is an areito. <sup>35</sup> Is an areito. No?
24	T:	mmhmm	T:	mmhmm
25	Y:	¿Nos cuentan qué? De los tiempos de Cristo, ¿no? ¿De la muerte de Cristo, ¿no? ¿Un areito cuenta qué? Las tradiciones de los Taínos, no tenían escritura. Entonces, ¿dependen de qué? De tradición oral.	Y:	They tell us what? Of the times of Christ, no? Of the death of Christ, no? An areito tells what? The traditions of the Taínos, they did not have writing. Then they depend on what? On oral tradition.
26	TA:	Oral.	TA:	Oral.
27	Y:	Las narraciones. {silence}	Y:	The narrations. {silence}
28	TA:	<b>Eso es de los tiempos de las trad-</b>	TA	<b>That is the time of the trad-</b>
29	TA:	<b>de los épicos por allá-</b>	TA:	<b>Of the epics over there-</b>
30	Y:	<b>de los Taínos.</b>	Y:	<b>Of the Taínos.</b>
31	TA:	<b>de Roma.</b>	TA:	<b>of Rome.</b>
32	Y:	TENEMOS TRES MESES de inmersión, tres meses de inmersión cultural...	Y:	WE HAVE THREE MONTHS of immersion, three months of cultural immersion.

In this excerpt, Yarey listed some of the most iconic traditional practices in Puerto Rico and asked the teachers to tell her their origins. Yarey responded to Teacher A's previous statement by listing a type of music that the students mentioned by Teacher A in

<sup>34</sup> As indicated earlier, Puerto Rican culture is often envisioned as resulting from the triad of Spanish, African and Indigenous influences. Locating the origin of particular cultural practices is often a difficult, if not impossible, endeavor. Teacher A's comment indicates this, and points to various tensions resulting from claiming to be indigenous.

<sup>35</sup> An areíto is a Taíno term for a ceremonial dance or celebration.

the previous excerpt did listen to: reggaetón.<sup>36</sup> Yarey argued that reggaetón has been influenced by Puerto Rico’s indigenous heritage, thus indirectly refuting Teacher A’s claim that younger people do not listen to traditional music. In fact, Yarey’s reasoning on reggaetón was parallel to her consideration that indigenous peoples were still present in Puerto Rico, though they may be creolized.<sup>37</sup> Later Yarey shared with me her frustration with Teacher A, and explained that this was why she listed all the traditional practices that arguably had an indigenous influence. The pattern of question and answer allowed Yarey to highlight the non-past nature of the indigenous influence on and presence in everyday life in Puerto Rico. Though Teacher A continued to question Yarey’s attempted adequations—for example, claiming that oral traditions are from times past (turn 28) “of the epics over there”, and elsewhere (turn 31 “of Rome”) other teachers (B, C and D) were willing to engage with Yarey, if only momentarily. Teacher A’s response was representative of the way in which many people reacted to claims of indigeneity in Puerto Rico. These reactions are tied to the challenging of people’s expectations concerning the indigenous extinction in Puerto Rico and to more interpersonal relationships regarding who has the institutional authority to make claims about national figures and historical trajectories. Yarey’s and the teachers’ exchanges revealed these concerns through the linguistic maneuvers used and the interpretive frameworks they drew from in challenging each other’s authority.

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<sup>36</sup> A popular form of music among Puerto Rican youth, it is a style of music combining aspects of rap, reggae and Caribbean rhythms—including, according to Yarey, Taíno beats. For more on reggaeton music, see Raquel Z. Rivera, ed. (2009).

<sup>37</sup> Both arguments (for reggaeton and indigenous continuity in P.R.) refute the logic that traditional practices and peoples are lost because they have changed or that new practices cannot, at the same time, be traditional.

### *Meeting with parents*

After meetings with teachers, if Yarey was successful in recruiting a few teachers to be her liaisons with the school, she would meet with the parents of the students who were eligible to participate in the program. The transcript I analyze in this section is from another school. The program had already been endorsed by the principal and there were teachers who are willing to collaborate with Yarey within the school. It was a middle school in a rural area nearer the coast, with a larger student population. The teacher liaison was very invested in the program and had arranged for the parents to meet after school in the student library. Quite a few parents showed up, but unlike her interactions with the teachers, the parents hardly speak. Tables had been arranged in a U-shape within the library, with parents sitting around the projector screen where Yarey and another member of the LGTK, who spoke briefly about his findings of Taíno pottery sherds in the area, stood.



Figure 3.4 After-school presentation in the library with parents (Feliciano-Santos 2007)



At this point Yarey's presentations had benefited from the trial and error of her meetings with teachers at several schools throughout the area during the last month and a half. She initiated her talk to the audience of parents and their children about the program by making explicit reference to the ideology of the three ethnic roots of Puerto Ricanness. In mentioning these roots, and reconfiguring them, she was aware that her own understandings may not have been congruent with those held by her audience, though she may have been talking about commonly held figurations of Puerto Ricanness.

*Excerpt "the Taíno they were exterminated"*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1 Y: Entonces me dedique a formar un programa llamado programa de inmersión cultural lingüística. ¿Y qué pretendemos con este programa? Acercar a su hijo a su cultura <i>indígena</i>. <b>Pa' que conozcan su raíz indígena, que no somos solamente españoles y africanos.</b> Que tenemos también una raíz <i>indígena</i>. <b>Qué somos tres razas, ¿no?</b> Pero siempre hablan de la raíz española y la africana. ¿Y la <i>indígena</i>? Siempre está olvidada. Este programa es para engrandecer este componente de nuestra cultura, la parte <i>indígena</i>, sin olvidarnos que somos qué: una mezcla, ¿no? De tres razas. Qué somos africanos, y somos europeos pero también somos <i>indígenas</i>, ¿no? (4s) "<b>pero eso es un disparate, profesora, a los taínos los exterminaron, en Puerto Rico no hay taínos</b>" (5s) ¡Mira un taíno allí!</p> | <p>Y: Then I dedicated myself to forming a program called program of cultural linguistic immersion. And what do expect with this program? To get your child closer to <b>their/your</b> indigenous culture. <b>So that they know their indigenous root, that we are not only Spanish and African</b>, that we also have an indigenous root. That <b>we are three races, no?</b> But they always talk about the Spanish and African root. And the indigenous one? It is always forgotten. This program is to enlarge this component of our culture, the indigenous part, without forgetting that we are a mix, no? of three races. That we are African, and we are European but we are also indigenous, no? (4s) "<b>but that is nonsense, professor (fem), the Taíno they were exterminated, in Puerto Rico there are no Taíno!</b>" (5s) Look at a Taíno there!</p> |
|--|--|

Yarey managed potential tensions between her audiences' knowledge of Puerto Rican history and what she was presenting to them by making all three roots of the Puerto Rican racial triad claimable and inhabitable. She explained her point of view by rhetorically posing her statements as questions. These questions, however, served to voice alternate understandings of Puerto Ricanness potentially held by the parents in the audience. By voicing the parents' concerns, and making obvious the gap between the particular cultural-historical discourses she drew from and those held by the parents, she was also able to show the nodes, or the confluences of such narrations. It was at these nodes that Yarey focused on reorganizing the ways in which people understood the collective past. In fact, it was through this process that Yarey was able to provide her interlocutors with new voices, new Taíno-aligned voicings of a Puerto Rican collective past. By creating a new narrative, Yarey was able to provide new understandings of important Puerto Rican events and figures.

Notably, where Yarey made most obvious the gap between what she was saying and what she presumed the parents to think was when she echoed a parent in saying "*but that is nonsense, professor (fem), the Taíno they were exterminated, in Puerto Rico there are no Taíno!*" By explicitly vocalizing such concerns, Yarey was able to successfully address and target the presuppositions about Puerto Rican history that she was concerned with—the historical foundations that have erased contemporary Taíno peoples. She responded to this concern, by pointing to a stereotypically indigenous looking person in the room and saying, "Look at a Taíno there!" By refocusing the audience's attention on what she considered visible indexes of contemporary indigenous heritage, on the here and now, she hoped to interrupt the notion that the Taíno have been "exterminated."

She furthered this argument by drawing from recent mtDNA findings and by specifically pointing to people in the audience that did not look stereotypically indigenous and saying that they too could be indigenous. In doing this she both interrupted and complicated links between phenotypically looking indigenous and being indigenous. She furthered this argument by making claims to the unseen, yet scientifically “provable” indexes of indigeneity, the blood, which in this use, became a metaphor for mtDNA. Re-tracking this discussion as a factually grounded one also served to establish Yarey as someone speaking with intellectual authority and evidence. As such, she posited that anyone, regardless of their appearance, could be indigenous, and by slipping these scientific findings into a folk paradigm concerning the value of blood, Yarey effectively convinced her audience that she might be on to something.

*Excerpt “Look at a Taíno here”*

26 Aud: ((Laughter))

27 Y: Mira **un taíno aquí, viendo un taíno!** (7s) Pues sí, pues si **somos indígenas**, y los estudios genéticos han demostrado en la UPR Mayagüez confirman que el puertorriqueño, el puertorriqueño igual que el cubano **tenemos una liga indígena, tenemos una liga indígena que no importa el color de tu piel no importa la textura de tu pelo, eso no importa, tu puedes ser un negrito-negrito-negrito y tener mas sangre indígena que este nene** ((*points to stereotypically indigenous looking boy*)). **Ella es blanquita, parece una gringa, ¿no?** Y puede tener más sangre *indígena* que el nene. Que no son

Aud:((Laughter))

Y: Look at **a Taíno here, seeing a Taíno!** (7s) Well yes, well yes **we ar-are indigenous** peoples, and the genetic studies in the UPR Mayaguez confirm that the Puerto Rican, the Puerto Rican the same as the Cuban **we have an indigenous mixture that the color of your skin doesn’t matter, the texture of your hair that does not matter, that does not matter, you can be black black black and have more indigenous blood than that boy** ((*points to stereotypically indigenous looking boy*)). **She is white, looks like a gringa, no?** And she could have more indigenous blood than the boy.

los rasgos físicos, este estudio dice que somos un 61% ADN materia genética *indígena*. Que la sangre *indígena* predomina en nuestra sangre y la sangre no miente.

That it is not physical characteristics; this study says that we are of 61% DNA indigenous genetic material. That the indigenous blood predominates in our blood, and blood does not lie.

Yarey's discussion drew from the notions presented in the racial triad, yet exposed its tensions and managed them in order to show that there is potential for an indigenous presence on the Island that can be claimed. She drew from popular notions of blood which she mapped onto the more jargon-laden mtDNA, to show that one does not need to look indigenous to be indigenous.

The above transcripts reveal the varied mechanisms involved in recalibrating expectations about contemporary Taíno in Puerto Rico. Yarey drew from a bundle of tactics to bring her audience to share in her conceptualization of indigeneity: the projection of non-Taíno-aligned and Taíno-aligned voicing onto her audience, the redefinition of popular national figures and practices, rhetorical questioning, and the strategic use of silences. By questioning conventional knowledge and redefining taken-for-granted terms, Yarey disrupted the presuppositions embedded in conventionalized notions of Puerto Rican history—a history that, as she understood it, too often silences the Taíno.

### *Redirecting conversations and refocusing reflections on life trajectories*

Whereas the LGTK's project seeks to bring younger generations of people in schools to an awareness of being Taíno, other unaffiliated indigenous groups work towards bringing awareness of the Island's indigenous *movement* to people of all ages, who have limited access to educational institutions, and who often live in highly rural

areas. Members of the Jíbaro-Boricua Movement (MIJB), most notably Tito Guajataca, often go to the homes of rural persons in the northwestern region of the Island to learn about rural/Jíbaro practices from elders who often already identify with having indigenous heritage. Tito's project was to acquire knowledge and information from elder jíbaros to whom he often referred as the "true representatives of the native culture," in order to buttress his own activist agenda with greater "authenticity." He also hoped that these elders would become active in his movement. The families he visited were often extended family units where grandparents, parents, and children lived in close proximity. Grandparents were typically the focus of interviews since they often held the most knowledge of past practices. In the following excerpt, Tito converses with Doña Justa and Don Álvaro, who are both in their seventies. The two lived in a small concrete home which we entered through the living room. Tito and I sat on the couch facing the two elders, Doña Justa in a rocking chair and Don Álvaro in an armchair, with other family members going in and out of the room. After explaining who I was and asking for permission to be recorded, Tito asks them to tell him more about how life was when they were younger.

***Excerpt "And the poor people what did they have"***

- |   |    |  |    |  |
|---|----|--|----|--|
| 1 | T: | ¿Y lo pobres qué tenían?   | T: | And the poor people what did they have?  |
| 2 | J: | porque [papá vivía en una finca y eso se consideraba...  | J: | because [dad lived on a farm and that was considered   |
| 3 | A: | [no, no, no si la mayoría de la gente, la mayoría de la gente era así, de paja y penca, mira, el señor ese que, que tenía la casa de paja y penca, él se dedicaba a eso. ¿A la pie-? de las piezas de caña {?} le quitaba la hoja seca de la caña la | A: | [no, no, no, if the majority of the people were like that, of straw and fleshy leaf, look, that man that had the house of straw and fleshy leaf, he dedicated himself to that. To the pie-? To the piece of cane {?} they took |

{dereke?} entonces le hacían unos macitos así. la amarraban con mollejos de guineo, la amarraba y **dispués** de que tenían una gran cantidad de macitos se lo sacaban fuera, le ponían una sogá y ponían los macitos y hacían un mazo así de grande esa cosa ((gesturing with hands))

dry leaf of the cane {dereke?} then made little bunches like that. They tied them with banana fibers, tied it and after he had a large amount of bunches they took them out, put a rope around them and made a large bunch like this big the thing ((gesturing with hands))

4 T: **mira, ¿que qué cosa comían ustedes cuando era niños? ¿Qué cuales eran las comidas?**

T: **Look, that what foods did you eat when you were children? What kinds of foods were they?**

5 J: hmm, ¿qué cuales eran las comidas? ¡verduras! ¿qué íbamos a comer? ahora, cuando yo nací no te puedo porque [ eso es así]

J: hmm, that which were the foods? Starchy root vegetables! What were we gonna eat? Now when I was born I can't tell you because [that is how it is]

6 A: [cuando yo muchacho] en mi casa mi mama [en el en el fogón mi mama asaba plátanos, asaba

A: [when I was a boy] in my mom's house [on the hearth my mom roasted plantains, she roasted...]

Tito focuses on two areas of practice that are often associated with Jíbaro life and that are also associated with images of the Taíno in the popular imaginary: housing and food. As shown in these examples, Tito's interest in these topics often surface as his attempt at focusing and re-focusing conversations on topics that correspond to his own image of Jíbaro indigenous life. In the following excerpt, Tito refocuses the conversation from talking about plantains (an imported post-Columbian period food associated with Puerto Rico's African heritage) to corn products which are associated with the pre-Columbian indigenous population in Puerto Rico.

*Excerpt “Interviewing Spaniards”*

- |    |    |   |    |   |
|----|----|---|----|---|
| 1  | T: | y la harina, la harina de maíz, la hacían allí, ¿o...?  | T: | And the corn flour, they made it there, or?   |
| 2  | A: | la harina de maíz se molía, [en casa había molino   | A: | The corn meal was ground [at home there was a grinder   |
| 3  | J: | [la molían, la molían así   | J: | [They ground, they ground it like this  |
| 4  | T: | ¿con qué la molían?   | T: | What did they grind it with?  |
| 5  | A: | con un molino   | A: | With a grinder  |
| 6  | T: | ¿Cómo era el molino?  | T: | What was the grinder like?  |
| 7  | A: | Dos ruedas de, de así, como de cemento, parecido al cemento pero eso no es, eso es de piedra, hecho de piedra del mar,  | A: | Two wheels of, of like this, like of cement, similar to cement but it's not that, it's of rock, made sea rock   |
| 8  | T: | de piedra   | T: | Of rock   |
| 9  | A: | la tallan, y tenía un boquete en el medio y uno en la orilla. el del medio era porque el de abajo tu le metías esa puya, y se, pa' que no se saliera de-de-ruta,  | A: | they shape it, and it had a hole in the middle and one on the side, the middle one was because the one below you put in the stick, and it, so it wouldn't get off the-the-course  |
| 10 | T: | aja   | T: | aha   |
| 11 | A: | Y entonces el otro, que lo estaba en la orilla... y caía el material... si lo quería más fino...  | A: | And then the other, which was on the corner ...and the material fell... if you wanted it finer...   |
| 12 | T: | ¿y dónde caía?  | T: | and where did it fall?<br><i>A continues to explain how the grinder works when T realizes that we have another appointment</i>  |
| 13 | T: | ..la muchacha lo que hace es escuchar lo que dicen la, los <b>boricuas verdaderos verdad, porque si ella quisiera entrevistar españoles estuviera allí en San Juan, con los políticos entrevistando españoles</b> | T: | ...the girl ((referring to me)) what she does is listen to what is said by, <b>the real Boricuas, right, because if she wanted to interview Spaniards she would be there in San Juan, with the politicians interviewing Spaniards</b> |

In his conversations with Justa and Alvaro, Tito directs the conversation towards a description of the corn flour making process. Towards the end of this exchange, Tito addresses my role in these interviews by punctuating my interest in indigenous

organizations in Puerto Rico. He draws attention to the difference between the rural populations and the urban elites by highlighting how they, the persons interviewed are the real Boricuas, and that the persons in San Juan, the politicians, are Spaniards. In highlighting and spatially marking this difference, and creating a dichotomy between Boricuas and Spaniards, Tito de-authorizes the opinions of the urban elite in defining the island and constitutes rural populations as authentic Boricua—a Taíno derived term for Puerto Ricans.

As we can observe in the transcripts above, Tito manages his conversations in order to discuss topics that he regards as relevant to the MIJB project, that is, topics related to what he considers indigenous Jíbaro Boricua knowledge. He strategically uses questions to redirect the interview. This redirection strategy becomes clear throughout several of his interviews, further indicating the sorts of ‘traditional’ knowledge he seeks to obtain from elders.

About a week later, Tito took me to the home of Don Luis and Doña Mariana. Their house is at the end of a small road on the top of a hill. Surrounded by fruit trees and with several banana and plantain stems in the driveway, Don Luis greeted us and offered me a mango. He showed us to his living room and introduced me to his granddaughter, and his wife, Doña Mariana. I sat alone in the couch, while Don Luis sat in an armchair and Tito sat in a folding chair next to him. I could see Mariana in the kitchen as she prepared us a snack in the kitchen. While Tito introduced me and my project, Rodrigo, a neighbor, joined us.

Tito attempted to set up a scenario for his interlocutors, Luis and Rodrigo, in order to lead them to consider how they would survive if the government would/could no



longer provide them with economic subsidies. Instead, Luis takes the questions as an opportunity to explain why he would be fine if the government took away his welfare. Since Tito's goal is for them to discuss survival strategies prior to the existence of governmental welfare subsidies, he redirects the conversation through the use of "but" followed by a question to inspire Luis to talk about what he would do. In this way, Tito is able to get more information on the traditional practices is he interested in.

***Excerpt "Pero, vamos a preguntarle a tu mujer que va hacer si no hay cupones"***

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>1 <b>T: Pero, vamos a preguntarle a tu mujer que va hacer si no hay cupones</b></p> <p>2 L: no, a mi no,</p> <p>3 S: {laughs}</p> <p>4 T: que no</p> <p>5 L: Yo, si me los quitan, yo no</p> <p>6 R: chacho</p> <p>7 S: {laughs}</p> <p>8 L: Eh, yo baso aquel librito que está por allí</p> <p>9 T: ¿Cuál?</p> <p>10 S: National, [¿national geographic?]</p> <p>11 R: [¿national geographic?]</p> <p>12 L: no</p> <p>13 S: ¿la [biblia?]</p> <p>14 R: [¿la biblia?]</p> <p>15 L: Al que está abajo, la biblia. No hay justo desamparado ni aunque mendimendige pan. Dios le da el el pan de cada día, Dios no te va echar <u>pa'</u> mundo <u>pa'</u> que tú te mueras de hambre, nhmm.</p> <p>16 <b>T: Pero, ¿si otro te está quitando lo que es tuyo?</b></p> <p>17 L: no, no</p> <p>18 R: {laughs}</p> <p>19 L: Siem-siempre viene, [de algún sitio viene]</p> | <p><b>T: But, let's ask your woman what she will do if there is no welfare</b></p> <p>L: no, not to me</p> <p>S: {laughs}</p> <p>T: what not</p> <p>L: Me, if they take them from me, not me</p> <p>R: oh man</p> <p>S: {laughs}</p> <p>L: Eh, I base on that book that is over there</p> <p>T: Which?</p> <p>S: National, [national geographic?]</p> <p>R: [national geographic?]</p> <p>L: no</p> <p>S: the [bible?]</p> <p>R: [the bible?]</p> <p>L: The one that is below it, the bible, there is no just man forsaken even if he is begging for bread. God gives the bread of each day, God will not throw you into the World so that you die of hunger, nhmmm</p> <p><b>T: but what if another is taking what is yours</b></p> <p>L: no, no</p> <p>R: {laughs}</p> <p>L: [It] Alwa-always comes [from some place it comes]</p> |
|--|--|

The two bolded turns in the above exchange are moments where Tito attempts to redirect the conversation. However, Luis focuses instead on how Tito's question presumes that he would be worried. Luis clarifies for Tito that he is insured by God's protection. In the next excerpt Luis and his wife Mariana develop this theme, and Tito makes an effort to redirect this conversation once again.

*Excerpt "Bueno, está bien, pero, ¿y si viene otro y se lo quita"*

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | L: [Cuando] yo se le dije al muchacho que estaba allí, que estaba allí <b>para</b> o anteriormente yo fui, después que, después que él se fue yo me fui a para-y " <i>Mira no pesqué <b>pescao</b>, pero mira lo que pesqué-é</i> " " <i>¿qué es eso?</i> " " <i>Un billetito de veinte pesos. Está apestoso a-a fango, pero lo voy a poner aquí a secar</i> " y lo cogí y lo amarre porque si me, el viento me hubiera <b>dao</b> se pierde, desde una <b>jorqueta</b> en lo que se secara, en un palo {laughing} no secó, con la servilleta yo fui a aga- a a allí a-a Pueblo-Xtra y compre una caja de pollo de treinta <b>libra</b> con doce pesos, estaba en especial. | L: When I told the lad that was there, that was there standing before I went, after, after he left I went to stan-, and " <i>look don't fish fish, but look at what I fished</i> " " <i>what is that?</i> " " <i>a twenty dollar bill. It smells like mud but I am going to put it here to dry</i> " and I took it and tied it, because if it, if the wind would have hit it, it would've been lost, from a fork while it dried, on a stick {laughing} it didn't dry, with a napkin I went to tak- to there to Pueblo-Xtra and I bought a thirty pound box of chicken with twelve dollars, it was a special |
| 2 | S: mm   | S: mm   |
| 3 | L: Le da Dios l-el pan de cada día a uno, ¿o no se lo da? Tú me vas a decir.  | L: God gives – one the bread of each day, or does he not? You are going to tell me.   |
| 4 | T: <b>Bueno, está bien, pero, ¿y si viene otro y se lo quita?, oo-</b>  | T: Well, that's good, but and if another comes and takes it from you?, oor-   |
| 5 | L: ¿Quién me lo va quitar? Lo que Dios me da a mi no me lo quita nadie, la comida [que  | L: Who is going to take it from me? What God gives me no one is going to take away from me, the food [that  |
| 6 | M: [Sí se, Sí se] lo hubiese ido a quitar alguien lo hubiera <b>encontrao</b> el otro, que estaba pescando en el mismo sitio  | M: [Yes I know, yes I know] if someone were to have taken it the other [guy] would have found it, that was fishing in the same place  |

- |    |    |   |    |  |
|----|----|---|----|--|
| 7  | L: | [Papá decía]  | L: | [Father said]  |
| 8  | M: | [No era pa'l] otro que el otro no [tenía la necesidad, él era que la tenía] | M: | [It wasn't for] another that the other did not [have the necessity, it was him who had it] |
| 9  | L: | [Papá decía la comida que era <b>pa'l</b> perro] el gato no se la comía     | L: | [Father said that the food that was for the dog] the cat did not eat                       |
| 10 | S: | {giggles}   | S: | {giggles}  |
| 11 | M: | Vente mami [to granddaughter], aquí   | M: | Come here mami {to granddaughter}, here  |
| 12 | L: | Siempre decía eso.  | L: | (He) Always said that  |

As Luis tells Tito the story of how he found a twenty dollar bill in a time of need and how that money helped him buy food for his family, Tito barely takes up his point, instead asking him again, “*and if another comes and takes it from you?.*” Such questioning gets Luis, Mariana and their neighbor Rodrigo to talk about what sorts of things they did after the last hurricane left them stranded without water and electricity. While on this topic, Tito attempts to redirect the conversation to survival strategies during a crisis.

*Excerpt “ the provocative question is”*

- |    |    |   |    |   |
|----|----|---|----|---|
| 1  | L: | [porque no estamos en época de, de- <del>{huracanes}</del> ]                                    | L: | [because we are not in-<br>{hurricane} season]  |
| 2  | M: | [Que <b>cocinábamos</b> con leña día] y noche aquí  | M: | [That we cooked with firewood day] and night here   |
| 3  | T: | Claro.  | T: | Of course   |
| 4  | M: | Tú te acuerdas  | M: | You remember  |
| 5  | R: | Tan bueno que era   | R: | It was so great   |
| 6  | L: | No puedes amontonarse. si usted se amontona, olvídense  | L: | You can't pile up, if you pile up, forget it  |
| 7  | M: | Ya tengo el fogono hecho, [lo que no he encon-, no he,  | M: | I already have cooking fire made, [what I haven't found, I haven't                        |
| 8  | L: | [No va pa' ningún lado]   | L: | [you are not going anywhere]  |
| 9  | M: | [no he traído las planchas de zinc <u>pa'</u> forrarlo <u>pa'</u> , poder a usarlo día y noche] | M: | [I haven't brought the zinc sheets so I could cover for, so I could use it day and night] |
| 10 | L: | [pero si usted se <b>abatalla</b> , batalla y-y-y se, y continúe] y no importa lo que venga     | L: | [but if you fight, fight and-and-and you, and continue] it doesn't matter what comes      |

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| 11 | M: cuando [maneje chavos voy a comprar la plancha de zinc <b>pa'</b> qu-  | M: when [I manage money I will buy the zinc sheets for   |
| 12 | L: [usted siga <b>pa'lante</b> , ese es mi lema]  | L: [you move ahead, that is my motto]  |
| 13 | T: <b>[Mira,] la pregunta provocativa es si, si, si se acaban los cupones, el precio de la gasolina sigue subiendo demasiao;, los empleos se acaban, cuanta gente están dispuesto a quedarse aquí y-y ¿cómo es que van a vivir?</b> | T: <b>[Look], the provocative question is if, if, if welfare is over, gas prices keep going up too much, jobs are finished, how many people are available to stay here and-and how are they going to live?</b> |
| 14 | R: La pregunta que yo te hago a ti, antes, cuando yo me críe no habían cupones. Se ganaban una peseta, as-por el día, por un día completo se ganaba una peseta cuando yo [estaba muchacho]  | R: The question I ask you, before that, when I grew up there were no coupons (welfare). People made a quarter, tha-for the day, for a whole day they made a quarter when I [was a kid]                         |
| 15 | M: [se comía] bueno,  | M: [one ate] well,   |

Though Tito rarely uses non-standard Spanish forms, or colloquial speech forms in his interactions, in attempting to refocus and regain control of the conversation he uses the form “demasiao” rather than “demasiado.” This deletion of the intervocalic “d” is a common feature in colloquial Puerto Rican Spanish speech, one that is conventionally associated with rural speakers. In fact, Tito’s speech is marked by the fact that he pronounces, rather than aspirates, word final “s,” so his saying of “dispuesto” rather than the plural “dispuestos” was marked. Though this might just be an idiosyncrasy of this particular turn, or a less monitored moment of speaking, it is interesting to note that this particular utterance of Tito’s was more pronounced with an aim to get the other participants’ attention—this is the fourth time he is asking the (in basic terms) same question, and not receiving the desired responses. This moment follows Luis’ and Mariana’s overlapping (yet distinct) conversations regarding dealing with adversity,

where they use many colloquial Puerto Rican Spanish speech forms, such as the apocopation of “para” to “pa-”, and the use of “n” rather than “m” in words ending in “-mos” (i.e. “cocinábanos” rather than “cocinábamos”). That Tito’s redirecting strategies include using Jíbaro speech patterns in addressing rural persons throughout interviews suggests a desire to align with Don Luis and Doña Mariana by sharing in their speech style.

These strategies reveal Tito’s underlying goal throughout many of his conversations with rural families, which is to promote indigenous lifestyles and communities as an alternative to what he considers to be unsustainable capitalist structures. Since the elders he speaks with often align traditional sustenance practices with better times, Tito often redirects conversations towards these alignments in order to recruit them to become active within the MIJB.

The above cases reveal how attempts to recruit people are premised on the idea that everyone is potentially Taíno. Activists such as Yarey use less explicit strategies to “get a foot in the door” in dealing with a potentially skeptical population. She manages tensions in Puerto Rico’s national (racial) myths to show how the indigenous Puerto Rican population did survive. She draw on these discursive tensions while using linguistic strategies to obtain (if only momentary) alignments. Tito, on the other hand, focuses his attention on people from rural areas, using questions and colloquial speech forms, as well as critiques of city inhabitants to collude with his targeted population of rural self-identified Jíbaro people.

## *Conclusion*

The analysis of the above conversations relies on moving across various scales of relationships: between the teacher/targeted audience and the activist; between social actors and their recollections; and between personal recollections and broader narratives of history. In order to address the various issues debated in these transcripts—such as who the Jíbaro is and what sorts of claims to ethnic heritage a social actor is allowed to make in Puerto Rico; and who has the authority to make assertions about history and what ought to be taught to children—it is imperative to consider the various, sometimes ambiguous, partial and self-invested, discourses that social actors may draw from as well as the specific relationships they may have in the specific instances recorded.

These excerpts are meant to highlight the conflicting understandings and ways of making sense of things that affect claims to indigeneity in Puerto Rico. Focusing on the struggles over these discrepant historical discourses and their interactional instantiations helps us examine the processes involved in changing or reproducing more established paradigms and ideologies, which for indigenous groups may affect the success in obtaining both interactional and institutional recognition (Messing 2007; Povinelli 2002). While contemporary Taíno peoples challenge common understandings of Puerto Rican history, in everyday interactions their struggle is not only about challenging historical discourses concerning the *when* and the *what* of the Taíno, but doing so in the context of negotiating relationships of institutional authority—as we encountered between Teacher A and Yarey. However, these interpersonal relationships still affect the potential for Yarey to effectively reconfigure the temporal location and symbolic load of the contemporary Taíno people. Additionally, for Tito such efforts include the practical aspect of not just redefining Jibaridad, but of bringing people who actually identify as

Jíbaro to also identify and become active as indigenous people—seeking to reinforce the conceptualization of the Jíbaro as an indigenous figure.

Several factors complicate the task of achieving and managing interactional recognitions of indigeneity in Puerto Rico: interpersonal challenges as they relate to the personal trajectories, as well as the aims of and claims to authority made by the social actors involved in these social exchanges; the various ideological incongruities that come about in these interactions; the break involved in different assessments of where to temporally locate the Taíno and the struggle over claims to the Jíbaro—Puerto Rico’s most prominent national archetype. The ideological discrepancies among the various participants serve to interrupt each others’ notions of the historical trajectory of the Island as relates to the indigenous populations. Given the interactional disruption that being considered extinct poses for the Taíno (who are often represented in the media as being crazy, as having self-serving motives or both), these maneuvers often depend on successfully re-narrating the Island’s history. That is, it requires the successful re-configuration of commonly held symbols of Puerto Ricanness and, in doing so, the re-analysis of the discourses that have patterned Puerto Rican history(ies). Yarey’s interactions with the teachers and parents reposition the narrative of Puerto Rico’s history to include a continuous indigenous presence. Tito’s interactions with rural elders draw from elders’ memories to draw upon their knowledge to reconstruct such continuities. In these excerpts, the Jíbaro figure became a key discursive site for such reconfigurations. Since the Jíbaro is considered the repository of Puerto Rican tradition and the Taíno are considered the depository of an illustrious, yet extinguished, historical past, making the

Jíbaro an extension of the Taíno serves to make the indigenous presence in Puerto Rico continuous, rather than erased.

A question that often comes up concerning the Taíno activism in communities and schools is, why now? What is compelling Yarey, Tito, and others to go out and bring others into their organizations? To reposition historical narratives? To learn about how people used to live? In the next chapter, I consider these questions with respect to a prophecy of Taíno revitalization claimed to have been foretold five centuries ago, the *Prophecy of Aura Surey*.



