ALTERNAUTAS

(Re)Searching Development: The Abya Yala Chapter

Early View

"This Is Not America": Restagings of the Cold War through Embodied Memory

Anna Grimaldi [α]

[α] *School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds*

Accepted: 16 December 2024 / Published online: 3 January 2025

How to cite:

Grimaldi, A. (2024), "This Is Not America": Restagings of the Cold War through Embodied Memory. *Alternautas,* 1-32. DOI: 10.31273/px1w4g32

University of Warwick Press
http://www.alternautas.net

ISSN - 2057-4924

Anna Grimaldi [1]

"This Is Not America": Restagings of the Cold War through Embodied Memory

Abstract. This paper explores resonances of Latin America's Cold War resistance in the work of Puerto Rican activist and artist, Residente. By analysing *This Is Not America,* released as a music video in early 2022, I explore the ways in which political projects of the Cold War are brought to life through embodied performances of memory. In the video, bodies reinforce a shared political subjectivity by choreographing and performing social struggles from across the continent since its invasion and colonisation in the 16th century, drawing in particular on experiences of the Cold War. The video's conceptualisation of the Latin American struggle is defined through shared historical experiences of oppression, regional heroes and martyrs, and anti- and post-colonial Latin American and Global South-driven visions for the future. In bringing certain bodies of the past to life and into dialogue (or not) with the present, the video positions the prefigurative political visions of more recent Latin American social movements within a longer history and genealogy. The video challenges an idea of America by constructing a Latin America, shedding light on how these shared subjectivities, rooted in Latin America's Cold War, are portrayed as cutting across time and space to join political action of the present.

Keywords: Residente; Childish Gambino; Latin America's Cold War History; Social Movements; Memory; Performance

Resumen: Este artículo explora las resonancias de la resistencia latinoamericana durante la Guerra Fría en la obra del activista y artista puertorriqueño, Residente. Mediante el análisis de "This Is Not America", lanzado como video musical a principios de 2022, exploro las formas en que los proyectos políticos de la Guerra

[1] Anna Grimaldi is a Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at the School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds (UK). Email: A.Grimaldi@leeds.ac.uk. ORCID: 0000-0002-8699-5648

Fría cobran vida a través de representaciones corporizadas de la memoria. En el video, los cuerpos refuerzan una subjetividad política compartida mediante la coreografía y representación de luchas sociales de todo el continente desde su invasión y colonización en el siglo XVI, basándose particularmente en las experiencias de la Guerra Fría. La conceptualización de la lucha latinoamericana en el video se define a través de experiencias históricas compartidas de opresión, héroes y mártires regionales, y visiones anticoloniales y poscoloniales del futuro impulsadas por América Latina y el Sur Global. Al dar vida a ciertos cuerpos del pasado y ponerlos en diálogo (o no) con el presente, el video posiciona las visiones políticas prefigurativas de los movimientos sociales latinoamericanos más recientes dentro de una historia y genealogía más amplia. El video desafía una idea de América construyendo una América Latina, arrojando luz sobre cómo estas subjetividades compartidas, arraigadas en la Guerra Fría latinoamericana, se presentan como transversales en el tiempo y el espacio para unirse a la acción política del presente.

Palabras claves: Residente; Childish Gambino; Historia de la Guerra Fría en América Latina; Movimientos Sociales; Memoria; Actuación/Performance

Introduction

In early March 2022, Puerto Rican artist-activist Residente released a four-minute track titled *This is Not America*. Within six months, the Youtube video had amassed over 21.5 million views[2]. Like many other of Residente's works, *This is Not America* deals with Latin American social movements, political struggle, inequality, colonialism and other aspects of historical social injustice. What also drove this particular video's popularity was its violent and graphic imagery and tone. Furthermore, the song appears as a response, albeit evocative of a diss-track, to US artist Childish Gambino, who in May 2018 released *This Is America.* Just like Gambino, the provocative visual and audio experience of Residente's video drew significant media attention and catalysed debates over its various meanings and interpretations[3].

[2]Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GK87AKIPyZY&ab_channel=ResidenteVEVO [last accessed 27/02/2024]. Warning: this video contains acts of violence such as shootings.

[3] See for example some of the many Reddit threads interrogating the video: *Residente Blasts U.S. Imperialism on Blistering New Track 'This Is Not America.'* Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/popheads/comments/tp0wa5/residente_blasts_us_imperialism_on_blistering_new/?rdt=54703 [last accessed 13/11/2024]; *Thoughts on Residente's new music*

**

The video's most fascinating feature is that it is composed almost entirely of references to the past. Historical figures and events are restaged, reconstructed and reassembled to memorialise Latin American activists, heroes and martyrs. The Latin American experience that the video presents is most notably rooted in the experiences of radical Latin American Cold War political, intellectual, social and cultural movements. At the same time, these scenes are de-historicised, pointing rather to a timeless presence of violence, oppression, capitalist exploitation, resistance and struggle, and challenging traditional periodisations. By weaving together past and present, the video reanimates and reactivates prefigurative political projects that have otherwise been condemned to history, providing present-day activism a genealogy of struggle in which to insert themselves, and from which to make sense of the present. By communicating its messages not only through lyrics and audio-visual devices, but also bodily ones (symbols, movements and gestures, etc.), the video engages the spectator by calling on them to activate embodied memories and knowledge participate in the memory politics of social activism in Latin America.

For these reasons, the video offers new insight to a growing subfield of social movement studies that, which seeks to better understand the relationship between social movements and memory (Berger, Scalmer and Wicke, 2021). Memory plays an important role in activism, where it drives, shapes and unites members of the movement, through activists' "emotional and political engagements with the past and the future" (Jelin, 2021, p.4). Bodies in particular carry, transmit and challenge mainstream memory and knowledge through performance and other embodied semiotics (Grimaldi and Gukelberger, 2023). Bringing bodies of the past back to life reanimates forgotten or obscured historical experiences, raises the agency of past ideas, practices and visions for the future, and grants them the power to incite political action in the present (Serafini, 2018). Simultaneously, bodies challenge the colonial power and mnemonic hegemony of the text (Taylor, 2003; Molden, 2024).

Given the video's close dialogue with the politics of memory in Latin America (Rodd, 2021), this research also has historiographical and socio-political implications, particularly in relation to the Latin America's Cold War. Residente's synthesis and

video - "This is Not America"? Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/asklatinamerica/comments/tjghvx/thoughts_on_residentes_new_music_video_this_is/ [last accessed 13/11/2024]; or *Residente - one of the biggest influence on latin rap - calling out Gambino on his latest track.* Available at: https://www.reddit.com/r/donaldglover/comments/tgp8k8/residente_one_of_the_biggest_influence_on_latin/ [last accessed 13/11/2024].

performance of diverse temporal episodes and geographical spaces challenges hegemonic periodisations of Latin America's Cold War, joining a broader debate around its atemporal transnational dimensions (Grandin, 2010; Harmer, 2011; Booth, 2021; Bradbury, 2024; Grimaldi, 2023; Sharnak, 2023). Through references to the military coups and regimes that swept across the region in the mid-20th century, Residente's performance calls on an existing collective rage against state violence that harassed, tortured and disappeared tens of thousands of citizens only to deny ever having done so. Scenes of conflict between citizens and the State are accompanied by symbolic, visual and lyrical references to capitalist exploitation and expansion, misery and marginalisation, pointing to the ever-present conflict between labour and capital in Latin America.

The video's conceptualisation of this period is defined through carefully curated historical artefacts of oppression, which presupposes the spectator's ability to identify with a distinct political subject and decode the bodily symbols they contain together with the song's lyrics. Thus, the video depends on a specific collection – or archive – of memories and knowledge to construct its own, and a spectator that is capable of and willing to activate them through bodily and implicit knowledge. On the one hand, the video explores definitions of the imagined communities of 'America' and 'Latin America' by creating an in-group and an out-group. It rallies together a community to reanimate and celebrate a shared history of political resistance, motivating and fuelling political action in the present while also holding to account the violence of political and economic regimes that sought, and still seek, to forget or silence those embodied resistances and experiences. On the other hand, as with any other archival work, *This is Not America* must also be understood in relation to the bodies that have not been included, as well as the spectators who might be excluded from engaging in the ceremonial act of memory work that the video seeks to elaborate.

At the same time, the video opens a dialogue. By declaring 'this is *not* America', Residente is also proposing what *is* America, largely by offering the silent companion text of Latin America's Cold War based on curation and performance, and subsequently making claims about its temporality and spatiality. As this article goes on to illustrate, one of the video's central messages is built around not only his own definition of 'America' and 'Latin America,' but also through what Residente perceives to be the assumptions of the Global North, as well as by pointing out who and what his 'bro' Gambino forgot in *This is America.* The video's memory politics therefore captures a tension between a trans-generational and trans-spatial political subjectivities, signalling to how artefacts, aesthetics and semiotics of Latin America's Cold War are reconfigured and interpreted in the present, in response to the latest iterations of state-society and labour-capital conflicts, and depending on who is

watching and when. The following sections elaborate on concepts surrounding embodied memory work, performance activism, and archives, as well as debates around the politics of memory and historiography in relation to Latin America's Cold War. Through a reading of *This is Not America,* I then explore how bodies, performance, activism and archives converge to challenge existing narratives while proposing new ones, in particular their implications for how Latin America's Cold War manifests in the present for different groups.

