



Archipelagic Futures: The Speculative and Decolonial Transecopoetics of Roque Raquel Salas Rivera

Ysabel Muñoz-Martínez

Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Norway

• <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3195-5876>

Abstract

Puerto Rico's experience of Hurricane Maria became an inflection point for the island's inhabitants, diaspora, literary and artistic communities, uncovering and stressing the overlapping crises that continue ailing the country. This paper discusses how political ecology and gender non-normativity are fundamental axes to approach Puerto Rican poet Roque Raquel Salas Rivera's decolonial proposal of futurity in the face of overlapping disasters. It directly engages with poems from the collection *antes que isla es volcán/ before island is volcano* (2022), explaining the operations through which his poetry speculates and performs gender, social, political, and environmental justice. Utilizing frameworks from transecology and Caribbean chronotropics, I identify three main operations contributing to forging decolonial futures: the development of *affective eco-literacies* to approach the future, breakage of normative time, and geological trans-speciation as a key rhetorical figure. These poetic engagements allow Salas Rivera to reimagine a nation outside the plantation logic that attempts to tie the Caribbean to endless regimes of extraction. Instead, the poet designs a chronotropics pointing towards novel forms of futuring in the tropics and beyond.

Keywords: Caribbean Trans Literature, Chronotropics, Speculative Poetry, Transecology, Transecopoetics, Decolonial Futures, Puerto Rico Futurity

Introduction: Disaster and Caribbean Futurity in Salas Rivera's Puerto Rico

In 2017, Hurricane Maria brought Puerto Rico into the spotlight of global discussions on political ecology. The hurricane struck the island on September 20th with remarkable severity, highlighting a trend of increasingly intense meteorological events linked to climate change (Arbino, 2021; Knutson, 2024).¹ Moreover, the phenomenon unearthed other crises on the island, mainly concerning its colonial status. Since the end of Spanish rule in the West Indies in 1898, the country has been under the control of the United States, acquiring the special status of “Free Associate State.” This means it is not considered a state but a territory or dependency with access to the U.S. mainland, without genuine autonomy or voting rights in federal elections. The hurricane exposed the vulnerability of this colonial infrastructure, resulting in over 4,000 human deaths—despite official counts remaining 64 (Kishore et al., 2018)—widespread scarcity, and more than 10 months of electric power outages (Kwasinski et al., 2019).

Additionally, the country has a longer history of damaged landscapes caused by militarism, polluting industries, and toxic political practices, which have prompted anthropologist Hilda Lloréns to affirm that the US installed its own set of economic, political, and environmental calamities in the archipelago (2021, pp. 8-9). Such overlapping crises underscore the idea that the Caribbean is an area where the term disaster needs to be problematized, understanding it “not [as] aberrations nor unmitigable mishaps, but recurrent consequences of constrained sovereignty, racist disaster management, and organized abandonment in emergency response” (Moulton, 2024, p. 4). Disaster is far from neutral, as specific communities are “made” more vulnerable and suffer more dramatically from its material consequences (Sheller, 2020, p. 3). This prompts an important caveat for disaster research, as scholars should not overlook the phenomena’s tangible impacts on those who go through such traumatic experiences (Deckard, 2016, p. 43).

Thus, it is crucial to consider critically ways of approaching disaster in the Caribbean precisely because of the long history of violence in the processes of conquest and colonialism since the C15, when European incursions and settlements began in the territory. This period marks the origin of practices that turned the Caribbean into a space of speculation and experimentation (Murray-Román, 2020, p. 77), with, for example, technologies powering sugar production and social organizations such as the plantation system with indentured and enslaved people. Black studies scholar Katrine McKittrick (2013) emphasizes the pervasive nature of this economic and racial regime across space

¹ Moreover, 2024 has been a year of records in the number of storms formed in the area. See Bekiempis (2024).

and time with the term “plantation futures,” a concept that describes its haunting aftermath in contemporary urban infrastructures and carceral systems. As political ecologist Malcom Ferdinand (2021, p. 110) explains, the colonial projects in the Antilleans have always intended to bind these islands and their futures to the plantation. Undoubtedly, Caribbean temporalities are entangled, and its past often attempts to cast a dark shadow on its future. However, as the rich archive of creativity, theorizations, and revolutionary practices demonstrates, we² Caribbean people resist being solely defined by pain and trauma, creating instead multiple ways to imagine futures beyond disaster.³