## CHAPTER 4:

### PROPHETIC FRAMES: INTERPRETION AND INTERACTION

*“...If you have chosen to read this, the energy of Aura Surey (Morning Star, Venus) is calling upon you to reflect and to see your true essence as one that is connected with the totality of creation. You, I and all are connected to the “drama” of the past and the future which is embodied in the Present...*

*Aura Surey in the Indigenous Tradition of Boriké is Morning Star in our Ancestral Language. According to oral tradition Aura Surey is considered to be part of our past. It was through this essence that prophecy was decreed to come pass in the twenty fourth generation of the descendants of this Land.*

*This message arose from the heart of the Mother of Creation and has been birthed into the timeless sphere of body, Mind and Spirit to rekindle the flame of the “Awakening” of Boriké and their descendents thereof.*

*In the year 1996 this message was received from Spirit in order for it to be put into written form. As such it was incorporated as part of the book titled: Honrando La Tradición Taína/Borikense, Author’s Edition, and Meaning of Indigenous Medicine of Boriké in The year 1999, Author’s Edition. It was received in the Puerto Rican Language.*

*Because of the need to communicate this message to the English speaking generations, an attempt is being made to translate this message by the recipient thereof. I will recount this story as facilitator, in the hope that the essence of the message be maintained.*

*It is no easy task to translate the spirit of the message into another language, however after having communicated with the source of this information, and having requested assistance, we present the following translation, trusting that the message be clear and whole for those that will read it or make reference to it.*

*This is the story of duality and the experiences of the past that will be narrated when at a given moment in time a decree was made prophetizing that the People of Boriké would rise from the ashes of the past.*

*...I was an instrument and nothing more of the grace and the glory of peace that within that space and time, was the life and the freedom that we lived. We lived the life of a people conscious of the Truth. However, this gradually crumbled due to a lack of clarity and to the misuse of energy and power. The vision of Truth turned into one of cruelty, as it penetrated our sacred way of life. Already in decline, our Ancestral Spirit received and accepted the teachings that the energy of Guacar would bring forth: the imposition of a foreign power that would destroy our ancestral way of honor and peace. The teachings of the Guacar were upon us. In guaitiao (friendship) our people met the bearded invaders. They were different from us, but we received them knowing that they brought with them gifts and offerings to conquer our minds. These things that they brought were rare and different and also expressed duality. Many of us already knew of their intentions. Other [sic] of our Nation were entertained with this relationship. My father, Chieftan Jayuya, of the High Mountain already knew of their intention to manipulate the many who entertained their presence. Those of our Nation took them to our sacred areas and they informed them about our prayer rituals. The visitors with their magic created the illusion to propagate our separation. It was while our ancestral path was in decline that the energy of the Guacar made its presence known and felt.*

*Those that made a commitment to return to this ancestral land may remember that they decided to render service to our sacred path and to pray to the Spirit of Creation for the fulfillment of Prophecy.*

*Before the illusion of separation took hold in our lives, I received the vision to decree the awakening of our Ancestral Spirit in then twenty-fourth generation of our descendants. The Ancestral Spirit of Love from the Whiteland of Boriké came forth. The two moons of Venus lit up the sky bringing forth the blessing that would elevate our Sacred Path. At the moment this Ancestral grace manifested to allow you to return and to again plant the seed of harmony to elevate the vibration of this land. It is the children of the Sacred Path that as “participant creators” will create this prophecy.*

*We knew at that moment that the thought of separation and duality had already manifested. However the Grandmothers in their inspired wisdom, knew that with the inter-relationship of the genes of procreation, the genes of our Nation would be safeguarded in the womb of every women [sic] of Boriké, Land of the Sun. In this way every generation would carry the seed of our Nation, for in every woman is the seed of Atabei, our Mother of Creation and in every son is the strength and the vibration of the Father of Creation.*

*Now that we are here everything is different. Today there are no titles of “Power”: Chieftan, Warrior, Worker, Medicine Person, and many others. There are many that may remember and express their tasks in related work and activities. Some may claim the*

*title, other the “power”, others the wisdom and there are others that claim the will and the ability to serve. It is by your tasks that you will know yourselves and each other.*

*The Wisdom of our Nation is safeguarded in the heart of the Earth Mother. You can remember when you connect with her peaceful Energy. It was She who hid the Ancestral Mysteries to be revealed to you during your evolution. Your major responsibility is to THINK and to ACT out of LOVE.*

*You are in a world of duality, where for everything there is a counterpart created, manifesting non-equality, struggle, discord, and confusion. You have learned things that are unnatural to your true essence. The environment is impregnated with energies that bring forth disharmony. It has been over 500 years of DRAMA, PERSECUTION, LIES and IMPOSITION. There are more than 500 years to unlearn and to liberate yourself. When you know the truth, you shed a layer of untruth. You become stronger and you know more about the TRUTH. Truth is what liberates you.*

*Many have spoken for you stating that you no longer exist. It is your turn now. By your tasks you will know. By your tasks you will recognize truth. By your tasks you will be recognized. The moment is yours to liberate. It is your Ancestry that you will elevate. It is your commitment that you will carry out. In harmony you will discover that you are not alone. We are all here. They are also here. Through your humble reverence and your honoring all things will be provided. The Creator will guide you to and in the Sacred Path of Truth and everything that you need to know will be revealed. In your life time you shall find the Path of Peace that will be revealed in the stillness and the silence of Creation.”*

*From “Prophecy of the Morning Star...The Story”  
by Margarita Nogueras Vidal, (2007)*

## *Introduction*

Grasping the hands of those beside me, my heart beat quickly as the ceremony revealed a social role for me, a place for me among, and with a responsibility to, the Taíno. I was supposed to be the contemporary chronicler; it was my role to bring news of the Taíno struggle to a broader, international audience. Thoughts rushed through my mind: Am I being directed? Who is *really* sending these messages? Did I even want these responsibilities? As a researcher, and as a Puerto Rican, how could I fulfill the social obligations entailed in such social ties? Am I really *meant* to be here? These

questions clouded my mind and followed me throughout my research—and my writing—as I struggled to make a place for myself among the Taíno with which I too could be comfortable.

Sometimes, I asked these questions out loud. I asked the elders, those with the ability to communicate with the Ancestral Spirits, and those in charge, whether they were sure that the social role they attributed to me was correct. Under the weight of such expectations I needed to be honest. I told them that I had never identified as a Taíno person, and that I continued to think of myself as not particularly Taíno. I wondered why were they so convinced that I had a particular task to fulfill for the Taíno? With the Prophecy of Aura Surey—narrated above—as a backdrop, I was told that my work revealed me and that, as prophesied, this was my Path, just as others had their Path. When I expressed the series of fortuitous happenings that led me to my research, as well as my doubts that the work that I produced would live up to their expectations, Abuela Serita, an elder, told me: “no es casualidad, es *causalidad*” (“it is not casual, it is *causal*”). Her clever words were not a unique response to that particular occasion as much as a way of thinking about certain kinds of events. Many in her group later repeated that same phrase to me. I came to understand that the causality embedded in the Prophecy of Aura Surey gave my research collaborators a sense of all actions as meaningful and purposeful, not necessarily individually but rather by intent of something considered greater, be it destiny, fate, or, as in this case, the specific power of Atabei and Yocahu (Taíno deities).

As I continued my field research, newly encountered social phenomena were often interpreted causally by quite a few groups I conducted research with. When, for

example, new persons showed interest in a Taíno organization they would also have their personal histories re-interpreted through the lens of Taíno narratives of belonging and reawakening. These emerging interpretations were reflected in how new members re-figured the narrative accounts of their particular trajectories towards being Taíno. In this way, these framings not only lessened the threat posed by emerging events and social actors, but also served as an effective recruitment strategy, one that maintained group membership and socialized novice members into Taíno ways of thinking about relationships in the World.

### *Worlds projected by prophecy*

This chapter considers how *la Profecía de Aura Surey* framed and influenced the daily life, interactions and interpretations of Taíno persons who believed in and lived through it. I argue that for a number of my research collaborators, prophetic worldviews influenced (and to some extent prefigured) how events and persons were interpreted and responded to. I consider the consequences of living within what many of my research consultants considered a prefigured unfolding sequence of events, which, in turn, had an effect on how particular actions and events, as well as their resulting outcomes, were linked and interpreted.<sup>38</sup> In the world projected by prophecy, otherwise non-remarkable events and interactions can be framed as significant, as signs of the prophecy, and as such, as non-coincidental and causal. On the other hand, when the expectations concerning the world projected by prophecy are not met, those invested in the prophetic narrative are forced to recalibrate their expectations to match the actual events that take place, and in doing so must carefully interpret how these events fit within the prophetic

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<sup>38</sup> In the future I hope to consider other entailments of prophecy in terms of the ways in which time is punctuated by the event expectations afforded by a prophecy, in many ways breaking down dichotomies set up between finite/infinite, linear/circular, as well as other models of time frequently cited in the literature.

projection. As Benetta Jules-Rosette (1978: 561) argues, “prophecy translates the facts of daily experience into its own system,” complicating ideas of failed or disconfirmed prophecies (see Festinger, et al. 1956; Tumminia 2005).

Much work concerning prophecy in anthropology has also concerned the question of time and temporalities. John Leavitt (1999: 201) states that “In the modern West, prophecy implies public discourse with a future oriented social or political message, so that the word can simply mean foretelling the future.” However, recent discussions have instead focused on the reconfigured and rearticulated temporalities brought about by prophecy (Guyer 2007), asking “How do particular formulations of the extension of time affect how people envision the future (or the past)?” (Crapanzano 2007: 423). I am interested in such questions of temporalities, but given the scope of time in which I was able to conduct my research, I mostly focus on how prophecy reconfigures past and current events such that they cohere with believers’ prophetic frame of reference.

In fact, I am generally interested in how prophecy frames events and trajectories, if not always explicitly. Often the prophecy was alluded to, or keyed in through, the mention of aspects that are bundled with the prophecy—such as the *cemí blanco* (a concept I discuss later in the chapter)<sup>39</sup> or the invocation of causal cultural logics<sup>39</sup>. Drawing from Csordas (1997) and Du Bois (1993), I consider how interlinking strategies are taught and serve to depict prophecy as continuous and coherent across time, space, and particular social actors. As Thomas Csordas (1997: 327) asserts that “prophecy as an arbiter of social practice (intersubjectivity) and as an ongoing body of discourse

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<sup>39</sup> A *cemí* refers to the materialization of an ancestor or deity often in the form of a three point stone. It is a sacred object that is both a vessel for and representation of the spiritual essence of a venerable being.

(intertextuality),” lends coherence and cohesiveness by providing a frame of reference through which to interpret social experience.

The material in the rest of this chapter considers how such cultural logics are modeled and how the details of the Prophecy are taught to novice members. I analyze the recording of an interaction that took place after a Taíno protest, showing how causal ways of thinking repair the prophetic narrative after an unexpected event and in doing so socialize new members into appropriate strategies to account for events—strategies that are consistent with Taíno worldviews. By considering how a “collective project of imagining the future” can create or reify a sense of the group, the Prophecy of Aura Surey naturalizes the relationships among Taíno social actors into a collective with a commitment to a shared future, understood as different from the one projected by non-Taíno (for similar process within Urapmin prophecy see Robbins 2004). Ultimately, I consider the social effects of the Prophecy in demarcating Taíno group boundaries, in its regimentation of how varied social actors are socialized into shared goals and prophetic “modes of attention” (Harding 2005).

Within the prophetic frame, a prophecy not only foretells a string of events in relation to a particular outcome, it socializes those who abide by it into a weaving together of current events with the prophetic narrative, including other past events, figures and natural phenomena that have been shared by the group at other points in time, as I will highlight in the transcripts later in this chapter. A highly integrated form for analyzing experiences, the accretion and interlacing of such instances into the prophetic sequence of events serves to strengthen the overall account as well as the social ties between the Taíno. As Harding notes with respect to Heaven’s Gate:

For those on the inside, the fact that Heaven's Gate's vision of the future was generative was no doubt attractive, but so was the practice, the daily experience of assembling, revising, and enacting the vision. Ti and Do and their students became adept at reading the world—and the skies—around them for signs that their prophecies were coming true... With their incessant making explicit of connection and intertwining of terms, Ti and Do taught their students a literary mode of attention. They showed them how things were connected, not just that they were connected, but *how* they were connected. Indeed, they showed them how to connect things, how to convert similarities across boundaries of difference into similarities always already linked by sameness. They taught them how to convert metaphors into metonyms. How to enchant, or reenchant, the world. (309)... Do taught his students a mode of attention which understands that the meaning of a text, an object, or event does not inhere in the thing itself, or its author or agents, but rather in the web of connections that link it to other texts, objects, and events. (310)

I follow Harding's insight that prophecy is able to show people how to connect things by highlighting how they are already linked by a primordial sameness—that is a sameness of source as well as a sameness of meaning. Similarly, Robbins notes that among the Urapmin it was the "...job of the faithful to be constantly scanning the horizon for signs... very often view changes in the political order as portending that the players are aligning themselves to enact the drama of the end-time scripted in the book of Revelation" (Robbins 2001: 162). I show how these ways of reading, and scanning, the world allow the Taíno to substantiate the prophetic narrative and in doing so explicitly, socialize others to do so too.

Additionally, in terms of group organization, questions of authority and deputization with respect to speaking of and about prophecies arise when considering the hierarchies that emerge in and through such forms of esoteric knowledge. Though the prophet who set forth the Prophecy of Aura Surey did so over five centuries ago, present day leaders in the Taíno movement who share in this prophetic outlook often speak for and through the Prophecy of Aura Surey because of their ability to read cues in everyday



life and relate them to the unfolding events foretold by the prophecy. The ability to successfully weave together current cues, the larger prophetic narrative and past events confers authority to the prophecy as well as to the persons who have this competency. As an interpretive framing, the Prophecy of Aura Surey holds a model of events that influences social experience and the ways in which many Taíno social actors understand the world. It sets the stage for a cultural logic that organizes how they make sense of the world and organize experience (on cultural logics see Comaroff and Roberts 1986; Jameson 1991). Drawing from Goffman, we can think of this in terms of "...the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events" considering, of course, "the special vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are subject" (Goffman 1974: 10-11). During the situations I describe in this chapter, the Prophecy of Aura Surey provided the outlines of the tenets along which the Taíno organized social inclusion and the framing of events. Two aspects of frames as discussed by Goffman are especially relevant to these analyses. First, I draw from the awareness that "all frames involve expectations of a normative kind as to how deeply and fully the individual is to be carried into the activity organized by the frames. Of course, frames differ quite widely in the involvement prescribed for participants sustaining them" (345). In this case, I also consider the role of frame repair/adjustment "when the unmanageable...occur[s], an occurrence which cannot be effectively ignored and to which the frame cannot be applied, with resulting bewilderment and chagrin on the part of the participants" (347). In this particular case, I consider how the Taíno activists of the GCT react when the stated expectations are not met for a long-planned event that had been understood to play an important part in the prophecy. As such, the analytic of

framing is useful for considering how the Prophecy of Aura Surey can make itself part of the analyses of everyday events for those who subscribe to it, and for understanding the dismissal of alternative orientations and modes of understanding events and happenings. In the following section, I detail the materials that serve as interdiscursive links to frame particular interactions within the schema of the Prophecy.

### *The Prophecy of Aura Surey*

The *Profecía de Aura Surey* (Prophecy of the Morning Star) is frequently discussed among several Taíno organizations, such as La Liga Guakía Taína-ké, el Consejo General de Taíno Boricanos and Guaka-kú. I discuss it as a unified narrative across these three organizations because the League came to know about the prophecy through the GCT and Guaka-kú, and overall the prophecy and the interpretive frame provided by it are similar throughout the various groups, except where noted. Each of them introduced the prophecy to me on separate occasions, and used it to explain the historical erasure<sup>40</sup> of the Taíno presence in Puerto Rico—as their exclusion was part of a larger set of events that were foretold by the prophetic narrative. The first time I encountered this prophecy was at a conference on contemporary Taíno survival in Puerto Rico organized by the League, whose leader, Yarey, was teaching at a local university at the time. Using a Power Point presentation, a college student discussed her research on this prophecy, and as I sat in the audience I did not give it too much thought. This conference took place early on in my research, and I was still unaware of its widespread meaningfulness to a large number of Taíno people. It was not until later in my research with Yarey, and then with Baké and Abuela Serita (spiritual and ceremonial leaders of

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<sup>40</sup> See Chapter 1 and 2 for more on the debates surrounding the absence of contemporary Taíno in current histories of Puerto Rico.

Guaka-kú and the GCT respectively) that I came to understand this prophecy as something that was being related to in everyday practice.

According to my research collaborators, the prophecy was revealed by Aura Surey, described in popular literature and oral narrative as the young and clairvoyant daughter of Cacique Jayuya. According to these accounts, around 1511 she prophesized that in twenty-four generations the Taíno would again become aware of their connection to their earth and take a stand. Meanwhile, they would live quietly and invisibly in their own lands. The twenty-four generations have been translated by the Taíno into approximately five-hundred years, making the time at which I conducted my research among the Taíno especially meaningful for the groups and organizations I worked with. That is, at the culmination of these five-hundred years, which is sometime around 2011, they expect the Taíno nation to be reborn and reclaim the Island.

Given how long ago the prophecy was foretold, I asked Taíno activists how they found out about it. Guaka-kú's leader's response was to give me a copy of his self-published book, which he said would help me better understand the different dimensions of the prophecy. Relatively new technologies have allowed many Taíno to self-publish pamphlets, books, and online articles on this topic. The contemporary spread of the Prophecy of Aura Surey is most notable in the number of these materials sold at local artisanal shops (a large number of Taíno are artisans) and in the re-socialization of new and current members into a causal sense of time as well as to the interlinked relationships among events. In doing so, Taíno writers hope to provide those interested in the subject with more information about the events and logics contained within this prophecy. In the

book ¡*Batey!*, Baké (T. Dávila 2001b: 57) explains how oral tradition within family networks enabled the prophecy to survive through the generations.

Tujan's book focuses on the largely fictional journey of a young contemporary woman whom he gives the name of the prophet, Taína Surey.<sup>41</sup> We follow her in a path of self-discovery, as she learns about the prophecy and, in doing so, her role in it. As she learns about her Taíno heritage, she also becomes skilled at interpreting her encounters for important signs concerning her path as a Taíno woman. In one exchange, for example, we witness as Taína Surey asks the elder that served as her guide throughout the account, Don Gerardo, to give her details about the Prophecy of Aura Surey:

Se comentaba por aquellos lares que los tiempos de un renacer *indígena* llegaría a estas tierras, supuestamente la hija de un cacique pronunció ese gran misterio algo así como el regreso de la tradición en conciencia, responsabilidad y servicio. Ella anunció ese momento cobra las generaciones que sumarán veinticuatro tiempos...(13)

TRANSLATION:

It was commented throughout these lands that the times of an indigenous rebirth would arrive to these lands, supposedly the daughter of a chief pronounced this great mystery something like the return of the tradition in conscience, responsibility and service. She announced that moment charges the generations that will add to twenty-four ages..." (13)

This "indigenous rebirth," as voiced by Don Gerardo, is central to the Prophecy of Aura Surey. For my research collaborators the return of Taíno tradition to the Island depends on the collective outcome of many individual rebirths into the indigenous tradition. In turn, this collective outcome, though prophesied, also relies upon current Taíno practices of socialization and knowledge sharing. In the following sections I consider these practices in terms of how the Prophecy circulates in song, a form of

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<sup>41</sup> This book is not a fiction in the usual sense—it can be thought of as a fictionalized manifesto, a chronicle of happenings told through the lens of a prophecy and meant to spread Baké's specific outlook on the Taíno and the Prophecy of Aura Surey.

teaching that explicitly gives details about the Prophecy. I also consider how the “modes of attention” afforded by the prophetic frame as an interpretive scheme are modeled and taught to novice members.

### *Teaching the Prophecy in Song*

Yuli has a special relationship to the ancestral spirits and an ability to see many things that go unnoticed by others. I was often surprised at the information that Yuli knew that I had not revealed to her. Even Taíno persons outside of the GCT had great respect for her. As an artisan, musician, and writer deeply involved in an artisanal cooperative in a small town located in the mountainous center of the Island, Yuli was largely responsible for the current circulation of the Prophecy of Aura Surey.

I had met Yuli on a trip to the artisanal cooperative where I introduced my project to her and she generously explained much of her understanding of the Taíno spiritual system to me. After that, I had been invited to conduct research at her grounds on several occasions. In my time with her I gained a better understanding of the prophecy and the signs that cued it as a frame of reference. In fact, in my first meeting with Yuli she told me that if I found the *cemí blanco* within me, I would find and reconcile with myself, bringing about my rebirth as a Taíno woman. For the GCT, such rebirths were understood in terms of Puerto Ricans’ reconciliation with the “*cemí blanco*,” or Taíno consciousness within themselves. Though the *cemí blanco* did not explicitly figure within the written versions of the prophecy of Aura Surey that I encountered, it was understood by those within the GCT as a personal materialization of Taíno spirituality, which allowed for an understanding of the role of the prophecy of Aura Surey in everyday life.

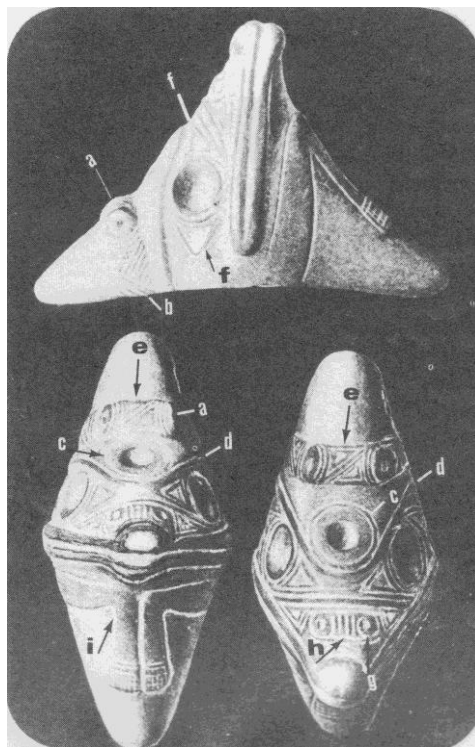


Figure 4.1 Image of a cemí from the side, top, and front.  
From Blasini (1985: 237).

The cemí blanco was often referenced in Taíno gatherings, accompanied by a hand gesture to signal that it had been acquired by the members. At one weekend gathering in Utuado with over forty activists staying overnight to commemorate the Taíno protest of the ceremonial grounds of Caguana, Yuli, Abuela Serita, Caona and other members began to sing and dance. Known for her beautiful songs and musical talent, everyone asked Yuli to sing her songs, which I was allowed to record. One of her songs was about the cemí blanco. She introduces her song as follows:

***Song of the cemí blanco***

***Introducción:***

Esta canción se hace en honor al cemí este es el cemí de la profecía. Trataré de cantarla, estas son las notas, este es el cemí que vive dentro de cada ser, que se llama el sueño del cemí, así que si se quieren ir en el ensueñito pues que bueno, yo creo que se puede mejorar pero esto es lo que hay.

*Canción:*

Soy cemí en la noche y del amanecer,  
soy cemí en la noche y del amanecer,  
y ahora y sin reproche también yo te diré,  
que estaba esperando que tu despertaras otra vez,  
también te contaré en la noche oscura encontré mi corazón latiendo  
desde siempre para que estaba esperando  
cuando el sol alumbrara mi fe  
que mi pueblo lo ha vuelto está vivo y ahora lo sé  
soy cemí en la noche y del amanecer  
el mensaje que te traigo es para alumbrarte tu fe,  
ya no duermo mas despierto estaré  
para enseñarte el sendero ancestral otra vez  
soy cemí en la noche y del amanecer  
levántate ahora y ve y calma tu sed  
soy cemí en la noche y del amanecer  
el sol alumbrará tu camino y en ti yo estaré,  
Soy cemí en la noche del amanecer  
estaba esperando que tú despertaras otra vez,  
soy cemí de la noche y del amanecer  
estaba esperando que tú despertaras otra vez,  
despertaras otra vez que con ti yo estaré.

TRANSLATION:

*Introduction:*

This song is in honor of the cemí, this is the cemí of the prophecy. I will try to sing it, these are the notes, this is the cemí that lives within each being, it is called the dream/sleep of the cemí, so if you want to go in the sleepiness well great, I think it can be improved but this is what there is.

*Song:*

I am cemí in the night and of the dawn  
I am cemí in the night and of the dawn  
And now and without reproach I will tell you  
That I was waiting for you to awaken again  
I will also tell you that in the dark night I found my heart beating  
Since always I have been waiting  
For when the sun would enlighten my faith  
That my people have returned and now I know it  
I am cemí in the night and of the dawn  
The message I bring is to enlighten your faith  
I no longer sleep, more awake I will be  
To teach you the ancestral path again  
I am cemí in the night and of the dawn  
Wake up/stand up now and go and calm your thirst  
I am cemí in the night and of the dawn

The sun enlightens your way and I will be with you  
I am cemí in the night and of the dawn  
I was waiting for you to awaken again  
I am cemí in the night and of the dawn  
You will awaken again and I will be with you

This song reveals several important aspects of the prophecy, including how it can transform and direct personal awakenings in terms of Taíno personhood. Materializing the inner self in terms of a fundamental symbol of Taíno religious beliefs and practices, the cemí, Yuli reminds listeners that people too, like cemíes of rock and wood, can be vessels for ancestral spirits. In this case, it is the ancestral spirits that enable a spiritual and collective Taíno awakening. The song format serves, formally, to teach other Taíno about the prophecy and, functionally, as a mechanism to awaken ancestral ways of knowing. In her introduction to the song, Yuli encourages her audience to allow the song to lull them to sleep, hoping that their physical awakening will parallel the awakening of their Taíno consciousness. The attainment of a person's cemí blanco concretizes their Taíno membership, conferring them more authority, as well as a role within the Taíno social field, mediating their ability to understand their context in a particularly Taíno way.

In another song, Yuli discusses the guidance and direction provided by the prophecy in terms of a historical cacique—Agüeybaná (d. ~1510)—largely known for his efforts in fighting the Spanish presence in Puerto Rico, then known as Borikén:

### *Song of Agüeybaná*

Aura Surey ha hablado la profecía se cumple el areito ha comenzado (?)  
Aura Surey ha hablado la profecía se cumple el areito ha comenzado (?) sagrado  
E: ¡Areito! ¡Areito Taíno!  
Cacique de la luz mayor señal de la llama del amor enseñanos el camino con tu sol  
Cacique de la luz mayor señal de la llama del amor enseñanos el camino con tu sol



Agüeybaná, Agüeybaná cacique de nuestras tierras, las tierras de Borikén  
Cacique de la luz mayor señal de la llama del amor enseñanos el camino con tu sol

TRANSLATION:

Aura Surey has spoken the prophecy is being realized the areito has begun  
Aura Surey has spoken the prophecy is being realized the areito has begun (?) sacred  
E: Areito! Areito Taíno!

Chieftan of the greater light signal of the flame of love show us the road with your sun  
Chieftan of the greater light signal of the flame of love show us the road with your sun  
Agüeybaná, Agüeybaná chief of our lands, the lands of Borikén  
Chieftan of the greater light signal of the flame of love show us the road with your sun

In the above song, Cacique Agüeybaná, who led the Taíno insurrection in 1511, is asked to show the way towards the realization of the Prophecy. An alignment between 1511, when the Prophecy was foretold, and the time in which the song was sung, 2008 emerges. It is access to the “cemí blanco” after self-recognition which allows a Taíno person to see aspects of one’s individual and collective role in the prophecy, stopping “even for the most minimal detail that could indicate” a path or a message (T. Dávila 2001b: 22).<sup>42</sup> These new members are responsible to their role in the prophetic narrative, understood as a projection and reconfiguration of the colonial narrative, which the Taíno are able to both recapture and disrupt. The dialogue between the Prophecy and current events gave space for spiritual leaders to extend the relevance of the prophecy to everyday life, and to better understand the prophecy itself. That is, the outlines of the Prophecy became more transfixing/absorbing as current events afforded more details to the Prophecy’s vague references.

For example, Baké was often adamant in his understanding of the role of what he called “contemporary Spaniards” in preventing the public acknowledgement of Taíno traditions and perseverance. I asked him who he was referring to with this expression.

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<sup>42</sup> Translation of: “Se detenía por el más mínimo detalle que en su saber podría indicarle...” (22)

He explained that “contemporary Spaniards” were found in many governmental, cultural and educational institutions such as the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP) and public scholars that denounced the Taíno resurgence. For Baké and quite a few others, a contemporary Spaniard was understood as someone who has little potential to recognize their *cemí blanco*—a sign of their ancestry, and as such could not be a Taíno. Such portrayals, then, depend upon alignments that result from the projection of the colonial narrative of the Island, which has the potential to mirror and subvert the story of Taíno conquest and extinction. Thus, the ICP is understood by people like Baké to reproduce Spain in Puerto Rico, paralleling/extending its influence in obscuring the Taíno presence since the fifteenth century. In his book he echoes this with specific regard to their role in the prophecy:

Para ellos [quienes no le gustan estas cosas de *indios*] los taínos solo [sic] eran un estorbo algo que debieron borrar hace siglos. Lo que “estos” no se explican es como el pueblo atesora el sentimiento taíno porque lo llevamos en la sangre y la conciencia y es el pueblo mismo quien ha protegido lo poco que nos ha dejado el famoso Isepecon.

TRANSLATION:

For them [those who do not like these Indian things] the Taíno were just a hindrance something that should have been erased centuries ago. What “these” can’t explain to themselves is how the people treasure the Taíno sentiment because we carry it in the blood and the conscience and it is the very people who have protected the little that has been left to us by the famous Isepecon” (19).

Baké’s understandings of these social relationships define a line between inhabitants of the Island, where he and others define people in Puerto Rico as either contemporary Spaniards or Taíno based on what is revealed through their actions.<sup>43</sup> It

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<sup>43</sup> Sara Trechter (2001: 23-24) considers how particular features of social engagement (e.g. encroachment, arrogance, meddlesomeness) are discursively constructed as features “of whiteness” by Lakota at Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota. Though not necessarily understood as an “essential quality of white people” (28), she argues that the “discourse frame forces participants to negotiate meanings of whiteness, to construct others’ racial identities, and through contrast and resistance, to emphasize Lakota cultural values. The process inevitably results in the association of some Lakota people with qualities of

also delineates authoritative Taíno persons as those who are invested in and able to read others as insiders or outsiders. In this way, the prophecy serves to organize current characters and events in ways that resonate with—yet also undermine—the narrative of Taíno extinction.

In fact, my own research became read in a similar way. Yarey had just picked me up from my apartment in Rio Piedras (a barrio of San Juan), when she told me that she was going to introduce me to the leader of a Taíno organization she had just learned of. He was going to provide support for a ceremony she was going to have that night. This is how I met Baké, leader of Guaka-kú. Baké was known for his spiritual knowledge, for his ideas on Taíno culture, and for his ability to communicate with ancestral spirits. His organization was deliberately small, with only three core members at any one time, though they associated with other Taíno groups and persons. After Guaka-kú provided ceremonial assistance that evening, they acceded to help me with my research.

A few days later I made it to their location, a pasture between a river and a cave system filled with Taíno petroglyphs in a small southeastern town. Baké, Ojí, and Piku greeted me, and showed me the grounds. At the end of the day, they celebrated a small ceremony to introduce me to the spirits in the area, during which Baké told me that my *cuadro espiritual* (*spiritual frame*) revealed to him that I was Taína, that I should be Taína. That it was my ancestors that had brought me to him and to my research. He asked how I could deny my being Taíno, and in doing so deny them—my ancestors,

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whiteness in particular contexts. Between the lines of this dialogic discourse, "whiteness" and "being a true Lakota" are (re)constructed" (24). The way in which the discursive construction of whiteness serves to emphasize Lakota cultural values is a useful parallel for considering how Baké's construction of contemporary Spaniards serves to underscore Taíno cultural values.

because as Anajuke my ancestors are *indios* (Indians) and they lead and protect me.

Again, after the ceremony, I restated my role as researcher.

From this Taíno point of view, however, my assessment of what I would do with this research mattered little. In fact, no matter how many times I attempted to clarify that my research might not get published and not become the book that they imagined me to be writing, the Taíno groups still talked about my book, which Baké even called *my chronicles*, and its role in the prophecy. My own lack of identification as a Taíno person also mattered very little, as it was out of my hands. That is, the way in which the Taíno activists I worked with understood my research had little to do with how I conceptualized my project. Rather, they presumed that my research resulted from events beyond my control. In fact, they expressed to me that the fate of what I would write, and am writing, lay outside of my command. Also, while I hesitated to identify as a Taíno person, the way my work was framed by the prophetic narrative identified me as Taíno by default; according to these people and the prophecy, I was/am Taíno; it just wasn't/isn't my time to acknowledge it, and as such I was responsible to my role in the Taíno restoration.

I found that as I moved further into my research local Taíno understandings of prophecy and causality influenced interpretations of my role as researcher. When I met the various Taíno organizations that were invested in this prophecy, my arrival coincided with their sense that they found themselves close to the time where the events prophesized by Surey would occur. As their comfort with me grew, my “chronicling” of their actions and interactions was read into the prophecy. In practice, I found that being included in the prophecy offered a partial resolution to the potential threat posed by my research both by establishing myself as trustworthy and of my research as a shared goal.

According to them, I was re-writing the chronicles of Taíno peoples, just as their reclamation of their indigeneity and of the Island (as Borikén) would rewrite Taíno history. Arriving into this field for the first time, I did not know that I would or even could be read into an already unfolding narrative that connected the past and the future in a uniquely present nexus.

Arguably, the accrual of interdiscursively deployable links such as the *cemí blanco* and the scripting of parallels to the conquest and colonization in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries substantiates the prophecy itself. It is through the weaving together of such interdiscursive links that the League, GCT and Guaka-kú attempt to both reveal people's roles and the importance of events and the meaning of objects in the larger prophetic narrative. This allowed Baké to understand the past as a script from which future events would unfold and in doing so, serve to subvert and rewrite that very past.<sup>44</sup>

Concurrent with discussions in Chapter 5 about how being Taíno compels an understanding of communication that includes the non-human world as a bearer of meaningful and important signs, the Prophecy of Aura Surey frames how such signs are interpreted. In her analysis of Heaven's Gate, Susan Harding argues that "Prophecy becomes scandalous in our post-Enlightenment world, even for most born-again Christians, when it 'speaks forth' its world, when those who hold it are also held by it,

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<sup>44</sup> Eisenlohr's (2006: 245) discussion of "the performative and spatial re-creation" of sacred Hindu pilgrimage sites onto Mauritian geography, and how such practices serve to create direct links to and indicate continuity between centers of worship in Mauritius and *India* is helpful for understanding how the iconic projection of co-presence can calibrate past and present events for Baké. Drawing from Silverstein (1993: 48-53) Eisenlohr discusses "how sign-events become interpretable by relating them to other, antecedent sign-events" which indexically unite (lamine) "layers of events, enabling their pragmatic contextualization--"reportive," "reflexive," and "nomic" calibrations" (2006: 262-263). Eisenlohr concerns himself with nomic calibrations to consider how the "calibration of displacement bridges the temporal and spatial bridge between events, therefore suggesting a relationship of temporal equivalence." In this particular case, the calibration of past events that displaced the Taíno and current events leading to the prophecy depends on their lamination, and if not temporal equivalence, a temporal parallelism with changed social roles and outcomes. Bakhtin's (1981: 84-258) discussion of chronotopes is also relevant in this regard.

when they inhabit and enact it as an unfolding social drama” (Harding 2005: 308).

Although there are few, if any, overlaps between Heavens’s Gate and the Taíno prophecies, the description of how prophecy is lived is applicable to the particular case that I am analyzing.<sup>45</sup> For these social actors, prophecy is both a silhouette from which to figure the world and a gaze with which to see its shape instantiated.

### *Preparing*

The timeline prognosticated by Aura Surey coincides with the period leading up to and following 2012—a year that was understood by my collaborators as resonant with popularly circulated understandings of the Mayan prophecies.<sup>46</sup> Such connections to the Mayan calendar were explicitly made and considered important by my research collaborators. Though few groups profess a connection between the Mayan and Taíno languages (see Chapter 5), many do acknowledge a spiritual connection between ancestral indigenous practices on the Island and among the Maya. Arguably, such connections are strengthened by the acknowledgement of a pan-indigenous connection among communities within the Caribbean basin.<sup>47</sup>

This coupling had a direct effect on how the GCT and the LGTK envisioned the Taíno return. Stating that “the code is in Maya, but the key is in Taíno,” GCT spiritual leaders explained that the Taíno rebirth as predicted by Aura Surey coincided with the

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<sup>45</sup> Whereas Heaven’s Gate is generally understood as an apocalyptic born-again Christian cult, the Taíno are an indigenous group seeking to reclaim a right to be recognized as such in Puerto Rico. I draw from Harding’s discussion because there are overlaps in the discussion of how a prophecy organizes experience that bear upon my own argument.

<sup>46</sup> Though the year 2012 has recently become quite popular due to the circulation of interpretations of the reset date of the long count of the Mayan calendar as portending the end of time itself (argued to be a misreading of the calendar that has been appropriated by many new-age denominations and not necessarily adhered to by a majority of Mayan peoples) the Taíno understood this coincidence as relevant to their own Prophecy, as a sign that Aura Surey’s revelation is in fact nearing.