Bodily Memorialisations of Latin America's Cold War

Drawing on memory studies, social movement studies and historiography, this paper makes its primary contributions to the growing subfield of bodily memory work in relation to Latin American social or political movements. Recent scholarship has emphasised this important (albeit overlooked) relationship: political and social movements have "the capacity to manipulate official memory" and "[construct] forms of 'counter-memory'" (Berger, Scalmer and Wicke, 2021, p. 6). Remembering also plays a crucial role in the construction of collective identity, as historical events "formaliz[e] boundaries between the social movement network and the outside world" (Berger, Scalmer and Wicke, 2021, p.11; see also Rigney, 2021). The relationship between social movements and memory thus emerges when hegemonic narratives are challenged, forgotten histories are revived, figures of the past are paid homage or condemned, and when memory work becomes part of a movement's purpose and strategy. From a decolonial perspective, memory has the potential to challenge the coloniality of hegemonic narratives (Mignolo, 2011) and bring political visions for future back from the dead and reactivating their ability to dialogue with the present (Mbembe, 2002, p. 25).

(Re)constructions of collective memory, memorialisation, and remembrance also "relat[e] implicitly to the human body," (Connerton, 2009, p. 5) through physical space, ceremony and ritual. The aesthetic and practical dimensions of memory-making – story-telling, pilgrimages, handing out flyers, erecting a monument – choreograph social order "directly at the level of the body," (Hewitt, 2003, p. 3) by guiding movements and interactions with physical space and each other. In terms of their spatial and temporal existence, bodily modes of memory-making and transmission can also be understood as performances. For Paula Serafini, the strength of performative arts-based activism lies in its ability to generate participation "as a potential channel for the enactment of a kind of prefigurative politics" (Serafini, 2018, p. 46). By inviting participants to collaborate in song, protest, dance or theatre performances, social movement activists render the spectator part of the political

project itself, revealing the transformative potential of performance-based bodily memory work.

The dynamics of the performer-spectator relationship can also be approached through semiotics. For Stuart Hall, communicative devices such as images are both encoded by the creator and decoded by the spectator by drawing on their respective situated experiences (Hall, 1973). Both 'codifications' rely on different types of knowledge, be they explicit, implicit, tacit or declarative (Fuchs, 2016), which become relevant when analysing messages transmitted through the body. A tango beat, identified through sound or bodily movements, for example, might alter the rhythm with which a person holds themselves and breathes while they watch. This requires memory work relating to implicit, tacit and procedural-based knowledges: a bodily reaction. Simultaneously, specific events, figures, spaces or slogans that are gestured by bodies require more explicit and declarative forms of knowledge.

Through this transmission, the video's elements are globally and, for now, permanently available and open to interpretation. As a digital online audio-video composition available to watch wherever, whenever, and with whomever, and allows the spectator-performer to control which part of the video is being played, replayed or skipped. While those without access to the internet or platforms like YouTube are unlikely to see the video, missing the opportunity to participate, those who do are extend an invitation to engage performatively, as an international community including the diaspora and other friends of Latin America. As a response to Childish Gambino's *This is America,* the video also opens itself to interpretations and responses from outside this community, both through their bodily reactions and public comments, signalling one of the more democratic features of digital content platforms. At the same time, the capitalist "temporality of consumption" (Connerton, 2009, p.3) that delineates the performative engagement has the ability to induce forgetting, signalling one of the trade-offs of disseminating and archiving radical ideas in the mainstream temporalities, spaces and distortive algorithms of mega-corporations, as well as submitting to the capitalist logics and constrains of the wider industry. By storing artefacts of memory in physical and digital archives, Residente's memorial becomes "in principle always retrievable, we can afford to forget it" (Connerton, 2011, p. 40).

Performative interactions with the past are also a means of challenging the mnemonic hegemony of the text – and its protagonists – as a static source of memory and knowledge (Molden, 2024). Bodies, as testimonies of lived experiences, offer a narrative of the past that the text cannot. Rethinking the archive as a site of performance and participation, Diana Taylor points to the role of "the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)" (Taylor, 2003, p. 19; original emphasis) that exposes the past to new

interpretive meaning. Through the performance of experiential repertoires of the past, the body reassembles and redeploys artefacts as an alternative mnemonic device for memorial transmission (Taylor, 2003, p. 20).

These ideas have an important place in recent scholarship around Latin American memory politics and activism. In *Reckoning with Dictatorship,* Rebecca Atencio highlights the relationship between bodies, spaces, and incommunicable testimonies of torture (Atencio, 2004). Through women's bodies in Argentina, Barbara Sutton shows how "structures of inequality, including economic disparities, are embodied. And it is as embodied beings that we transform, resist, and challenge economic forces" (Sutton, 2010, p. 35). Drawing from protests for the right to abortion in Peru, Phoebe Martin shows how through embodied and performance-based activism, activists can "reclaim their bodies […] to reframe the terms of the debate" (Martin, 2022, p. 32). As highlighted by Paula Serafini, the distinctive performance-based activism of decolonial-, indigenous- and eco-feminisms in Latin America also connect performance activism through experiences of territorial and bodily invasion and exploitation (Serafini, 2022, p. 40; see also Cusicanqui, 2020).

If Residente's *This Is Not America* is to be understood as an archive of Latin America's forgotten oppression and struggle, then its curation of embodied artefacts and incantations – its contribution to memory - must also be read in relation to forgetting. While the video carries the power to strike back against cultural amnesia by promoting a duty to remember, on its own this archive necessarily silences elements of the past that are not included. Likewise, by virtue of its medium, the video also sheds light on how forgetting takes place through the mainstreaming of interpretations of social movements in Latin America today.

This is Not America's dialogical approach mitigates against these risks. Residente's larger body of work indicates a commitment to generating socially conscious artworks that unite Latin Americans and foreground their potential to stand in solidarity with the wider Global South[4]. The video is intended to be read, interpreted and performed, opening it up to the contributions of others who further challenge and build on the archive through their own reactions and idea-exchanges with other, both public and private, online and offline. This not only engages its spectators in memory work around Latin America's Cold War, but also stimulates them to make sense of

[4] I employ Anne-Garland Mahler's conceptualisation of the Global South as "a resistant imaginary of a transnational political subject that results from a shared experience of subjugation under contemporary global capitalism." (Mahler 2018).

and engage politically with the present-day political subjectivities of 'America', 'Latin America,' and their victims of structural violence.

The Politics of Memory and Forgetting in Latin America

Fundamental dimensions of Latin America's Cold War experience have been condemned or lost to the past. Between the 1950s and 1980s, a wave of military-authoritarian regimes imposed a form of social oblivion through the denial and destruction of physical evidence of state violence and oppression (Longoni, 2016). By denying access to, hiding or destroying records of state repression and economic violence, the regimes and their successors also denied the rights of post-dictatorship societies to truth. This is the case, for example, of disappeared persons, or *desaparecidos,* many of whose bodies have not yet been found. Attempts to reconstruct and synthesise this past has formed the basis for multiple civil-society campaigns and collective actions at the local level (Villalón (ed.), 2018).

Even the most consolidated efforts to establish truth face the near-impossible task of integrating multiple interpretations without excluding certain voices. Scholars have often pointed to simplifying narratives of 'victim-perpetrator' or the 'two demons' that emerge through national truth commissions and public perceptions. These are seen as a threat to critical debate, as well as to the agency of political activists who suffered at the hands of the regime, adding to the censorship of their ideas and ability to influence the present (Weld, 2012, p. 45; Furtado, 2017). Likewise, popular and cultural representations of the past risk embellishing upon and distorting facts, sensationalising or patronising Latin America's Cold War resistance (Hernández and Hosek, 2022, p.71; Schneider and Atencio, 2014). For both state and society initiatives, one of the dangers of memorialisation is that it necessarily involves the exclusion and forgetting of alternative pasts (Connerton, 2009, p. 29). While archives have a radical potential to restore the agency of bodies of the past and ignite those of the present through performance, they can also contribute to forgetting. In this way, reading archives means acknowledging both memories and absences. Understanding the forgotten as "a representation of something that was but no longer is" (Jelin, 2021, p.4) allows us to verify the forgotten's definitive power over the present.