Proposals such as Kamau Brathwaite’s “tidalectics” (Brathwaite, 1999), Édouard Glissant’s “poetics of relation” (1997), Sylvia Wynter’s “demonic grounds” (1990), and Mayra Santos Febres’s “fractal self” (2019) exemplify this ethos of breaking with the linear temporality imposed by Western imaginaries and its subsequent teleology.⁴ Scholars Odile Ferly, Tegan Zimmerman, and Joshua R. Deckman have recently defined these impulses of breakage with the term “chronotropics.” The concept describes narratives that “actively challenge the anthropocentric and androcentric logic propelled by European capitalism according to which space is delimited, privatized, tamed, and subject to extraction and time is measured, linear, singular, arbitrarily standardized, and teleological” (Ferly et al., 2023, p. 2). The eponymous edited volume *Chronotropics* (2023) gathers instances from the Caribbean that embody and perform this work in various ways. With this reconfiguration of temporalities, the collection recognizes the multiple possible futures and modes of futuring in the tropics, i.e., the world-building processes that reimagine futurity in a region characterized by warm(ing) climates and colonial histories.

In this paper, I approach yet another instance of “futuring” in the Caribbean that challenges the imperatives of colonial time. I turn to Puerto Rico as the home of writers and artists who embrace chronotropics and respond to the consequences of its colonial status for the island’s ecosystems and communities. Imagining futures for/from Puerto Rico otherwise requires considering how the island deals with onsite catastrophes, while connected to politics decided elsewhere and a substantial diasporic community. Among these Boricua⁵ creators, the work of Mayagüez-born poet and translator Roque Raquel Salas Rivera (he/they) stands out in his speculation with time, space, and language to

² I want to reclaim the mostly contended “we” and embrace it in its sense of community. I write as a Cuban woman of color in the diaspora; by “we,” I mean “Caribbean people” throughout this paper.

³ I appreciate the pertinent comment made by an anonymous reviewer, which reminded me that research must avoid essentializing and reducing this region to traumatic experiences.

⁴ See works by Kyle P. Whyte, who critiques linear time and offers alternatives based on Indigenous knowledge.

⁵ Boricua is used to describe people or things natural of Puerto Rico. It derives from the island’s Indigenous Taíno name Borinquen.

imagine a decolonial and flourishing Puerto Rico, especially in the latest published collection *before island is volcano/antes que isla es volcán* (2022).

The recipient of numerous accolades, Salas Rivera charts intimate landscapes that negotiate Puerto Rico's political ecology and his own transgender experience. Notably, his world- and word-bending poetry collection *while they sleep (under the bed there is another country)* (2019) has already been widely praised for embodying the affective response of millions of Puerto Ricans after Hurricane Maria. The collection inspired the exhibition *no existe un mundo poshuracán. Puerto Rican Art in the Wake of Hurricane Maria* (2022-2023) at the Whitney Museum. The title, roughly translated as "there is no post-hurricane world," is one of the lines from the collection that represents Salas Rivera's capacity to condense the reality of mourning environmental and political havoc through poetry's economic language. He brings the most radical future, not after—because time here is not a linear category—but beyond the hurricane as a discrete disaster. As Whitney curator Marcela Guerrero comments, the line reflects that the "real disaster is the thought of its perpetuity, the belief that Puerto Ricans are and will continue to be caught in the wake of Maria" (2022, p. 12). Not being able to imagine a future is also a form of "colonial death" that the poet accuses and refuses, leaning towards the "creation of new modes of existing politically" (2022, p. 12). In doing so, Salas Rivera also resists "extractivism and dispossession" and "denaturaliz[es] disaster" (Moulton, 2024, p. 1), creating cathartic responses that encourage movement, uproar, and action. These understandings of temporalities, which I call elsewhere *transing disaster* time,⁶ obliterate the colonial impositions concealed in the language of crisis. They also conduct a necessary *wake work* (Sharpe, 2016), remapping landscapes of "mourning and nostalgia" amid climates of anti-blackness that are also hetero-patriarchal, anti-ecological, and anti-Indigenous.

While neoliberalism demands the acceptance of injustice and death as inevitable, the poet seeks to transcend its norms, envisioning a world where we pursue more inclusive responses to disaster, "underlin[ing] the importance of attuning post-disaster reconstruction policies to historical and imaginative insights, and identifying how artistic works and intellectual critique are implicated in recovery processes" (Carrigan, 2015, p. 126). In his lamentation, the poet enquires into the affective responses that seed a "critical hope" (Grain, 2022), or a "hopeful pessimism" (Bonilla, 2020) in community-making and community-oriented activism. Such a proposal also responds to a call emerging from many tropical regions facing the aggravation of environmental degradation to "humanise climate change" (Lundberg et al., 2021, p. 3, 24) to better understand it. Furthermore, if futuring practices often rely on visual, graphic, and narrative enactments—like the techno-