<sup>47</sup> As further discussed in Chapter 2 and 6, many Taíno acknowledged pre-Columbian exchanges with other indigenous groups in the Caribbean. Recent archaeological evidence reveals this position to not be too far-fetched (Keegan and Carlson 2008; Rouse 1992).

highly circulated interpretation of the Mayan calendar as predicting the end of the world in 2012. However, they were quick to clarify that the end of the world did not indicate a literal end of the planet. To them it spoke of changes in worldly matters—an end of the world as it had been known. Taking this meaning into account, leaders such as Abuela Serita and Caona planned for the actual events of the prophecy by acquiring land in order to organize the Taíno community. The “end” would occur through the loss of access to the technologies on people are dependent on (for food, communications, entertainment, electricity, and running water, among others). The acquisition of land would enable the survival of the Taíno, despite the loss of technologies, by providing a space where a Taíno spatial community could be formed and Taíno spiritual practices could be carried out. The Taíno community, as envisioned by the GCT and LGTK respectively, would grow food, dig wells and survive in harmony with the land. The expectation of going back to the land was such, that the Abuela Serita always reminded me to carry seeds with me, just in case.

Additionally, given the restrictions the Taíno encounter in attempting to have a say in the management of the Island’s indigenous patrimony, this land was envisioned as a space where Taíno spirituality could be practiced openly, and currently exhumed Taíno remains could be respectfully and properly reinterred (see Chapter 7 for more on debates concerning treatment of Taíno remains). Moreover, it could serve as a cemetery after the passing of current Taíno peoples. As an elder, Serita was particularly invested in having a place where she could be buried and attended to in accordance with Taíno traditions and ceremonies. During my fieldwork with the GCT, we researched several potential sites, recruited the economic support of the membership, as well as planned various

fundraisers to obtain the resources necessary to purchase such a location. Obtaining the economic support from the membership was complicated by the limited resources most members of the GCT had access to, and their difficulties in obtaining governmental and/or non-profit cooperation for such a project. As such, the attempts to obtain a landsite for this project were not successful during this time.

Members of the League also endeavored to rally together sites that would serve as centers for Taíno recruitment and sustainable living. These efforts, however, had largely focused on obtaining old buildings managed by the government, such as closed school buildings, old town halls, and other sites in disuse. Though members of the League garnered some support from governmental officials and agencies, even obtaining and renovating some abandoned governmental buildings for a period of time, local party politics had thwarted long-term efforts in achieving such goals.<sup>48</sup> The alliances the municipal government required in order to provide Taíno organizations with resources often prevented the Taíno from obtaining resources if such political alliances were understood to be compromised by interactions with persons from another political party, or when the political party occupying the governmental seat after an election changed. These compounding difficulties have made it difficult to ensure the development of any long-term Taíno centers and cooperatives during the time of my research.

### *It's a matter of the spirit*

As I became more involved in my work with the GCT, I became aware of the ways in which they understood the relationships between events and meanings, the points of reference from which the significance of occurrences were evaluated and the ways in

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<sup>48</sup> I will discuss this topic again in Chapter 7.



which access to these references were related to the social organization of personal relationships within the group. I found that a large part of the GCT's work with novice members was geared toward teaching them the logics and points of reference through which they would be expected to assess everyday incidents and interactions in relationship to the larger prophetic frame. However, given that these interpretive practices are not explicit nor centered on the conclusions reached, the focus of the socializations is placed on the process of interpretation itself and, as such, is often modeled for the novice member across speech events (see literature on hierarchical socialization and modeling: Hymes 1967; Ochs and Schieffelin 1984; Ochs and Taylor 1995; Collins 1996; Wortham 2005; Mertz 2007). In turn, such interpretations and the models of interaction they propose for newer members rank communicative and interpretive practices as emblematic of Taíno language practices above any particular linguistic structures.

In the transcripts that follow, I examine how the logic of causality as prefigured by the Prophecy of Aura Surey affects communicative and interpretive practices. Though these transcripts do not specifically refer to the Prophecy of Aura Surey, I argue that it is the frame of the prophecy that imposes a specific sense of causality and “mode of attention” to the world, which, in turn, affect how events are interpreted and how their significance is understood. Specifically, this transcript shows how GCT leaders, Abuela Serita and Caona, repair the disruption posed by their unmet expectations as respects the protest of the archaeological and bureaucratic treatment of the Jacanas burial and ceremonial site. Considering how the protest was thwarted by a lack of local governmental and organizational support, I analyze how the participants in a

conversation after the protest—Caona, Serita and Noemí—draw attention to and interpret specific reference points, to indicate how the event has still been a success, even when attendance was low and the media attention was minimal. This is accomplished through Caona’s and Serita’s specialized understanding of the relationships between events, contexts, and the ends of their efforts as framed by the Prophecy.

Taíno newcomers within the GCT are subject to various socializing processes in order to make them successful and contributing members of Taíno organizations. Elders and leaders in the GCT often make use of particular narrative framing devices to indicate not only how to interpret particular utterances and situations, but also to link and/or interrupt interpretations of events, practices and social relationships. This is accomplished interactionally through the use of deictic grounding to construct particular forms of interactional solidarity and differentiation, framing, and the management of participant role structures (Jakobson 1957; Brown and Gilman 1960; Goffman 1967; Benveniste 1971; 1974; Fillmore 1975; Levinson 1983; Errington 1985; 1988; Goodwin 1990; Hanks 1996; Irvine 1996; Silverstein 2003).

### *Sitting on the side of the road*

We were waiting for a few more people who were scheduled to join us for the protest when the Abuela asked me to turn my camera on. She told me that since I was interested in how people talk and understand things, she and Caona were going to talk about “the ways of Taíno communication.” However, as the discussion unfolds, it becomes clear to me that the discussion was also aimed at re-framing the weekend’s events. The Abuela and the Cacica share the responsibility of socializing and directing the group. Abuela Serita serves as spiritual guide of the group and mentor to Cacica

Caona. Through this interaction, members of the group are directed towards a new interpretation of the events, and are being taught how to do so from a Taíno perspective.

The following exchange includes three speaking participants: group elder Abuela Serita; Cacica Caona; and novice member Noemí (who at that point had been active in the group for approximately eight months). Noemí's son, Willy and I are also nearby. Additionally, Miriam (another GCT activist) and her boyfriend are occasionally present. I consider how the following interaction serves to socialize novice members, while articulating hierarchies and GCT-sanctioned Taíno ways of interpreting events with the purpose of allowing the members to see the event as a success, even as they face the low attendance to their event.

***"Si, estamos en lo correcto" part 1. April 12, 2008-Jacanas, Ponce, P.R..***

- |    |    |  |    |  |
|----|----|--|----|--|
| 1  | S: | Ahora mismo, donde estoy yo senta', si tu miras aquella dos piedras que están de aquí, de de donde yo la estoy viendo, es un corazón, para mi yo [que veo                  | S: | Right now, where I am sitting, if you look at those two rocks that that are here, from from where I am looking, it is a heart, for me [what I see                |
| 2  | C: | [aha   | C: | [uhuh  |
| 3  | S: | es un corazón. {?} y el otro que esta al lao {¿no?} es un corazón. Es una piedra cuadrada pero tiene una, como una raya, donde, si para muchos llamarían una cruz, que [y, | S: | is a heart. {?} and the other one next to it {is not?} a heart. It is a square rock but it has a, like a dash, where, yes for many they would call a cross, that |
| 4  | C: | [Sí  | C: | [Yes   |
| 5  | S: | <b>para nosotros tiene otro significado</b>  | S: | <b>for us has another [meaning</b>   |
| 6  | C: | [Sí  | C: | [yes   |
| 7  | S: | ¿pero si tú ves es un corazón?   | S: | but you see a heart?   |
| 8  | C: | Sí   | C: | Yes.   |
| 9  | N: | ¿Está de lado verdad?  | N: | It's on its side, right?   |
| 10 | S: | Sí, [está de lado  | S: | Yes, [it's on its side   |
| 11 | N: | [Está de lado.] sí. [sí  | N: | [it's on its side.] Yes. [yes  |
| 12 | S: | <b>[Sí] sí te paras aquí, si te paras aquí y la puedes ver es un corazón. Dentro de esa piedra, dos corazones {?} dos corazones</b>  | S: | <b>[If, if you stand here, if you stand here and can see it it's a heart. Inside that rock, two hearts {?}two hearts united</b>                                  |

unidos allí, y yo, mientras que se hablaba, cuando lo que estaba hablando Caona, lo que yo decía es, si vamos a a lo que explicaba ella, el comunicarse para mí, eh, {?} **como esta misma mañana como dice, aquí estaban los corazones de ustedes unidos, con nosotros**, o sea, que ese fue el [el-

there, and I, during the speaking, when what Caona was talking about, what I was saying is, if we go to to what she was explaining, communicating for me, is {?} **like this very morning like said, here were your hearts united with ours, that is, that that was the** [the-

- 13 C: [el significado de las cosas que **aparentemente que no son [casualidades**
- 14 N: [aha
- 15 C: que son causalidades.
- 16 S: o sea, estar sentado aquí y tu tener la comida [{?}
- 17 C: [los mensajes espirituales
- 18 S: E-Exacto, ver esas piedras en esa forma de corazón, la otra tratándola de proteger o eso, incluso como te dije, puede ser por lo menos lo que yo visualizo es como si fuera una, una cruz, que para nosotros pues tú sabes que tiene, **tiene el signi- de la vida también, y, y entonces para mí yo pues mira este corazón de nosotros**, aferrado dentro de esa piedra, de de esa roca, de esa piedra y esa montaña, aquí en Jácana. sabes, que **los corazones te acuerdas como te dije, salir es estrella en ese momento que hago así y veo esa estrella fugaz**

- C: [the meaning of the things that **apparently are not [casual**
- N: [uhuh
- C: that are causal
- S: that is, being here sitting here and you having the food [{?}
- C: [the spiritual messages
- S: E-exactly , seeing those rocks that heart shape the other trying to protect or that, moreover like I told you, it could be-at least like I visualize it's like it was, a, a cross that for us well you know well it **has, the meani- of life too, and, and then for me, well look at that heart of ours embracing inside of that stone, of that rock, that stone and that mountain, here in Jacana. You know, that hearts remember like I told you, that star coming out that moment I do like this and see that shooting star**

- 19 C: fugaz
- C: Shooting

In the excerpt above, Serita and Caona share their interpretations of the setting surrounding them. In turn 3, the Abuela Serita explains to the other members present — Noemí, Caona, Noemí's son and me—what she is looking at while explaining the significance of the object she is indicating. The Elder explains the shape of one of the

details she wants everyone to see by describing what “muchos llamarían una cruz” (“many would call a cross”), her serious tone and her frequent pauses keying the participants to the importance of what she is observing. She is careful not to say it is a cross, or that it looks like a cross. In calling attention to the fact that “many” would call it a cross, she is distancing herself, as well as her audience, from Christian belief systems. In turn 5, she explains that the cross shape “para nosotros tiene otro significado” (“for us has another meaning”). Two things stand out in this statement. First, the use of the deictic “nosotros” (“us”) grounds a difference between those who would call it a cross and those who wouldn’t. In fact, the second part of the utterance underscores the alignment/socialization work that is accomplished in this excerpt. By saying that that which some call a cross, has “another meaning” (“otro significado”) for the “us” she alludes to, she shares with more novice members that the interpretation they *should* have is not that other meaning—rather, they should take the meaning she is putting forward as “ours” instead, though she does not state what that meaning is yet. Later, midway through turn 18 she explains that “for us...it has the mean[ing] of life as well.”<sup>49</sup> By revealing this other meaning that the cross may have she does not challenge the potential other meanings associated with the cross (notably Christian interpretations). Rather she allows for these, however uncomfortably, to stand alongside as alternative interpretations of a shape.

The ability to read signs of the prophecy in the world is a creative process, deeply connected to questions of authority, where the suggested lamination of voices serves to authorize the Abuela to voice that “our” Taíno interpretation is the relevant one (turn 18).

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<sup>49</sup> On other occasions, I understood Serita to consider Christian understandings of the cross as the burden one carries, and one’s redemption would depend on how one dealt with that burden. The difference she elaborates on seems to imply that this is the other understanding that “others” have.

Such authority also confers upon Caona the ability to tie in particular contextualization cues that index the interpretive framework, such as the reminder that it “is causal” (see Gumperz 1992 on contextualization cues). The Abuela further frames the utterance by voicing the ancestors that inhabit the spatial context: “*here were your hearts united with ours*” serves to set up another voice which in turn aligns the unspoken “us” of the spirits embodied in the spatial/physical context with the “your” of the Taíno people present and supportive of the event.

Analytical attention to the deictic grounding of the pronouns used in this conversational excerpt highlights the participant structure of this event as it relates to the socialization to Taíno hierarchies of knowledge, especially as specific spheres of knowledge are authoritatively commanded by particular social actors. As an elder, Serita is able to define the group organized around her as sharing a particular interpretation of the rock and its intersecting lines. And in doing so she defines the participants as a discrete grouping. Such authority is predicated by her role as an elder and spiritual leader, as well as its instantiation in the continued conversation. As discussed in Bucholtz and Hall (2005) authority often emerges in intersubjective encounters through the use of pronouns to conflate social actors and speak on the behalf of, as well as socioculturally orient, the constructed “we” and “our.” Since, as Irvine (1996) suggests with respect to Wolof insult poems, this exchange is “but one moment in a diachronic chain of discourses, a moment which presumes earlier moments and in which later moments are already envisioned,” the building of hierarchies within the GCT may result from the accumulation of such instances of authorization and in the expectation of further hierarchical social interactions among its members.

With the authority to orient others, Serita tells novice member Noemí to literally position her body so as to see from the Abuela's visual perspective (turn 12): "If, if you stand here, if you stand here and can see it it's a heart." However, other than Noemí's affirmative responses (turns 9, 11, 14) to both the Elder and Caona, she is relatively unsuccessful in her attempts to take on an active speaker role in the exchange. The turn-taking patterns consistently map onto group hierarchies in terms of Serita's and Caona's roles, time in the organization and presumed knowledge of Taíno social and cultural practices/worldviews.

In the following section Caona and Serita become more explicit in expressing what they consider Taíno to be and do so by considering how a Taíno is able to fruitfully read the signs of nature and to use those interpretations to learn and, arguably, to continue on the path predicted by the Prophecy.

***"Si, estamos en lo correcto" part 2. April 12, 2008-Jacanas, Ponce, P.R..***

- |    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
| 20 | S: que yo dije gracias, que es-estamos-estamos en lo correcto, <u>estamos en lo correcto</u>   | S: that I said thank you, that we- we are we are doing the right thing, <u>we are doing the right thing.</u>   |
| 21 | C: Sí. Estamos en lo correcto.   | C: Yes. We are doing the right thing   |
| 22 | S: estamos en lo correcto, ¿sabes qué? que, que esas señales que buscamos pa' =  | S: we are doing the right thing, you know what? what, what those signals that we look for=   |
| 23 | C: =Sí:, que ese <u>es otro</u> idioma, que nuestra gente conoce, verdad, el-el poder identificar las señales que en los momentos cruciales de nuestras acciones diarias, cotidianas, los maestros nos enseñan o los seres de luz verdad, espirituales, que, que son protectores y son, verdad, maestros ascendidos, pues nos enseñan eso y es de la manera en que nosotros como pueblo <b>podemos también conocer, tú conoces un taíno, porque sabe leer los ojos, porque</b> | C: =Yes:, that is <u>the other</u> language, that our people know, right, the-the ability to identify the signals that in those crucial moments of our daily, quotidian actions, the teachers teach us or the true beings of light, spiritual ones, that, that are protectors and are, truly, ascended teachers, well they teach us that and that is the way in which we as a people can also know, <b>you know a Taíno because they know how to read the eyes, because they</b> |

As discussed earlier, it is the acquisition/recognition of the *cemí blanco*, which enables Caona and Serita to see the messages/signals of nature and understand them. The particular mode of attention afforded by the Prophecy as well as being able to key in to “the teachers...the true beings of light, spiritual ones, that, that are protectors and are, truly, ascended teachers” is essential to making the necessary repairs between what could be interpreted by outsiders as a failed event and the larger framework of Taíno re-appropriation as set forth in the Prophecy.

Throughout the excerpt another outcome of the exchange is a re-interpretation of the protest/clean-up events. Prior to this moment, the mood among the participants was rather defeated. However, the interpretation of the rocks and the choice to sit in a location where the shape of the intersecting lines could be seen coupled with the occurrence of a shooting star in the ceremony of the night before were understood as linked and, as such, as both meaningful and agentive. In turn 20, Abuela Serita repeats twice that “estamos en lo correcto” (we are doing the right thing). In turn 21, Caona reiterates the statement by repeating “estamos en lo correcto.” Abuela Serita repeats the statement again, effectively leaving no space for disagreement to be voiced in this conversation. Even though the events surrounding their protest (discussed further in Chapter 7) did not turn out how the participants may have expected, according to Serita’s analysis the events turned out the way they were supposed to. Here, Abuela Serita’s ability to read the signs of fate and to understand the links among otherwise disparate events overrides the unmet expectations of the other members. Therefore, according to Serita, they are all doing the right thing. Again, Serita deictically grounds this as



something that “we”—the Taíno—do. Her choice of the verbal form “buscamos” (*we search*), includes the audience of Taíno/potential Taíno in it. In doing so, she models for her interlocutors how they should be interpreting said events.

Caona explicitly frames these interpretations in terms of what it means to be a Taíno. By explaining that “ese es otro idioma que nuestra gente conoce” (this is another language that our people know) she overtly includes the sort of nature-signals the Abuela Serita discusses. In fact, Caona’s and Serita’s discussion reveals that non-humans serve as an important link between spiritual ancestors/beings and present Taíno peoples. This, Caona argues, is in fact how one can recognize a Taíno—in being able to read nature’s messages which in practice are to be interpreted as spiritual messages.

For some, this ability to “read” is materialized in the “mode of attention” afforded by the *cemí blanco*. Caona’s voice is authorized by the parallel between/lamination of her relationship to the “ascended teachers” and her relationship to the other members of the group, as one to protect and provide guidance.

The narrative form and the modeling of how to interpret the events surrounding the protest socializes novice Taíno members by introducing them into Taíno ways of reading natural elements. This is accomplished both implicitly through the use of deictics and the modeling of interpretive processes, and explicitly through meta-pragmatic commentary. In doing this, Serita and Caona bring to novice members awareness that nature should not be discounted when interpreting the significance of events. Such modeling also serves to instantiate the authority of elder Serita and Cacica Caona insofar that they are the only members with the authority to model such interpretations for others and who through various rhetorical techniques are able to represent themselves as able to

communicate with the spiritual world and, in turn, communicate their messages to the rest of the membership, that is, to be the grouping's spiritual and cultural brokers.

The following excerpt shows how another member, Noemí, attempts to join the conversation. As a more recent member of the group, however, Noemí is limited in her authority to interpret events or to command the conversation. The following exchange highlights some of the difficulties Noemí confronts in her attempts to share an experience she had in the prior evening's ceremony. Here, as discussed earlier, the prophetic frame delimits Noemí's participation and her role in the conversation; she was consigned to agreeing and describing the incident alone. Only Serita and Caona are sanctioned to and successful in sharing their interpretations of the events and the broader meanings of their interpretations. This participation framework has the effect of aligning newer members' discourse with the leaders' goals and modes of attention.

***“Si, estamos en lo correcto” part 3. April 12, 2008-Jacanas, Ponce, P.R..***

- |    |    |  |    |   |
|----|----|--|----|---|
| 24 | N: | Sí.  | N: | Yes.  |
| 25 | S: | Pero, lo que yo le decía ahorita a ella, que yo decía, no, yo quiero hablar con la persona pero como yo le dije a ella {?} que nos sentemos y nos veamos de cara a cara. | S: | But, what I told her a while ago, that I said, no, I want to talk with the person but like I already said to her {?} that we sit down and we see each other face to face. |
| 26 | C: | Exa:c[tamente]   | C: | Exa:c[tly]  |
| 27 | S: | [por]que de cara a cara podemos ver, tú puedes sentir la vibración, hasta cuando tú puedes sentir la vibración de la palabra de nosotros ah en este momento.             | S: | [becasue] face to face we can see, you can feel the vibration, even when you can feel the vibration of our word ah in this moment.  |
| 28 | C: | Exacto, y los ojos [también]   | C: | Exactly, and the eyes [too]   |
| 29 | S: | [y los] [ojos que te dan]  | S: | [and the] [eyes that give you]  |
| 30 | N: | [Yo ano:che] yo no sé si ustedes sintieron lo mismo que yo, pero yo anoche cuando nos acostamos así, las palpitations de mi corazón, yo oía                              | N: | [I last ni:ght] I don't know if you felt the same as me, but I last night when we laid this way, the palpitations of my heart, I heard them                               |

31	S:	[se siente]	S:	[it is felt]
32	N:	[un hueco] y hacía, mm ((hand gesturing)), o sea era como=	N:	[a cavity] and it did, mm ((hand gesturing)), that is it was like=
33	C:	=¿un hueco?	C:	=a cavity?
34	S:	para saber lo que se siente	S:	to know what is felt
35	N:	<b>como, no era mi corazón</b>	N:	<b>like, it was not my heart</b>
36	S:	de adentro pa' fuera	S:	from outside in
37	N:	yo oí de adentro para fuera	N:	I heard from inside out
38	S:	ella recibíendote	S:	her receiving you
39	C:	Si	C:	Yes
40	N:	¿Y yo? yo me quede así=	N:	And me? I just stayed like this=
41	S:	=Que uno quisiera quedarse allí	S:	=That one would want to stay there
42	N:	Si yo me iba quedar, yo dije=	N:	Yes I was going to stay, I said=
43	S:	=Si no hay quien, o si,	S:	=If there is no one, or yes
44	C:	No, y les voy a decir, la experiencia más bella.	C:	No, and I am going to tell you, the most beautiful experience

In the excerpt above Noemí attempts to take a more active role in the conversation. These attempts are initially followed up by Caona and Serita. Noemí explains her experience during the previous night's ceremony, when the GCT hugged the earth beneath them. She explains the feeling of the palpitations to show that it was not just her heart participating in the sensation she describes. In turn 35, she makes clear that "no era mi corazón" (*it was not my heart*). However, by opening the floor to a more metaphysical explanation, she also opens the discussion to Abuela Serita's and Caona's hierarchical expertise, and their desire to model correct interpretive practices. Again, Serita's and Caona's ability to key into their knowledge of the Prophecy and the spiritual world authorizes them to interpret Noemí's experiences. At this point, as Noemí attempts to give an explanation of the events she experiences (Turn 42) "Si yo me iba a quedar, yo dije-" (*I was going to stay, I said-*) she is interrupted by Caona, who speaks about her initial spiritual experiences. Caona's story outlines how as a novice she did not know how to interpret the spiritual experiences she had—it was with the assistance of an elder,

a Taíno-Sioux woman, that she was able to learn how to interpret and understand encounters with the spiritual realm. This story serves as a subtle chastisement of Noemí.

After Caona's story, Noemí attempts to reintroduce her experience of the night before again with limited success. As before, Serita and Caona regiment the participation framework such that Noemí is unable to share her interpretation of the evening's events as she experienced and understood them.

***“Si, estamos en lo correcto” part 4. April 12, 2008-Jacanas, Ponce, P.R.***

- |     |    |   |    |   |
|-----|----|---|----|---|
| 96  | C: | acoger  | C: | receive   |
| 97  | S: | acoger ((gestures hug)), abrir aquí estoy madre, de ahí entonces se une ((gestures this union)) est- esa, ese, ese  | S: | receive ((gestures hug)), open here I am mother, from there then is united ((gestures this union) tha- that, that that                                    |
| 98  | N: | Dándole prioridad [a la]  | N: | Giving priority [to the]  |
| 99  | S: | [ese ese ese]   | S: | [that that that]  |
| 100 | N: | yo lo sentí, que yo dije {?}  | N: | I felt it, that I said {?}  |
| 101 | S: | EXA::CTO  | S: | EXA::CTLY   |
| 102 | C: | Sí::  | C: | Yes::   |
| 103 | S: | que en ese momento, como, eh no, no se a ustedes, pero a mí me sucede, no sentimos a nadie a menos que esté al lao de nosotros, a nadie, a nadie, no [sentimos] | S: | that in that moment, like, eh I don't know if you guys, but to me it feels, we don't feel anyone unless they are next to us, no one, no one, no [we feel] |
| 104 | N: | ((Noemí motions as if to begin to talk))  | N: | ((Noemí motions as if to begin to talk))  |
| 105 | S: | NO pensamos si habían {?}, cucarachas, habían ratones, o...   | S: | We did NOT think {?} if there were roaches, there were mice, or...  |

After Caona tells her story, Abuela Serita poses an interpretation of and response to Noemí's experience. She explains that in such a situation, Noemí and others should welcome and receive the mother's (Mother Earth, Atabei) communication and hug her as a gesture of union and togetherness. Here (turn 100) Noemí, again makes an attempt to offer her own interpretation of her experience, saying again "yo dije." This time, in a louder voice, the Abuela Serita interrupts the attempt and offers her explanation of

Noemí's experience. Noemí makes another unsuccessful attempt to speak, but ultimately it is the Elder's turn to share her spiritual experiences and interpretations. Though there are attempts made by Noemí to insert herself into the conversation, these efforts are largely limited by both Caona and Serita in their attempt to show/teach Noemí how to correctly interpret the experience. Though Taíno people were expected to naturally be able to read such messages, they can do so authoritatively only with more training and experience, which Caona and Serita offer. In addition to providing specific kinds of interpretive modeling, such interruptions to Noemí's narrative serve to establish specific kinds of relations among participants. Such participation frameworks ratify Caona's and Serita's role in ascertaining their authority and legitimacy in determining important points of reference in conversation. These points of reference both substantiate and instantiate spiritual values within and through natural non-human interlocutors—in the cases presented above, for example, what the rock or the flash of lightning could communicate. Such modes of attention, as framed by the Prophecy of Aura Surey, are socialized to the membership through the elder's and the cacique's modeling of correct interpretive practices. The ability to conduct such interpretations, however, has a twofold role. First, given the division of labor in who is and who is not allowed to interpret events for others, it affects the authoritative stance available to different members, which in turn affects the hierarchical relationships within the group. Second, such modeling coheres the group around particular interpretations of events and specific outlooks.

## *Conclusion*

The Prophecy of Aura Surey is a catalyst for the current cohesion of Taíno people and organizations. With reference to the noted late nineteenth century ghost dances, Smoak (2006: 205) indicates that prophecy may serve “to declare and enact their [American Indian] survival as a people.” For the Taíno, the Prophecy of Aura Surey echoes such a declaration. As such, prophecy plays a role in the public revival, maintenance and cohesion of the Taíno as a people. In the interactions presented above, as well as in the writings circulated by Taíno spiritual and political leaders, access to and knowledge of the Prophecy as evidenced by (1) the recognition of the *cemí blanco*, (2) the ability to read the signals in the world, and (3) the successful interpretation and modeling of interpretations for other Taíno lends authority to particular members. Such authority is important in organizing efforts among the Taíno, and also helps leaders set clear goals for all Taíno to work towards. The Prophecy is more than a hope; it serves as an assurance that Taíno efforts towards reclaiming the Island will be successful.

By prefiguring Taíno survival, the Prophecy of Aura Surey also facilitates Taíno group demarcation, relatedness, and the re-emergence of Taíno culture in Puerto Rico. Groups that take the Prophecy seriously tend to collaborate with each other even when they may disagree on other issues. Groups that do not believe in the Prophecy do not. Many new members are recruited with an understanding that the Prophecy is approaching and that their self-recognition as a Taíno will enable them to thrive through the changes. Once a part of the group, the Prophecy frames the accepted ways of knowing, it is the backdrop against which signals are read, against which successful action is evaluated, within which one can successfully enact one’s taínoness. Prophecy responds to hierarchies that oppose Taíno claims by serving as an alternate font of authority—one

that legitimized elders' and caciques' claims to authority, and created a moral realignment for both the socialization of novices and the Taíno struggle.

Considering the disruption caused by being considered extinct, this analysis attends to how novices claiming to be Taíno are resocialized into Taíno ways of making meaning and interacting. In this respect, this chapter speaks to an understanding of “socialization as the accumulated effect of a number of recurrent modifications[...]in the ways in which novices are expected to relate to particular a phenomenon” (Duranti 2009: 219). In view of how the Abuela Serita, Caona and other Taíno people with whom I spent time asked me and other novices to reorient ourselves to the world, to denaturalize what we took for granted about meanings and interaction frameworks, and to project ourselves into an alternative relationship to time and the link between causes and events, this chapter also adds to discussions of the challenges of how adults modify their daily engagements and routines.

Through its multiple layers, the Prophecy of Aura Surey animated events, relationships, histories and interpretations. It framed the socialization of novices, including myself, new members and outsiders into Taíno rhetoric, hierarchies, and participation. In imposing alignments and continuity between what could be understood as unrelated events, it disambiguated emerging phenomena by showing relationships and connections and (if only temporarily) resolved historical incongruities by revealing links between events. It did this by pointing to and presupposing particularly Taíno ideologies and logics of knowing. It is to this topic that I turn in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5:

### SPIRITUAL MEDIATIONS OF ANCESTRAL RELATEDNESS: OR, LESSONS ON HOW TO TALK TAÍNO

#### *Introduction*

Identifying what counted as Taíno talk was not an easy task for me. While I was focused on the sparse lexical items couched in Spanish grammar used to represent some sort of Taíno speech, most Taíno were more broadly focused on specific communicative dispositions. Though various Taíno people I encountered, especially within the GCT claimed to speak the Taíno language,<sup>50</sup> I never encountered anyone who was able to speak more than a few words with me. Or, did they? Whenever I explicitly asked about persons who claim to speak the Taíno language, I was presented with a lecture about communication. I was told that it was not so much a matter of speaking Taíno itself but listening—understanding like a Taíno. With this in mind I explore the various ideological positions about language and communication taken by Taíno people. Though the formal linguistic expectations of Taíno talk vary greatly, the conviction that there are particularly Taíno ways of sensing and communicating things was quite common across groups.

In this chapter I focus on Taíno groups in Puerto Rico that consider reconstructing Taíno language as less important than being able to communicate, express and understand in a Taíno way, defined as an attention to symbolic and interactional indicators of Taínoness. As such, talking Taíno is about expressing oneself in a way that communicates and indicates to others that one is Taíno and understands appropriate

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<sup>50</sup> Whereas I was referring to a Taíno grammatical /lexical /semantic system it wasn't clear that this is what my consultants referred to when speaking of language.



Taíno norms of behavior, ways of knowing and symbolism. This focus on ways of making meaning stands in contrast to groups who more explicitly attend to word origins and through the recovery of such origins, the extrapolation and reconstruction of Taíno worldviews and meanings.

This chapter considers how different groups manage, develop and extend their linguistic resources in accordance with the negotiation of social relationships and histories. How they handle Taíno/Boricua inflected vocabulary, participation frameworks, scripts, as well as ways of making and obtaining meaning are deeply related to issues of authority and legitimacy more broadly. Given the skepticism surrounding claims to identifying as Taíno, such acts are important in publicly constituting Taíno as a legitimate social identification. Such connections are instantiated through socialization practices that regiment modes of language uptake, production and circulation according to a particular group's explicit social aims and implicit ideas about language itself. Differences in how indigeneity is claimed among different groups in Puerto Rico are reflected in different approaches to language use and linguistic knowledge. For example, the GCT focuses on the intent and interpretation of communicative gestures and the management of participation roles and turn-taking rather than on recovering the Taíno language (I focus on language recovery efforts in the next chapter). Rindstedt and Aronsson (2002) argue that for older generations of Quichua speakers in San Antonio, Ecuador "Being Quichua is much more than speaking the language" (740). Instead, children are taught Quichua norms of behavior and are aware of the history of their ethnic identity. Though this case differs from the Taíno insofar as there are Quichua speakers, there is a parallel in what indigenous elders may focus on in socializing new generations.

The Taíno attention to practices other than the production of Taíno language as sites of Taíno cultural survival and replication (such as the structuring of interactional routines, participation roles and ideas about communication) could have resulted from the ways in which “indigenous patterns of interaction may be retained after the language used has shifted” (Field 2001: 249). Margaret Field argues that this is because “aspects of a speech community’s interaction that are most tacit are also the most resistant to change, and are maintained through mundane routines and forms of everyday interaction.” I argue that for the GCT the very socialization of new members into Taíno social life occurs through the correct expression and interpretation of a Taíno way of seeing and understanding things—which includes communicative criteria such as knowing how to listen, and an understanding of events as causally motivated (discussed previously in chapter 3). This is part of what some Taíno call a magical-metaphorical gaze, which can be described as an outlook that privileges searching for similarities across different dimensions of phenomena.

I also consider efforts such as the LGTK’s and Guaka-kú’s to instantiate specific differences between the Taíno and Spanish languages through creating scripts specific to Taíno. Whereas the GCT membership focus on interactive communicative criteria, the LGTK and Guaka-kú members concentrate on textually symbolic boundary-making with respect to Spanish as well. LGTK’s script is based on pre-Columbian petroglyphs whereas Guaka-kú’s is based on paired inversions of the Latin Script.<sup>51</sup> Margaret Bender’s work on Cherokee scripts (2008: 96) shows how “for many Cherokees, [...] syllabary signs express (and enact!) the community’s recent cultural revitalization and index the physical spaces of the reservation as authentically Indian spaces.” By

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<sup>51</sup> Images of both scripts appear later in this chapter.

iconically representing their difference from the Puerto Rican mainstream through the use of a separate script, the two Taíno group's proposals for a Taíno script also serve to demarcate specifically Taíno spaces and modes of expression. Though aimed at different audiences—Guaka-kú's script had a more limited circulation among people who already identified as Taíno, whereas the LGTK's circulated among non-Taíno identifying children and families with the expectation that some would begin to identify as Taíno—both scripts were successful in helping legitimate Taíno reclamation efforts among non-Taíno identifying audiences.

For these groups, attention to the written instantiations of Taíno is linked to practices that make Taíno words exceptional, imbuing value to and deriving significance from the vocabulary that has survived in the Puerto Rican linguistic corpus. Jocelyn Ahlers (2006: 73) proposes analyzing the use of Native Language as Identity Marker (NLIM) styles “to perform not only the identity of the speaker, but to create a discourse space in a larger sense, as a Native American discourse space, and to pull the audience into that creation.” In this way, non-fluent heritage speakers of Native American languages foreground that the “the metacommunicative / pragmatic function of such language use over referential function serves to highlight a broader Native American identity shared by speaker and audience” (58). Applying this insight to the use of Taíno language forms in Puerto Rico, I consider how the use of Taíno words and phrases serves to create a Taíno discursive space where Taíno ways of understanding and communicating—even if in Spanish—are privileged. Considering LGTK's and Guaka-kú's position towards these tokens of Taíno, I show how these words (1) are understood

as sources of a Taíno awareness and (2) the writing practices through which such tokens are further segregated from Spanish.