Over the past two decades, the politics of memory has also shaped historiographical approaches to Latin America's Cold War, leading scholars to question the spatiality and chronology of the so-called 'Cold War' by proposing global and longer historical perspectives. The key principle of this debate is that Latin America had a distinctive experience of the Cold War, that complies with neither the periodisation nor consequences acknowledged in mainstream historical narratives (Harmer, 2011). Experiences of temporality itself were skewed by the intensity of repression and

economic violence felt by those resisting and struggling under this Cold War, leading "to the experience of revolutionary time as suspended time" (Grandin, 2010, p.4). The persistence of state-society and capital-labour through structural violence, "whose origins long pre-dated Latin America's Cold War" (Booth, 2020, p.1131), and, I would argue, outlived it.

In 2010, Gred Grandin argued that scholars of Latin America were missing an opportunity to understand the 'suspended' temporality of Latin America's Cold War, which requires "embedding political violence deep in prepolitical sentience or in trans historical linguistic syntaxes of culture" (Grandin, 2020, p.9). My proposal here is to locate not only these linguistic but also embodied, visual and audio 'syntaxes of culture' through the artefacts mobilised in relation to Latin American social movements. The Latin America Cold War past that Residente engages relates to a broader movement that developed alongside the military-authoritarian regimes of the mid-20th century. The more militant Left, including armed guerillas, priests, and students, drew ideas, practices and cultural symbols from the revolutionary tactics of the Cuban Revolution, engaging radical anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist ideas and practices (Marchesi, 2018).

The movement promoted a 'Latinamericanist' interpretive framework that drew on the situated experiences of oppression and resistance across the region, such as colonialism, indentured labour, enslavement, genocide and cultural genocide, misogyny and state violence. This manifested not only through militant analyses (Marighella, 1969), but also more mainstream ideas such as dependency theory (Cardoso, 1972), decolonial pedagogies (Freire, 1968), liberation theology (Gutierrez, 1971), and resource nationalism, with implications for the larger imagined community of the Global South (Osorio, 2009). By establishing a connection to these communities of thought and action, perhaps unknowingly, the video also touches on a the debate about whether or not Brazil forms part of 'Latin America'; a debate that has tended to the idea that Brazil's inclusion was most firmly established through the transnational dimensions of Latin America's Cold War that connected Brazil to Latin America through the Southern Cone, Cuba, and in their categorisation as part of a broader Latin American community of political refugees (Bethell, 2018).

Without making direct and explicit references to the Cuban Revolution, *This is Not America's* widespread use of Cuban visual and embodied semiotics is unmistakable to those with prior insight. Throughout the Cold War, Cuba played a central role in the creation of cultural and visual artefacts, as well as seeking to discursively integrate Latin America into a broader network of South-South solidarity. In 1966, under the

Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), the Tricontinental was established to produce and disseminate political magazines, bulletins and posters as a way of complementing OSPAAAL's diplomatic activities. It imagined and created a shared community of intellectual, philosophical, and political exchange based on principles of anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, and anti-racism, moving beyond the geographical concept of the three continents by also connecting with the struggles of marginalised groups within the so-called Global North, such as the Black Panthers in the USA. The materials they produced were disseminated globally, and today are being used to weave together a clearer picture of Latin American resistance, South-South diplomacy, solidarity and knowledge creation[5]. The Tricontinental codified specific and distinctive semiotic devices in attempt to connect struggles of the past and present, identify heroes and martyrs, and condemn the moral hypocrisies of the capitalist world through satire, stereotypes and arresting depictions of violence and oppression (Rodriguez, 2006; Guerra, 2018; Stites Mor, 2019). Pre-colonial, 'indigenous', and agricultural weapons such as spears, machetes or bows and arrows indicate the just struggle, AK-47s evoke Che Guevara-style guerrilla activism, while enemies, often in the form of militarised police, are armed with bombs, barbed wire and tanks (Esch, 2018)[6].

This article builds on earlier methodological work to bring the concepts of embodied knowledge and memory, bodily memory work, performance and memory-activism into dialogue with Cold War Latin American resistance as a counter-hegemonic archive of experiences and narratives (Grimaldi and Carvalho, 2024; Grimaldi and Marty, 2024; Grimaldi and Smith, 2024; Grimaldi and Gukelberger, 2023). In my reading of Residente's *This Is Not America*, I pay close attention to the location and configuration of specific individuals or groups, as well as the clothes, accessories, facial expressions, bodily gestures, scars and other symbolic codes and signifiers they carry, such as the construction of race or gender. In dialogue with the present-day politics of memory and social movements in Latin America, I also consider the ways the body is used to transmit knowledge and invoke performance through the reactions of the spectator, and what this tells us about present-day conceptualisations of 'America' and 'Latin America' in relation to the past.

---

[5] See the recently published special issue of *Alternautas,* Volume 11 Issue 1, titled "Solidarity Politics: the (Re)Activation of European-Latin American solidarities" (Grimaldi and Marty (eds.), 2024).

[6] The Tricontinental has returned through the Tricontinental Institute for Social Research, whose published content offer an entirely alternative perspective on the visual aesthetics and discourse of tricontinentalism today. See: https://thetricontinental.org/ [last accessed 23/11/2024].

Residente's Memorialisation of Radical Latinamericanism: *This is not America*

Residente, known off-stage as René Pérez Joglar, entered the music scene in 2004 as part of *Calle 13,* a band formed together with his siblings, artists Visitante and iLe. One of the band's earliest releases, "Querido FBI" (Dear FBI), protested the killing of 72 year-old Puerto Rican political activist Filiberto Ojeda Ríos by the FBI in 2005. Filiberto's murder took place on the only day of the year that Puerto Ricans were able to celebrate an eight-hour period of independence that took place on 23rd September, 1868. The song not only memorialised Filiberto's martyrdom and struggle for independence, but also protested the denial, or forced forgetting, of Puerto Rican independence (Democracy Now! 2013). From this early stage, the band and its frontman positioned themselves politically against the US' territorial, economic and political occupation of the country.

Residente's activism became a more prominent feature of his work following the decision to pursue a solo career in 2015. He used his platform to support social issues around education, human trafficking and indigenous land rights, as well as raising money and donating resources to charity (Gilbert, 2017). In July 2019, Puerto Rico saw mass protests demanding the resignation of the island's former Governor, Ricardo Rosselló, after a string of sexist and racist messages he sent were leaked online. In a widely circulated image of the protests, Residente is seen atop a truck alongside fellow artists Bad Bunny and Ricky Martin (Leight, 2019; Laughland, 2019). Residente's own contribution to the memorialisation of this moment appeared in the form of two collaborative tracks: *Canta Mi Gente*[7], with Ricky Martin and Bad Bunny, and *Afilando Los Cuchillos*[8], with Bad Bunny and iLe. The former, an elaboration on the famous 1975 track, *Canta Mi Gente,* written by Johnny Pacheco and performed by Héctor Lavoe, employs celebration, dance and song as a metaphor for collective action and unity among Puerto Ricans. The latter, more sombre track, opens with the line "come on, let's sharpen the knives," and declares that "rage is the only party that unites us," signalling Residente's ability to transcend the cultural syntaxes of different liberatory imaginations.

Residente attributes the survival of US colonialism to a lack of memory of Puerto Rican history (Exposito, 2017). Likewise, he is convinced that the social consciousness prompted by music has the power to incite political action (Neil, 2018). Part of this pedagogical process, he argues, is for Puerto Ricans to connect

[7] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aG_A5Pj-5fs&ab_channel=RickyMartinVEVO [last accessed 14/11/2024]

[8] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RSh7HIH2pvg&ab_channel=Residente [last accessed 14/11/2024]

their struggle with that of the rest of Latin America, where he sees hope in the relentless work of social movements, students and 'militants': "[…] it's gunna be difficult if we can't connect Puerto Rico with Latin America, but more and more and more, maybe they, they'll wake up, you know" (Democracy Now! 2013).

As an educator, I tend to begin by asking: What even *is* Latin America? My contribution to answering this question is to acknowledge that, for the most part, the concept was invented, imposed and assimilated through colonialism. At the same time, there is a long tradition of envisaging a 'revolutionary' future for a united Latin America (see for example Bolívar, 1815; Martí, 1891; Mariátegui, 1929), indicating a re-appropriation of the concept around the time of the region's independences. These ideas also drew on the events of the Haitian Revolution, which "conceived of independence as freedom not just from a nation, but from White ways of engaging the world — a view requiring Black liberation" (Rodríguez, 2022).

During the Cold War, revolutionary and/or Left-leaning activists, politicians and intellectuals once again resignified Latin America as a locus of anti-colonial and postcolonial ideas and practices (Bethell, 2010; Moya, 2011), albeit "often maintaining ties to ways of thinking and knowing connected to the West". At the same time, there persisted through more radical movements a commitment to anti-colonial struggle through solidarity with African and Asian independence movements[9] and the US Black Panthers. These networks were often prompted and supported by Cuba, which connected local struggles such Puerto Rican Liberation movements with those of the broader imagined community of the transnational Tricontinental.