*“Escucha en silencio y escucharas su lenguaje”*

*“Listen in silence and you will hear its language” (Nogueras Vidal 2007).*

As I walked across the river, stumbling over rocks to find the one that I would use at ceremony that night, Evaristo stopped me. Less skeptical of me than he used to be, he held up a rock and asked me how many different colors were in it. I thought for a moment and tried to anticipate the trick. “Well, there are many different shades of the 2 main colors. I mean 3 main colors. I guess maybe hundreds, if not thousands of colors.” The way Evaristo smiled, I knew I had not correctly responded. He said to me “There once were a pair of siblings, they were twins—a boy and a girl—who fought because they were both competitive and different. They fought a lot over land and leadership, but one day, as they were fighting, they were trapped together at the top of the mountain and had to stick together for warmth and protection. Over time, they are found and asked who will take the land and leadership they were fighting about. They respond that neither, one says “this is my brother.” The other says “this is my sister and we are stronger, better together.” Evaristo asked me, again, “how many colors do you see now?” Getting the point, I said “One.” He responded “now, you are beginning to see. If you want to know how the Taíno know, you have to learn how to see things like a Taíno, how to understand things like a Taíno. That’s Taíno communication, for you, learning things in the way I just taught you now. No one will tell you it’s like this, this, like that. They will show you how to understand it, not what to understand.” He smiled at me, and as I was going to ask him what he meant, he walked away. I later realized that the questions I had were not

questions that Evaristo would answer. In fact, that had been his point. No one would *tell* me how things were, letting me know if the end result of what I thought was correct or not. I would have to learn through the process. This, I thought, is precisely what I had wanted.

The responses to the topic of my research, especially among members of the GCT, often focused on my ability to interpret the world around me. The first time I introduced my research on Taíno language and cultural survival to Abuela Serita, she responded and explained to me that talking Taíno is about feeling and knowing Taínoness. Instead of answering my initial questions, she showed me how to prepare a traditional Taíno dish and say a prayer. Understanding my research as a question of how to become *indio*, she told me that it was a matter of doing, not saying.

Almost a year later, I found myself staying over quite often at Abuela Serita's home. One morning as I woke up particularly early, coffee and breakfast prepared for me, Serita led me to her front porch. I attempted to start up a conversation, but, instead Serita told me to be quiet and just listen. Expecting her to say something, I instead found myself enveloped by the sound of the wind rustling the tree leaves and of birds chirping. After a while, the Elder told me that every morning I should be quiet, go outside and listen to the beauty and harmony of nature—which, too, communicates. Nature, she told me, speaks forth time, the weather, and through its various forces, can also tell us of the wishes of the ancestral spirits. This, she said, is what I should include in my “teksis” about Taíno language.

From such a perspective, speaking Taíno is not limited to the use of tokens of the Taíno language. Rather speaking Taíno is invariably about seeing as a Taíno, interpreting

as a Taíno, communicating as a Taíno—ultimately, about becoming and being Taíno (where being Taíno is, in part, understood as the ability to find, and successfully express, Taíno meaning in the world). Concomitant with this understanding of the communicative potential of nature within the GCT was the interpretability of specific forms of imagery. That is what to wear, what not to wear, and how to decorate objects were often read as important markers of indigenous knowledge and culture, which indexed to insiders and outsiders an understanding of Taíno peoples and heritage. As such, as I was often reminded by Serita, talking like a Taíno was less about access to large Taíno vocabulary and scripts, but knowing when and how to use that vocabulary and how to express oneself in terms of a Taíno worldview. These often included specific ways of talking about history, about spirituality and the connection between self, group, spirit and earth. Corrections of my speech made by the Abuela, by Evaristo, Yuli and Justina (a highly knowledgeable middle-aged Taíno artisan who works with Yuli at the cooperative and is married to Evaristo) often focused on my interpretation of events and the manner in which I expressed such interpretations rather than on corrections my word choices. In my observations, this was how novice members were corrected as well.

During the course of my fieldwork, spiritual expressions were not always understood as legitimate by other Taíno. In one of the initial meetings I attended with the GCT, there was a participant who attempted to express what the spirits were telling him in the initial ceremonial circle, which often preceded the actual meetings. I observed that his communications were not followed up on by other members of the circle. Z—, who had recently published a Taíno-themed novel sold at various bookstores throughout the Island, was a man in his late forties or early fifties. When the Abuela and Caona

communicated messages that they had received through various means, others in the circle accepted and followed up on their communications. While Serita, Caona, and Yuli were authorized to communicate such messages, and as such the messages they communicated were understood to be legitimate, Z—'s messages were not responded to. In fact, they were overlooked. I asked myself, what about Z—'s performance made it so unsuccessful? Whereas the other members expressed the messages that they received in their own voices, with gestures that seemed their own, as if they were relaying a message that only they were privy to, a message from an interlocutor that not all circle members could see, Z— communicated the message in a voice other than that which was understood to be his own. Though he prefaced each message with “y dice” (it/they say) to demarcate that the author of the message was not himself, his voice became creaky, breathy, and his bodily comportment was markedly different from his behavior otherwise. Within the circle, it was clear that other members were not responding to his messages, and later, in more private conversations GCT members expressed that they felt that the message was fabricated, and that, in fact, Z— had authored that performance, and as such it was not legitimate and held no authority over the GCT. “What marked it as fabricated?” I asked. The answers I received to these questions were, again, neither straightforward nor always obvious to me. Reading Trechter (2001: 28) I gained some insight into what might have been at stake in Z—'s problematic performance. She argues that in her ethnographic work among Lakota people in South Dakota, “practices such as exaggerated clothing, seeking of visions,” were marked as non-Lakota and indexed whiteness, a premise which one could analytically extend to ideas of outsider-ness more generally. In the Taíno context, Z—'s exaggerated manner may have indexed him as an

outsider, which was compounded by his self-proclaimed authority even though he was a newcomer. Because of this, his performance was understood as disrespectful and untrustworthy.

Over the course of my research, some of the features of successful spiritual communication became more apparent to me. Though some of the evaluations of the legitimacy of Z—'s message were based on his bodily and expressive performance, they were also based on the logic and content of his messages. His message suggested the GCT take a stance on a matter of importance that was undergirded by a logic that was not understood by the central GCT members to be Taíno. The following section considers a talk given by a Taíno elder and scholar that makes (more) explicit an approach/logic that undergirds much of Serita's, Caona's and Yuli's actions/ways of interpreting, and the way they socialize others. Such an approach depends on highly interdiscursive and contextual interpretations of natural and cultural phenomena which in turn are premised on a normative understanding of causality, where causality means that phenomena are not coincidental as much as divine/ancestral/spiritual manifestations, available to those who are able (both gifted with an ability and/or trained) to read and interpret them.

### *Interpretation through a magical-metaphorical gaze*

A question I often asked Taíno people was how Taíno ways of interpreting things and events were different from any other way of interpreting them. One Taíno elder, Robinson, who was associated with, though not exclusively a part of the GCT, defined the difference in terms of having, or, not having what he called a *mirada mágica-metafórica*, a magical-metaphorical gaze. Such an outlook, he argued, allows the Taíno person to see metaphors and, thus connections, among types and kinds of objects and



events. As such, the idea of a particularly Taíno gaze is helpful in considering how communication ideologies are premised on having different ways of seeing and interpreting the world. As such, the magical metaphorical gaze that Robinson indicates is an analytical lens through which many Taíno understand and make sense of/in the world.

During my research, for example, many Taíno often remarked that archaeologists were unable to capture the significance of Taíno ceremonial grounds because the perspective from which they were making their analyses was not the perspective from which Taíno would make their analyses. Without a Taíno gaze/outlook to mediate the analyses of such sites, they argued, their protection and administration would be compromised. The Taíno argue that the analyses archaeologists make of the meaning and value of such material heritage has direct bearing on the Taíno's ability to make their own claims on such remains. The lack of conversation between Taíno and academic analyses of the materials within indigenous ceremonial sites was often an area of concern for the Taíno, as they often criticized how scholarly inferences about artifacts' meanings influenced how Taíno histories and mythologies became written—often without a space for Taíno people to question such inferences.

Understanding the concept of a Taíno magical-metaphorical gaze can provide unique insight into Taíno communication and worldviews. In the following excerpts, Robinson, a Taíno activist and self-taught scholar of material culture gives a talk explaining this viewpoint with regards to a petroglyph known as the Woman of Caguana on one of the rocks in the ball/ceremonial courts in Caguana, Utuado, Puerto Rico.<sup>52</sup> In order to justify his broader argument regarding the magical metaphorical gaze, Robinson explains how seeing a particular shape in the clouds, in this instance, a serpent, can be

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<sup>52</sup> Robinson is the speaker's real name.

understood as a decipherable message from the gods. Applying this logic to a more general understanding of how the Taíno communicate, Robinson endeavors to apply his knowledge of Taíno beliefs as a gaze through which to imagine how such shapes in the clouds might be understood as messages.

*Excerpt, “los indígenas veían todo en el aire”*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>1 R: También los <i>indígenas</i> veían todo en el aire, ves esto, yo, yo me he puesto a aislar en el cielo semejante a una tortuga, ¿no? y <b>cuando ellos veían de acuerdo a su mirada mágica y metafórica</b> una nube o una serpiente que está abajo, ves, los serpientes <b>ellos lo veían como una designio de los dioses, de acuerdo a su, a su</b></p>   | <p>R: Also the <i>indígenas</i> saw everything in the air, see um, I, I have put myself to isolate in the sky similar to a turtle, no? and <b>when they saw according to the magical and metaphorical gaze</b> a cloud, or a serpent that is underneath, see serpents <b>they saw it as the intent of their gods, in accordance with, with</b></p>   |
| <p>2 C: Un <b>mensaje</b></p>   | <p>C: A <b>message</b></p>   |
| <p>3 R: Un <b>mensaje</b> de los dioses, ves. ok. vamos a <b>descifrar</b> ahora aquí está, aquí es donde vamos a entrar al detalle de la mujer de Caguana, originalmente cuando hicieron, esto está en miles de libros pero nadie se ponía a, y decían que esto eran ancas de rana y todo el mundo lo creyó pero el que lo dijo no puso, no decía porque eran "¡ah! porque se parece a ancas de raya, de rana" tiene razón se parecen a ancas de rana, es obvio, pero no explicó</p> | <p>R: A <b>message</b> from the gods, see. Ok. Lets <b>decipher</b> now here this, here is where we will go into the details of the woman of Caguana, originally when they made, this is in thousands of books but no one was putting themselves to, and they said that these were frog legs and everyone believed it, but the one that said it didn't put, didn't say why they were, it was "ah! Because it looks like frog legs" he is right they look like frog legs, it's obvious but, he didn't explain</p> |
| <p>4 Ot: pero no explicó</p>  | <p>Ot: but didn't explain</p>  |
| <p>5 R: Pero no explicó por qué, pero qué pasa, cuando nosotros tenemos en el parque ceremonial <i>indígena</i> una inmensa tortuga y tenemos dos inmensas iguanas, obviamente</p>  | <p>R: But didn't explain why, but what is happening, when we have in the indigenous ceremonial park an immense turtle and two immense iguanas, obviously</p>   |

Robinson establishes agreement with his audience with regards to how the indigenous pre-Columbian Taíno understood the world—finding meaningful messages in natural phenomena. Drawing from this understanding of how the Taíno interpreted the world around them, he poses how the Taíno might have understood and expressed such understandings. He criticizes the reading of the legs on the woman of Caguana as frog legs, and instead proposes that they are iguana legs. Such an understanding, for Robinson and others makes more sense given the context of the ceremonial center as a religious site with other iguana and turtle shapes, it also aligns with origin stories that include the iguana figure. Mythologically, for Robinson, this difference matters, as one of his main claims is that the iguana was a key figure in the pre-Columbian Taíno worldview.



This is the foot shape being debated

Figure 5.1 Image of Mujer de Caguana for Reference throughout transcript

Here, Robinson finds meaning in the similarities that he can identify across objects and texts. That is, he is able to pick out the significant details in objects and

events which may be repeated in other objects and events, such that the selected details come to be understood as meaningful and expressive in themselves. People, such as Robinson, who are successful in identifying and interpreting these details are expected to share such understandings with others. The main interpretive mode here depends on the iconic parallelisms across objects and events, which play an important role in how the repetition of forms across space and time both indicate the recontextualized meanings of a form depending on the particular context and what parts of such forms get highlighted. Over time, such iconically related details may accrue meaningfulness from their past contexts. In this framework, the identification of an iconic detail gains significance from its indexical/interdiscursive relationships to all other past contexts in which a detail resembling it has been identified. In this way, similarities across objects and events are identified, ‘extracted,’ made to refer to a concept and read across categories. This is, in part, understood to be nature’s /ancestor’s / spirit’s communicative effort—successful members know this and the ability to read these communications has the effect of legitimating and authorizing them. These ways of finding meaning are related to understandings of the communicative and expressive potential of nature, which is considered a possible interlocutor.

Robinson, in the next excerpt, explains where he thinks such an outlook/gaze/way of understanding and making meaning in the world emerges from. He contextualizes such practices within a larger frame of *cemí* worship and artistry.

*Excerpt, “¿de dónde surge esa mirada mágica y metafórica?”*

- 1 R: Pero, ¿de dónde surge esa mirada mágica y metafórica?, porque los *indígenas* dice Pané, volvemos a Pané, que un día, un *indígena* fue al monte y vio un árbol que se movía, ¿un árbol? y pues que es un árbol, para nosotros es un árbol, pero para él no era un árbol, **era un árbol un ser vivo**, y le dijo, y le habla con el árbol y le dice a la luz, "qué tú quieres?" **y el árbol le dijo "llévame tráeme un bohique, un behique, un sacerdote"**, y se lo trajo, y entonces, el árbol, él le pido permiso para cortar el árbol y se lo llevó e hizo un un cemí, ¿qué pasa? de allí, vemos ese es el mejor ejemplo para ver que **el taíno mira dos veces, mira el árbol, o mira una piedra, pero ves, después de que inicialmente ve el árbol y ve la piedra**
- 2 C: **ve el ser**
- 3 R: **ve el ser que hay dentro.** Así es que hay que mirar las cosas y ustedes están bien acercados en el camino, porque veo lo que me dijeron de eso, ustedes me lo dijeron que llegue que C me dice del cemí, ok.
- R: But, where does that **magical and metaphorical gaze** come from?, because the *indigenas* says Pane, we return to Pane, that one day, an *indigena* went to the woodland and saw a tree that moved, a tree? And well what is a tree, for us it is a tree, but for him it was not a tree, **the tree was a live being**, and he said to it, and he talks with the tree and he says in the light, "what do you want?" **and the tree said "take me, bring me a bohique, a behique<sup>53</sup>, a priest"**, and he brought it to him, and then, the tree, he asked permission to cut the tree and he took it and created a cemí, what happened? From there, we see this is the best example to see **that the Taíno looks twice, sees the tree, or sees a rock, but sees, after initially seeing the tree and the rock**
- C: **sees the being**
- R: **sees the being that is inside.** So things have to be seen and you all are very close on the path, because I see that you told me of that, you told me when I arrived that, C tells me about the cemí, ok.

Robinson rhetorically asks "where does that magical and metaphorical gaze come from?" voicing the potential concerns his audience might have about such an understanding of how the Taíno interpreted the world around them. An example

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<sup>53</sup> In this recording, Robinson says both bohique and behique . Both spellings appear in the chronicles, and debates concerning which pronunciation would be correct based on such spellings are not infrequent among Taíno activists and scholars of Taíno culture. Robinson probably uses both forms to avoid such debates, while also highlighting the different words used to communicate the same referential content of "religious leader."

provided by the chronicler Pané serves to answer this question (see Pané 1571).

Robinson explains that such a gaze comes from the Taíno ability to see not only objects, such as a rock or a tree, but to also see the being inside those objects. In this way, he argues, the *indígena* sees twice. It is this ability to see both the object and the expressive spirit within it, which enables the metaphorical-magical gaze. This ability is essential to the spiritual Taíno world, where the expressive potential of trees and rocks are where spiritual artifacts such as the *cemí* emerge from.<sup>54</sup>

This is one of the reasons why Robinson argues that archaeologists cannot dismiss the cultural worth of nature-related markings of rocks and trees found within ceremonial grounds. In the following transcript, Robinson explains how these should be understood from the point of view of the magical-metaphorical gaze.

*Excerpt, “vamos a asumir”*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 R: vamos a asumir lo que tú dices, vamos a asumir que eso es una cara que encontré, que hizo la naturaleza, que pasa, si asumimos eso, pues el <i>indio</i> la vio y pá' donde se la llevo <u>nada más y nada menos</u> para un contexto arqueológico, un contexto mítico, mítico, mágico, arqueológico, religioso todas esas cosas, ya tiene otro simbolismo, ¿no? ok, y si la mete en el centro de un batey ya implica más importancia, ¿no? | R: let us assume what you say, let us assume that it is a face that was found, what nature made, what happens if we assume that, well the Indian saw it and where did he take it well <u>nothing more and nothing less</u> than to an archaeological context, a mythical, mythical, magical archaeological, religious context, all these things, it already has another symbolism no? Ok, and if they put it in the middle of a batey it already implies more meaning, no? |
| 2 C: SI porque ellos asociaban los elementos [R: ok] con una, o sea, lo que narra el mensaje evolutivo   | C: YES because they associated the elements[R: ok] with a, or that is, what narrates the evolutionary  |

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<sup>54</sup> In *The Order of Things* (1970), Foucault writes about resemblances with respect to their role in 16<sup>th</sup> century epistemes, without comment on the particular genealogy of thought he delineates, his insight that such a logic of resemblances as tied to making meaning “...provides all investigation with an assurance that everything will find its mirror and its macrocosmic justification on another and larger scale; it affirms, inversely, that the visible order of the highest spheres will be reflected in the darkest depths of the earth” (31) is helpful in understanding the logic that may undergird analyses such as Robinson’s.

mitológico [R: exacto] ese es el contexto del colectivo que forman

3 R: Exacto. Entonces vemos nuevamente la **mirada metafórica** del *indígena*, asumimos que fue una, que lo hizo la naturaleza pero, el *indio* dijo "**no, esto lo hizo la naturaleza los dioses, ¿porqué?**" pues se parece un gato se parece un jaguar y nosotros conocemos el jaguar por medio de la tradición oral de nuestros ancestros que decían de Suramérica o Centroamérica" y yo dije pero acuérdate, cuando un *indígena* coge un objeto hecho por la naturaleza y lo utiliza deja de ser un elemento natural y se le convierte en un elemento, que tu sabes de eso, cultural. **O sea ya esto no es un elemento de la naturaleza, se convierte en un jaguar, por la similitud que ellos vieron.** Otra cosa=

4 O: =y es má::s adorado que el que ellos mismos hagan {hayan} hecho

5 R: exacto

6 C: porqué? porque se lo dio la naturaleza he allí el poder de-de el

mythological message [R: exactly] That is the context of the collective they form

R: Exactly. Then we see again that the **metaphorical gaze** of the *indígena*, we assume that it was, that it was made by nature, but the Indian said "**no, this was made by nature the gods, why?**" well it looks like a cat it looks like a jaguar and we know the jaguar through the oral tradition of our ancestors that said from South America or Central America and I said "but remember, when an *indígena* takes an object made by nature and uses it, it ceases to be a natural element and becomes an element of, and you know about this, of culture. **That is, this is no longer is an element of culture, it becomes a jaguar, because of the similarity they saw**" Another thing=

O: =and it is mo::re adored than the one that they themselves could have made

R: exactly

C: why? Because it was given to them by nature, therein lies its-its power

From this point of view Robinson and Caona argue that a naturally made design on a rock or a tree would have been understood as more meaningful and important for the Taíno, insofar as such markings would have been understood as a divine message –actually making it doubly important. If such an object is found in a ceremonial context, he argues, then it should be understood by archaeologists in such a way. In turn 3, Robinson assumes an indigenous voice to explain this point of view and to show how a natural element can also be a cultural element. Ultimately, Robinson explains such a worldview

as one that is metaphorical in that it looks across categories for similarities and differences as important sites for meaning-making.

Robinson's analysis depends on being able to accept the expressive potential of non-human beings through objects and natural phenomena. This communicative disposition includes ideas about expression, the potential for something to express and be expressed, interpretation and interpretability, as well as who/what is included and excluded from particular communicative boundaries and who/what count as potential interlocutors. How do Robinson and others come to identify particular practices, events or details as resembling each other, such that iterations of the object that is understood to be similar can carry with it interpretable associations, sediments, residues of the past interpretations of that which it has been understood to be a reverberation of? How does the identification of such resemblances become socialized? How does the non-human agentive element come to be understood as a more authoritative source? Here, ideas about pragmatic residue, where trajectories of semiotic relationships become attached to, and indexed by, particular signs and which may differ for distinct social actors, are particularly relevant. Thinking about such communicative dispositions within an interdiscursive context brings attention to how such practices serve to naturalize the "pragmatic sediment of discourse presupposition" (Parmentier 1997: 18) as integral to the meaning and interpretation of particular elements throughout objects and phenomena understood as recurring or repeating by the will of non-human authors.<sup>55</sup> As such, Robinson's interpretation of resemblances takes into account the "pragmatic residue" left by past interpretations of what he understands to be a similar sign (see Silverstein 1976:

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<sup>55</sup> For further discussion see (Silverstein 1976; Urciuoli 2003; Harkness 2010). Also relevant is Mannheim's (1999) discussion of iconicity.



52). This phenomena can also be understood within the rubric of entextualization, where discourse is rendered as text and in the process may “incorporate aspects of context, such that the resultant text carries elements of its history of use within it” (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 73). Though the processes surrounding entextualization (decontextualization and recontextualization) pervade all discourse, for the Taíno activists I observed the ability to make meaning in the context of a sign’s current instantiation with reference to the “elements of its history of use” was made explicit and was operative in meta-commentary about *why* particular signs were important. As Abuela Serita and Chief Caona often reminded me, this form of interpretation was a mode of communication, of language that the Taíno knew—where the right and appropriate meanings could be extracted from the world surrounding them. In sharing these ways of making meaning, they were trying to get me to the appropriate episteme for understanding what language meant for *them*.

Such an understanding of meaningfulness as imbued within specific shapes, figures and objects was not limited to physical objects. For example, it was precisely the residue that many Taíno who research remaining Taíno words are interested in. In the following section, Baké—the leader of the Guaka-kú—understands Taíno words themselves as historical residues that connect him to a time when and a place where the Taíno still communicated with each other and the land in the Taíno language. For many current Taíno peoples, the remaining linguistic elements of the Taíno language as spoken before the conquest and colonization of the Island are understood as important spiritual and cultural elements that are empowered to link current Taíno to the ancestral and sacred realm by enabling the right mindful state. In the following section, I attend to how Taíno,

its words and forms, become collected and revered by Taíno groups such as the LGTK and Guaka-kú.<sup>56</sup>

### *Collecting Taíno*

*Batey! The sound of the word reverberates in the internal Borincano being's space. It survives many other words of our mother tongue, Taíno. Even the children of the cybernetic epoch recognize it when it is taught with respect and honor towards its true meaning. (T. Dávila 2001b: XXX).*<sup>57</sup>

When speaking of words that originate from the Taíno language, Taíno groups such as LGTK and Guaka-kú paid attention to much more than just the word's dictionary meaning. For them, the words themselves indicated a connection to their ancestors; as such, the words' sounds were meaningful in creating a meditative space where communication with such ancestors was possible, and through this, each word was also understood as a key to claims concerning the Taíno survival. In this section, I explore these relationships to Taíno words in order to better understand how being Taíno can become framed by specific word practices. In this section, I explore how Taíno words become infused with sacredness and how, in turn, this creates a need to demarcate a boundary around Taíno, such that it does not become polluted by what is understood as the colonizing language—Spanish. In this way, Taíno becomes distinguished from Spanish words by the creation of distinct scripts, two of which I will discuss. To do this, I consider what groups such as Guaka-kú, and also some members of GCT, advance as the performative and transformative power of otherwise mundane Taíno words to mark specific places as sacred and worthy of respect.

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<sup>56</sup> As Dr. Barbra Meek noted, this relationship to language forms has a parallel in Latin for some Catholics.

<sup>57</sup> Original quote in Spanish: “¡Batey! El sonido de la palabra retumba el espacio del ser interno borincano. Sobrevive a muchas otras palabras de nuestra lengua madre, la taína. Aún los niños de ésta época cibernética la reconocen cuando se les enseña con respeto y honra hacia su verdadero significado.” (XXX)

Baké, the leader of the Guaka-kú, was a man in his fifties. Known in his town for often walking barefoot, sleeping in a cave full of Taíno petroglyphs and teaching Taíno cultural heritage at a local private Christian school, he was an eccentric character. However, due to his teaching, his involvement in the municipal cultural center and a local radio show he hosted, he was also quite influential in representing Taíno people in regional political and cultural debates concerning the protection of Taíno material culture and increasing the visibility of Taíno cultural heritage. He considered himself, and was considered by others, to be a particularly clairvoyant person. He was quite careful to write his thoughts, visions and perceptions of events and persons into a number of notebooks, some of which resulted in a book which he published and circulated among others interested in their Taíno heritage. In the following excerpt from his book, Baké (Dávila 2001b: XXIV) explains the value particular words have had for his own Taíno path:

Unas voces con las cuales se dio forma a la razón de ser pueblo taíno. Aquí colocaremos algunas que afectaron mi trama y mi sentido de usarlas...

AREYTO, BAGUA, TEY, BAIRA, BAJAREQUE, BOHIO, BAJARIS, BATEY, BATU, BEHIQUE, BIBIJAGUA, BIJANI, BOGUEY, BURENES, BURENQUEN, BRUCAYO, CABAO, CACIQUE, CANEY, CANOA, CAOBA, CAONA, CASABE, CEMI, COAIBAI, CIAS, COJOBA, COROZO, DUJO, GUAILI, GUATIAO, GUAJEY, GUAMIQUINA, GUAMO, GUANARA, GUANIN, GUARICHE, GUATAUBA, GUAYACAN, SIBA. HIGUERA, JAGUEY, JAYUYA, JURACAN, JUTIAS, MACANA, MACAO, MAQUETAURIE, MARACA, MOCA, NACAN, NITAÍNO, SABOREI, COINI, TUREY, YARAGUA, YUCA, YABOA

El hecho de leerlas en voz alta y con sentido de lograr un acto de reconciliación de pensamiento se crea un ambiente digno de lectura.

**TRANSLATION:**

Some voices with which the reason of being of the Taíno people was given form. Here we will position some that affected my plot and my sense of using them...

AREYTO, BAGUA, TEY, BAIRA, BAJAREQUE, BOHIO, BAJARIS, BATEY, BATU, BEHIQUE, BIBIJAGUA, BIJANI, BOGUEY,

BURENES, BURENQUEN, BRUCAYO, CABAO, CACIQUE, CANEY, CANOA, CAOANA, CAONA, CASABE, CEMI, COAIBAI, CIAS, COJOBA, COROZO, DUJO, GUAILI, GUATIAO, GUAJEY, GUAMIQUINA, GUAMO, GUANARA, GUANIN, GUARICHE, GUATAUBA, GUAYACAN, SIBA. HIGUERA, JAGUEY, JAYUYA, JURACAN, JUTIAS, MACANA, MACAO, MAQUETAURIE, MARACA, MOCA, NACAN, NITAÍNO, SABOREI, COINI, TUREY, YARAGUA, YUCA, YABOA

The act of reading them out loud and with a sense of accomplishing an act of reconciliation of the mind creates a dignified reading environment.

Here, Baké underscores the value of these particular words in terms of their Taíno heritage. It is because of and through this heritage that these words are performative (in the Austinian (1975) sense of the word, where enunciating an utterance brings about a state of affairs in the world) and it is as such they are capable of producing transformations in people and space. The above excerpt from Baké's book was written, he explained, with the desire to open up a path for others to encounter their Taíno heritage. Baké's book is one of quite a few publications self-published and circulating among Taíno and local indigenous circles in Puerto Rico. In the introduction to his book, Baké suggests that these words in conjunction with "a sense of accomplishing an act of reconciliation of the mind" create a "dignified reading environment" for the rest of the book. Since the book itself is envisioned by Baké as a guide to "awaken sleeping consciousnesses"—referring to a person's indigenous self-awareness—these words are understood as not only transforming particular kinds of spaces, but also as leading to a transformation of the mindset of the book's readers. It is through an engagement with Taíno vocabulary, then, that Baké envisions the commencement of an eventual attainment of a Taíno worldview. As such, Taíno words such as *batey* are not only valuable as indices of a Taíno past, but as a form of cultural heritage to be celebrated and

recovered. They are valuable insofar as they make available a particularly Taíno worldview to Taíno descended peoples.

Una vez se establece la conciencia nos dará acceso a los santuarios que poseen lenguaje taíno...Esta esencia es como el cuarzo en el agua natural, cualquier detalle que lo opaque no será traducible y su código no será decifrado [sic] para quien el lenguaje natural se perfecciona con la constante y perseverante luz de los iniciados. Cada iniciación es particular al deseo de custodiar las bondades de estos santuarios. No se determinan los procesos antes de los mensajes pues estos surgirán a medida en que nos responsabilizamos ante el creador (XXXIII).

TRANSLATION:

Once the consciousness is established it will give us access to the sanctuaries that possess the Taíno language...This essence is like quartz in natural water, whatever detail that opaques it will not be translatable and its code will not be deciphered for whom the natural language is perfected with the constant and perseverant light of the initiates. Each initiation is particular to the desire of holding in custody the kindness of these sanctuaries. The processes are not determined before the messages because these will emerge to the extent that we make ourselves responsible to the creator (XXXIII).

Again, this excerpt emphasizes that the Taíno language is not accessed through dictionaries, but through a consciousness of being Taíno. The language is likened to “quartz in natural water” visible only to those whose consciousness has been established. Access to this language essence perfects the “natural language,” or Taíno worldview, of those who awaken to their Taíno heritage. Throughout these excerpts, it becomes clear that this natural language can be defined as a Taíno worldview, a way of sensing things. Parallel to the socializing practices put forth by Caona and Serita in the GCT, Baké explicitly entextualizes an understanding of Taíno language as a worldview in relation to spiritual matters, the natural world and social relationships. As such, words function as keys to this worldview insofar as they might open up consciousnesses.

The knowledge contained within Taíno lexical and morphological items can be embedded within the very structure of a word in ways that are beyond the intent of an individual speaker, as evidenced by how my name, for example, was interpreted by MIJB, LGTK and GCT. Based on explanations often found in dictionaries of Taíno, where the composite character of what are considered Taíno words today is expounded upon, many Taíno suppose that morphemes couched into Taíno words can correspond to particular words in Spanish. The reading of morphemes as a source of significant knowledge about the world and people was not limited to words considered indigenous. Although my parents named me without any particular attention to the name's significance or etymology<sup>58</sup>, research consultants often would rework my name and read it into the morphemic reconstruction that they had of Taíno—even respelling and correcting my name to fit into their systems. For Yarey and the LGTK I became Ke-ri-na (Active spirit of the Earth, Arawak derived), for the MIJB I became Chel-ina (Rainbow woman-Mayan derived)—each accompanied by slightly different meanings and alignments. In fact my name's similarity with an important elder's name in the GCT marked me to become that elder's caretaker while I was conducting research. When I would explain that my name was not selected by my parents in terms of a Taíno worldview, they would tell me that my parents did not know that they had—but that they did. The knowledge of specific morphemes, then, was afforded with the power to extract and convey meaning in ways that were understood as beyond the control of specific social actors. This positioning towards my name exemplified a logic that does not allow for randomness, where things that can be understood as not intended by their purported

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<sup>58</sup> According to my parents, my name was selected when they saw the name “Sherin” on one of the doors of the hospital I was born in. They adapted the name by adding “-a” so that it would “sound better with Feliciano,” resulting in “Sherina.”

producers are understood as emerging from a spiritual elsewhere. These are interpreted as ‘messages’ which without an intentional human interference are construed as even more meaningful and revealing than if these messages had been intended by their purported producers, the “magical-metaphorical gaze” in practice.

Writing technologies were also understood as significant in obtaining revelations about persons and their potential Taíno-ness. Both LGTK and Guaka-kú had expended great efforts creating Taíno scripts. Guaka-kú used a Latin Script as its base, but as Baké told me, the Guaka-kú script subverted the Latin one by joining it with its mirror image at its axis (a sort of palindrome) or by superimposing letters onto themselves in the case of the letters that correspond to M, N, O, Q, V, W, and X. From what I could gather, this may have been to avoid redundancies with other symbols.



Figure 5.2 The Guaka-kú script (as reconstructed by the author)

According to the Guaka-kú, this subversion of Latin Script served to also undermine the colonial relationship with Spain as represented by Spanish and its writing system. Not only were the letters themselves proposed as challenges to the Latin Script, but words were to be spelled from top to bottom and proper names were only spelled with consonants. According to Baké, the letters hide their meaning in plain sight. Though the letters themselves are meant to allow those literate in Spanish and English to decipher the phoneme they represent rather easily, and the spelling conventions were easily learned, if a person were to glance at Baké’s notebooks, they would not be readily able to decipher the meanings entextualized within.

These conventions were understood to do two additional things (1) to serve as an allegory of the Taíno people, who are also hidden in plain sight, and, also (2) to allow the script to be able to reveal something essential about people through the spelling of their names. For example, this group named me Anajuke (White flower of the Earth, because I arrived at the ceremonial site they were custodians of when the Higuerrillo Tree was in bloom with many small white flowers). They spelled out my name as:

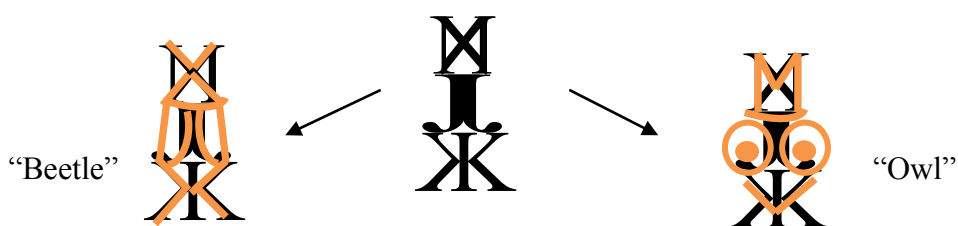


Figure 5.3 The spelling of Anajuke according to the Guaka-kú script and writing conventions (as reconstructed by the author)

From this rendering of my name, they claimed that they would be able to reveal important aspects of my role there. By seeing what shapes and forms were couched



within the letters' relationships to each other, they attempted to gain insight into who I was and whether they could trust me. Two persons took up this task, and initially disagreed in their interpretation. One revealed a beetle, another saw an owl. They ultimately settled on the owl, given that I was there as an observer, and it wasn't clear to me what it would have meant if they had instead settled on the beetle.

This naming practice also depended on my acceptance of the name (though I didn't know that). When, one day, I finally called myself "Anajuke," Baké said that since I had claimed my name he would tie some twine around my ankle in order to officially tie me to my name. He advised me to not remove the tie until it fell off on its own, in order to complete the process. Such procedures, he explained, helped communicate to the spirits that I had accepted my new name, and as such, my connection to the Taíno people. Not really understanding such processes, I accepted his explanation and left the twine around my ankle for the duration of my research with Baké. With this moment, however, I also opened myself up to becoming "read" by Baké on other levels. He would often comment on my "cuadro espiritual" or spiritual frame. Not knowing what a spiritual frame was before then, I asked Baké what he meant the first time he attempted to read mine. Though initially he withheld explaining it to me, he eventually described it as referring to the compilation of spiritual traits and ancestral relationships that surround any person. Such traits and relationships are readable and decipherable to those with the gift of clairvoyance. As a non-clairvoyant person myself, I took his word for it, yet, remained curious: Where are such meanings obtained? Who is communicating? Readability and decipherability were bound with matters of writing and authorship/authority. The ability to successfully conduct readings is not only about being

able to communicate with the spiritual realm, but also about strategically positioning oneself as someone with specialized knowledge and skills.