Drawing from Latinamericanist popular culture and imagery to address the legacies of colonialism, state violence and transnational capitalism is a notable feature of Residente's work. He celebrates the strength and unity with which Latin Americans meet, contest, resist and survive oppression as part of a wider collective. He connects with writers, artists and thinkers of the 20th century, such as Gabriel García Marques, Silvio Rodriguez, Violeta Parra and Victor Jara, who are known for their socially-aware art. Video contents add to this assemblage with visual symbols and bodily gestures. In 2010, Residente and his brother embarked on a Che Guevara-style pilgrimage across the continent, which they filmed and released as a documentary titled *Sin Mapa* ("Without a Map," 2009). The documentary footage was reassembled for *Latinoamerica* (2010), a video that juxtaposes every day performative

[9] Examples range from military support, such as the Brazilian exiles who trained in Cuba and joined the battle lines of independence wars in Africa, to expressions of solidarity through music, such as Victor Jara's *El Derecho De Vivir En Paz* (1971).

rituals - walking, eating, smiling, sharing drinks, carrying out labour – to restage and memorialise social activism through widely-known choreographies. In one scene, individuals are shown holding up photographs of disappeared persons, a symbolic and silent act of protest which emerged during Latin America's Cold War, accompanied by the lyrics "I am the photograph of a *desaparecido*" (see O'Keefe, 2009).

The Latin America consecrated in *This is Not America* cites many of these same semiotic devices. Likewise, it engages much of the anti-colonialism and anti-racism of the Cold War through its depictions of critical awakening as collective action. It does this by exploring the lasting legacies of colonial rule through power structures and epistemicide, particularly in relation to indigenous peoples. Residente challenges Gambino's definition of 'America' by reminding him, and the spectators, that experiences of *Latin* America are at risk of being culturally silenced. At the same time, in the dialogue between the two, both artists fall into the trap of forgetting the situated experiences of enslaved people in relation to the African diaspora South of the Rio Grande. As two widely circulated political statements, both music videos risk denying fundamental elements of the counter-hegemonic narratives they seek to revive.

Assembling a Latin American Solidarity

This Is Not America[10] follows Residente's personal approach to Latinamericanist assemblage by bringing together discursive, visual, audio and embodied artefacts of Cold War oppression and resistance. These artefacts are employed and deployed through the body, and awaken memories of popular resistance and oppressive forms of governance: colonialism, displacement, slavery, US territorial expansion and political and military interventions. In my reading, the video's visual highlights include: the Zapatista movement, social uprisings against neoliberal structural adjustment programmes in the early 2000s, the FIFA Confederations Cup of 2013 hosted by Brazil, the disappearance of 43 students in Mexico in 2014, Venezuelan riots in the same year, student protests in Mexico in 2018, and against the presidency of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil (2019-2022). It also points to diverse phenomena such as migration, *pandillas* (gangs), guerrilla warfare, exile, forced displacement and narco-governance.

[10] The track features vocals from the Cuban-born music duo Ibeyi, and is directed by Greg Ohrel.

Lyrically, the song references multiple local music and dance styles, such as "cumbia, bossa nova, tango o vallenato", as well as musical movements such as 'Nova Trova,' a revolutionary Cuban style of song that emerged in the 1960s, and 'Nueva Canción', known for its politically-charged lyrics and inclusion of 'popular' styles and instruments from the 1970s (Fairley, 2013). While a musical analysis of the song is beyond the scope of this article, suffice it to say that the audio experience of the track, which brought together diverse including instruments and styles, also suggests a clear attempt to reflect the ethnic and cultural diversity of Latin America. The featured artist duo, Ibeyi, is made up of twins Lisa-Kaindé and Naomi Diaz, whose use of instruments, language and musical style pays homage to their Afro-Cuban heritage. The radical practices of 'popular music' in the context of Latin America's Cold War is therefore brought into dialogue with the present-day mainstreaming of underrepresented Latin American groups through music videos.

For certain audiences, the song's title is a clear reference to the explosive music video released by Childish Gambino four years earlier, in 2018, titled "This is America" – if not David Bowie's 1985 song of the same title. Gambino's track made headlines for its unfiltered critique of the treatment of African-Americans in the US through graphic depictions of violence. Similarly an assemblage of embodied cultural, musical, lyrical and aesthetic artefacts, the video reconfigures references to enslavement, police violence, mass shootings and negative or exoticised stereotypes of African-American culture. In the context of its release amidst the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, the video confronts racialised experiences of state and capitalist violence by Black US citizens (Simmons, 2018). With "This is *Not* America" (own emphasis) therefore, Residente responds to Gambino by reminding him that America is also made up of Latin Americans.

This is a delicate place to be starting the conversation, as Residente has previously been called out for minimising the experience of Black US citizens and artists, downplaying poverty in the US, and failing to fully acknowledge his privileges as a successful artist (Rodríguez, 2022b). This raises important questions about the memory that Residente is attempting to create, and how this is transmitted to and received by different audiences. Here, the relationship between the two videos is fundamental: while, in isolation, *This Is Not America* might be read as a denial or attempted replacement of the African diasporic experience North of the Rio Grande, read in conversation with *This Is America,* Residente's work initiates a dialogue that both complicates and complements Gambino's narrative. In addition, Residente invites a range of audiences to make their own, critical interpretations of this mainstream public debate, as well as to shape it.

Residente begins the conversation about who and where forms part of 'America' with an artefact. To those with a more intimate knowledge of 20th century Latin American

cultural production, 'This is Not America' has a double meaning that becomes explicit with the video's title scene. Filling the screen, we see a pixelated block of neon colours in the shape of the territorial borders of USA. In the foreground in capital letters are the words "THIS IS NOT AMERICA". The image itself is an artefact, capturing an artwork produced by Chilean conceptual artist Alfredo Jaar in 1987. The image is a still of "A Logo For America", an animated video in which the US flag is accompanied by the words "THIS IS NOT AMERICA'S FLAG", followed by a corrective map of the entire continent, "AMERICA", represented by the North, Central and South regions together (Valleja, 2011). The artwork constructs "the subject through the object and space" (Cabañero and Mulet, 2015, p. 4), attempting to "displace the popular conception of the United States as America" (Valleja, 2011, p. 221-222)[11]. Later in the song, Residente returns to this citation: "America isn't just the USA, bro, it's everything between Tierra del Fuego and Canada". In line with his commitment to liberating Puerto Ricans and Latin Americans through solidarity and memory, Residente challenges hegemonic historical memory and highlights the colonial past shared by the whole landmass.

After a few seconds, the first scene opens. We are shown the bottom half of a woman's face. She is wearing elegant earrings, a necktie, a suit and bright red lipstick. At this close range, the viewer quickly becomes aware of the woman's deliberate heavy breathing, as if summoning up the strength to do something important. For someone familiar with Latin American history, the reference is almost immediately clear. The woman is Lolita Lebrón, and the year is 1954. Lolita is about to lead a group of Puerto Rican Nationalists into the US House of Representatives in protest of her country's exploitation by the US. Once inside, Lolita was the first to fire at the ceiling whilst shouting "Viva Puerto Rico libre!" (long live a free Puerto Rico!). She was later imprisoned, surviving twenty years of psychological torture before being pardoned by President Jimmy Carter in 1979, by which point both her children had died.

After firing four shots in the air in time with the beat of the song, we see this new Lolita being aggressively taken away by US police, mimicking one of the most widely-circulated photographs of the event itself, in which Lolita maintained a posture of defiance that would come to define her memory (Fig.1 and Fig.2).

[11] The sequence was projected in Times Square in Manhattan in 1987 and 2014, and also appeared in London's Piccadilly Circus in 2016.

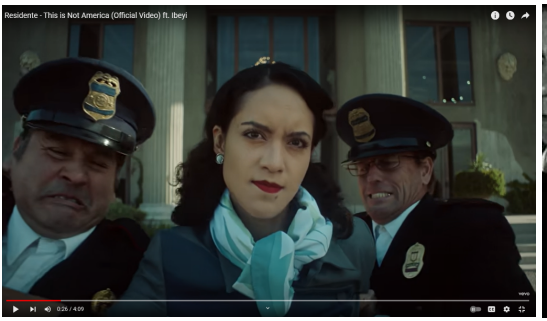

Fig.1 (left) Still from *This Is Not America* at 24 seconds showing the detention of Lolita Lebrón in 1954*;* Fig.2 (right) Photo of the real-life detention of Lolita Lebrón.

In this Cold War context, the scene could plausibly also be read as a proposal of alliance between African Americans and Puerto Ricans, as two subjugated groups within the territorial borders of the USA. This is not the first time these specific groups have been brought together in this way. In 1971, on the front cover of the 60th issue of the Tricontinental Bulletin, appeared an image of Angela Davis holding the shield of the Young Lords Party, an organisation of Puerto Ricans in the USA. Like the Black Panthers, the Young Lords were revolutionary and socialist, and provided free social programmes to promote community empowerment among Latin Americans and Puerto Ricans, oftentimes sharing resources, knowledge and practices with the Black Panthers (Ogbar, 2006; Jeffries et. al., 2010). As a symbol, this image of Angela Davis embodies a specific imagined solidarity between Cubans, African Americans, and the rest of the Tricontinental based on a struggle against US oppression (Seidman, 2020, pp. 11–12). Armed with a shield and an AK-47, a symbol of revolution (Esch, 2018), the body is mobilised to propose and project solidarity in armed struggle across the Global South. In *This is Not America,* Lolita Lebrón's storming of the US Capitol simultaneously memorialises a female-led act of Latinamericanist revolutionary struggle and potentially extends an invitation of radical transnational solidarity to Gambino.

Choreographing Trans-Generational and Trans-Local Struggle

The first verse of the song begins its narrative of the shared historical experiences of 'The Americas' with colonialism. Through his voice, Residente expresses frustration that he even needs to be having such a conversation. The song's introductory lyrics emphasise the invisibility of indigenous Americans in the US imaginary: "We're here / Listen! We're right here / Wait up, we're here". The first verse continues: "Our footprints were here long before you arrived". Alongside these

lyrics, the video pans to a scene of New York, where an indigenous North American has been digitally imposed onto the plinth actually inhabited by the body of 'Lady Liberty', a bodily spatial imposition echoing Jaar's. For Residente, this is a matter of memory: "these bastards have forgotten that the calendar they're using was invented by the Maya". Through these angered attempts to remind the forgetful spectator, Residente challenges the association of the word 'America' with the United States (and, for Gambino specifically, its violence against African-Americans) alone by recalling the historical and epistemological oppression of indigenous peoples across the continent.

This touches on an important debate regarding the place of Indigenous and Afro-Americans in Latin American revolutionary thinking, as well as how it has shifted over time[12]. Residente begins by identifying a 'we'. Reading the lyrics alone, the song centres on those that were 'already here', the originary peoples, sidelining the distinct experiences of those who were brought by force as part of the same colonial enterprise, namely enslaved Black Africans. The video's performative dimensions complicate this reading. The forced migration of enslaved Africans is hardly denied through the bodies composing the video's community. Instead, their diasporic presence is integrated into a wider radical struggle, comprising a diverse range of distinct ethnic categories, as well as people of various mixed-heritage descent. Likewise, although not lyrically present, the chosen actors embody or carry symbols of a range of movements and alliances, including students, feminist movements, and rural or peasant populations.

Echoing the Tricontinentalist imagined community, weapons of the universal righteous struggle are used to acknowledge cross-movement solidarity in a way that Gambino's America might not. The machete, a recurring motif of justified, revolutionary violence, are symbolic not only of indigenous or indigenous-descended agricultural workers across Central America and the Andes, but also the sugarcane plantation system made up of enslaved Africans. Towards the end of the video, a particularly significant point is made about the exoticisation of Black bodies through exportable industries such as football, while also engaging debates about gentrification, forced displacement and state violence against Black Latin Americans as well as the urban poor. The scene is split across two screens. On the left-hand side, at the foot of a favela, a Black man points a rifle into the camera, directly aiming for the viewer; on the right-hand side, the same body appears in a football stadium wearing a Brazilian football shirt, holding up a trophy. The scene draws attention to

[12] In relation to the Tricontinental specifically, some fascinating debates are brought together in Parrot, 2022. See also Grimaldi and Gukelberger, 2023.

Brazil and the rest of Latin America's persistent denial of anti-blackness through cultural exports such as football. This particular body is simultaneously a violent, weapon-yielding, paralegal gatekeeper of his territory, whilst also pointing to the contradictions of Brazil's long-standing claim to colour-blindness and racial democracy (Campos de Sousa and Nascimento, 2008). Simultaneously, this scene is a reminder of the social and political activism, as well as state violence, that has taken place in response to mega sporting events such as the 2014 World Cup in Brazil.

Among the other choreographically constructed groups we find a scene that evokes an association between the Zapatistas of Mexico, in which women are seen to have significant political equality, and the more recent wave of decolonial and intersectional feminist movements across the region[13]. At first, the group of women, lined up in military order, stand solemnly with their weapons, wooden spears, while wearing the black balaclava frequently associated with members of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN)[14]. This is reinforced through their clothing, which borrows from regional Mexican customary dresses associated with the female Zapatistas. As the scene continues, they begin to lift their masks, transforming from the Chiapas-based Zapatistas into female militants of a broader variety; differences in age, class and race are revealed by cutting out the anonymising symbols of clothing and balaclavas and disrupting their orderly bodily composition.

In juxtaposing these movements and groups, Residente creates symbolic configurations that propose the commonalities and shared interests of different groups. From beginning his message to Gambino with Latin American readings of colonialism, the video brings both indigenous and Black communities together with the radical militarism most frequently associated with white, male members of a predominantly middle-class socialist and communist network with connections to the church, academia, and the political class. At the same time, the video's choreographies transform and assemble bodies to transmit a struggle that is both old and new, creating a lineage between movements in relation to Latin America's Cold War.

Embodied Violence and Ghosts

At 2 minutes and 52 seconds, Gambino cuts in with a direct message to his contemporary: "Gambino, my brother, *this* is America". The video cuts suddenly to

[13] See for example, Lastesis: https://www.colectivolastesis.com/ [last accessed 24/11/2024]

[14] The balaclava could have many other interpretations in relation to Latin America. Those from or familiar with Bolivia, for example, might associate the balaclava with shoe shiners, who traditionally wear the masks as a marker of shame for the social status they have acquired through their labour.

the scene of a military officer executing a man by firing a bullet into his head at close-range. Then, a momentary break in the sound, allowing the spectator to take in the scene, and perhaps a breath, before the song continues (Fig.3). The scene re-stages the real-life execution of Victor Jara, a famous Chilean singer-songwriter and supporter of Salvador Allende, the President of Chile overthrown by a military coup on September 11th, 1973. Four days later, Jara was pronounced dead. Without much evidence, most of what is known about his final days has been pieced together from a handful of eyewitness accounts[15]. Jara first appears just over halfway through the video, bloodied and beaten, being led through a football stadium by two military officers. The reference here is to Chile's National Football Stadium, which during the most violent years of the regime functioned as a prison for those who opposed the regime, where tens of thousands were tortured, killed and disappeared. It was there that Jara wrote his last song, *Estadio de Chile,* before being horrifically tortured and killed. In this, Residente addresses the absence of truth surrounding Jara's death, as well as the thousands of others tortured, killed and disappeared by the regime: "those that were forgotten". Jara is one of the few characters that returns several times in the video in a repetitive act of remembrance, reinforcing the symbolic value of his living image, and reactivating a sense of historical injustice by depicting his execution.

[15] Following the identification of ten former military officers in relation to Jara's death in 2009, his family filed a civil suit against Pedro Barrientos Núñez who was living in the US at the time. In 2016, Barrientos was declared liable for his involvement in Jara's torture and murder. After decades of relentless campaigning, his 90 year-old widow Joan Jara was finally delivered some form of justice. See: "Pinochet Coup and the Murder of Folksinger Víctor Jara: Jara vs. Barrientos." *The Center for Justice and Accountability.* Available at https://cja.org/what-we-do/litigation/jara-v-barrientos/#:~:text=The%20jury%20delivered%20their%20verdict,in%20compensatory%20and%20punitive%20damages [last accessed 23/11/2024].

Fig.3 Still from *This Is Not America* at 02.57 showing the murder of Victor Jara in 1973

Survivors of the stadium-turned-detention centre recall how Jara's fingers were broken as he was forced to continue singing and playing his guitar. To this day, Jara's songs are sung at protests across the world[16]. The resurrection of his beaten and bloodied body together with his weapon – the guitar - does not merely add to the assemblage of historical events, but also reinforces Residente's message to Gambino. The scene directly references the shocking opening scene of Gambino's own video, in which the artist shoots an unarmed, hooded Black man in the back of the head as he is sitting and playing the guitar. By drawing this reference, Residente suggests that Gambino's victim is not exclusive to the territorial boundaries of the US. Bringing these two scenes into dialogue with one another prompts the spectator to question the relationship between the torture and murder of a beloved artist for his political position, and the heartless shooting of an unnamed Black man dismissed as collateral damage. Through the video's engagement with Latin American Cold War artefacts, Residente summons spectators and performers to make sense of wider struggles and

[16] Recently, a performance of Victor Jara's final song, in 'his' voice, was generated using Artificial Intelligence. See, "Cheil Worldwide Picks up 7 Gongs at the New York Festival Awards," available at https://adsofbrands.net/en/news/cheil-worldwide-picks-up-7-gongs-at-the-new-york-festival-awards/6159#:~:text=For%20the%20%E2%80%9CVictor%20Jara%20%2D%20Somos%205.000%E2%80%9D,song%20that%20musician%20Victor%20Jara%20ever%20wrote. [last accessed 24/11/2024]

their shared subjectivities as targets of state violence deployed in the interests of global capital.