The above discussion focuses on one sense of “reading” Taíno. Below I explore a more conventional reading of Taíno being taught in several public and private schools in the southeastern regions of Puerto Rico.

### *Teaching how to read “Taíno”*

The LGTK’s Taíno heritage program was initiated in the schools where parents and teachers gave their support. The LGTK programs were most successful in a small elementary school in the southeastern mountains. The students met for an hour a week during their Social Studies class; Yarey taught the lesson and their regularly scheduled teacher made sure the students behaved. Yarey’s lessons focused on several aspects of Taíno culture, history, and language—particularly Taíno words. Classes often began with the children reciting a Taíno prayer and a poem Yarey wrote. After a short lecture, Yarey would ask the students about what she had just lectured and then organized more interactive activities for students to implement their new knowledge. Among her class objectives was to teach the students the Taíno script developed by the LGTK so that they could write Taíno words. The script was based on Taíno pictographs that corresponded with letters in the Latin script. The pictographs were selected for their iconic similarity to a letter in the Latin script.



Compare to the symbol for "Y"

Figure 5.4 La Piedra Escrita or The Written Rock, in Jayuya, P.R..  
 Source: Municipio de Jayuya  
<http://www.jayuya.puertorico.pr/turismo.htm>



Figure 5.5 "Taíno ABC's" Located on a classroom wall  
 (Feliciano-Santos 2007)

Students became very adept at writing in this script. In fact, in a trip to another school, I spotted a child writing in the script. When I asked the child where they had learned it, they explained that their younger sibling went to the school where Yarey had first implemented the program. Within the context of the classroom, students were excited to learn about Taíno culture and given the space in which they learned such lessons, they were soon quite comfortable claiming that they too were Taíno. Below is an example of a child completing an assignment to write a story with the Taíno words that Yarey had used in this lesson.

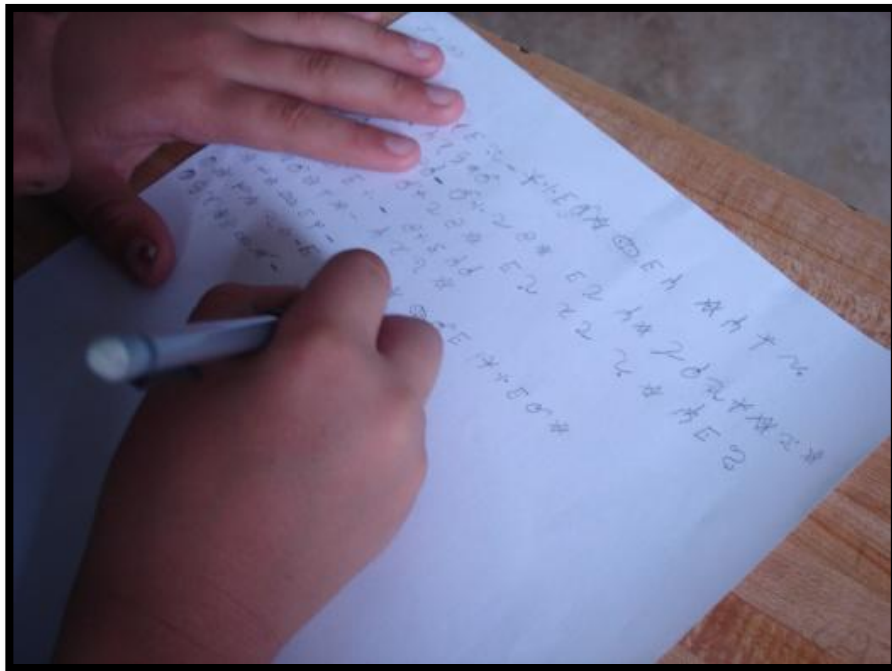


Figure 5.6 Student writing a Taíno vocabulary assignment in the “Taíno ABC’s” (Feliciano-Santos 2007)



Figure 5.7 Classroom Activity.  
Each word is written in the Latin Script, translated into Spanish, and written out in the Taíno Script.

The program had been so successful that the LGTK’s Taíno heritage program’s success had even been reported in local newspapers. For example, *Primera Hora* reported:

En el programa piloto Inmersión Cultural-Lingüística de la Liga Guakía Taína-ké cerca de 120 menores, principalmente de cuarto a sexto grado, de dos escuelas de Maunabo aprenden sobre el vocabulario taíno y se basan en una codificación escrita inventada, utilizando los símbolos de los petroglifos *indígenas*, para escribir las palabras. Cabe destacar que otras tribus han hecho ejercicios parecidos ante la ausencia de una codificación escrita (Rodríguez-Burns 2007).

**TRANSLATION:**

In the Cultural-Linguistic Immersion pilot program of the Liga Guakía Taína-ké close to 120 minors, principally from fourth to sixth grade, from two Maunabo schools learn about Taíno vocabulary and they base themselves on an invented codification, using the symbols of the indigenous petroglyphs, to write the words. It is important to emphasize that other tribes have done similar exercises when confronted with the absence of a written codification.

*Primera Hora's* coverage of the LGTK school program was understood by the LGTK as a sign of great success and served to further legitimate their efforts at linguistic recovery and reconstruction.<sup>59</sup> This media exposure helped the LGTK obtain further resources for the program as well as aiding in recruiting linguists to help reconstruct the Taíno language.

Though groups such as GCT might be invested in maintaining and preserving the existing Taíno vocabulary, they have not taken up these scripts or formally attempted to extend their vocabulary. In fact, when this newspaper article appeared quite a few people expressed concern that the LGTK script might serve to further separate Taíno groups—in effect breaking the potential for communication among Taíno groups by limiting intelligibility rather than extending it. They were concerned that the script might give an inaccurate vision of Taíno peoples as a whole. Debates concerning the validity and usefulness of these scripts provide insight into differences into various groups' stance towards language revival and use.

What makes such a script Taíno, other than LGTK's claim that is? In part, it was the LGTK leader Yarey's sophistication in knowing that though it had not been a Taíno script in the past, it could be a Taíno script in the future. During the period of my fieldwork, Yarey also began to talk to scholars at the Linguistics Department in the University of Puerto Rico, with hopes of finding people that could support her efforts to

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<sup>59</sup> Additionally, the program was presented in a way that fed into nationally circulating around language teaching in Puerto Rico. For example, Yarey once commented in a presentation “como los muchachos pronunciaban el Arauco era mejor que el inglés” (“*how the kids pronounced the Arawakan was better than English*”) (8/29/07). This led her to a discussion of how this may be because the Taíno language is less foreign than English to Puerto Rican youth.

construct a Taíno language that she could include within the curricula of her school program.

Considering that there are two fairly developed language reconstruction projects in place, and that LGTK had so far not expressed an interest in participating in these, as well as the potential scope of LGTK's influence through the Taíno heritage program already occurring in several schools, other groups' concerns regarding the potential such a program might have in limiting the mutual intelligibility, or potentially allowing for competition and discord among Taíno groups, was not so far-fetched.

### *Conclusion*

*“El sueño mío es que algún día podamos estar aquí hablando en el idioma taíno.”*

*“My dream is that one day we could be here talking in the Taíno language.”*

This chapter has addressed the various ways in which a Taíno language is conceptualized and its relation to how current language practices take place. In focusing on the non-linguistic aspects of reconstruction of these conceptualizations, this chapter addresses how the idea of speaking a language might differ among social actors and Taíno organizations. Different aspects of “speaking” are highlighted and/or privileged by each group—the GCT focused on how to and who could read symbols and signs, highlighting that not all performances of reading signs are felicitous. Guaka-kú and the LGTK both focused on creating signs to be substantiated as scripts that could circulate and come to represent and frame Taíno as a language different from Spanish, or at least infuse such practices of writing with Taínoness. The socializing context for these scripts differed insofar Guaka-kú only practiced the script among their own members, whereas the LGTK circulated their script among elementary and middle school students with the

expectation that they would further circulate the script and become active in the LGTK. Their different approaches to teaching the Taíno script were related in part to the different aims Guaka-kú and the LGTK had for their groups. Whereas Guaka-kú was invested in the spiritual and mystic aspects of Taíno practice where novices had to be careful initiated and socialized, the LGTK was devoted to normalizing claims to being Taíno by extending their knowledge to the general population. By teaching children, the LGTK could focus on a population less likely to be skeptical and who would be prone to taking on a Taíno identification as their own.

Accounting for what aspects of language are privileged among diverse social actors is necessary in understanding the complications that arise with respect to what counts as and becomes enacted as language reconstruction and linguistic practice for communities. Given that context plays a large role in the process of meaning making and communication more generally, an analysis of the contextual aspects people draw from in communicating and who/what is understood to be capable of communicating is important for understanding the role of language and linguistic communication in social and cultural life. In the next chapter I consider more conventional efforts at Taíno language reconstruction with attention to how groups manage researching, putting together and implementing indigenous languages in Puerto Rico and in New York City.



## CHAPTER 6:

### GENEALOGY, RECONSTRUCTION, MANUFACTURE AND IMPLEMENTATION: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

#### *Introduction*

Unrecorded and currently unspoken, the language of the indigenous people of the Antilles is the focus of much interest among Taíno and Jíbaro-Boricua groups in Puerto Rico. Several, though not all, groups actively support efforts to reconstruct and restore the language. During my research, I encountered two groups that had dedicated decades of work to the reconstruction of the Taíno language, one with long-term hopes that one day Taíno, or as they preferred to call it *Taíney* would be restored as a language through which to communicate, and another who preferred to call the language *Jíbaro-Boricua* who hoped to prove that the indigenous population of Puerto Rico spoke a Mayan language.

Such endeavors towards reconstruction, however, are bound with complications at various levels. If one of the stated goals of language reconstruction is to restore Taíno as a language in use, restoration involves many correlated efforts given the few linguistic resources available to actually communicate in and through Taíno. In the case of Taíno, it entails gathering information from the remaining vocabulary and related languages of Taíno, both comparative and historical reconstruction work, decisions on how to incorporate such resources and which resources to incorporate (Arawak—Eyeri or Lokono?; Taíno derived words in Spanish?; *or even* Yucatec Mayan?), the creation of teaching materials and spaces, the training of teachers, the setting of attainable goals, the

implementation of Taíno teaching programs, as well as the institution of mechanisms to appraise the success of such programs in order to secure their sustainability (on issues related to language reclamation and revitalization more generally Errington 2003; Hinton 2001; Hinton and Ahlers 1999; Hinton and Hale 2001; Moore 2006; Wong 1999). The various steps of this process are interrelated and fraught with the potential for disagreement between members within each particular group and among distinct groups. Such disagreements, in turn, are bound up with claims to authority (who gets to make choices), claims to knowledge (who is understood to have the training and experience to make such calls), socio-political alignments (what sorts of cultural-genealogical associations inform/result from making claims about linguistic-genealogical associations and vice-versa) as well as acts of boundary-making and boundary-breaking (within Taíno and Jíbaro-indigenous groups, what sorts of boundaries result from and what sorts of connections are made in relation to choices about language genealogies and restoration outcomes) (on similar questions see Dementi-Leonard and Gilmore 1999; Eisenlohr 2004a; Hill 2002; Tlen and Moore 2007).

To illustrate, I explore how debates about language origins affect reconstruction efforts among different Taíno groups. In particular, I ask: how do different assumptions about language origins affect how Taíno is recreated? How do beliefs about Taíno extend what we know about the language currently? In order to address such questions, I consider two distinct language reconstruction projects. Though these are not the only projects currently taking place among the Taíno, they are both relatively advanced, ongoing, long-term projects that are particularly suited to show the potential of and the

challenges for efforts at reconstruction and restoration of the Taíno / Jíbaro-Boricua language in Puerto Rico.

During the period of my research, two organizations were active in reconstructing and restoring Taíno /Jíbaro-Boricua in use. However, significant differences exist between these two organizations and in how their efforts at reconstruction and restoration are implemented. I met one group on a research trip to New York, the *Taíno Nation* in New York City (TN).<sup>60</sup> They had been involved in language reconstruction since the seventies and drew heavily from other Arawakan languages to remake/construct Taíno. Another group, which I met in the later stages of my research, was the MIJB (introduced in chapter 2). They felt very strongly that their ethnic identification and the language they spoke were Jíbaro-Boricua and not Taíno. This preference was related to their efforts to disassociate from Arawakan and instead use Yucatec Mayan to reconstruct a current indigenous language in Puerto Rico. The TN, mainly organized within New York City, is taking advantage of the resources of the New York Public Library and at el Centro, the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, CUNY. The MIJB is based in rural Puerto Rico, gathering data through interviews with Jíbaros and drawing from the main reconstruction figure's, Oki's, access to dictionaries in Yucatec Mayan. Though neither has completely reconstructed the language, TN's efforts at reconstruction are understood by its members as ongoing, while MIJB's are understood to be complete. I show that such interpretive differences affect both the authority of teachers and the expected longevity of what is taught. As such, it affects whether people expect there to be room for debate in how the reconstruction efforts take place. I focus on tracing such arguments and show what they reveal about historical alignments more generally.

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<sup>60</sup> The *Taíno Nation* is the organization's actual name.

Though both groups link to their indigenous past through their Jíbaro ancestry, they differ in how they understand the genealogy of such ancestry. For example, while both groups consider their Jíbaro family to be their link to being indigenous, they conceptualize indigeneity itself differently. For the MIJB it is linked to a Mayan genealogy. For the TN it is linked to an Arawakan ancestry. These genealogical differences affect the process and outcome of their language reconstruction projects. Furthermore, these differences in approaches to language use are the source of a division (is it one of the main divisions) among indigenous groups in Puerto Rico and are associated with other significant differences regarding political action, relevant audiences and the goals for the indigenous resurgence on the Island.

These distinct approaches to the linguistic origins and communicative purposes of the native language spoken in Puerto Rico presuppose distinct ontologies, mythologies and histories. The different forms of knowledge that circulate about pasts and genealogies are, with or without that intention, couched within structures of authority, legitimacy and power as much as they are about cultural assertion and self-determination (Conklin 1997; Hinton and Ahlers 1999; Lomawaima, et al. 2002; Wong 1999). How groups understand the value of language is not just about its use in communication, it is also about historical alignments and future trajectories; about technologies of authority and legitimacy; and about creating and/or erasing boundaries. It is related to larger expectations of what indigeneity looks like as much as they are related to people's concerns about heritage.

### *Mayan origins?*

Though the MIJB differs from other groups in the Island, their position concerning indigenous origins on the Island is important to understanding the variability in how indigeneity can be construed in contemporary Puerto Rico. Whereas the TN (and most other Taíno groups) presume an Arawakan origin for what they call Taíney, the MIJB argues for a Mayan origin of the language spoken in Puerto Rico prior to Spanish colonization. The following section discusses a more radical approach to indigeneity in Puerto Rico by looking into how arguments for a Mayan origin are justified and sustained on the Island.

### *Debates about origins*

Tito Guajataca, who I previously introduced in chapter 3, had a very radical concept of what it meant to be indigenous. Though I had heard about him and his politics, I had not yet met him in person when he called me. He did not tell me how he got my phone number. He just told me that my contact information had been made available to him by someone who thought that I should speak to the “genuine native population” of the Island. Not quite understanding what he meant, I asked him what he meant by “genuine”. He answered that he was not Taíno, because Taíno was the name given to Island’s population by the colonizers. Rather, he said he was Jíbaro, a Jíbaro Boricua, one of the Island’s genuine natives. Most of the phone call was then spent convincing me of the importance of the work that he was doing, as well as convincing me that my work with the so-called Taíno was a waste of time, because unlike the people he works with, they are not genuine. Rather, to him they were performers—which in this context meant that they were not, in fact, Taíno, but instead performing being Taíno.

Through his remarks, I became aware of a distinct counter-approach to the genealogy of indigeneity in Puerto Rico.

Intrigued, I met with Tito soon thereafter. He lived in a small wooden home on a hill in a town not too far from my parents' home. Instead of sofas and beds, there were hammocks hanging from the ceiling.



Figure 6.1 Research companion<sup>61</sup> in one of Tito's hammocks.

I sat in the hammock and was offered some local black coffee. Tito asked me if my recorder was on, as he proceeded to give me his version of the regional history of this part of the Island. He stopped, left for a moment, and came back with various 8½ by 11 manila envelopes. He handed these to me as if there were treasures inside them. Within each envelope was a photocopied typewritten unpublished manuscript. As I looked through them, Tito told me they were written by Oscar Lamourt Valentín, also known as

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<sup>61</sup> In my initial meetings with potential research consultants I often brought a companion, especially if these were with one person rather than a group or at a home rather than a public space. After establishing trust with my research consultants, research companions became less necessary.

Oki.<sup>62</sup> Having read about Oki in a dissertation about the Taíno movement in Puerto Rico, but unable to find anything written by him in any library, I was surprised to actually see his writings (e.g. Castanha 2004). Tito had been a student of Oki's and before Oki passed away he named Tito as custodian of his writings. In giving me copies of Oki's work, Tito told me which manuscripts I could copy and distribute and which I could cite but not circulate. He was concerned that another group would find the writings and take credit for them, distributing and teaching the knowledge contained within them without truly understanding them. Though I was allowed to see many of the manuscripts (he never gave me all at once, new manuscripts were given to me with each visit), I was not authorized to reveal all of them. As the custodian of such writings, Tito expressed their importance to me in terms of defining his movement's approach to thinking about indigeneity on the Island. Looking through them, they were manuscripts related to proposed alternative interpretations of the Island's history and the continuity of Taíno indigenous languages within Jíbaro dialects of Spanish. As I continued my research, people who shared Tito's vision of indigenous resurgence in the Island often cited Oki's writings as helping them define their own expressions of indigeneity.

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<sup>62</sup> From what I can gather from my interviews and his own writings, Oki, the nickname for Oscar Lamourt Valentín, graduated with a BA in sociolinguistics from Iowa State University in the sixties or seventies. A continuing studies course given by Uahtibili Báez Santiago and Huana Naboli Martínez Prieto at the University of Puerto Rico-Utuado Campus. "Introducción al Lenguaje Taíno," describes Oki as follows: "As of the present [time], no etymological studies of the Puerto Rican Native tongue have been published. The only existing documented linguistic study was realized by Mr. Oscar Lamourt Valentín, anthropologist and linguist from Lares, who learned the Mayan tongues from the Tzeltal and Lacandon peoples, while he lived with them, and in discovering the relation of these tongues with our own, begins and documents the first existing etymological study of or native Boricua language. He discovers that our language, not Taíno or Arawakan, is one of the Mayan tongues, of the Chib'al'o or Jíbaro peoples, as known in its transliterated version in Spanish." (Translation mine, original in Spanish below) *"Al presente no se ha publicado estudio etimológico alguno sobre la lengua nativa en Puerto Rico. El único estudio lingüístico documentado existente fue realizado por el Sr. Oscar Lamourt Valentín, antropólogo y lingüista lareño, quien aprende las lenguas maya de los pueblos tzeltal y lacandón, mientras convive con ellos, y al descubrir la relación de estas lenguas con la nuestra, comienza y documenta el primer estudio etimológico existente de la lengua nativa boricua. Descubre que nuestra lengua, no taína ni arahuaca, es una de las lenguas mayas, la del pueblo Chib'al'o o Jíbaro, como se conoce hoy en su forma transliterada por el español."*

The content of Oki's manuscripts focuses on revealing the Jíbaro as Puerto Rico's true native peoples, arguing that the indigenous presence in Puerto Rico has been continuous, de-authorized and misunderstood. Significant to this chapter is Oki's insistence that the pre-Columbian language spoken on the Island was not Arawakan. Rather, he argues that the original indigenous language was more closely related to Mayan. This claim has an effect on the social mobilization around indigenous ethnic identities in Puerto Rico. Because of this, Oki labels the indigenous population as Jíbaro or Boricua rather than Taíno. He explains this in his introduction to an unpublished yet moderately circulated manuscript written in English "The extrapolation and the limits of language":

For being retrospectively extinct and being disauthorized from having an identity of one's own on the basis of someone else' [sic] identity, and ascribed as belonging to a colonial demographic inventory,..we refer to ourselves as the "Jíbaro", and within the context of our own geography "Boricuas". The word we employ to designate our own compatriots is "pana" while our island is named by us "Borinquen". One can observe of course that these are native language terms "as if they were spanish,"[sic] but then that only means that morphemologically they are denied any significance on their own, so that they can only be defined as someone else' language, and then what we could find is that they are in fact epistemologically disauthorized.(Lamourt-Valentín n.d.-b: 1)<sup>63</sup>

This understanding of indigenous languages on the Island as de-authorized by their absorption into Spanish is shared by many groups, though how such languages are genealogically traced may vary. For Oki, the evidence that comes into play when interpreting Jíbaro words is Mayan. As shown in the following example, the evidence

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<sup>63</sup> He continues: "This is a very curious condition of things because there is no secret in their regards being aglutinative polysyllabic root elements combined grammatically, so that each term is a grammatical coherent product of the language,..which remarkably escape identification when of course integrity is surfeit since intentionality is to be supposed.

One should also observe that a European language is made to assume the place of a pre-columbian language, which is even more strange yet, since the same things can be repeated over again, if you can get away with it the first time by employing the term pre-american, as if everything past,.. was future."



Oki provides for a Mayan origin depends upon a series of steps whereby he takes the hispanicized spellings of the remaining indigenous words in Puerto Rican Spanish and renders them into what he claims are the Mayan morphemes that form the non-hispanized word, which he then defines in Mayan and then translates/glosses back into Spanish. An example of this is in the same manuscript:

Since our identification is an eponymous term “Jíbaro” or “can.ch’íb-al.o” in the native language, referring to “caste, generation, lineage in the direct Male line”,..the [sic] “male” in question is the ancestral hero and demi-urge “Iguana Lord” or “Itzamnah” called Kukulcan by the Quiché and Quetzacoatl by the Toltec...But [sic] as the present work has been pointing out from the start, the native language we have been talking about is a maya-thantik,...mayanese [sic] speech, albeit, with a certain number of characteristics qualified as quite archaic, such as the retention of “ng”; otherwise it grammatically approaches with minor alterations the Yucatec-Lacandón (Mopan? Itzae?) group of Maya-thantik. (Lamour Valentin, n.d: 9)

Such arguments about Taíno as a Mayan language are not just about language, but also about specific lineages and alignments with respect to indigenous populations in the Americas more broadly (on Mayan people and languages see Danziger 2001; Lucy 1994; Shoaps 2009). In a recently published book based on Oki’s work, the authors, Uahtibili Báez J.B.L. and Huana Naboli Martínez Prieto of the Movimiento *Indígena* Chib’al’o (Jíbaro)-Boricua (MOVIJIBO), state that:

Nuestra isla era la cabeza o isla principal del conglomerado de islas que comprenden el área desde Isla Margarita hasta la Península de la Florida, en lo que hoy se conoce como las **Antillas**. Al igual que toda el área antillana fue, y todavía es, habitada por aborígenes de la etnia Can’Chib’al’o, con una cultura y sistema de creencias que caracterizan una historiografía Maya (Báez J.B.L. and Martínez Prieto 2008: 21).

TRANSLATION:

Our Island was the head or principal Island of the conglomerate of islands that comprise the area from Margarita Island to the Florida Peninsula, in what is known as the Antilles today. The same as all the Antillean area it was, and still is,

inhabited by aboriginal peoples of the Can'Chib'al'o ethnicity, with a culture and belief system that characterize a Mayan historiography.

This orientation draws from Yucatec Mayan and presumes that the morphological items found in dictionaries of Taíno roughly correspond to both the indigenous words preserved and still used on the Island today (most often in the form of place names and in the realm of domestic practices) and to instances of the Taíno language found in the chronicles of Friar Ramon Pané, Bartolomé de las Casas and a few others.<sup>64</sup> The logic in this argument is that each native word can be broken down into its component morphemes, which in turn can be read and interpreted through the Mayan language, and that the ability to do this reveals a genetic language connection which in turn is due to an ancestral ethnic relatedness. The breaking down into morphemes is not systematic and interpretations of a word may vary depending on where morphemic boundaries are drawn for a particular word.

Docenas de palabras del vocabulario *indígena* aparecen adulteradas por todas partes. Esto ha causado grandes polémicas entre historiadores que se disputan la más correcta. Entre estas palabras se halla la palabra Borinquen, nombre que ha prevalecido por siglos, de origen *indígena* y muchos autores escriben Boriquen, nombre genérico de Puerto Rico. Su significado ha sido también tema de grandes polémicas, pero a pesar de todo, nadie se ha molestado en buscarle relación con otros nombres que, por lo menos, tengan igual consonancia entre aquellas palabras del vocabulario *indígena* de América.” (Blasini 1985: 136)

TRANSLATION:

Dozens of words from the indigenous vocabulary appear adulterated everywhere. This has caused great polemics among historians who dispute which is the most correct. Among these words is the word Borinquen, name that has prevailed over centuries, of indigenous origin and many authors write Boriquén, generic name of Puerto Rico. Its meaning has also been the topic of large polemics, but through it all, no one has been bothered in finding its relation with other names that, at least, have a consonance with those words from the indigenous languages of the Americas.” (Blasini 1985: 136)

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<sup>64</sup> These are all 16<sup>th</sup> century chroniclers.

According to this argument, since the indigenous words have been imperfectly translated by chroniclers, the indigenous languages of the Americas can be used to retrospectively reconstruct what contemporary indigenous words in Puerto Rico meant to their speakers.

An example of these processes follows:

Tambien podemos asociar a la lengua náhuatl otras palabras. Por ejemplo, *yuquiyotl*. Significa el sol tal y como lo vemos; *zuz yuquiyotl*, “el sol en carne y hueso”, o sea, tal y como se ve. Por el significado de estas podríamos afirmar que *Yukiyú* y *Luquillo* es una misma cosa y que ambas son de origen náhuatl. *Yukiyú* es la misma divinidad del panteón taíno, que vendría a ser el dios solar. El monte de su morada toma el mismo nombre del dios sol. (Blasini 1985: 138)

TRANSLATION:

We can also associate the nahuatl language to other words. For example, *yuquiyotl*. It means sun just as we see it; *zuz yuquiyotl*, “the sun in flesh and bone”, that is, just how it is seen. Because of the meaning of these [words] we can affirm that *Yukiyu* and *Luquillo* are one and the same thing and that both are of nahuatl origin. *Yukiyu* is the same divinity in the Taíno pantheon, which would be the solar god. The forest of its dwelling takes the same name as the god sun. (Blasini 1985: 138)

Oki credits his own success deciphering the composition of indigenous words on the Island to methods learned in a course on medical etymology (Lamour-Valentín n.d.-a). For the MIJB, such linguistic origins are evidence of the cultural origins of the Island’s indigenous peoples, which has led to a reconfiguration of the pre-Columbian origin story as well as a re-codification of Puerto Rico’s indigenous trajectory with respect to Puerto Rico’s indigenous history since the time before European contact. That this purported Mayan origin is brought to light within what appeared to my research consultants to be an academic and objective method further serves to legitimize this thesis.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Perhaps such associations with Mayan language and culture serve to associate the Island’s indigenous population with a historically documented, prestigious and powerful indigenous group, or it might be related to the documented forced migration and displacement of indigenous persons from throughout South

Such methods are effective in delimiting the membership of the MIJB. Within the group itself, members such as Tito G. who show fluency in using Mayan to decipher Taíno are well-respected and authoritative. The distinct interpretations of terms that emerge from the understanding of indigenous expressions as either Mayan or Arawakan influence the analysis of the indigenous past as well as the reconstruction of the Boricua-Jíbaro language. The following table shows some of the significant interpretive differences for some of the most central terms in contemporary indigenous culture in Puerto Rico. The first column includes terms that are currently used or recognizable in Puerto Rican Spanish and the second column contains the most conventional glosses for their meanings. The third column consists of Oki Lamourt Valentín's (OLV) Mayan-based reconstruction of the corresponding word. In it I show the morphemic correspondences OLV has identified. For example, if the term currently in use is "Borinquen," alternately spelled "Borikén," OLV reconstructed the word to have been "Bohlikin" based on Mayan morphology. The fourth column shows how OLV has glossed the meaning of the word, in this case "The Island of the Dawn." This is contrasted with the fifth and sixth columns where I show the Arawakan analyses. The fifth column reconstructs the meaning of Borinquen/Borikén based on other Arawakan languages, and the sixth column includes a gloss of the word's meaning based on an Arawakan comparison.

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America and Mesoamerica to the Caribbean, including Puerto Rico, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. This could be an area of investigation in future research.

Table 1 Examples of differences between Oki Lamourt Valentín (OLV) Mayan-based reconstruction and more conventional Arawakan reconstructions

<i>Term</i>	<i>Current gloss</i>	<i>OLV Mayan version</i>	<i>OLV Mayan gloss</i>	<i>Arawakan version</i>	<i>Arawakan gloss</i>
Borinquen/ Borikén	Indigenous term for the Island	Boh→ “to scrutinize” li→ “in the east cardinal direction” kin→ “sun”	The Island of the Dawn	Bori → noble ke→ island <i>OR</i> Buren→ instrument where yucca is prepared ke→ island	“Island of the Noble”  “Island where yucca is prepared”
nigua	bothersome, small bug that bites	nich→to take bites uah→life	“bug that bites”	nigua→small thing	“small thing”
guaitiao	friend/ally	u-ah→suyo ti’→con hau→clasifier of divided things/ half	“exchange”	wa→land <i>OR</i> wã→ocean tiyawo→friend <i>OR</i> wa→our tiaho→friend	“our friend”
Agüeybaná	name of a cacique	ah→lord uay→lodging bana→marine iguana	“lord of the land of the marine iguana”	a→noun designator guey→sol ba→big/great -na→verb designator	“Great sun leader”
Cacique	leader	c→ our ah→ master tzich-eh→ very reverenced	“our reverenced master”	ca→the ci→head ke→land	“the head of the land”
Oubao Moin	“Land of Blood”	hau→ turn around ba→ as such o→class marker Mu→brother in law in→my/mine	“like my brothers in law/ the people we marry with”	oubao→Island moin→blood	“Island of Blood”
cemí	“thee-point spiritual artifact”	dzem→to alleviate/calm a wrong/damage in→ my/mine	my fixer of damages	ce→god/supern atural mi→spirit	ancestor spirit

Sources: OLV Mayanized terms from Lamourt-Valentin n.d ;  
Arawakan from: (Alvarez Nazario 1996; Arrom 1980; Granberry and Vescelius  
2004)

Such differences in interpretation are significant to the readings of both past historical trajectories and future imaginings on the Island. On one occasion as I drove through an area called Cibao, Tito asked me if I knew what Cibao meant. I responded that it meant “rocks,” which was the Arawakan derived gloss for the term. He corrected me and told me, “Well that’s if you subscribe to the Arawak version of Taíno. However, if you read Oki and realize the Mayan origins of Taíno, Cibao, or rather in its correct pronunciation, Shibao means place of departure (xib: male; hau: departures).” Though I was admittedly skeptical of the etymology Tito provided for Cibao, his explanation resonated with other members in his group. Members of the group and others that follow Oki’s approach to the native language—in this particular case his understanding of Cibao’s meaning—read the landscape of the region through an understanding that linked the area to where the Jíbaro-Boricua movement, or the indigenous organizing on the Island, would begin/depart rather than to the rocky surface of the area. These etymological arguments were central to the claims made about the land and the people that live in it. For those who understood the area to be linked to the departure of the true indigenous movement in Puerto Rico, the region’s inhabitants were understood as the “genuine native descendents,” which to them were known as the Chi’bal’o, also known as the Jíbaros.

Groups such as Tito’s consider Jíbaro speech styles to be the Native manner of speech that is relevant today. Tito’s own efforts to learn Maya Yucateco are motivated by his desire to show that present day Jíbaro speech is related to Mayan. In fact, Uahtibili Báez J.B.L. and Huana Naboli Martínez Prieto (MOVIJIBO) taught a course that drew from Oki’s etymologies called “Taíno language” in a continuing education program at the

University of Puerto Rico, Utuado Campus (a public university). Here, the reconstructed form of language produced largely through Oki's research was taught in a classroom setting to novice Taíno/Jíbaro-Boricua, and potentially non-indigenous students.

### *Taíney*

During the summer of 2008, I traveled to the New York City area to meet with the various Taíno groups based there. One of the groups, the TN, invited me to interview them about their language reconstruction efforts. I met J.B.L., Ricky, and Wakonax at Wakonax's home in Brooklyn.<sup>66</sup> J.B.L. who appeared to be in his late sixties sat in an armchair to my right. Wakonax, probably in his late forties or early fifties, sat to my left. On the other side of the coffee table directly in front of me sat Ricky, who seemed to be about my age, in his late twenties or early thirties. The apparent ages of these three members of the TN coincided with the authoritative hierarchies that emerged in my conversation with them—especially as relates to decision making in the language reconstruction process.

Sitting in the living room, I turned the recorder on and asked them about their language reconstruction project, an effort that I had learned about through the group's website. J.B.L., the person behind most of the language reconstruction efforts for this group, explained that he had been working on reconstructing the Taíno language since the seventies. He explained that the impetus for such a project developed out of a recognition of his own Taíno ancestry, an ancestry contained within his Jíbaro family background. He told me that it was controversial to claim to be Taíno then, but having

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<sup>66</sup> These are the research consultants' actual names, as requested by the participants.

grown up a Jíbaro, he knew that that was who he was. Wakonax and David listened as J.B.L. elaborated on the origins of the language reconstruction project.

J.B.L., David and Wakonax were careful to not call the language Taíno. Rather, sticking to their findings concerning the grammar of the languages, they called it Taíney. When I asked them why they called it Taíney, rather than Taíno, they explained that Taíney would be the correct name for the language in terms of the morphology of the language as they expect it to have been spoken by the Taíno people in pre-Columbian times. Taíney, they clarified, is the singular form. J.B.L. explained:

‘Tain-’ is good, ‘-ney’ is, comes from ‘igney’, o ‘ine’, which is man. Okay, and like, and the no, in Taíno is the plural, the plural human, when you wanna say people you use the -no. So the good people, ‘Taíno’. And since ‘tain’ is good, the ‘-no’, being an n, there is no need for the other n, so you put ‘Taíno’. That’s the plural, ok and when you identify a language, you don’t identify with it as a plural but as singular.

For J.B.L., Taíney is the correct designation for the language because it reflects Taíno grammatical norms and practices, as reconstructed by his group. This position towards the naming of the language spoken by the Taíno is indicative of larger concerns among some members of the TN regarding the accuracy and precision of language reconstruction efforts more generally. As my upcoming conversations with J.B.L., Wakonax and David show, the reconstruction of Taíney within this one group is fraught with various difficulties—ranging from what linguistic resources to draw from in reconstructing a Taíno language to how to successfully teach and implement a spoken form of *Taíney* in practice. Tensions between the reconstruction and the practical implementation of Taíney became more apparent as I continue my interview with the TN. These tensions are themselves interlaced with issues of authority, legitimacy, norm-making and conflicting goals for speech.