The video's use bodily violence echoes the aesthetics of resistance during Latin America's Cold War. From the posters of the Tricontinental to informative pamphlets produced by exiled Latin Americans, images of bodily violence were used to shock and compel audiences to action as well as to convey messages outside the limitations of text. Heroes and martyrs of the movement are therefore brought back from the dead and depicted in their living form to indicate the legacy of their sacrifice. Conversely, the bodies of enemies are satirised and elaborated to emphasise inhumane acts of injustice. In this way, *This is Not America* echoes Cold War semiotic practices by using the body to define the movement, incite a sense of responsibility, prompt retaliation against common historical enemies, and provide ancestral blessings.

The distinction between friends of the movement and its enemies is also used to identify the contexts in which violence is employed for a just cause, and when it is not. During the song's chorus, vocalists Ibeyi sing "if you want, I'll let my machete bite you". Here, the machete is the weapon of the just struggle, a tool used by enslaved people, indentured labourers, landless peasants and farmers in agricultural labour. In one scene we see a protestor amidst the crowds, performing a dance with two machetes, showing off his skills. Over the top of this scene, Residente warns "the machete isn't just for cutting sugarcane, it's also for cutting heads." Throughout the video, machetes, raised fists, sticks, AK-47s, pistols and even Victor Jara's guitar are wielded by protestors and activists. The enemy instead bears bulletproof shields and holds machine guns and batons, predominantly through generic depictions of Latin American military personnel: anonymous, male and uniformed bodies with little to differentiate them. This particular enemy is identified through the bodily violence it imposes on others - beating with fists or batons, shooting, dragging and restraining protestors, or standing proudly over their dead bodies[17].

Violence and terror have increasingly formed part of Residente's repertoire, "encourag[ing] the viewer to empathize with a distant Other" (Robinson, 2020, p. 346). For Rodríguez, Residente might also be attempting to call out the US artist for the lack of violent Black resistance in his own video. Indeed, while Gambino's video

[17] The song also mentions "false positives", referring to a Colombian military practice during the country's civil war, in which innocent civilians (often poor or mentally impaired) were killed and added to the body count of guerilleros, thus earning a bounty. Importantly, this emerged after the conventional periodisation of the Cold War, adding to the temporal reconfigurations of the video.

features plenty of violence, Residente's video juxtaposes experiences of violence with "just as many scenes of people resisting that violence" (Rodríguez 2022a). If Residente's distinctive feature is violent resistance, this can in part be explained by the presence of enemies, who are provided bodily representations.

Like agents of state terror, invisible global enemies are also identified through the violence they inflict on bodies. Through a clever use of graphics – presumably to avoid legal action – transnational entities such as FIFA, Amazon, Starbucks, Coca Cola and McDonalds can be identified through their graphic styles, as well as through their interactions with the body. A particularly prevalent example of this comes in a series of scenes depicting indigenous children. More broadly, children appear across the video not only as references to past and present injustice and victimhood, but also as carriers of prefigurative politics that signal an inevitable *reinvindicacion,* "the retrospective conferral of dignity and agency upon historical actors tarred as traitors engaged in subversive activity" (Weld, 2012, pp. 42-43). From early in the video, children appear as young babies, members of the indigenous community, professional youth footballers, and even, in an easily-missed flicker 23 seconds in, a girl preparing for her *quinciniera.* The appearance of children, subjected to colonial, exploitative and patriarchal forces, are granted agency in the construction of a political vision based on the video's envisaged community.

In earlier scenes, the indigenous children are depicted as victims of consumerist culture: one bites into and chews a McDonalds burger, another sips at a Starbucks iced coffee through a straw. The latter appears atop a pile of Starbucks coffee cups, posed as if being crucified. This particular assemblage recalls a controversial series of photographs produced by Cuban artist Erik Ravelo, in 2013, which produced a multi-layered critique of neoliberal society through the scars it places on children, including one focusing on McDonalds[18]. Over the course of the video, the children are progressively transformed from victims of systemic violence into survivors and warriors of a radical *reinvidicación* to bring to fruition the imagined futures of social movements, past and present. Later in the video, the children pour away their cans of Coca-Cola, discard their plastic cups of Starbucks coffee, and fish out Amazon boxes from a body of water.

Each of the children is dressed to represent a different indigenous community or civilisation, evocative of Guarani, Aztec, Amazonian, and Maya groups. In this way, their role as the child-victim of global capitalism is intersected with another function, which is to represent the original heroes, victims and martyrs of the Americas: its

[18] See the artist's photos on facebook: https://www.facebook.com/ErikRavelo [last accessed 18/06/2023].

indigenous populations. The placement of these children amongst more contemporary scenes and representations of violence allows them to simultaneously embody past, present, and future. They appear to exist outside processual time, a potential reference to both indigenous cosmologies in which time is cyclical, as well as "revolutionary time as suspended time" (Grandin, 2010, p.4). As the children stand silently over the scenes of chaos unfolding around them, without actually forming part of them, the historical distance between figures and struggles collapses. Across the scenes, they engage the viewer's gaze directly and solemnly, standing or sitting, hands on their hips or arms folded in front of their bodies, as if waiting for their revenge. As well as representing heroes, martyrs and victims, the symbol of the child is also used to look hopefully towards the future.

The transmission of liberatory struggle and capitalist violence through the bodies of children is likewise a defining feature of Tricontinentalist visual culture that revives a debate around the place of indigenous struggles among the radical Cold War Left, which through a critical reading and the benefit of hindsight is problematic in its own ways. The more mainstream Left that engaged in Latin America's processes of redemocratisation has been criticised for perpetuating embedded state logics that relate to indigenous persons through patriarchal guardianship, resource extractivism and cultural genocide. Similarly, the revolutionary and anti-colonial visual communications of entities such as the Tricontinental arguably participated in circulating exoticised or orientalised stereotypes of various ethnic minority groups. For a number of reasons, including the need to speak across multiple cultures and prioritise a more generic message, the diversity of indigeneity in Latin America was not a visual priority in Tricontinental communications. In *This Is Not America,* the portrayal of indigeneity through children may well be read as perpetuating harmful stereotypes, creating hegemonic ideas about indigenous peoples, and simplifying their struggles today, including the intensification of extractivist and internal territorial expansion over recent decades. At the same time, the video signals a much more sensitive approach to the issue than that of the Cold War aesthetics it draws from. Under the constraints of a four-minute video, *This Is Not America* succeeds in acknowledging at least five distinct indigenous groups and centring key elements of their experiences.

Later in the video, one of the indigenous children reappears, this time standing behind the disgraced Brazilian ex-president, Jair Bolsonaro, who is cutting into and eating a steak at the presidential desk. References here include the country's accelerating deforestation, largely for cattle farming and soy production, as well as to the ongoing case against Bolsonaro for crimes against humanity at the International Criminal Court. Once finished chewing, Bolsonaro wipes his mouth on the Brazilian

flag, tossing it to the side in a gesture representative of his attitude to indigenous and other marginalised Brazilians. In the background of the scene, the child looks on in silence with neutral and calm body language. As Bolsonaro smiles into the camera, looking pleased with himself, the child begins pulling a thumb across the front of their neck to mimic a beheading (Fig.4). The child has ceased to be a victim and innocent bystander and has now become a warning, wielding not only the blessing of indigenous ancestors but also the righteous machete provided by Residente earlier in the video. In this way, revenge takes the form of a prophecy, another symbolic gesture to radical Latin American visual culture. In a 1980 Tricontinental poster designed by Victor Manuel Navarrete, we see the US Uncle Sam figure attacked by a lightning bolt, which appears to be taking the top of his head off and his famous hat along with it. The lightning bolt, a force of nature, presents this *reinvidicación* as something inevitable and unstoppable (Fig.5).

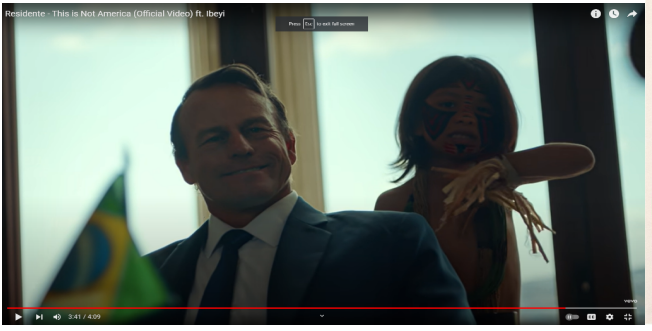

Fig.4 (left) Still from *This Is Not America* at 03.41 showing an indigenous child threatening Jair Bolsonaro; Fig.5 (right) Tricontinental poster designed by Victor Manuel Navarrete in 1980

Thus, the righteous struggle is named, identified and predicted through violence and the visible and invisible marks it leaves on the body. Placing struggles of the present along a longer historical tradition of Latin American resistance and cultural production brings these movements into a non-linear historical dialogue with one another, and in doing so proposes or indicates certainty that the movement is both justified and destined to succeed.