An elder, J.B.L. offers a portrait of his experiences as a youth in Puerto Rico. He is careful to acknowledge having been “born a Jíbaro.” Though J.B.L. begins speaking English, he switches to Spanish about half-way through his talk, to reflect this I include a translation in italics on right.

**Excerpt, “Is this guy crazy?”**

- 21 J: Even though at that time to say that you were a Taíno meant you know, “is this guy crazy?” You know “the Taíno are extinct they don’t exist.” But I have always had a-a closeness to what we have, of the language. I was born a Jíbaro. I lived the Jíbaro<sup>67</sup> for a while, not for long. But I think long enough for me to be attached. I know what it is to sleep in hammocks. I know what it is to make a hammock. I know what it is to make ropes from, uh, maguey. I know what it is to eat in ditas, which in eyeri they call ritas. See, so they have the same word but they use the “r” and, uh, I know what a jataca is, *una dita era forma era una higuera pequeña que la cortaban y la usaban para tomar agua, para coger agua eh muchas cosas que estuve relacionado con eso porque viví con mis abuelos en ambos bandos de la familia y ambos bandos venían de Orocovis un centro muy, había mucha influencia indígena el el abuelo mío paterno era de la Cabán de Orocovis y mi abuelo materno y abuela materna su familia eran de Damián Arriba en Orocovis*
- J: Even though at that time to say that you were a Taíno meant you know, “is this guy crazy?” You know “the Taíno are extinct they don’t exist.” But I have always had a-a closeness to what we have, of the language. I was born a Jíbaro. I lived the Jíbaro for a while, not for long. But I think long enough for me to be attached. I know what it is to sleep in hammocks. I know what it is to make a hammock. I know what it is to make ropes from, uh, maguey. I know what it is to eat in ditas, which in eyeri they call ritas. See, so they have the same word but they use the “r” and, uh, I know what a jataca is, a “dita” was a form was a small gourd that they cut and used to drink water, to take water, eh, many things. I was related to that because I lived with my grandparents in both bands of the family and both bands came from Orocovis, a center very, there was a lot of indigenous influence. The the my paternal grandfather was of the Cabán of Orocovis and my maternal grandfather and maternal grandmother their family was from Damián Arriba in Orocovis also my

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<sup>67</sup> This use of “I lived the Jíbaro” was a unique occurrence in my recording with Santiago. I suspect it was just an idiosyncrasy to this instance of talk.

*también mi abuela paterna era de Aibonito o sea era de allí uh y tengo familia en Cayey que tu lo ves y dices, como decimos nosotros, no lo voy a decir, pero indio, {laughter} eh, una de mis tías, tías abuelas chiquititas una mujer chiquitita, pero bien esto de un genio de un espíritu fuerte no confeccionaba las ditas, hacia la batea de las higueras grandes y con ella, con esa gente yo aprendí muchas cosas, y eso que yo pues, estamos tratando lo que yo sé lo que saben otros ponerlo en en perspectiva y a la misma vez enseñar esas destrezas y esas cosas para que nuestros niños aprendan y lleven la cultura adelante entiendes para que no muera porque si pasa de nuestra generación sin comunicarlo, se perdió, esa es la realidad y conscientes de eso, eh, nosotros nos movimos a luchar juntos para que llevar eso a cabo, ¿entiendes?*

*paternal grandmother was from Aibonito, that is she was from there uh and I have family in Cayey that you see them and say, like we say, I am not going to say it, but Indian, {laughter} eh, one of my aunts, my great aunts very small, a very small woman, but very this, of a strong temper (she) did not make ditas, she made the “batea” from the larger gourds and with her, with those people I learned many things, and thats what I well, we are trying what I know what others know to put in in perspective and at the same time teach those skills and those things so that our children learn and take the culture ahead understand? So that it doesn’t die because if it passes from our generation without communicating, it’s lost, that is the reality and conscious of that, eh, we moved to struggle together to carry that out, understand?*

Though the conversation had begun in English—I suspect due to both Ricky’s and Wakonax’s relatively greater fluency in English as compared to Spanish, J.B.L. switches to Spanish relatively early in his turn. Speaking of his Jíbaro days as a child in Puerto Rico, his description moves from a list of the everyday practices that took place, in English, to his filial ties and genealogy, in Spanish. J.B.L. makes a link to his indigenous heritage through his family’s Jíbaro background. He shares his knowledge of Jíbaro practices, with the (whether intended or not) effect of authorizing his efforts at the reconstruction of Taíney and justifying his own Taínoness. While revealing his ancestry, he explains both what he has learned and a concern for maintaining the continuity of such

practices by teaching them to younger generations. It is interesting to note that throughout the transcripts, only J.B.L. consistently makes such switches and they often occur when speaking about indigenous and Jíbaro topics, perhaps suggesting how he is conceptualizing the indexical connections between Spanish, Jibaridad and Taíno identifications. Finally he returns to the topic of language, after clarifying how the teaching of Taíno practices arises from his group. He explains, continuing in Spanish:

*Excerpt, “yendo al idioma”*

- 21 J: Oh, yendo al idioma, yo estudié muchas fuentes, pero las fuentes primordiales, las más importantes son el Eyeri o el que llaman mal nombrado Caribe insular, y el Lokono. Y tenemos más fuerzas con el Lokono que el mismo Caribe insular o el Eyeri. Compartimos de las dos tenemos de las dos, pero el Ta-el Taíney, como yo le digo, o el Taíno como dicen corrientemente, está más relacionado para mi entender con el Lokono que con el Eyeri porque el Eyeri es una lengua, lo que llaman una lengua "n" pertenece a "n" pertenece ¿qué qué queremos decir con eso? Los pronombres comienzan, el primer pronombre comienza con la "n" mientras que el Taíney comienza con la "d" y cual, exactamente como el Lokono, yo fui estudiando tanto el Eyeri tanto como el Lokono, y también el Guajiro, porque hay cosas del Guajiro, y me puse a hacer listas de palabras y a compararlas y los significados, y fue muy deslumbrante y a la misma vez muy bueno para mí encontrar que habían paralelos. Definitivamente, eh, por ejemplo, te
- J: Oh, going to the language, I studied many sources, but the primary sources, the most important are the Eyeri or what they wrongly call Insular Carib, and the Lokono. And we have more strength with the Lokono than with the very Insular Carib or Eyeri. We share from both, we have from both, but the Ta-the Taíney, how I call it, or the Taíno as they say commonly, is more related to in my understanding with the Lokono than with Eyeri because the Eyeri is a language, what they call an “n” language it belongs to “n” it belongs, what do we want to say with that? The pronouns begin, the first pronoun begins with the “n” while Taíney begins with the “d” and which, exactly like the Lokono, I studied both the Eyeri as well as the Lokono, and also the Guajiro, because there are things from the Guajiro, and I made myself make word lists and to compare them and the meanings, and it was enlightening and at the same time very good for me to find that there were parallels. Definitely, eh, for example, I will give you an example: in the Dominican Republic they still

voy a dar un ejemplo: en República Dominicana todavía se le dice a la calabaza, auyama, y la la palabra exactamente igual la encuentras en el Lokono y significa lo mismo.

call the pumpkin “auyama”, and the the word exactly the same you find it on Lokono and it means the same thing.

For the TN choices about what languages to use for comparative reconstruction are based on the overlap and convergence of lexical and morphological forms. In the above excerpt J.B.L. mentions three Arawakan languages that he has drawn from to build current forms of Taíney: Eyeri, Lokono, and Guajiro. In explaining his preference for Lokono as opposed to Eyeri and Guajiro in comparative reconstruction efforts, J.B.L. draws on the morphological characteristics of the languages to explain why Lokono is a better fit for comparison with Taíney. He also illustrates these similarities with respect to particular words that are still used in Lokono and in the Spanish of the Dominican Republic, for example, the word ‘auyama’ for pumpkin. He also mentions other fruits, noting that the differences in terms of present day pronunciation may be the result of contact with Spanish in the Caribbean. That is, decisions about which languages to use are based upon the making of word lists and finding overlaps (or differences) significant and numerous enough to justify using (or not) a particular language as a source. The word lists are based on Taíney-derived words still in use throughout Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, and also use words found in the chronicles. Though interested in what are currently considered words, the TN was focused on agglutination in Taíney. As such, they expend a significant amount of effort in trying to determine what information they can gain about the structure of the language by analyzing the morphemes that compose Taíney words.

J.B.L. has spent close to forty years looking through the surviving Taíno vocabulary, Eyeri and Lokono for patterns of difference and similarity in spelling and morphology. Through the identification of certain patterns, J.B.L. feels justified in extrapolating from these languages to interpret and reconstruct Taíney. For example, in the next transcript J.B.L. explains that he found a pattern of correspondence between Loko and Taíney, where he concluded that /a/ in Loko corresponded to /e/ in Taíney, /l/ corresponded to /n/, and /h/ becomes omitted. With this pattern he was able to take the word *jalika* (“why”) and manufacture the word *aneke* which is now used in Taíney to mean “why.” Here, he explains:

*Excerpt, “Taíney”*

23 J: las fuentes que usó fueron los hermanos Moreau que estuvieron de misioneros con los Lokono, y de allí yo estudie eso y vi mucho, mucho, muchas las fuentes. Incluso, **a base de eso yo decidí que muchas de las palabras que no tenemos pues simplemente hay que ir a la hermana lengua, tomarlas y acomodarlas a la forma Taína a la estructura Taína—Taíney.** Cuál es la diferencia? Como en otras, otros pueblos *indígenas* de aquí de las Américas, grandes, pueblos grandes muchas veces se dividen la misma etnia se dividen diferentes dialectos y eso lo vemos entre los Iroquíes, y lo vemos entre los Lakota, están los Lakota, los Dakota y los Nakota, ¿cuál es la diferencia? Que en su, por ejemplo los pronombre, usan, unos usan la "d", otros usan la "n" y otros usan la "l" ¿entiendes?

J: the sources that (he) used were the brothers Moreau that were missionaries with the Lokono, and from there I studied that and saw a lot, a lot, a lot the sources. Additionally, **based on that I decided that many of the words that we don't have well simply we just have to go to the sister language, take them, and accommodate to the Taíno form to the Taíno structure—Taíney.** What is the difference? Like in others, other indigenous peoples from here of the Americas, large peoples many times the same ethnicity are divided in different dialects and we see that among the Iroquois, and we see that among the Lakota, there are the Lakota, the Dakota, and the Nakota, what is the difference? That in their, for example the pronouns, they use, some use the “d”, other use the “n” and others use the “l” understand?

Entonces yo encontré que lo mismo sucede con el Eyeri, con el Loko, y con el Taíney, eh, el Eyeri por ejemplo usa la "r" intervocálica y la usa también al principio. El Taíney usa la "r" intervocálica pero la "d" como afijo, prefijo al principio, y a veces usa la "d" intervocálica también, aunque es menos común te voy a dar un ejemplo, en el loko, eh, existe la palabra "jalika" que significa {?} Y el equivalente en Taíney, encontré es "aneke", o sea que la a de "jalika" se convierte en e, la l en n, y la h {j} no se usa en Taíney, y pos allí con esa misma palabra, en la forma que lo escribas, te da el porqué quien qué y así si yo fui he ido reestructurando todo eso acomodándolo a la forma en que el Taíno se expresaba y claro en muchos casos tuve que volver a investigar lo mismo, reflexionar, y buscar. Estábamos hablando de la palabra "guanábana", ¿verdad? en Taíney se dice "wanábana," y el español lo escribió "guanábana," en el eyeri se dice walápana, ¿ves la relación? y en el loko "warápana," o sea que la "l" en un caso se vuelve "r," en el Taíney se vuelve "n," y la "p" se trastoca en "b" en el Taíney, mientras que en Eyeri y en Loko se mantiene la "p," ¿entiendes? Entonces en el mismo significado, "guayaba," que en realidad debe ser "wayaba," allí los eyeris dicen "coyaba," y los loko "malyaba," ¿eh? que a pesar de las diferencias que hay en ciertas consonantes se le sale el sentido de la palabra; sale lo que significa.

Then I found that the same happens with the Eyeri, and with the Loko, and with Tainé, eh, the Eyeri for example uses the intervocalic "r" and it also uses it at the beginning. The Taíney uses the intervocalic "r" but the "d" as an affix, prefix at the beginning, and sometimes uses the intervocalic "d" too, although it is less common. In the Loko, eh, the word "jalika" exists that means (?) And the equivalent in Taíney, I found is "aneke", that is that the "a" of "jalika" is converted in "e", the "l" in "n", and the h {j} is not used in Taíney, and well with that same word, in the way that you write it, it gives you the why, who, what and in that way I have gone restructuring everything accommodating it to the form in which the Taíno expressed themselves and clearly in many cases I had to go back and investigate the same, reflect, and look. We were talking about the word "guanabana" right? In Taíney you say "wanabana," and the Spanish wrote "guanabana," and in eyeri you say "walapana," see the relationship? And in Loko "warapana," that is the l in one case becomes "r" and in the Taíney it becomes "n," and the "p" is converted to "b" in Taíney, while in Eyeri and in Loko the "p" is maintained, understand? Then in the same meaning, which in reality should be "wayaba," there the Eyeris say "coyaba," and the Loko, "malyaba," eh? That in spite of the differences that there are in certain consonants, the sense of the words comes out, the meaning comes out.

In the above excerpt, J.B.L. explains the patterns he discovers across what he considers semantically equivalent words in Eyeri, Lokono and Taíney. Such patterns enable J.B.L. to reconstruct Taíney words, by substituting the appropriate phonemes in one language with the corresponding phoneme in another. Ricky, a younger member who currently collaborates with J.B.L. in the reconstruction efforts, describes how such comparisons are grounded in the words used by current speakers of Eyeri and Lokono. He also shows how the contemporary use of such words is indicative of the more general survival of Taíno peoples, including their habits and concepts.

***Excerpt, “But, you know what made it easy”***

41 D: But you know what made it easy, I mean to begin with, is that huge amount of words that are still used today and that’s like, I like that part of it, like the words that are still alive and they’re the same, similar that we can find in Garifuna which is still closely related to us they still speak the same words, like in Puerto Rico there’s a type of, a type of duck that they call, we call them wanana, in Garifuna they say wanana, you know fruit, foods, all that stuff, we have the breakfast, marota, you know.

42 J: y no dicen ma-, ah, ¿maromaroti?

43 D: ah, maro maro, marota, maromaroti and it’s the same food

44 J: Ahí tú ves la relación

45 D: and the list goes on and on and on, that’s just like three examples out of a hundred.

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J: *And they don’t say ma-, maromaroti?*

D: ah, maro maro, marota, maromaroti and it’s the same food

J: *There you see the relationship*

D: and the list goes on and on and on, that’s just like three examples out of a hundred.

By noting that such reconstruction efforts are not just a matter of taking items from related languages, but also rooted in actual language use, Ricky's interjection to J.B.L.'s discussion prompts a consideration of the relevance of such efforts and serves to align Taíno indigeneity with other Arawakan indigeneities. Such alignments are important insofar as they serve to highlight the contemporaneousness of Taíno practices. In fact, such efforts to link reconstruction efforts to current language practices are reflected in how the group aims to obtain and pool new linguistic and cultural information about the Taíno through their membership application process, which I describe in the next section.

#### *Other resources: membership and reconstruction*

In addition to the comparative reconstruction work, the group uses their membership application process to obtain new information about the words and practices of the Taíno—information which could further enlighten how the Taíno language may have once been spoken. By compiling information about the potential remnants of Taíno that may currently enjoy some circulation, the TN shows that the Taíno language (and culture) are still present in the Caribbean. Wakonax explains how they acquired an important piece of information about the Taíno language, one that he argues told them something new about Taíno agglutination and greeting practices.

#### *Excerpt, “that’s the whole thing about language”*

103 W: that’s the whole thing about the language. But you didn’t say the other part of how we got some ideas of [how] the language was. We created a registry and in the registry people needed to write an essay, “how do you know you’re Taíno?” Not to prove that they were. No. It is really, really, it’s like a misnomer, “how is it that you are aware that you are Taíno?” is what the question had to be, is what it meant, and then, what happens? People tell stories. “My grandmother used to tell me this, tell me that”, and a little piece



comes out, a little piece, “oh there’s a word we never heard before.” “There’s a little one.” “That’s the biggest one.” That’s the one that told us about the agglutination of the language.

104 Sh: oh, which word was that?

105 J: haiakapashke, Haiakapashke,

106 W: this guy, he signed up. Wrote in his thing and he says “every time that we have a family gathering, you know everybody greets each other with the phrase haiakapashke”, and so, he says, “uh, but we don’t know what it means, you know we lost the meaning” and this guy goes and he starts taking it apart and comes out with a whole phrase, an introductory phrase, like when you travel to another village you introduce yourself using that phrase and within the phrase is enough information, who you are, where you’re from, and who your family was,

107 J: it happened that this family was originally from, uh, ah, *el yucayeque del viejo Urayoán*, ¿conoces el yucayeque del viejo Urayoan?  
(*The yucayeque (chiefdom) of the old Urayoán, do you know the yucayeque of the old Urayoán?*)

108 Sh: that’s amazing that his family was doing this over such a long time

109 W: yeah because when we first started, we were doing the language, he’s always been doing the language even before we first came together, but we soon realized that **a lot of the culture survived within individual families**, and so in order to get that out, we had to create something, so we had to create a registry and a process where people had to write, and also a letter from the eldest person in your family, maybe your grandmother wrote something, a letter, or your mother, or whatever, and out of those came some real jewels,

110 J: "you know what my family used to practice this and that" you know

This anecdote lends insight into how the membership application process may serve to aid language reconstruction. The sharing of such experiences is relished as they extend the scope and use of the Taíno vocabulary and traditional practices as a whole, as well as to show the continuity of these words within particular pockets of indigenous networks. Wakonax describes another instance of such experiences. The following anecdote Wakonax discusses does not arise out of the membership application process, but from Wakonax’s recent window installation, where one of the installers was Taíno.

## Excerpt “Simanca”

- 111 W: I had a guy installing a window, um, and his name was Simanca, Simanca, I said to him "¿de dónde tu eres?" (*where are you from?*) he said "no, cubano" (*no Cuban*) "oh momom." So we talking, talking, talking, talking, yo digo, "ese nombre, es, es *indio*, ¿verdad?" (*That name, is, is Indian, right?*) "oh, sí, sí, es un nombre taíno." (*Oh, yes, yes, it is a Taíno name*) And so so, you know, names are not for nothing. Everything in the, you know, in the indigenous way was, every name had a meaning it meant something. Like the chief Cibanan is you know stone from the center in other words he's the center of the so Simanca, turns out, and I say "oh, what does it mean?" He say "well my father told me or my grandfather blahblahlahblahs. It means ceremony of the seven stones" he said. "What?" I said to him "by the way, what the hell is the ceremony of the seven stones?" So, then uh, they came another day, you know and finished it and uh, he said that it was conflict resolution ceremony and, and everything goes by family, you know, so the Simancas was, became the family name, but they all were the practitioners in the ceremony. And it was that you would put seven stones in a circle when there was conflict between two individuals. We in our belief systems were very strong. So if we said to you "go in the circle and tell your side of the story," you know you can't lie and then you come out and then the next person would tell his side or her side of the story, and come out and then the Simancas, the family, uh decided on who was telling the truth. So it was a ritual, right, nowhere, have we found anything to do, because we haven't found a lot of functions, because they didn't write them down, they sort of like reported on what they saw but the they didn't write down like how it functioned like the *cemis*. They know what they were but they don't know exactly how they functioned. Not all of them so this was where we get that, we get that installing my windows,
- 112 Sh: Simanca was his last name?
- 113 W: Simanca

Here, Wakonax narrates the recovery of a Taíno ceremonial practice through the traces left by a family name and the accompanying oral narrative of the significance of the name. Such linguistic and practice-based findings are valued by the TN. Through the directive body of the group, such family-based practices can be brought together, reconstructing the social life of the Taíno, and making it available to the larger organizational body. Here, historical trajectories are understood to be embedded within

particular lexical items, especially names, and potentially within other linguistic structures. The TN, however, is quite aware that such reconstruction efforts are not unique to them. David explains to me how their efforts are related more broadly to other revival efforts across the world, where the overall success of reconstruction and restoration projects have often been preceded by smaller successes in discrete areas of practices—he mentions prayers for ritual performances, classroom routines, and naming practices among others. Though David indicates that Taíno is currently used in ceremonial practice, he also explains how youth are sometimes using Taíno words in place of other words in everyday talk. Both David and J.B.L. recognize that Taíno might not be used as a full spoken language for a while, but are quick to indicate how, currently, it is used within specific contexts.

***Excerpt, “what it becomes like to revive the language”***

- 192 D: You know what it becomes, like to revive the language. Obviously it's not unique to us. You know indigenous, it's happening all over the world, with people trying to take ethnic pride and stuff like that, but at the beginning, when you're talking about revival, obviously it's a huge thing so it becomes a question people maybe they take baby steps will revive it using ceremonial language
- 193 J: right, right that we do
- 194 D: as for reviving as a full language spoken you know, obviously that's
- 195 S: that's in the future
- 196 D: takes its natural course if it does, you know it depends you know, I'll tell you one thing that within like the younger people that they do now which is part of that human evolution we take, we um coin words and take words and we use them in idioms, that is something that came out of this, so like for the word for turkey, you know, guanajo, so we but use that as an insult, "oye guanajo como estas" you know, "whats up guanajo" like trying to diss a person or we took, lots of younger people, between me Yamil, this other guy and some other people we got this word, that we coined like turey is sky, and so, yeah, but not for us, if you wanna say someone's gay you say he's turey,

Pointing to how Taíney is currently being integrated into his everyday vocabulary, David explains how he and other Taíney youth have coined new uses for a few Taíno words. The words are *guanajo* for “turkey” and *turey* for “gay.” David explains that he and his friends use these words in their everyday talk amongst themselves. Both words, interestingly serve to express potentially controversial terms. Sort of like slang, such words also enable particular kinds of closeness between David and his friends, establishing themselves as persons who mutually understand such words and are able to use them in everyday interactions and expressions. In the case of the Taíno, thinking about lamination might aid in understanding how these Taíno terms become attached to particular interpretations through their repeated use. By lamination, I refer to the accrued instances of the use of particular terms and the histories of use that may be attached to it for speakers (Eisenlohr 2004b; 2006; Silverstein 1993). In this case of language manufacture, it is interesting how it explicitly incorporates from its formation, the specific prejudices (and I mean this in the way that most of us have in the ways we take for granted particular understandings of how the world is organized) that may be held by the manufacturers. J.B.L. compares this to an emerging creole language, where his understanding of creole is to use Taíno vocabulary structured by Spanish grammar.

***Excerpt, “more like a creole”***

208 J: more like a creole sort of, you know, you use Spanish words but you put in the Taíno words also, in place, what you know in Taíno you put in place of the Spanish or the English

Such integration of Taíney vocabulary into either Spanish or English, for David and J.B.L. is a way to begin the integration of Taíney into everyday life contexts.

## *Teaching and implementing Taíney: goals and obstacles*

Interested in what happens with the results of such reconstruction efforts and in which contexts it has been successfully implemented, during the exchange I also asked J.B.L., Wakonax and David about their efforts at teaching and using Taíney. The group's website indicates that the class had been taught in the past, and given the amount of work that J.B.L. and David indicated that they had done to reconstruct Taíney accurately, I wanted to know more about how such work had been taken up by other Taíno people. This question brought up several issues concerning how teaching a language in the process of reconstruction and with few available models of speech affects the process of student uptake.

In response to my question, J.B.L. describes the efforts of reconstruction in terms of needing to focus teaching efforts on children, rather than adults. J.B.L. talks about his interest in commencing an immersion program that would enable him to counteract what he considers to be the pernicious effects of the United States culture and what he considers its colonizing effects on youth. Adults, he explains, have already suffered such effects.

### *Excerpt, “hay un problema”*

51 J: Yo estaba dando clases allí en Manhattan, últimamente no he podido, porque hay un problema, y es un problema que tenemos que lidiar con eso, pero mayormente yo creo que la concentración debe ser con la, **con los niños**, porque los adultos se lo hemos puesto en el boletín, y luego tu le preguntas cual es el significado de Taíno, nada, tu sabes somos, lamentablemente, somos un pueblo

J: I was giving classes there in Manhattan, ultimately I haven't been able to, because there is a problem, and it is a problem that we have to deal with it, but mostly I think that the focus should be with the, **with the kids**, because the adults we have put it in the bulletin, and after you ask them what is the meaning of Taíno, nothing, you know lamentably we are a

colonizado y eso implica muchas cosas, estamos absorbido por el individualismo pernicioso de esta cultura, eh, la dejadez de no darle mucha importancia a las cosas y luego de exigir sin saber lo duro que es llegar a eso, pues entonces yo he tomado una pausa para ver si arreglamos esto del libro que yo estoy que ya lo el, el hicimos el copyright y todo, entonces a ver si salimos de eso y entramos de lleno a un programa de inmersión

colonized people and that implies many things, we are absorbed by the pernicious individualism of the culture, eh, the neglect of not giving things a lot of importance and then to demand without knowing how difficult it is to get to that, well then I have taken pause to see if we fix this of the book that I am, that he already, he we made copyright and everything, then to see if finish it and fully enter an immersion program.

Wakonax, however, focuses on other difficulties that came about in the teaching project in Manhattan. Instead of faulting the adults for the program's lack of success, Wakonax relocates the focus to the rapid pace of the changes in Taíney as the language was being taught *while* it was still being reconstructed. He narrates how interest in learning Taíno while it was still being reconstructed affected how the language became taught as well as its reception among the communities. He describes how what was learned stood in tension with each new finding and development in Taíney.

*Excerpt, "One of the problems"*

- 52 W: One of the problems of this has been that, um, a lot of the real heavy work that that these two guys did in terms of **the grammar** happened in the last 5 or 6 years so that you would it didn't make sense people wanted it anyway, and we kept saying "you know wait" they didn't wanna wait. They learned. So there all these songs that we know that we had to change the words, because the grammar didn't fit and there's phrases and stuff that people were learning that you know then you had to say excuse me but you have to change that and to teach an adult is one thing, to **unteach him**
- 53 J: is another one

As Wakonax and J.B.L. discuss, the difficulty lay in having to “unteach” changing rules and patterns as they “discovered” more about the language. The idea of *unteaching* here is a particularly productive one in terms of understanding the relative lack of success in teaching Taíney to adults. Each new development in Taíney was accompanied by having to unteach adults who had already learned specific linguistic forms. Given that the reconstruction of Taíney is as much a process of language manufacture as it is a rescuing of current Taíno language forms, the justification of such continued changes may have been difficult for language learners to accept or deal with. While Wakonax begins the narration as someone making a third-person observation of the class dynamics, towards turn 54, he reveals his own frustrations with the course:

*Excerpt, “is an impossibility”*

54 W: is an impossibility, there are songs that are changed now that other people sing that I refuse to sing changed because to me it's the meaning of the song. But the words have changed so I sing songs and people go [makes facial expression] "we don't do it like that" now I say "I don't care" [laughter] because I, I am communicating something. So, but but that's one of the things a big problem and people want to speak right away right away and but, but the language was in process of evolving, and the grammar and they didn't understand “you're gonna learn this today and maybe next year or next week you're gonna have to undo that and change this one, this pronoun”

Wakonax clarifies his own particular difficulties with the changes in Taíno.

Focusing instead on the more pragmatic function of communication, Wakonax clarifies that he is not so invested in keeping up to date with the changes, precisely because he is communicating something. Here, Wakonax essentially puts into question J.B.L.'s expectations considering the goals of reconstruction and restoration in terms of linguistic production. Whereas J.B.L. evaluates linguistic production from the standpoint of its

match with his ideal of an accurate and precise form of Taíney, Wakonax evaluates it in terms of what people can reasonably attain in practice and how what is attained can aid their communications. To illustrate such difficulties, Wakonax discusses some of the limitations of trying to use Taíno currently to communicate concepts that he can communicate in English.

*Excerpt, “we don’t have the word yet for welcome”*

62 W: the way that you know the way that I get to say something like uh I was I marched in the Yonkers, Puerto Rican day parade yesterday, and so I was rehearsing in my head what am I gonna say to them you know? well I said like welcome, uh, I don’t think we have the word yet for welcome, so I can’t say that [laughter Sant], so I can just say, uh, I can say “ketaurie” but that’s like long live, “Ketaurie boriken!”[laughter] I can’t say that so, I say “ok” I say “ahhhhhh, daka Wakonax? daka Taíno” and I had this whole thing rehearsed on the way up, but **it’s sort of like around it**, like we can’t say “look there’s the sun in the sky”, we can say “look”, we can say “sky”, “sun”, but we can’t say where it is, we don’t have that syntax, that’s it we have that now pretty much

63 J: right

64 W: That’s the last thing that got developed

Wakonax’s anecdote reveals some of the complications of learning Taíney. Since his goals for learning Taíney are to successfully express himself, and his sense of self expression is bound by what he is able to say in English or Spanish, Wakonax evaluates his attainment by how well he is able to verbalize in Taíney the content that he can readily articulate in Spanish and/or English.

In terms of areas of practice in which Taíney has been implemented, Wakonax tries to give an example of the ceremonial use of Taíno, but issues concerning the most correct and accurate Taíno usages arise instead. This interaction between Wakonax and J.B.L. reveals some of the difficulties and frustrations that learners such as Wakonax



might feel when their Taíno performances become evaluated for not matching up with expectations concerning language accuracy.

*Excerpt, “version propia del idioma”*

- 230 W: when uhhh, first, what the first prayer was, um, chief, Cibanaacán who’s a chief, um, he um, wrote out the words to the equivalent of the “Our Father”, uhh, but it’s got more words about sea and water land and uh batatas, used casabe
- 231 J: it’s one of the, the padre nuestro que es que se ideó este el Doctor Cayetano Coll y Toste, ok, and incluso todavía muchos grupos lo usan, pero yo estoy trabajando en una **versión propia del idioma**,
- 232 W: but we started changing it already, and we replace **baba** as father, so now and for instance would be proper word for father
- 233 J: **itini**
- 234 S: **iTini**
- 235 W: so I would say, este em, **guakia**, our, **itini**, father,
- 236 J: **waka, waka itin,**
- 237 W: **waka itin**
- 238 S: **waka itin**, para
- 239 W: together, **guaka itini, turey toca, guami, keni**, land and
- 240 S: **you are using the old version still**
- 241 W: **keni, Guami caraya guey**, sun and moon
- 242 S: I would rather than say **keni**, I would say, right, **guama**, que es señor (*that is sir*), right? **amona**, que es la tierra (*that is earth*), **oya** de tierra, y agua (*of earth and water*), **kuniabo, ke-uniabo** es (*is*) **ke** es y (*is and*), **uniabo** es agua (*is water*)
- 243W: from Finch?
- 244D: yeah

In turn 230, Wakonax commences to talk about the use of Taíney in ceremonial contexts by focusing on a prayer known and circulated by various Taíno groups.

Immediately, however, J.B.L. brings attention to the fact that the prayer Wakonax is referring to is not a “version proper to the language.” Wakonax follows such redirection and talks about the rapid pace of change, where the word for father in the prayer has already changed. In turn 233, J.B.L. corrects Wakonax, telling him that the word is not

*baba*, rather it is *itini*. During turn 235, Wakonax corrects his use of *baba* to *itini*, but uses the word *guakia* for our. Again, J.B.L. corrects the use of *guakia* to *waka*.

Wakonax makes the correction again, and goes on to share more of the prayer. J.B.L. responds “you are using the old version still,” going on to explain what he considers to be the correct vocabulary to use. Wakonax, ultimately redirects the conversation by looking at David and asking him for the source of such changes in order to discontinue the patterning of this conversation with J.B.L..

Ultimately, Wakonax recognizes the explanatory power of this exchange and explicitly states how this is related to the difficulties of teaching Taíney. However, J.B.L. and Wakonax disagree in their analyses of these difficulties. J.B.L. frames the problem as one of people being “stuck to the old stuff,” whereas Wakonax considers it to be a problem of change happening after people have learned it one way already. Such arguments point to larger concerns regarding the teaching of Taíno, its continuing reconstruction, and whose responsibility it is to mediate these two, sometimes conflicting, practices.

For the TN, teaching in the midst of the reconstruction process was a challenge. First, Wakonax’s frustration indicates that it is hard to learn a manufactured language that has a constantly changing vocabulary and grammar. Second, he indicated that there were mismatches between what was getting taught and students’ expectations of what they would learn. Third, there were few people trained to teach Taíney who knew it sufficiently. Fourth, the lack of any speakers and the lack of finalization of the reconstruction made it difficult to find contexts to speak the language, outside of highly formalized ceremonial contexts. As such, the rapid pace of change in what counted as

correct Taíno, affected the teaching and implementation of Taíney in use—limiting the success of such efforts so far. Wakonax was especially vocal in expressing concern and frustration about his own Taíney learning experiences.

*Excerpt, “yes papa”*

- 245 W: you see now what I was talking about, about why it wasn't a good idea to teach the language
- 246 J: right, because they're stuck to the **old stuff** that we were grappling with
- 247 W: it's not that we were stuck to **the old stuff it's that it changed** so I still know it in the old way and so does everybody else and people have picked it up from the book and so a lot of other groups, also use
- 248 J: use it that way =
- 249 W: yeah, use it that way, I mean I'll change it, but it's gonna take time before it you know it comes out, so then it's like **guami caraya, busika guakia, um, ifta tau ti bo matum,**
- 250 J: and you see they're **still use the guakia which is not really Taíno**, which is Loko, see,
- 251 W: if its Loko, it's you know it's uh
- 252 J: it's within the family but
- 253 W: it's a grandfather language you know
- 254 J: but uh, you see what what people don't understand is that Coll y Toste for lack of having information he used those words, and he used, including, Carib words that **don't belong there**
- 255 W: **yes papa**

In turn 245, Wakonax explicitly states that the previous interaction exemplifies some of the difficulties of teaching Taíney. For J.B.L., this is a matter of people sticking to the “old stuff” whereas Wakonax focuses on the rapid pace of change. In turn 249, Wakonax states that given the rapid pace of change in what counts as Taíno, he will stick with what he knows until he learns the new vocabulary. In turn 250, J.B.L. still corrects him. J.B.L.'s focus on correctness finally results in Wakonax's defense of his choices. J.B.L.'s insistence that such words “don't belong there” prompts Wakonax to respond “yes papa.” Since they are not related, Wakonax's response to J.B.L. reveals further

frustrations with the process while acknowledging that J.B.L., as an elder, is senior to him. J.B.L.'s goal of accuracy and precision with respect to how he imagines Taíney having been spoken thwarts Wakonax's attempts to communicate his point to me, and as he explains hinders communication more generally. While Wakonax is trying to explain a point about ceremonial language to me, J.B.L. focuses on the problem of Coll y Toste's (1979 [1897]) version of the "Our Father" in Taíno and its uptake by Taíno organizations in Puerto Rico. J.B.L.'s status as an elder and leader in the reconstruction project also stands in the way of Wakonax directly responding to or confronting J.B.L. with respect to this issue. David, in many ways a buffer between Wakonax's and J.B.L.'s stances towards Taíney in such moments, redirects the conversation towards other groups on the Island that use "old stuff."

*Excerpt, "In Puerto Rico they use those words"*

256 D: en (*in*) Puerto Rico they use those words

257 J: **guey**, que **guey** es sol en realidad **guey gueyu** en el caribe significa sol, en el Taíno no es **gueyo** es el nombre de un pueblo que tenemos en la Isla **Camuy**, y en en el caso de una oración se dice **camuya**, eso es sol, **caraya** luna, que es lo que aparece, having appearance, eh  
*guey, that guey is sun in reality guey gueyu in the Caribbean means sun, in Taíno it is not gueyo it is the name of a town we have in the Island Camuy, and in the case of a sentence one says camuya, that is the sun, caraya moon, which is what appears, having appearance, eh*

258 D: you know what happens, como en Puerto Rico [like in Puerto Rico], they use a lot of those old words, from the, whats that guy again that guy that did the

259 W: Coll y Toste

260 D: Coll y Toste and stuff like that, and they use, they borrow heavily from Eyeri and and Carib, and you know not everybody is into linguistics and not everybody understands the nuances behind it, and so I know, because a lot of groups in Puerto Rico they still use the **old words**, and one of the people from **over here was over there**, Yamil, and he's like "oh we say it like this, you know" and they say "well you know **we started learning like this we are just gonna keep it like that,**" so it's really, to them it's not as important linguistically the whole academic answer so they say "we started learning it this way (claps)"

261 J: basically because they have no understanding of, you know, structure of language

In turn 256, David acknowledges that in Puerto Rico, other Taíno groups use the “old stuff.” J.B.L. moves to correct the use of a word commonly used among Taíno in the Island to designate the sun--“guey.” He notes that the correct word to be used should be “camuya.” David explains, in turn, that people are not willing to change what they have already learned, as they are not invested in academic precision. J.B.L. attributes this to a lack of understanding of the structure of the language.

In the following transcript, David gives an example of a group in Puerto Rico that wants to keep the words they know already, precisely because they have already learned them. There is little investment as to whether the prayer is accurate or precise to the way that Taíney was spoken in that past. J.B.L. has a more normative stance towards Taíney. For him, the correct forms of the language are the forms that are consistent with his research on the language structure as a whole. As such, J.B.L. wants to interpret this as a lack of understanding of the structure of the language, whereas Wakonax disrupts such thinking, by again, bringing up that what matters is the communicative aspect of speech. Wakonax redirects the conversation from one about Taíney linguistic structures to one about the spiritual aspect of Taíney—an area where the interaction reveals Wakonax as more authoritative. He argues:

*Excerpt, “words to God mean nothing”*

262 W: Well::::, you gotta have a little leeway with that, because it it’s, **words to god mean nothing, creator, words don’t mean nothing**

263 J: no, I understand that,

264 W: it’s your soul, your heart your spirituality, so if those are the words that you were taught that link you in to that spirituality, then, that's all you're interested

in, you know, **I don't want to know if its linguistically correct, I just want to know that I get there by using these words**, so when you think about other people you have to begin to put out the new words put it out with the description and what it really means, and you know people may pick it up,

265 J: right

266 W: you know, people, I even I:: that's the one I say and when you told me "**no es, no es baba, es itini**" "**itini es?**" as you give it to me I put it in, now **you see you've progressed already and you haven't told me**

267 All {laughter}

268 W: **you see you've progressed but you haven't said anything**

269 D: another, another kind of trend, well not a trend because it really hasn't happened, but, is, uh, obviously it's very frustrating when, it's a it's a huge endeavor,

270 W: Yeah it's huge

In turn 262, Wakonax states that “words to god mean nothing,” effectively halting J.B.L.’s corrections of him. Instead Wakonax proposes that such words “link you in to that spirituality.” Through an explanation of how such words serve to direct spirituality, Wakonax explains to J.B.L. how new words in Taíney would have to be presented for them to be taken up by other Taíno people. He continues on to explain to J.B.L. that he can't expect people to know the new changes to the language if they aren't communicated to him. He repeats this twice, in line 266 and 268, “you see you've progressed” and had not informed him of these changes. David intercepts here and buffers this allegation by explaining that it is a huge endeavor.

Again, Wakonax redirects the discussion away from the more formal aspects of language reconstruction and towards some of the communicative value that such “old ways” of speaking might have for people's spirituality. He also redirects the critique away from people's lack of understanding to the rapid pace of change in what J.B.L. considers the correct way of speaking Taíno, as well as the lack of communication of such changes as the project progresses. David again buffers such critiques by

generalizing how frustrations with the language may lead some people to want to just use Eyeri for Taíno communication instead of attempting to reconstruct Taíno as it was once spoken. In the following excerpt, J.B.L. recognizes the frustration and explains that the solution is to teach youth the language through immersion. Such a response helps further clarify why youth language immersion might be understood as a solution for teaching Taíney according to J.B.L..

*Excerpt, “let’s just use that”*

- 271 D: So, you know you get some people that say, "you know what well let’s just use, um, eyeri", you know spoken in Dominica, in Saint Vincent, you know because they have huge dictionaries, and stuff like that "let’s just use that" its related you know, others say "let’s use Garifuna" it’s still spoken "we gotta hook up with them you know and make it a lingua franca or something like that" and it come [from a] sort of frustration you know, cause I’ve done that too, you know that’s uh ["come on let’s just use the eyeri"]
- 272 J: [That what people wanna do or something
- 273 D: you know, so that's another, [element
- 274 W: [that's that's] that's what that's what, I mean what you're doing that's what makes it **really legitimate, legit**-you're in no hurry to put it out, you know, were all, we wanna use the language yea {gruffy voice} you know, well but you want it to be that nobody can look back and say oh, you know "that's bullshit" **you can’t say that’s bullshit about his work**, I mean you
- 275 J: he was uh, **he used to get frustrated sometimes**, but I, uh, you know I brought him down, I says this is the important thing, you know, and practically right now, unfortunately, that’s all the nation counts on, us two, linguistically. Because we, we have knowledge of that, well we’ll have to get people that, who are interested and especially young people that can got into that may have an interest in language persé and go into a linguistic uh, studies

In turn 271, David expresses his own and others’ frustration with the reconstruction process by explaining that sometimes he felt that drawing from Eyeri or Garifuna would have been easier than reconstructing Taíney. Wakonax, in a moment of repair with J.B.L., expresses his appreciation of J.B.L.’s and Ricky’s efforts by stating that what they are doing is what makes their work legitimate. J.B.L. reveals his

understanding that Wakonax has been at times frustrated with the process, and that he has expressed to Wakonax that the project is both important and short-staffed.

This conversation provides insight into some of the difficulties that the TN have run into throughout the language reconstruction process. Several significant obstacles complicate the successful completion and implementation of their linguistic efforts. These obstacles can be understood as challenges of reconstruction and challenges of implementation. In terms of reconstruction, there are difficulties in terms of making choices about what resources to draw from in reconstructing the language, attending to the various linguistic levels that are used in a spoken language—that is, choices about vocabulary, grammar, meaning and practice. Added to these choices are questions about how to teach and implement Taíney. This requires making decisions about what and how to teach, about the context-specific applicability of what is learned in such courses, about how to deal with how the limits of the reconstruction process affects the use of Taíney in varied contexts, and ultimately, a consideration of what contexts, for now, are best suited for implementing Taíney.

### *Conclusion*

Related to the emergence and non-standardization of contemporary indigeneity in Puerto Rico, these diverse linguistic practices are also tied to larger debates among groups. Questions of which linguistic practices are the most legitimate and which should be taken up by the other indigenous organizations are the subject of much heated debate. These distinct ideological positions towards language, and the associated differences in historical alignments and future orientations and goals, pose an obstacle to the consolidation of Taíno language and social practices more generally. The lack of



consolidation has been proposed by groups such as the U.S.-based UCTP as an obstacle to the consolidation and the political mobilization of the movement—important for both cultural and indigenous rights purposes.

Since, in general, there are limited texts from which the Taíno can draw from to reconstruct the language as it once was imagined to have been spoken, the choice of linguistic resources that are drawn from (Taíno, Arawakan languages, Mayan languages, Spanish, or English among others) by different and competing Taíno groups to reconstruct a spoken and written Taíno language with its grammar, lexicon and discursive styles is indexically related to other underlying ideologies regarding not only the Taíno people, but also indigeneity in both the Caribbean and in the Americas. In this way the linguistic choices and maneuvers made by various Taíno groups become culturally meaningful and recursively constitutive of difference, membership, and social life.

The MIJB and the TN's approach to language manufacture and implementation differ in significant ways. In addition in presuming different genealogies in their language projects and being based in different locations, the persons involved have distinct relationships to the project. Though Oki was active in researching and acquiring evidence for his Mayan proposal, he did not lead any courses. Instead, current MIJB activists scan through his manuscripts for words and word meanings. In fact, Tito's attempts to learn Yucatec Mayan are an attempt to continue and keep Oki's project dynamic. Although members of MOVIJIBO recently taught a class at UPR-Utuado based on Oki's work, I have no indication that there are any new developments in developing the Jíbaro-Boricua language. The work of the TN, on the other hand, has been quite dynamic in the last decades. Their project of language manufacture involves at

least three members, and they have attempted to teach Taíney regularly to TN members. Attempts at teaching Taíney, however, have been frustrated by what are understood by members like Wakonax to be the constant changes in what counts as correct Taíney.

The boundaries emerging around practices of talking Taíno or Jíbaro-Boricua construct Taíno social life and culture in particular ways, affecting internal alignments among members and external alignments with other Taíno and Native American groups. For example, MIJB's insistence on the Mayan origin of the Taíno language presupposes a distinct historical trajectory from the TN conceptualization of Taíney as an Arawakan language. This, in turn affects who the MIJB and TN are interested in visiting and learning from in Latin America, and what coalitions are sought. In the case of the TN, exchanges with members of Arawakan indigenous groups are promoted; whereas the MIJB interacts rather sparsely with Taíno groups that take for granted an Arawakan genealogy, and is uninterested, except as regards proving this thesis to be wrong, in any Arawakan texts or in any exchanges with Arawakan indigenous people. While these two groups have significant differences, they also converge in some aspects of their understanding of indigenous ancestry and diverge in their interpretation of others. Given this context, I consider the effects of such convergences and divergences in practices and interpretations of language and language reconstruction. My aim is to show how disputes about language among Taíno groups are undergirded by issues of authority on historical alignments.

Given the limited formal training in linguistics possessed by most persons involved in the Taíno reconstruction process, such boundaries are further compounded by particular unquestioned principles of how language works. Though work in linguistic

anthropology has shown how historical trajectories are (to some extent) embedded in language forms and practices, among the Taíno the differences in word meaning that emerge within each genealogy are projected into the mythologies, rituals and histories favored and they also aid in the further demarcation of difference between such groups. These, then become the mythologies, rituals and histories made in and through language, as a vehicle of cultural transmission and instrument of social action. Here, language is not just an investment in the future cohesion of the Taíno people; it is also a form of recovery and representation. That is, at stake in each reconstruction is not just the future of the Taíno people with respect to a language, but about proving that they are, will be, and have been, here.

## CHAPTER 7:

### SURVEILLING ACTIONS, DELIMITING INTERACTIONS: GOVERNMENTAL INSTITUTIONS, TAÍNO/BORICUA ACTIVISM AND INDIGENOUS HERITAGE SITES IN PUERTO RICO

#### *Introduction*

Bearing in mind all the dimensions through which Taíno activists have sought to reposition the histories that erase them (within discursive and interactional realignments, through recruitment encounters, in the socialization of novices, in the course of creating a Taíno script, and throughout the manufacture of Taíno speech forms), this chapter turns to consider how the reclamation of a Taíno identity materializes through bureaucratic encounters. I focus on the events surrounding a campaign to protect the recently unearthed Jacanas burial and ceremonial grounds in Ponce, Puerto Rico. This event occurred during a weekend mid-April 2008. The General Council of Taíno (GCT) called the event the “Sacred Reclamation and Great Cleaning of Jacanas” which they described as follows:

The main goal of this activity, as established by the Council for all ancestral sites, is to conserve, protect and defend Jácanas as well as the general integrity of its surroundings. This includes the forest, the river, and everything that makes up the totality of this ancestral center associated with Tibes (another center), which is custodian of important aspects of our origin, prehistory and spirituality, as well as ceremonial objects, human funerary remains, relevant vestiges of our ancestor’s lives, which should be preserved for future generations, for Jacaná and Boriken.

This event, though envisioned to include different cultural, environmental, conservational and community organizations ran into a number of difficulties, including struggles with governmental bureaucratic officials. The analysis of these struggles reveals that the

expectation of surveillance and the act of monitoring were significant in affecting the organization and the outcomes of interactions. Here, surveillance indicates a heightened and directed monitoring of specific social actors with an aim of obtaining information and/or delimiting acceptable actions, often couched in hierarchies of authority and power (Giddens 1977; see also Foucault 1975; Goffman 1962). In my analysis, I take into account the complicated relationship among the United States government, the Puerto Rican government and the Taíno by focusing on the interplay among United States federal agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), local Puerto Rican governmental organizations such as the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (DRNA), State Office of Historic Preservation (OECH) and the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture (ICP), and Taíno groups such as the General Council of Taíno/Boricuas (GCT).

I focus particularly on how the GCT's interactions with state-authorized patrols are permeated by an expectation of surveillance. Such assumptions resulted in an environment of mutual suspicion and distrust. This materializes in the exchanges in terms of how the leaders of GCT prepare and strategize for an impending discussion with state-patrols, how they delimit potential ways of acting while the patrols are present, and how the GCT designates who will speak, based upon understandings of who would be best prepared to respond to and manage information. Such assumptions, in part, stem from the GCT activists' reading of the patrols in their roles as representatives of a governmental agency (the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources—DRNA for its Spanish initials) which is understood as being partly responsible for the neglect of the Jacanas ceremonial grounds. Along with being government representatives, the

DRNA guards make such assumptions difficult by presenting themselves as regular, everyday citizens who sympathize with the Taíno. In that light, I look at the complex ways in which the frame of surveillance and the ensuing forms of self-suppression that result are helpful in analyzing the organization and assessment of interactions between Taíno Boricua social activists and the DRNA guards.

Surveilling and monitoring factor, to some extent, in many interactions, especially exchanges where social actors step outside of that which is conventionally expected. The tensions brought about by the mutual surveillance and self-suppression of the Taíno activists and the guards are amplified by the institutionally non-sanctioned identification of the activists as Taínos. The analytic frame of surveillance is helpful in explaining the role played by the expectation of monitoring in organizing particular participation frameworks, that is who participates and the attitudes that may underlie their participation. This analysis allows us to explore how the strategic interactional alignments that emerged in the conversations between members of the GCT and the governmental representatives became achievable through the use of strategic shifters (see Urciuoli 2003), as well as other interactional cues. Though these alignments are operative throughout the interaction, they are not maintained outside of it.

### *Expectations of surveillance*

Taíno activists' expectations of surveillance, and the interactional framings that accompany them, have been historically constituted. A few of the GCT elders claimed to have experienced federal surveillance due to their involvement in Puerto Rico's pro-independence movement in the seventies. In Puerto Rico between the thirties and nineties, the U.S. and Puerto Rican governments systematically surveilled persons

suspected of pro-independence activities.<sup>68</sup> Such surveillance took the form of the monitoring of meetings, organizations or events with any rumored pro-independence leanings. It also included the use of undercover local police to covertly watch and keep track of persons thought to be affiliated with any pro-independence activities (Ayala 2000; Bosque Pérez and Colón Morera 1997; Martínez Valentín 2003; Poitevin 2000). The information was compiled into files called *carpetas* or *listas de subversivos* (files or lists of subversives) which often outlined even the daily activities of these individuals and organizations. The *carpetas* were compiled by Puerto Rican state authorities, but the information contained within them was managed by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In 2000 the *carpetas* were publicly released and many persons became aware for the first time that they had been surveilled by the local and federal governments. Places such as the Center for Puerto Rican Studies at Hunter College, CUNY are active in making these materials public and available for both researchers and those affected.<sup>69</sup>

A number of the Taíno people I interviewed reported that they had *carpetas*. Many, though by no means all, had been active in pro-independence activities and remembered the particular ways in which government surveillance took place. On many occasions during the time I conducted my fieldwork, people told me to avoid giving any specific information over the phone, for fears that their phones were tapped. At other times, persons from one Taíno group specified that they were concerned about people from other Taíno groups infiltrating their group, so in order to properly protect themselves, they video recorded all official meetings and required all members present at

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<sup>68</sup> Such political surveillance has its roots in the Cold War, McCarthy era blacklisting, and took place under the FBI's Counter Intelligence Program (COINTELPRO) which, under the directives of J. Edgar Hoover, conducted investigations of and attempted to disrupt what were deemed potentially politically subversive groups between 1956-1971 including many civil rights movements, the women's rights movement, communist and socialist organizations, as well as groups protesting the Vietnam War.

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.pr-secretfiles.net/>

meetings to sign their names in the record book. It was made clear at these meetings that the video was being taken not only as a sort of visual minutes of the meeting, but, also as a preventive measure that could prove visually the presence of a potential spy. This precautionary surveillance exercised by the GCT was undertaken after rumors started circulating that members of another Taíno group who were often paid for their Taíno dance performances by governmental agencies had covert members spying on other groups. Thus, at the time in which the events I analyze took place, there was a general environment of lessened trust and increased monitoring.

In the spring of 2008, I spent time with the GCT which was organizing a protest against both the federal U.S. government's and local Puerto Rican government's actions concerning a recently unearthed Taíno ceremonial center and burial ground in Ponce, P.R.. Specifically, the group requested that the federal governmental agents be held accountable for their treatment of an important Taíno spiritual center and the human remains it contained.

Since my project overlapped with their interest in taking a stand against the government on these issues, my arrival was understood as bringing another pair of hands, capable of drafting and delivering computer documents to the government and of the documentation of their efforts and struggles with the government and government agents.

The GCT had organized a similar protest in 2005 with regards to the management of the Caguana Ceremonial Site in Utuado, P.R. (it was actually through the media coverage of that protest in 2005 that I became aware of Taíno activism in the Island). The Caguana protest was held in order to bring attention to the mismanagement of the Ceremonial Center, to criticize the charging of an entry fee to the site—especially for the



Taíno who wanted to access the site for ceremonial purposes, and to condemn calling the grounds a ceremonial park. They argued that to call Caguana a park was to belittle the ceremonial value and historical importance of the grounds. They believed that by calling the grounds a park, the government effectively privileged it as a place of recreational and educational value rather than a spiritual center. This protest brought public attention to the Taíno as a contemporary Puerto Rican movement with a stated goal to protect ceremonial grounds and pre-Columbian remains throughout the Island. The Taíno critique was aimed at the governmental custodian of the site—the Puerto Rican Institute of Culture (ICP). They argued that the ICP, and the archaeologists that informed their policies, were ill-informed and, thus, ill-equipped to respectfully manage the grounds. Though the ICP had taken legal actions against the leaders of the GCT for trespassing the Caguana grounds during their protest, the GCT was successful insofar as they received extensive coverage in the media, which in turn brought awareness to current Taíno causes.

### *The archaeological findings*

On October 19, 2007 the headline of the popular newspaper *El Vocero* was “They discover Taíno village.” The event was given a great amount of coverage by the major news outlets, all of which immediately focused on the tensions between local and federal archaeologists. The archaeological site was managed by the New South Associates, a private archaeological contract company that was hired by the U.S. Army Engineering Corps. They were hired to conduct an archaeological survey of the site before constructing a dam meant to avoid flooding in the Jacanas sector of Ponce. While conducting the archaeological survey—in accordance with Puerto Rico’s Law 112 of

1988 (Asamblea Legislativa De Puerto Rico) for protecting land patrimony—the New South Associates found what may have been the largest Taíno ceremonial center in the Caribbean (Medina-Carrillo 2007).<sup>70</sup> In addition to obligating contract archaeologists to inform the Institute of Culture of Puerto Rico (ICP) of any archaeological findings and sites, Law 112 stipulates that all archaeological artifacts found in Puerto Rico belong to the Puerto Rican people, to be held in custody by governmental agencies, such as the ICP.

This is not what happened. Instead, the New South Associates continued their dig without including local archaeologists or contacting the Land Archaeology Council of the ICP. Archaeologists, such as Norma Medina Carrillo, were outspoken in noting that these digs were not conducted according to protocol—e.g. excavator trucks were used to remove the dirt from above the ceremonial grounds. Furthermore, local archaeologists claimed that damage was done to the rocks that compose the ceremonial court (Medina Carrillo 2007). Moreover, some of the artifacts were sent to the New South’s offices for analysis without consulting the ICP, which was in direct violation of local laws; their offices were in Atlanta, GA. Most notably, among the things sent to Atlanta were 66 human skeletal remains via FedEx —argued to have been removed without consulting

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<sup>70</sup> Relevant sections of Law 112: Ground Archaeological Heritage Protection Act, Law 112 of July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1988 [...]

SECTION 5 - Within ninety (90) days from the date this law becomes valid, all natural or legal persons and all Government agencies and instrumentalities, including its public corporations and municipalities, are obligated to effectively notify the Council by letter, of all material, structures or sites that are under their ownership, possession or custody, which may be of Puerto Rican archeological interest according to the provisions of SECTION 1 of this Act. It is also required to notify the Council within thirty (30) days from the date in which the discovery of any goods of archaeological interest located near the surface that are prone to being declared of public utility, as stated in SECTION 1 of this Act. [...]

SECTION 9 - As of the enactment of this law, no natural or legal person, government agency, public corporation or municipality may sell or exchange, transfer, alter, take possession, transfer, or take out of the territory of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico any property or object that constitutes part of the Puerto Rican archeological land heritage, according to the provisions of SECTION 1 of this Act, without sending notice to the Council and having obtained their permission to carry out the corresponding procedures. [...]

forensic anthropologists or local authorities. This caused an outrage among local archaeologists—most of them affiliated with the University of Puerto Rico (UPR)—and the ICP. Though both the UPR and the ICP are government-funded and affiliated institutions, they tend to be more autonomous in their politics than other bureaucratic branches. As the investigation continued, it became clear that two other government offices, the DRNA and the OECH (which are both represented in the Governor’s Office), had colluded in allowing the New South Associates to obviate the stipulations of Law 112, bypassing the ICP’s jurisdiction on this matter.

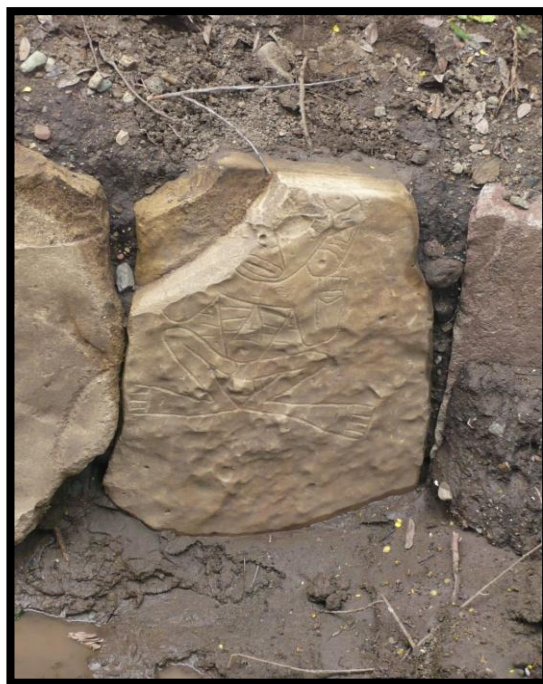


Figure 7.1 Jácanas archaeological site: Broken petroglyph



Figure 7.2 One of the human remains that would have been sent via FedEx to Atlanta. (Both photos provided by GCT)

The planning of the federal dam project began in 1978 (Solórzano García 2007). After a two-decade hiatus, the project was restarted in the 2000s as a national security measure on the behalf of the Corps of Engineers, considering the experiences of Hurricane Katrina and flood-prone areas. The project was conducted with the avail of two local agencies: the State Office of Historic Preservation which is affiliated with the Governor's offices (*'Oficina Estatal de Conservación Histórica'*-OECH) and the Department of Natural and Environmental Resources whose Secretary is a member of Governor's Constitutional Cabinet (*'Departamento de Recursos Naturales y Ambientales'*-DRNA ). When the agencies were confronted about their management of the project, they argued that as a federal project the local Law 112 had no jurisdiction, instead the legal jurisdiction was under the "National Historical Preservation Act" (NHPA) of 1966. Then, a local archaeologist, Norma Medina Carillo, argued that the

NHPA includes a stipulation for the inclusion of local authorities in the management of “historical properties”:

### 36-CFR PART 800—PROTECTION OF HISTORIC PROPERTIES

#### Subpart A-Purposes and Participants

(3) *Representatives of local governments*: A representative of a local government with jurisdiction over the area in which the effects of and undertaking may occur is entitled to participate as a consulting party. Under the provisions of the Federal law, the local government may be authorized to act as the agency official for purposes of section 106. (in Medina-Carillo 2007)

She argued that what was most alarming about this part of the NHPA, was that “...those who exclude Law 112 of the process under Law 106 of the Advisory Council, are not the functionaries of the federal institutions proper, but the third rank functionaries of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico in their “whimsical” interpretation of Law 106.”<sup>71</sup> In response to this sarcastic accusation, the local functionaries argued that since the project was formulated before the creation and implementation of Law 112, they were not bound by it. Local archaeologists (both affiliated and not affiliated with the ICP) replied that since the present phase of the project occurred *after* the implementation of Law 112, they were in fact bound by it.

As these events unfolded, mostly between October of 2007 and February of 2008, people in Puerto Rico—not just archaeologists and local cultural agencies such as the ICP—became alarmed at both the federal dismissal of local laws and regulations as well as at the ways in which local heritage could be so mistreated and mismanaged. The close attention given by the local newspapers to these events made it the topic of conversation in many of my interviews both with Taíno and non-Taíno persons. A Taíno

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<sup>71</sup> Translated from: “...quienes excluyen a la Ley 112 del proceso bajo Ley 106 del Advisory Council, no son las instituciones federales no los funcionarios federales locales propiamente, sino funcionarios de tercer rango del Estado Libre Asociado de Puerto Rico en su interpretación “a capricho” de la Ley 106.”

concern was that the voice of the Taíno activists had been dismissed from this debate, perhaps because their rights to speak on behalf of the remains were not institutionally-sanctioned. Drawing from their understandings of NAGPRA and human rights concerns, they were somewhat shocked that the question of the removal of human remains had not been more central to the argument between federal and state agencies. Concerns about looting made it such that not even local archaeologists had been given permits to observe the site, much less would the Taíno as non-recognized by governmental institutions, be given access to the site.

With growing concerns over the disturbance of the spiritual balance of the area and the disruption of their ancestors' burial sites, Taíno groups occupied the areas surrounding the site and held a series of ceremonies, protests and interviews with the families still remaining in the area. Though the three main groups participating in raising awareness of the spiritual dimension of the Jácanas site disagreed on how to repair or ameliorate the situation, they initially united to protect the site. One of these events occurred in December of 2007. Setting up a camp on the remains of what used to be a family home, they brought awareness of their claims as indigenous peoples to those working around the archaeological site.



Figure 7.3 GCT Council Meeting with Jácanas Community.  
(Photo by Connie Laboy, accessed from UCTP Online Newsletter,  
December 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007)

Given that Jácanas community members had been severely affected by the events, first being obligated by the government to sell their homes to the government for the dam project, and later suffering the effects of people thinking that they had already departed their homes—taking their plumbing, for example—many joined the Taíno protests. The homemade signs below resulted from the local population’s frustration with the theft of their plumbing. Both signs are handwritten; the one on the right includes a date so as to inform the potential thief of the recent nature of the sign, as well as a reminder that there were families that still lived in the communities. Given the unoccupied state of the houses, where windows, cabinets, sinks and even toilet bowls had allegedly been

removed by members of nearby communities, the need for such signs was understandable.



“Por favor no te lleve tubería de Pb si queda serbicio”

*“Please do not take the Pb tubing there is service”*

7/25/07

“Este sistema esta en funcion por favor no toque nada de esta caja afectaría a las familias que quedemos en esta comunidad. No haga a los demás lo que no le gustaría que le isieren a uste. Gracias.”

*“7/25/07 This system is in function please do not touch anything of this box you would affect the families that remain in this community. Do not do to others what you would not like having done to you. Thanks.”*

Figure 7.4 Signs on the road near the ceremonial grounds. (Feliciano-Santos 2008)

Though the aim of such local community and Taíno organization action was to get the attention of state- and federal- level governmental agencies, the Taíno-community coalition found it difficult to obtain a voice in discussions occurring between the local and federal agencies. On the other hand, meetings with some local archaeologists were fruitful in discussing when and where meetings between local and federal agencies would be occurring. With this information, the Taíno secured a presence at an important



meeting scheduled February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2008, and intended to make sure that their opinions were heard. This meeting was understood by governmental agencies, the media and the Taíno to be where a compromise on how best to manage the ceremonial site would be reached, especially since the plans to build the dam were not presented as negotiable. Members from the GCT were present at the meeting. Though I was not able to be in attendance, GCT leaders informed me that it was made clear to them that the administration of the site was seen as an issue for the agencies to decide, effectively excluding the Taíno from the discussion and discounting their ancestral investment in the site and their role in reaching a consensus.

Dissatisfied with the meeting's outcome and wanting to make their voice heard, the Taíno activists and community members began to organize a public protest at the site, hoping it would be as successful as the one they had organized in 2005. Initial planning of the protest went smoothly. Members of the GCT took on different responsibilities, contacting the media, different governmental agencies and actors, planning and organizing the actual event, getting supplies and arranging facilities. Given the media attention that Jácanas had received in the past three months, the GCT expected that the actual event would go smoothly.

However, the support they had expected and been offered did not come through. With increased tensions around whether or not local community members would have to move, the community involvement in the protest waned as the planning of the event continued. Additionally, though the protest was originally planned for March, it was postponed until April in order to find out what other resources the Taíno might receive—ultimately they were not able to secure any new resources. The day before the event they

received a letter from the DRNA telling them that any act of protest conducted on the whereabouts of the site would be illegal and prosecutable by law. In order to avoid cutting their protest short, they reframed the protest as a clean-up of the nearby river, from which, as a public waterway, they could not be legally barred. Additionally, in framing the event as a clean-up they hoped to attract a larger audience of people interested in environmental issues even if they did not identify as or explicitly support Taíno activism. Changes were made to all the schedules and handouts, such that the paper trail of the protest would reflect its aim to clean the river surrounding the sacred site.

### *Strategizing encounters*

Abuela Serita and I were the first to arrive to the site around 8:00am. After we saluted the sun, we searched for dry wood and leaves for the fire. Two more, Caona and Willy, arrived a little later. Together we held hands in a circle around the fire and said a prayer requesting strength and wisdom in the days ahead. Caona and Willy went up to the abandoned house we had been using as headquarters. Abuela Serita and I continued to make sure the fire was alive when a guard from the Body of Watchmen ('Cuerpo de Vigilantes') of the DRNA came by to see what we were up to. The Elder, saddened by the situation, spoke. "We are just here to clean the river. We just want to make sure that the waters that feed the ground of this sacred site are clean. How are you?" The guard, respectful to the older woman standing before him responded that he agreed with her that they haven't taken care of the site well enough and that he had a picture to show her of what was in there. While displaying the pictures in his cell phone, the guard explained that he was just doing his job; he was following orders and they had been told to be on

the lookout for the Taíno and that she and her people should be careful because some people would not be as sympathetic to her as he was.

The elder smiled and I, likewise, smiled. We retrieved our belongings and returned to the abandoned house in which we were camping.



Figure 7.5 Abandoned home where the GCT camped during planning of and during actual protest.

We prepared the house weeks before during the planning of this event, including the preparation of a *batey*, a ceremonial grounds in the house's yard. When we arrived the house was in the state we had left it, except for some sheets left over from people who had taken advantage of the clean shelter while we were gone. The *batey* was untouched. Rumors were, the chieftain Caona told me, that the DRNA people were afraid that it had *brujeria* (witchcraft) so they would not touch the rocks. The elder Serita had begun to cook a *marota* (corn-based stew) for everyone who would attend and assist in the event when representatives of the DRNA stopped by the house. They were there, they said, to

inform everyone that they were trespassing on “the government’s private property” and that they would need to make plans to leave. The chieftain immediately questioned the DRNA officials’ rights to ask them to leave. The elder, however, took a different approach. Her eyes tearful, she offered them food to eat. She asked them, “how would you feel if you found out that your ancestors were removed from their burial grounds and sent via FedEx to a foreign land?” The officials were silent. She continued, “All I am is an old woman and soon I will be buried too. What will happen to me one day? In the future, when my people forget me, will I be removed from my resting place too? We know we cannot do anything now, except make sure that those that remain are respected. So we will clean the river that feeds their lands tomorrow. That is all. We are cleaning the environment—is that not what you encourage us to do?” After further discussion with the elder Serita, and having those present sign a notebook which they verified against our IDs, the officials left and said that they could make no promises; we would stay there at our own risk. They did not show up again.

That night the ceremony was very intense and emotional. It was cool and the ground was rough under our bare feet. The elder Serita, who often led ceremonies, seemed physically, emotionally and spiritually drained that day. She cried. She cried for the spirits of her disturbed ancestors. She cried because she had to keep fighting. She cried because she was tired. She cried because she had to put her own pride and rights aside in order to secure the realization of the event. We all cried along with her. The elder asked us all to hug our mother, and everyone embraced the ground they stood on. I heard tears and breaths and with it the pain and fear of the people around me. When

everyone stood again, they held hands and prayed that tomorrow their goals would be accomplished.

Early in the morning the next day, the guards blocked off access to the entrance to the site. The GCT decided to avoid the guards and set up the initial clean-up and protest at the side of the road. Attendance was meager, limited to the more active members of the organization. Few outsiders from non-Taíno organizations showed up. The people there, a little heartbroken and low-spirited, continued cleaning alongside Highway 10, right alongside the site. After cleaning all that we could clean, we ate a meal and sat by the side of the road while we waited to see who, if anyone, would show up.

In this excerpt, Abuela Serita, Caona, and Willy—a member in his forties notice a DRNA vehicle at the entrance to the ceremonial center. Suspicious of the motives of the guards within it, I was asked to use my video camera to get a close up of them. The guards were on the phone, and then went back in towards the ceremonial center.



Figure 7.6 DRNA vehicles blocking entrance to ceremonial/protest site.

The appearance of the *Cuerpo de Vigilantes* provoked the discussion of, and agreement on, which strategies to draw from when talking with the guards. Regardless of whether the event was actually being surveilled at this time, the Taíno activists read this action as an act of surveillance and reacted accordingly. This had effects in how discussions with the guards were actually handled, and in making sure that recording devices were on throughout their interactions. Such counter-surveillance measures were understood as a form of protection, and also framed these engagements as surveillance interactions, regardless of whether the guards were actually monitoring the GCT activities or not.