A final gesture to violence and the timelessness of the struggle comes in the form of ghosts, whose bodies are either marked by violent deaths or temporal and spatial detachment from the scenes they occupy. About halfway through the song, the video turns to a group of students in front of what looks like a university building. Although the bodies are where they are supposed to be, standing upright and looking directly at the spectator, bullet wounds in their heads show that they are no longer alive. They might remind the spectator of the 43 students from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers College in Mexico, who were abducted and killed by state agents in 2014, disturbingly while on their way to commemorate the infamous Mexico City student massacre of 1968. As ghosts, their bodies preside over events in the present and bring the video performance to a close.

In another scene, towards the end of the video, we find the murdered Victor Jara sitting in the empty National Stadium where he was killed. From the stadium seat, he leans his elbows onto his knees, his bloodied hands crossed in front of him, while he looks into the distance as if waiting for something. He does not appear in pain, and his guitar, also covered in blood, sits in the seat next to him, poised and ready to be called into action. As the final chorus is fades out, the video pans to the aftermath of the protest, where military personnel can be seen dragging the dead bodies of the students into a pile. To the side of this scene, a Black woman in traditional Afro-Colombian clothing walks calmly through the carnage, watching over the scene with poise and dignity. It is unclear whether she is alive or dead, but the military soldiers standing around to watch what is happening to the students do not see her. Her face contains sadness, but reveals no trace of surprise: this is a scene she has witnessed multiple times before. As this ghost watch over the military laying out the students' bodies to spell out the word 'America', Residente directs a final wink at Gambino.

Conclusion

This is Not America brings together a distinct repertoire of embodied symbols and semiotic techniques to define a Pan-Latin American movement, as well as its vision of the past, present and future. By bringing heroes and martyrs of popular memory back from the dead and into direct contact with struggles of today, the video's assemblage of bodies breaks with chronological time. The reigniting of revolutionary ideas, practices and symbols rescues unfinished struggles and drives those that are ongoing. In the process, struggles of the present and future are anchored in a historical trajectory.

Through bodies, the video positions itself against a global order that has imposed enslavement, genocide, state terror and the violent extraction of resources, as well as identifying the heroes whose resilience allows has ensured that the struggle continues to live. Through the identification of heroes and villains, the video invites spectators to self-identify within a specific context. The video raises from the dead the named martyrs whose words, actions and visions become sources of inspiration and guidance to movements in the present. Bodies are embellished with weapons, clothing, genders, ethnicities, ages, facial expressions, gestures, and other physical movements to cite specific events and individuals. The video also engages the body to prefigure political futures not only with violence, but also optimism and resilience, which are grounded in the blessings and inherited power of the past. The video's particular rendition of Cold War events emphasises its visions and practices of outreach and solidarity by connecting the struggle of Puerto Rico to those of Latin America and the broader Global South.

Through the body, the knowledge and participation of the spectator is called upon to collectively memorialise and prefigure a radical Latin American movement. While aesthetically, musically, and lyrically Residente's work draws from an archive of Latin American experiences of oppression, it also reconfigures and gives new meaning to the past by incorporating new artefacts of Latin American resistance and solidarity. In doing so, *This is Not America* contains its own proposals about what constitutes both America and Latin America. For Residente, Gambino's conceptualisation of 'America' is territorially distorted and fails to acknowledge a fundamental part of its common historical experience, namely colonial invasions and indigenous resistance. Reinforcing this, he points to the co-existence of Latin American pasts and futures through friends, enemies, weapons, violence and bodily transformations.

In establishing an archive of embodied artefacts, the video both memorialises and forgets. Residente's particular reanimation of a dormant political subject takes place both through the inclusion and exclusion of bodies, their memory and knowledge, which in turn limits what is made available to the spectator and performer. Omittances might reflect the positionality of the artists involved in the video's collaborative creation, but are also a reflection of the limitations set by the industry and form itself: a limited number of actors, time on set, and time to communicate their message. While Latin American Cold War experiences, traditions, narratives and interpretations of oppression form a central reference point, the video's reconfigurations and choreographies create new meanings and alliances around the shared community of 'Latin America' and its place in the world today. Residente's Latin America is one of historical injustice, exploitation and suffering, as well as one of violent resistance and hopeful visions of the future that transcend time and space.

Ultimately, *This Is Not America* is part of a call and response performance between Residente Childish Gambino, and must be read as such. This is not something new for Residente, whose more recent works have constituted some lengthy critiques of other artists (*Cátedra* 2017). Residente's direct speech to Gambino flaunts his lyrical ability to draw from and reconfigure the past, honour longer traditions and secure their proliferation. He mocks the way that the word 'America' is deployed ignorantly, uncritically and interchangeably with the 'USA', forestalling the mutual re-cognition of a common political subjectivity. Through his begrudging and frustrated body language and tone, Residente positions himself as the more critically conscious person for his ability to see this shared oppression and act upon it. Residente is also more direct in his justification of violent retaliation, showing that depictions of violence need not be confined to that of the oppressed. Finally, the direct naming of heroes and martyrs through the resurrection of bodies allows Residente to create a genealogy of social movements and prefigurative politics that moves beyond the present moment, indicating their relative absence in Gambino's video.

While Residente's angered mockery suggests opposition, the video's open-ended dialogue suggests a recognition of mutualities and the resurrection of political solidarity. In line with his longer-term political messaging, this critique is accompanied by offering to resolve the issue by educating 'Americans'. The video engages, reminds and informs the audience through bodily memory work, reflecting Residente's broader conceptualisation of socially-aware art. If *This Is Not America* could speak, it might be to ask Gambino about the silent companion text: where is Angela Davis? Where is Malcolm X? Where is the militant response to violence? Parallel to these provocations, Residente is accusing Gambino's representation of 'America' for failing to recognise a common struggle with 'Latin America'. Yet in the process of elevating and reconfiguring distinct counter-hegemonic narratives, *This Is Not America* arguably falls into the same trap of exclusion. After all, between them, neither of the artists identify enslaved Africans in relation to the diaspora South of the Rio Grande.

Acknowledgments

My extended thanks to the incredibly generous and supportive comments of the anonymous reviewers of this and earlier iterations of the article. If you see this, please reach out. Thanks also to the participants, colleagues and friends of the various conferences and meetings I presented this work, for your enthusiasm and feedback. I would also like to thank Sandrine Gukelberger for her guidance in getting this project

started, Camilo Caicedo for his encouragement and solidarity, as well as Paul Kaaya, for his much appreciated support right at the end.

References

Atencio, R. (2004) Memory's turn: reckoning with dictatorship in Brazil. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Berger, S., Scalmer, S. and Wicke, C. eds. (2021) Remembering social movements: activism and memory. London: Routledge.

Bethell, L. (2018) Brazil: essays on history and politics. London: University of London Press.

Bolívar, S. ([1815] 1951) 'Letter from Jamaica', in Bertrand, L. (trans.) Selected writings of Bolívar. New York: Colonial Press.

Booth, W. (2021) 'Rethinking Latin America's Cold War', The Historical Journal, 64(4), pp. 1128-1150.

Bradbury, P. (2024) Revolutionary Christianity in Argentina: emergence, formation and responses to state terror. Woodbridge: Tamesis.

Cabañero, J.S. and Mulet, T.S. (2015) 'Dialectical space: the case studies of Alfredo Jaar and Gordon Matta-Clark', International Journal of Art and Art History, 3(2), pp. 1-15.

Campos de Sousa, L. and Nascimento, P. (2009) 'Brazilian national identity at a crossroads: the myth of racial democracy and the development of black identity', International Journal of Politics Culture and Society, 19, pp. 129-143.

Cardoso, F.H. (1972) 'Dependent capitalist development in Latin America', New Left Review, 1(74).

Cusicanqui, S.R. (2020) Ch'ixinakax utxiwa: on decolonising practices and discourses. Cambridge: Polity.

de Beaufort, M. (dir.) (2009) Calle 13: Sin Mapa [Documentary film].

Democracy Now! (2013) 'Calle 13's René "Residente" Pérez on revolutionary music, WikiLeaks and Puerto Rican independence', YouTube, 15 November. Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_IDBVZpTkHw (Accessed: 1 March 2024).

Esch, S. (2018) Modernity at gunpoint: firearms, politics, and culture in Mexico and Central America. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Exposito, S. (2017) 'Calle 13's Residente talks exploring global roots on star-studded solo debut', Rolling Stone, 4 April. Available at: https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/calle-13s-residente-talks-exploring-global-roots-on-star-studded-solo-debut-193965/ (Accessed: 1 March 2024).

Fairley, J. (2013) 'There is no revolution without song: new song in Latin America', in Kutschke, B. and Norton, B. (eds.) Music and protest in 1968. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 119-136.

Freire, P. ([1968] 2017) Pedagogy of the oppressed. London: Penguin.

Fuchs, T. (2016) 'Embodied knowledge–embodied memory', in Proceedings of the 37th International Wittgenstein Symposium. Berlin: De Gruyter, p. 23.

Furtado, H. (2022) 'On demons and dreamers: violence, silence and the politics of impunity in the Brazilian Truth Commission', Security Dialogue, 48(4), pp. 316-333.

Gilbert, J. (2017) 'Residente of Calle 13 takes his advocacy fight global', Borgan Magazine, 26 June. Available at: https://www.borgenmagazine.com/residente-of-calle-13/ (Accessed: 1 March 2024).

Gildea, R., Mark, J. and Pas, N. (2011) 'European radicals and the "Third World"', Cultural and Social History, 8(4), pp. 449-471.

Grandin, G. (2010) 'Living in revolutionary time: coming to terms with the violence in Latin America's Cold War', in Grandin, G. and Joseph, G. (eds.) A century of revolution: insurgent and counterinsurgent violence during Latin America's long Cold War. Durham: Duke University Press, pp. 1-42.

Grimaldi, A. (2023) Brazil and the transnational human rights movement, 1964-1985. London: Anthem Press.

Grimaldi, A. and Carvalho, V. (2024) 'Thinking inside the box: performance and decolonial pedagogies of the archive', Diálogos: Revista Electrónica de Historia, 26(1).

Grimaldi, A. and Gukelberger, S. (2023) 'Reawakening Cold War social movements through memory work and archival performance', Bandung Journal of the Global South, 11(1), pp. 169-205.

Grimaldi, A. and Marty, S. (2024) 'Introduction to solidarity politics: the (re)activation of European-Latin American solidarities', Alternautas, 11(1), pp. 1-15.

Grimaldi, A. and Smith, R. (2024) 'The semiotics of solidarity: reinterpreting artefacts of Latin American resistance in contemporary Leeds', Alternautas, 11(1), pp. 209-232.

Guerra, L. (2018) Heroes, martyrs, and political messiahs in revolutionary Cuba, 1946-1958. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Gutiérrez, G. (1971) A theology of liberation: history, politics, and salvation. Maryknoll: Orbis Books.

Hall, S. (1973) Encoding and decoding in the television discourse. Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies.

Harmer, T. (2011) Allende's Chile and the inter-American Cold War. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Harmer, T. (2012) 'Brazil's Cold War in the Southern Cone, 1970-1975', Cold War History, 12(4), pp. 659-681.

Hernández, R. and Hosek, J.R. (2022) 'Tricontinentalism: the construction of global political alliances', in Parrott, J.R. and Lawrence, M.A. (eds.) The tricontinental revolution: Third World radicalism and the Cold War. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 69-92.

Hewitt, A. (2005) Social choreography: ideology as performance in dance and everyday movement. Durham: Duke University Press.

Jeffries, J.L., Dyson, O.L. and Jones, C.E. (2010) 'Militancy transcends race: a comparative analysis of the American Indian Movement, the Black Panther Party, and the Young Lords', Black Diaspora Review, 1(2), pp. 4-30.

Jelin, E. (2021) 'Introduction', in The struggle for the past: how we construct social memories. New York: Berghahn Books. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv2tsxjxb.4 (Accessed: 23 November 2024).

Laughland, O. (2019) 'Puerto Rico: thousands protest governor's sexist and homophobic texts', The Guardian, 18 July. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jul/17/puerto-rico-protests-governor-ricardo-rossello (Accessed: 1 March 2024).

Leight, E. (2019) 'Ricky Martin, Residente, Bad Bunny fuse salsa and trap at Latin Grammys', Rolling Stone, 14 November. Available at: https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-latin/latin-grammys-bad-bunny-ricky-martin-residente-cantalo-912861/ (Accessed: 1 March 2024).

L'Internationale (2016) 'Decolonising archives', in Ištok, R. (ed.) Decolonising archives. L'Internationale Online.

Longoni, A. and Red Conceptualismos del Sur (2016) 'Another mapping of art and politics: the archive policies of Red Conceptualismos del Sur', in Ištok, R. (ed.) Decolonising archives. L'Internationale Online, pp. 25-31.

Mahler, A.G. (2015) 'The Global South in the belly of the beast: viewing African American civil rights through a tricontinental lens', Latin American Research Review, 50(1), pp. 95-116.

Marchesi, A. (2018) Latin America's radical left: rebellion and Cold War in the global 1960s. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mariátegui, J.C. (1929) 'Anti-imperialist viewpoint'. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/mariateg/works/1929-ai.htm (Accessed: 1 March 2024).

Marighella, C. ([1969] 2002) 'Minimanual of the urban guerrilla'. Available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marighella-carlos/1969/06/minimanual-urban-guerrilla/ (Accessed: 23 November 2024).

Martí, J. (1891) 'Nuestra América', La Revista Ilustrada, 1 January.

Martin, P. (2023) 'Poner la cuerpa: the body as a site of reproductive rights activism in Peru', Bulletin of Latin American Research, 42, pp. 21-35.

Mbembe, A. (2002) 'The archives and the political imaginary', in Hamilton, C. et al. (eds.) Refiguring the archive. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers, pp. 19-37.

Mignolo, W. D. (2011) The darker side of western modenity. Duke University Press.

Moya, J.C. (2011) 'Introduction', in Moya, J.C. (ed.) The Oxford handbook of Latin American history. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-24.

Neil, E. (2018) 'Residente: musician, artist, film director, activist — and human being', Al Día, 18 August. Available at: https://aldianews.com/en/culture/music/residentes-honest-self (Accessed: 1 March 2024).

Ogbar, J.O. (2006) 'Puerto Rico en mi corazon: the young lords, Black Power and Puerto Rican nationalism in the US, 1966-1972', Centro Journal, 18(1), pp. 148-169.

O'Keeffe, M. (2009) 'Evidence and absence: documenting the Desaparecidos of Argentina', Communication, Culture and Critique, 2(4), pp. 520-537.

Osorio, J.M.F. (2009) 'Praxis and liberation in the context of Latin American theory', in Montero, M. and Sonn, C.C. (eds.) Psychology of liberation. New York: Springer, pp. 11-36.

Parrott, R.J. (2022) 'Tricontinentalism and the anti-imperial project', in Parrott, R.J. and Lawrence, M.A. (eds.) The tricontinental revolution: Third World radicalism and the Cold War. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rigney, A. (2021) 'Afterword: the multiple entanglements of memory and activism', in Berger, S., Scalmer, S. and Wicke, C. (eds.) Remembering social movements: activism and memory. London: Routledge, pp. 299-304.

Robinson, C. (2020) 'Residente's "War" and the reframing of terror', Studies in Spanish & Latin American Cinemas, 17(3), pp. 331-349.

Rodd, R. (2021) 'Dossier introduction: museums, art, and the politics of memory in Latin America', Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research, 27(2), pp. 191-197.

Rodriguez, B. (2006) Beyond nation: the formation of a tricontinental discourse. PhD thesis. Yale University.

Rodríguez, J.J. (2022a) 'In "This Is Not America," Residente interrogates the story of "America"', Latino Rebels, 21 March. Available at: https://www.latinorebels.com/2022/03/21/residenteamerica/ (Accessed: 28 February 2024).

Rodríguez, J.J. (2022b) 'Sitting with criticism from my engagement of Residente', Medium, 23 March. Available at: https://medium.com/@JJRodV/sitting-with-criticism-from-my-engagement-of-residente-51606c242703 (Accessed: 28 February 2024).

Schneider, N. and Atencio, R. (2016) 'Reckoning with dictatorship in Brazil: the double-edged role of artistic-cultural production', Latin American Perspectives, 43(5), pp. 12-28.

Seidman, S. (2020) 'Angela Davis in Cuba as symbol and subject', Radical History Review, 136, pp. 11-35.

Sharnak, D. (2023) Of light and struggle: social justice, human rights, and accountability in Uruguay. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Simmons, K.E. (2018) 'Race and racialized experiences in Childish Gambino's "This is America"', Anthropology Now, 10(2), pp. 112-115.

Stites Mor, J. (2019) 'Rendering armed struggle: OSPAAAL, Cuban poster art, and South-South solidarity at the United Nations', Anuario de Historia de América Latina, 56, pp. 42-65.

Sutton, B. (2010) Bodies in crisis: culture, violence, and women's resistance in neoliberal Argentina. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Taylor, D. (2003) The archive and the repertoire: performing cultural memory in the Americas. Durham: Duke University Press.

Traverso, E. (2017) Left-wing melancholia: Marxism, history, memory. New York: Columbia University Press.

Valleja, A.A. (2011) 'Displacements - beyond the coloniality of images', Research in Phenomenology, 41, pp. 206-227.

Villalón, R. ed. (2018) Memory, truth, and justice in contemporary Latin America. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.

Weld, K. (2012) 'Dignifying the guerrillero, not the assassin: rewriting a history of criminal subversion in postwar Guatemala', Radical History Review, 113, pp. 35-54.