***Excerpt “¿Pero están ellos jugando?”***

- |   |     |  |     |  |
|---|-----|--|-----|--|
| 1 | S:  | (( <i>pointing to DRNA car in the distance</i> )) Mira T--, Ah:::, están allá. | S:  | (( <i>pointing to DRNA car in the distance</i> )) Look T--? Ah:::, they're over there. |
| 2 | W:  | Los ves? Lo ves?   | F:  | You see them? You see it?  |
| 3 | S:  | mmhmm  | S:  | mmhmm  |
| 4 | W:  | Ah, bien.  | F:  | Ah, good.  |
|   |     | ...  |     | ...  |
| 5 | W:  | No hay señal allá abajo, también aprovechan,                                   | F:  | There is no signal down there, they also take advantage                                |
| 6 | Sh: | Salir pa' fuera, esta virando de nuevo   | Sh: | Going outside, they are turning around again.  |
| 7 | W:  | Si::.  | F:  | Yes::.   |
| 8 | S:  | <u>¿Pero están ellos jugando?</u>  | S:  | <u>But are they playing?</u>   |

After this instance, Serita and Caona strategize what they will say and do when the DRNA guards come to talk to them. They hypothesize that the guards were sent to see what the Taíno activists were up to, and that they were presently communicating with their supervisors in order to establish what their course of action should be. Soon enough the DRNA representatives came to talk with the Taíno activists. Serita and Caona

decided that they would be the only ones authorized to speak with the guards. The rest of the participants were to remain supportive, yet in silence. They wanted to make sure to manage the information they provided to the guards concerning the event. As such, they also decided to keep video recorders on through the conversation in order to properly contextualize document what ensued.

The following transcripts and the agreements and alignments that seem to occur within them, must be understood within a context of distrust and in which counter-surveilling measures are being enacted. For example, in the following instance, the guard did not take responsibility for the actions of which he was only, in terms of participant roles, neither author nor animator, but a performer.

*Excerpt, “yo soy, yo soy Taíno”*

1 G1: Nos dan unas directrices, pero la otra vez que ustedes hicieron actividades, que usted se acuerda, yo soy, yo soy Taíno...

G1: They give us some directives, but the other time you guys had activities, which you remember, I am, I am Taíno.

Here one of the guards reveals that he even considers himself Taíno, interrupting potential binaries between the Taíno as protestors and the guards as non-Taíno. This revelation also serves to align the guards with the Taíno protestors in order for them to communicate the orders that they have received, not as orders to be *imposed* upon the Taíno, but as advice on how to best balance the Taíno goals with the governmental restrictions. However, given the GCT’s framing of these interactions as highly-monitored and self-monitoring, they take this moment of alignment as a cue to strategically reverse the channels of communication, where they expect the guards to send a message to their directors. Though the guard revealed himself as Taíno, later

transcripts reveal that his identification is not necessarily understood as sincere given the expectations embedded in the surveilling interactional frame presumed by GCT members.

In the following transcript, the self-designated Taíno representatives—Abuela Serita and Caona—respond to such realignments by asking the guards to relay a message to their bosses. The guards respond by explaining that they get orders from elsewhere, that the authorities who decide the orders that the guards enforce reside somewhere else, not in the immediate there of the conversation. By pointing to the hierarchies that bound them and their actions, and by spatializing that hierarchy in terms of a linear chain of command, of which the governor of Puerto Rico is apparently at the top and the guards are at the bottom, the guards avoid being accountable. As such, the guards set themselves up as one-wayed mediators of the DRNA’s decisions with little power to change or even negotiate directives; they only have the power to negotiate their execution.

*Excerpt, “Llévenle el mensaje”*

- |   |     |   |     |  |
|---|-----|---|-----|--|
| 1 | C:  | <b>Llévenle el mensaje que se pueda</b> , de que se ponen en tiesto o van a tener que confrontar la responsabilidad de-de-de juntos proteger un sitio sagrado | C:  | <b>Take the message that you are able to</b> , that they put themselves in the pot or they will have to confront the responsibility of-of-of together protecting sacred site |
| 2 | S:  | Nosotros estamos dispuestos a ayudar, a poner nuestras manos  | S:  | We are disposed to help, of putting our hands  |
| 3 | C:  | Exacto  | C:  | Exactly  |
| 4 | S:  | Ni la comida pedimos, que nosotros traemos, al contrario  | S:  | We didn’t even ask for food, we brought it, to the contrary  |
| 5 | G1: | Lo que pasa es que no puedo contestar porque, aquí hay unos jefes que están   | G1: | What happens is that I can’t answer, because, here there are some bosses that are  |
| 6 | G2: | De parte de nosotros que estén tranquilos que aquí no hay   | G2: | On our behalf be calm because here there is no kind of   |



		ningún tipo de		
7	C:	Gracias, gracias, nosotros sabemos	C:	Thanks, thanks, we know
8	S:	no, no a ustedes los tenemos, ahora mismo yo le estaba diciendo a la muchacha, que, ellos ninguno se portaron mal	S:	no, no, you guys we have, right now I was just telling the girl, that, them none of them comported themselves badly
9	G1:	Es que si las ordenes llegan de allá y	G1:	It's that the orders come from there
10	S:	<b>y entonces hay que decirles mira las ordenes</b>	S:	<b>well then you have to tell them look at the orders</b>
11	G2:	{?}	G2:	{?}
12	C:	Ehe, entonces, ¿cuál es el mal que estamos haciendo?	C:	Ehe, then, what is the wrong we are doing?
13	G1:	¿Cuál es el problema? Qué, que=	G1:	What is the problem? That, that=
14	C:	=Eh, todo el mundo hiciera eso	C:	=Eh, if everyone did that
15	G1:	<b>Bueno, mira eso viene del secretario pa' bajo.</b>	G1:	<b>Well, look that comes down from the secretary</b>
16	G2:	Del gobernador	G2:	From the governor.
17	G1:	<b>De arriba pa' bajo.</b>	G1:	<b>From top down</b>

Here the guards, in trying to mediate and communicate their departmental orders to the Taíno, open the conversation to the Taíno activists' critiques of the department. Serita and Caona focus on mailed correspondence that indicated that the Taíno should receive permits from federal agencies in order to complete their clean-up. This suggestion was problematic to the Taíno activists who do not consider federal agencies to have authority over Taíno affairs on the Island. To make the point clear, Serita and Caona highlight the perceived absurdity of asking for federal permits for activities they consider outside of the federal jurisdiction, such as playing the *fotuto* (traditional shell instrument). They continue the joking by highlighting other tensions that become mapped onto the federal/United States and local/Puerto Rican binary, such as speaking "Englieech" or

being “Taíno Indian.” This is especially significant in marking the problematic relationships among the Taíno, Puerto Rico and the United States.

*Excerpt, “Yo le entiendo”*

- |    |  |     |  |
|----|--|-----|--|
| 1  | G1: Yo la entiendo, pero el departamento. Ustedes, es parte de, él tiene que saber de esta=  | G1: | I understand you, but the Department. You, it's part of, he has to know of this=   |
| 2  | C: =Lo sa::be, pero sabe, pero sabe lo que nos dijo que nuestro grupo tenía que contar con el aval de agencias federales. <b>Ahora, yo no le voy a pedir permiso a ningún federal para tocar el fotuto ni para limpiar mis ríos. No:: a NINGUN federal le voy a pedir permiso.</b> Eso es un patrimonio <u>nuestro</u> . | C:  | =He kno::ws, but you know, but you know what he told us that our group had to have the permission of federal agencies. <b>Now, I will not ask any permission of any federal (agent) to play the fotuto nor to clean my rivers. No:: I will NOT ask any federal (agent) permission.</b> That is <u>our</u> patrimony. |
| 3  | S: Ahora le voy a decir una cosa, ¿ahora vamos a tener que pedir a los federales eh este un permiso pa' tocar los fotutos aquí?  | S:  | Now I am going to tell you something, now we have to ask the federales, eh, a permit to play the fotutos here?   |
| 4  | T: ((laughter))  | T:  | ((laughter))   |
| 5  | G1: Yo entiendo que hay un patrimonio, un un   | G1: | I understand that there is a patrimony, a a  |
| 6  | S: Te digo una cosa tú tú te imaginas a mí, todo hablando en ingles  | S:  | I will tell you one thing, you you imagine me, all speaking in English   |
| 7  | C: <b><u>de Taíno Indian</u></b>   | C:  | <b><u>Of Taíno Indian</u></b>  |
| 8  | S: Si lo hablo solo porque si lo tengo que hablar, pero yo estoy en Puerto Rico que en español, que aprendan español   | S:  | If I speak it only because I have to speak it, but I am in Puerto Rico which is in Spanish, have them learn Spanish  |
| 9  | C: <b><u>In ingli::sh</u></b>  | C:  | <b><u>In ingli::sh</u></b>   |
| 10 | S: Entonces que me diga claramente ¿cuál es la ley que me prohíbe limpiar el río y yo tocar un fotuto?   | S:  | Well then tell me clearly <b>which is the law that prohibits me from cleaning the river, and me playing the fotuto?</b>  |

After the guards leave, the Taíno activists discuss their understandings of what has occurred between them and the guards. Ultimately, though the guards attempted to distance themselves in conversation from the governmental authors of the orders, the Taíno activists did not completely trust them. Because of this the GCT made sure to counter-surveil the guards by recording the interactions, an aspect of which my own research was complicit. In the following transcript, Serita explains that they have recorded the GCT's interactions with the guards, where they said that everything is okay. Serita understands this counter-surveilling measure as a form of protection from any later potential misrepresentations of the interactions by the guards.

*Excerpt, “Ellos dicen”*

1 S: Ellos dicen, **lo tenemos grabado todo, todo**, lo que decían allí y nos vinimos entonces a esta área. Pusimos nuestros carros, nos vistimos de *indígenas* y a todo el que pasaba decía: “¿qué estaba pasando allí?” Una protesta pasiva. Anoche invadimos por todo el internet por todo lo que podíamos llevarnos, **la carta está en nuestro poder y todos los papeles donde ha sido negado** y ¿dónde nos dicen que necesitamos una orden federal para limpiar el río ((laughter)) o entrar a nuestro río, ah? Viéndose en que estamos entonces le tiramos con lo que sabíamos que se iba tirar, **ellos están cumpliendo con su deber y nosotros nos vamos a cumplir con el de nosotros acá**, y nos paramos aquí hemos hecho

S: They say, **we have it all recorded, everything, everything**, that they said there and we came to this area. We put our cars, we dressed as indigenous people and everyone that passed said “What is happening there?” A passive protest. Last night we invaded all over the internet with everything we could take, **the letter is in our power and all the papers where we have been denied** and where does it say that we need a federal order to clean up the river ((laughter)) or go into our rivers, ah? Seeing what we were in, we threw at them with what we knew was going to be thrown, **they are fulfilling their duty and we will fulfill ours here**, and we stood here, we have made our campaign here, we have

campana aquí, hemos integrado  
y hemos bregado al ver que no  
nos había, no nos habían  
{parado?} empezaron a mandar  
estos que llegaron, estos que  
llegaron, esto que llegaron **han  
seguido bajando la guardia  
hasta hoy ellos nos dicen ahora  
que está bien**

integrated and we have dealt  
and in seeing that they have not  
{stopped?} us, they started  
sending these that arrived, these  
that arrived, these that arrived  
**have kept lowering their  
guard until now they tell us  
that it is ok**

The GCT is aware that the conversation with the guards, though attempting to give the impression of standing on the same footing, is pretty asymmetrical. The guards still have the power to force the Taíno activists to leave, but the Taíno activists protect themselves through counter-surveilling activities and by avoiding activities that would make them accountable to the guards. For the Taíno activists in this encounter, self-suppression and silence became, within the limitations of this particular context, strategic techniques of (albeit limited) empowerment. Though the interactions with the guards reveal agreement and potential alignment between the guards and GCT, Serita's later utterances show how the expectation of monitoring confuses such conclusions. Once the guards leave, the Taíno activists assess the interaction as one meant to get information for the guards' DRNA supervisors, where the GCT members were being baited into thinking that they were not being surveilled. It is not clear whether the guards are aware of such assumptions.

In fact, this is underscored by Serita when she explains that there are cameras in the area and for the Taíno to avoid activities or areas that would/could potentially get them arrested. Serita makes sure to clarify that Taínoness should not be tied to the contestation of the particular instance of surveillance they were experiencing. Instead, it

should be tied to changing the laws that allow for and enable the surveillance of the Taíno in the first place.

*Excerpt, “indígenas preso no hacen ná’ ”*

- 1 S: porque como yo digo, **indígenas preso no hacen na’** pero, porque, pero vamos a dividir. Yo siempre digo que me gusta dar, no me gusta solamente recibir. Nosotros vamos a dar, ellos me dicen, “mira váyase, tenga tiempo en el río, dense el chapuzón que ustedes quieren, no traten de recoger basura porque entonces nos van a obligar a que nosotros”, **y nosotros no le vamos a dar el gusto de que violamos, porque nos están tirando el pescaíto y nosotros no vamos a caer en el pescaíto, yo vi el anzuelo.** Vamos a ir al río, al río, y aunque veamos que la basura está, que nos está tapando, **ellos no quieren, lo que están esperando es pa’ decirnos que de ahora en adelante nadie va pasar del puente para allá.**
- 2 F: Corriente abajo.
- 3 S: **Hay cámaras puestas.** Quiero que lo entiendan y no le van a decir. Nosotros nos, por estar violando la ley no nos hacemos más Taínos, quiero que lo entiendan. Nosotros nos hacemos Taínos cuando reclamamos la ley.
- S: because like I say, **imprisoned indigenous peoples don’t do anything**, but let us divide, I always say that I like to give, I don’t only like receiving. We are going to give, they say to me, “look go, have time in the river, give yourselves the dip that you want, don’t try to pick up garbage because you will obligate us to,” **and we are not going to give them the pleasure of us violating, because they are throwing us the bait and we are not going to bite that bait, I saw the hook.** Let’s go to the river, to the river, and even if we see that the garbage is there, that it is covering us, they don’t want, **what they are waiting for is to tell us that no one will pass from the bridge over.**
- F: Down river
- S: **There are cameras there.** I want you to understand and they won’t tell you. Us, we, by violating the law we are not making ourselves more Taíno, I want you to understand that. We make ourselves Taínos when we reclaim the law.

Here issues of surveillance become complicated by the various scales in which the relationships among the social actors in these interactions can be traced. On the one

hand, it is not clear in the interaction itself to what extent the Taíno activists are being surveilled by the guards or whether the guards have an interest in arresting them or giving them citations, but the Taíno expectation of that behavior was still relevant in how they prepared for, dealt with, and later evaluated such interactions. Arguably, we can understand surveillance then not only in terms of the hyper-vigilance of specific social actors, but also in terms of the hyper-protection from specific actors. Based on such an understanding, the Taíno leaders evaluate and interact with the guards. As Basso states “suppression of voice is often one consequence of mutually perceived inequalities of power” (134). Such power inequalities become obvious in who and in what situation particular social actors feel a choice between “remain[ing] silent or...speak[ing] out” (129). Such hyper-protection often takes on similar forms of monitoring as that which they are hoping to defend themselves against. In this context the relationships of power embedded within interactions in which surveillance is understood to occur, are negotiated and complicated by the interpersonal relationships of the social actors present in the exchange—in the case, the GCT members and the guards—as well as their institutionally mediated relationships—for the guards: the DRNA and other governmental institutions affiliated with the Governor’s office such as the OEPH; and for the GCT: their ancestral heritage and the current community interests.

In the excerpts above, though the Taíno may avoid specific actions or discussions with the guards, there are other ways in which they challenge the guards and the hierarchies on which the guards’ authority rests. For example, in making fun of the premise of federal authorization for Taíno events they use the presumed surveilling and

reporting gaze of the guards in order to attempt a relay of their critique of the governmental requirements back to the government officials who authored the orders.

*What happened with their efforts?*

We stayed at the side of the road for a while. We waited for other people to show up before going to the river and engaged in a conversation about the meaning of all of these events. When everyone who was expected arrived, we walked to the river, following the Abuela's instructions. They all had to turn the other way when passing by the debris that they had hoped to clean up that day, leaving their equipment in their cars.



Figure 7.7 Garbage around fenced ceremonial grounds and equipment to be used in clean-up



Figure 7.8 River that runs through Jacaná. Further down there is a deeper area of water in which one can swim.

On our way to the place in the river where the ceremony would be held, Serita asked that we ask the river permission to take a few pebbles, and the earth consent to take some soil. We all did as we were asked; saving what we took in a few bags we had at hand. The GCT, including spiritual leaders Abuela Serita and Yuli, conducted a water ceremony for the displaced ancestors, after which everyone there spent time enjoying the day. I asked the Abuela what the pebbles and soil were for; she told me that she would tell me later. In the car that night as we drove to Serita's home on the other side of the Island, she told me that she was taking those rocks and that dirt to the United Nations. She was going to go later that month. They were going to participate in the Seventh Session of the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.



## *Conclusion*

A framework that includes surveillance is helpful in explaining the ways in which interaction itself becomes organized. The Taíno activists seem to understand surveillance in terms of “the supervisory control of subject populations, whether this control takes the form of ‘visible’ supervision in Foucault’s sense, or the use of information to coordinate social activities” (Giddens 1977: 15). Based on such an understanding, the Taíno leaders evaluate and interact with the guards. Here, the potential for the guards as government watchmen to relay information to governmental agencies is managed by the Taíno leaders. As such, regardless of the intent of surveillance that the guards may have had during the exchange, the understanding of being surveilled informed how the Taíno organized themselves and the information that they shared. By focusing indirectly on surveillance, from the perspective of those that who understand themselves to be the subject of such measures, we can understand some aspects of the connection between on the ground interactional choices and longer-term strategies. In this specific case, I have indicated some of the mechanisms through which the Taíno activists manage perceived government surveillance. They attempt to reverse the course of information back towards the more powerful officials. As such, though they may seem to align with the guards, these alignments are not indicative of more permanent alliances. Rather, the Taíno reveal that they expect the guards’ alignments to only be temporary as well, and expect them to report to their supervisors the information that the Taíno have carefully managed to share.

Given the spread and availability of audio and video recorders in the context I study, I address the complications that arise from what has been alternately termed counter-surveillance or *sousveillance* when referring to a sort of protective,

contextualizing surveillance with respect to relations with state figures of authority (for more on sousveillance see Mann 2005). In coming to expect these forms of surveillance, the Taíno people have configured their own political strategies to effectively respond to and protect themselves from negative governmental actions meant to subvert their efforts. Considering that identifying as Taíno in Puerto Rico is not institutionally ratified by the state- or federal-level governments, and is often disputed interactionally, the exchanges above elucidate some of the processes by which surveillance may serve to delimit the possibilities of political engagement for emerging and/or non-authorized social identifications.

CHAPTER 8:  
CONCLUSION  
¿EL TAÍNO VIVE? / THE TAÍNO LIVE?

*Introduction*

On October 10, 2010, Puerto Rico's main newspaper published a special online video article titled "El Taíno Vive" by photojournalist Rubén Urrutia.<sup>72</sup> Upon entering the site, the webpage visitor is greeted by the picture of a young Taíno woman and is asked to "press the petroglyphs to see the videos." With seven videos to watch, the report comprises a short documentary of Taíno activism and practice in Puerto Rico. Upon watching the videos, the familiar images and the snippets of talk within the interviews resonated with my fieldwork experiences. Reflecting back to the beginning of my research in 2006, and to my own initial surprise upon reading about the Taíno protests at Caguana in 2005, I considered the significance of the increasing visibility of Taíno people in the media. Though such increased visibility may indicate an increased acceptance of claims to being Taíno, the comments to the web article reveal that some discomfort remains—e.g. one commentator, *SuperSuperMAN*, wrote: "the modern taíno, who communicates with blackberry and eats breakfast at burger king...".<sup>73</sup> The juxtaposition of the image of a Taíno person and the associated expectation of what traditional indigeneity should look like with modern amenities such as fast food and

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<sup>72</sup> See <http://especiales.elnuevodia.com/tainovive/tainovive.html>

<sup>73</sup> See comment by "SuperSuperMAN" at <http://www.elnuevodia.com/eltainovive-795837.html>: "el taino moderno, que se comunica con blackberry y desayuna en burger king..."

telecommunications points to the tensions of claiming a Taíno identity in Puerto Rico, even as it is becoming a less shocking claim.

Considering the questions with which I introduced this dissertation, it is clear that what constitutes being Taíno, an *indio*, in Puerto Rico depends on who you ask. For the commentator mentioned above, being Taíno apparently does not involve the use of modern amenities such as smartphones and fast food restaurants. This expectation implies that being Taíno must align with the commentator's image of Taíno indigeneity, an image which has probably been informed by representations of the Taíno as extinct, pre-Columbian peoples. The Abuela, as an elder, often responded to the expectation that a Taíno with a mobile phone was a contradiction by saying that she was “Una Taína moderna,” a modern Taíno woman, and as such often repeated “¿Por qué me haría la vida más difícil, cuando se puede hacer más fácil? Claro que llevo celular y miniván y computadora también. ¿El mundo cambia y yo no voy a cambiar? ¡Ay Bendito!” (“*Why would I make my life more difficult, when you can make it easier? Of course I have a cellular [phone] and a minivan and a computer too. The world changes and I am not going to change? Oh please!*”).

The Abuela's response to the allegation that she was a contradiction speaks to the heterogeneity of understandings of what being Taíno should look like in Puerto Rico. As Mannheim (1998) concludes in “A Nation Surrounded:”

The most striking feature of these discourses is their heterogeneity. No single slogan encompasses the entire range of rhetorical strategies: not “double voiced”; not “symbolic reversal”; not “ambivalence”; not “ambiguity”; not “hybridization”; not “syncretism”; not “oppositional”; and not “resistance.” The recognition that all cultures are “creole”—blended inventions from “(re)collected pasts” (Clifford 1988: 14–15)—is not enough; we must be able to enter the zones of engagement between cultures from which new forms are generated in order to understand the ways in which these forms themselves

articulate the terms of engagement at the same time as they shape their own interpretive communities.

Throughout the dissertation, I have engaged the discourses in and through which the Taíno make their claims, some ambivalent, others ambiguous, and a few resistant—altogether heterogeneous. This engagement has revealed how Taíno activists reposition the histories that erase them by focusing particularly on three factors: (1) the incongruity between the life stories and documents that inform prevalent historical narratives premised on the Taíno extinction and the personal and filial trajectories that inform current claims to being Taíno, (2) the ensuing discrepant interpretations of ambiguous terms in historical documents, and (3) the repair of their erasure through the active reclamation of Taíno identity in cultural and linguistic terms. I examine how these incongruities, ambiguities and repairs materialize at various levels of social action: within discursive and interactional realignments, through recruitment encounters, in the socialization of novices, in the course of creating a Taíno script, throughout the manufacture of Taíno speech forms, and in bureaucratic encounters. My dissertation shows how these social dimensions have been involved in the recent public emergence of Taíno as an increasingly visible social identification in Puerto Rico.

### *Activism and origins*

Although I only began to think of Taíno organizations within the framework of activism towards the end of my writing, quite a few questions have emerged about activism more generally as I write this conclusion. When do group efforts become labeled as activism? Would the Taíno be characterized as activists if they had some sort of bureaucratic recognition? How do social movements become socially organized and assembled? When are such movements successful? How do they become

institutionalized, especially in the context of tribal recognition processes in the U.S., for example? Who joins activist organizations? In view of the role that particular leaders played in the success or collapse of a group, what happens when they are no longer able or wanting to be the leader? How are activist organizations sustained and supported, politically, economically, and otherwise? As Taíno activism emerges and materializes in the Puerto Rican public domain, their long-term trajectories might inform our understanding of how social movements work more generally.

In fact, considering that Puerto Rican Taíno activism takes place in a context that has historically abounded with other social movements—student, ecological, anti-military, pro-independence—questions emerge considering the intersections and alliances that have formed, are forming, and will form among these distinct varieties of social activism. How do such potential connections influence Taíno activism? How do personal relationships affect the possibility for such partnerships?

Reviews of trends in the study of social movements often focus on understanding why and how particular social actors come to organize sufficiently around a particular issue or set of issues in order to mobilize as a larger grouping (Holland, et al. 2008; Franceschet 2004; Gongaware 2003; b; Nash 2007; Salman and Assies 2010; Wolford 2006). Work in the last decade has increasingly attended to how “ephemeral and factionalized” such groupings are (Edelman 2001). Indigenous activism is no different. Though the efforts I observed could be termed to be those of an identitarian movement, the lack of cohesion, and the fluidity of group alliances and quarrels complicate its functioning as an united movement.

Additionally, considering the complicated identifications particular social actors may have with a variety of social practices, traditions, and beliefs, questions emerged with respect to how particular members juggled their relationships to their ethnic Taíno identifications and their religious affiliations during the period of my research. Many Taíno activists were Christian and while a few people, mostly Catholic, had no trouble integrating being Taíno and Catholic; other persons, mostly Protestant—Lutheran and Pentecostal—encountered tensions when attempting to practice both. On one occasion, for example, Yarey attempted to start her program in a Lutheran school and found that some teachers and parents presumed that Taíno ceremonies were un-Christian and, therefore, diabolical. Yarey was unable to institute her program in that particular school and, from that experience, was always careful to tell teachers and parents that her program was cultural and not religious. Such events affected how organizations presented themselves and what alliances were sought.

In effect, though I am unable to write about the particular details regarding the more spiritual and ceremonial aspects of Taíno practice, there are parallels that emerge with respect to the practice of Santería and Espiritismo in Puerto Rico. Though Taíno spirituality often emerges as a major reason for self-identification as Taíno, it is not necessarily the main reason for all Taíno activists. But, for those who find Taíno spirituality to be an important aspect of their identification as Taíno, it would be interesting to investigate what relationships to Santería and Espiritismo might surface. These questions are especially relevant because Santería is related to African spiritual practices and many Taíno consider Espiritismo to have many indigenous influences.

Linguistic anthropology has much to offer to the study of social movements in its attention to how people interactionally negotiate alignments to make unified claims. This point of view allows us to see how activist alliances are momentary and take work to sustain. Though Taíno activists may draw from their ethnic identifications to make claims about sacred sites and sociocultural revitalization, their activism is not just about identity. These alignments are also about sympathy and similarity. The success of Taíno claims depends on the work that social actors do to understand themselves and others as sufficiently similar for the particular purpose or goal that might unite them.

This research motivates the further study of the role of language and interaction in activist movements generally by showing how relationships become negotiated in interaction—in this case how expectations about the Taíno were interrupted in everyday interactions in schools, homes, and bureaucratic encounters. A focus on interaction contributes to discussions of how differing expectations—sociocultural, interactional, historical—are managed in face-to-face encounters (Meek 2010a; see also Svennevig 2010; Stivers and Hayashi 2010). The exploration of the sociocultural organization of interaction among Taíno activists showed how talk disrupted and recalibrated expectations about indigeneity in Puerto Rico by (1) interrupting ideological expectations about the extinction of the Taíno, and (2) aligning or calibrating expectations in regards to Taíno survival. Considering the increased visibility and acceptance of Taíno activists' claims in Puerto Rico's public media, these strategies have had some success. A consideration of the linguistic and discursive strategies used to interrupt institutionally and conventionally sanctioned hierarchies and authorities exposes how national



sociocultural ideologies and historical trajectories manifest interactionally in people's expectations, a site where these ideologies can be disrupted and contended.

In fact, the study of language and interaction can complicate studies of activism and social movements. Analysis of everyday social exchanges allows the multifacetedness of these social projects to emerge. Struggles over meaning show how the interactional restructuring of the indexical associations among particular terms, historical tropes, ways of speaking, and sociocultural alignments also affect broader political orders (for recent work addressing similar questions see Goebel 2010; Pagliai 2009; Rampton 2009; Roth-Gordon 2007; 2009). For example, debates surrounding the *Jíbaro* label in Puerto Rico (chapter 1 and 2) showed how contested a deceptively straightforward concept could be. Looking at the contestations and the multiple referents contained within the *Jíbaro* and how the term became referentially grounded throughout a variety of interactions, revealed that the debates about the *Jíbaro* label were not only about its referent, but about “struggles to define the indexical values” and “to overturn schemas” (Newell 2009: 157; see also Boromisza-Habashi 2010; Gallie 1962 [1956]).

Ultimately, such interactional analyses expose the range of investments and moral latitudes of political actors across social mobilizations. Not all Taíno people were equally invested in official governmental recognition. Some, for example, wanted to reconfigure the ambiguities inherent to their history. Such reconfiguring on an everyday level and at different sites of social interaction, for Taíno social actors—including activists and non-activists—could ensure their right to defend and become custodians of sacred ceremonial and burial sites, guaranteeing that such sites were attended to with respect, in line with Taíno spiritual beliefs and actions.

Additionally, considering that the project of readjusting peoples' expectations with regard to the history of the Taíno happened over the course of multiple interactions and several types of encounters, attention to “intertextual misunderstanding and heterogeneity” revealed the interactional work involved in constituting (or not) sociocultural communities (Nevins 2010b: 5). This focus on how ambiguities, incongruities, disjunctures, and gaps are managed lends insight into the role of entextualization in regimenting and/or interrupting texts and discourses, illuminating how particular modalities of power are exercised (Agha 2005b; Gal 2005; Howard and Lipinoga 2010; Irvine 2005; Meek 2010b; Nevins 2010a; Nevins 2010c; Silverstein 2005; Trix 2010; Urciuoli 2010).

Though Taíno activists often couched their goals in terms of being Taíno ethnically, their claims beg the questions: Why Taíno? What is at stake? While I touch upon some aspects of these questions throughout the dissertation, future research will consider these concerns more carefully. What about the present day, about current conditions has precipitated this search, this reclamation of origins? Given that such searches and reclamations have been documented around the world—why the search for origin in a world that is increasingly written and talked about in terms of globalization and transnationalism? In what ways are such phenomena related? How does history become used in the present to make such claims? How do people use historical sources and their own personal trajectories to reclaim subaltern histories while interrupting more widespread national narratives? How do such reclamations take shape across different national, political, economic, ethnoracial, and sociocultural contexts? What other ways of knowing are enlisted to make claims to ethnic origins? As I have been asked, “what is

at stake in historical redemption?” While I have left these questions largely unresolved, they linger provocatively as a motivation for future work.

Recent work in linguistic anthropology has increasingly added to this discussion by paying attention to language across historical periods. In fact, a look at trends in this recent work reveals a larger concern with ideologies of origin (Woolard 2004; 2002), with the deployment of histories and genealogies of language (Inoue 2002; 2004; Irvine 2008; 2009), and with the reconstruction and study of linguistic and sociocultural trajectories (Errington 2001; 2008; Irvine 2004; Philips 2004; Silverstein and Urban 1996). This dissertation, and the future research that will follow, shows how acts of ethnic and linguistic reclamation (re-)construct genealogies of origin to legitimate efforts, and in turn, how such genealogies might direct future trajectories of social action. In my own work, the questions of why, and especially why now, still remain to be explored.

The last sixty years in Puerto Rico, which have seen the rise of Taíno identifications, have also been host to great changes in Puerto Rico’s living and working conditions, in global and transnational relationships, and in the mobility of social actors. Though these conditions remain in the background throughout this particular work, they point to directions that still need to be explored in the study of such an identitarian movement.

In the immediate future, these questions will be engaged by following up on the particular concerns that arose while analyzing the data in this dissertation. For example, the process of analyzing research data also brought about new questions concerning the role of secrecy in narrations of Taíno survival and in current relationships among groups. Though some of these questions are explored in the dissertation, drawing largely from

Paul Johnson's work with Brazilian Candomblé (Johnson 2002), future research will investigate these questions with respect to the role of secrecy and practices of silence in protecting particular forms of knowledge within colonial regimes, establishing boundaries and enacting power (see recent work looking at similar questions Debenport 2009; Harrison 2001; Kirsch 2009; Venables 2010; Williams Duncan 2006).

In the process of writing the dissertation, questions about the connections among historical narratives, indigeneity, issues of colonialism, racial relations and economic disparities also emerged. Having encountered people who identified as Taíno from Cuba and the Dominican Republic in my field research, I wondered: how is the indigenous resurgence in the region presently becoming articulated, organized and negotiated in settings with distinct historical trajectories? Further research will comparatively analyze conversations across Taíno peoples living in the United States, the Dominican Republic and other indigenous groups in the broader Caribbean to consider how social actors across national boundaries manage, transform, and challenge historical narratives, social categories and identities through social interactions (for example Garifuna politics: Anderson 2007).

### *Field developments*

Since I left the field, new alignments among groups have formed, novel projects have been put forward, different causes have been supported, and fresh faces have become involved in Taíno activism. The LGTK's first class of students has entered its fourth year in the program, now in eighth, ninth, and tenth grade, many of them are now active in organizing LGTK activities themselves. Tito from Guaka-kú called one day to tell me that he had found an elderly person who still spoke Taíno, and has been immersed

in that project for a year. I have not been able to contact him since he called me last. The TN have kept active with their project and continue adding new vocabulary to their website. Baké became sick for a period of time after my research and now hosts a radio show in a town near where he now lives. The municipal government of his town has removed him from the site where he served as custodian. The stress of travel and activism work took its toll on Abuela Serita. The Abuela had a heart attack shortly after her return from representing the GCT at the United Nations in New York. Following her recovery, she shared her frustrations concerning the UN with me. After preparing a speech for the meeting, the Taíno delegation was never given a chance to speak. Though she appreciated meeting other indigenous groups, she was angry that the indigenous delegations—some with very pressing issues—were not given the floor they needed to give attention to their issues. Though with what she calls a “quarter of a heart,” the Abuela is still indefatigable in her efforts. She and other GCT activists have actively sought to create connections with elders from indigenous groups from across Central America and the United States, hosting an encounter of elders to “promote Taíno identity in an exchange with other peoples with rich indigenous roots.” These new directions in Taíno activism in Puerto Rico bring new questions and further research paths that I will continue to explore.

### *A Final Note*

This dissertation has been my attempt to make sense of the life trajectories and histories I encountered throughout my research and my own conventionally informed understandings. I have not aimed to make these histories coherent or unambiguous. Instead, I wanted to examine how they emerged and materialized interactionally. Within

my own interactions with Taíno activists, with Boricuas, with Jíbaros, my own expectations were recalibrated, broadened, and complicated. Throughout the dissertation I have attempted to indicate those moments where I too was interpellated, where I was being resocialized. My analyses have been informed by these experiences as well as the social relationships I observed. Though, initially, this dissertation emerged out of a desire to understand Puerto Rico, its history, and its people; the process of research and writing has only brought to light new questions and new areas for examination. As I continue, I only hope to hear more stories, further heterogeneous threads of discourse, to witness as personal narratives become entangled with and respond to more conventional histories. Like David Samuels (2001: 295) argues with respect to Britton Goode's placenames:

Ethnographers ought to direct their attention to those areas in which not only cultural categories, but also indeterminacies, are likely to shed illumination onto the processes of cultural world-making. Britton Goode's placenames [...] fuse together disjunct domains, asking their beholders to find meaning in unresolved ambiguity as well as clarity, in disjunctures as well as resonances.

Though much in my own research remains, and will probably remain, unresolved, I have attempted to find meaning in the ambiguities and in the incongruities and in how people make sense of them. It is in those moments where people attempt to make themselves legible to others, audible against a cacophony of voices, where maybe, not understanding, but transformation can happen.



Appendix B: Map of the Caribbean





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