⁶ This project is part of my in-progress doctoral dissertation focused on Caribbean futuring praxes.

imaginaries that dominate climate and science fiction as futuristic genres par excellence—this poetry highlights other ways of performing futurity. Poetry opens new orientations towards “affective eco-literacies,” more invested in “feeling and acting for” than just “seeing” possible futures. Such configurations of the affective as central for future-making also signal the trans-feminist foundations of these practices, foregrounding the epistemological systems of feelings, bodies, politics, and their situated entanglements. By “affective eco-literacies,” I mean that Salas Rivera’s poetry brings emotions and affective responses as tools to grapple with today’s complex socio-ecological crises and to imagine and create more just scenarios for the present and the future. Alongside knowledge of data and history, the poet teaches us to read the affective as a critical part of the landscape.

Moreover, learning with transgender authors of the tropics is crucial, considering how transness is experienced here (Jacobo, 2024)—where colonialism also cultivated gender violence—and the insights they offer into radical transformations. Salas Rivera recognizes how disaster hits underprivileged communities differently and how trans visions of the future demand more attention.⁷ This is attuned to “chronotropics...where bodies and imaginations come together to propose other modes of being in the world, ways that dissolve and break through the sediment of colonial-heteronormative patriarchy” (Ferly et al., 2023, p. 7). A more specific framework that contributes to seeing transness in chronotropics is offered by the field of transecology. Transecology’s main interests are parallel instances of transphobia and nature destruction and how trans authors intervene in their surrounding ecologies (Bedford, 2020). For ecocritic Nicole Seymour (2022), the future is full of transness as both are deeply concerned with change. Salas Rivera’s lived transgender experience permeates his work (Salas Rivera & Melvar M Dapana, 2024); thus, it is rather surprising that his writing has not yet been approached through these theorizations that he so wholesomely embodies.

His poetry has been categorized as “speculative poesis” (Murray-Román, 2020), “cuir eco-translations” (Gómez, 2023), “transdecolonial” (Salas Rivera & Melvar M Dapana, 2024), “ecological and anti-capitalist poetics” (Abi-Karam & Gabriel, 2020, p. 19), and more. Adding to these analyses, I bring transecology and chronotropics as suitable frameworks to approach his project and vision of futurity. The present study focuses on Salas Rivera’s poem collection *before island is volcano* (2022) and its articulation of speculative and decolonial transecopoetics. I highlight Salas Rivera’s contributions to

⁷ Bringing more trans voices to the forefront, Salas Rivera is also the editor of the compilation of Puerto Rican trans poetry *La piel del arrecife: Antología de poesía trans puertorriqueña* (2023).

futuring practices by analyzing the collection's themes and structures and performing close readings of five poems. I conclude that he creates novel modes of futuring based on affective eco-literacies, centers futures that counteract the singular narratives of the Caribbean as endless plantation, and expands transecology and chronotropics by rearticulating the relations between transgender bodies, islands, and temporalities. He unapologetically reclaims poetry's affordances in rebuilding the world. Telluric, vibrant, and tenderly revolutionary, his poetry launches the Caribbean into the future, imagining it free from colonial and heteronormative tethers and beyond the necropolitical discourses that attempt to naturalize disasters.

Mapping Themes and Structure in *before island is volcano*

In the collection *while they sleep...*, Salas Rivera focuses on capturing the anger, mourning, and absurdity of coloniality in the aftermath of Maria, reacting to the "push to be politically coherent and forward-seeking," without considering "exhaustion, or even pain or grief..." (Salas Rivera in Therrien, 2022). Conversely, the collection *before island is volcano* is a more explicitly future-oriented speculative project that condenses the decolonial longings of the island in a post-disaster context. The speculation here is both thematic and formal, using the blank page as a canvas to remap the island's future. The future opens, directs, and closes the collection in a design that seeks to always return to the island. This is not an easy task, however, as the poet notes, "It's hard for me to think I wrote a poetry book about the future when everything feels so apocalyptic, but I keep believing we have a responsibility to dream other worlds" (Salas Rivera, 2022a, p. 69). Yet the book's dedication reveals his confidence in the project's importance when he declares, "for the futures that once dreamt me/and for our exponential imaginative capacity." The poet reclaims the Caribbean's power of taking control of its future through collaborations across time and place, a capacity that neoliberal systems of commodification and individualism attempt to diminish. By emerging from the very futures he creates, the poet emphasizes our agency in shaping what is to come.

Originally conceived as a children's book, the project transformed into a daring and provocative reimagining of Puerto Rico with its independence. Rather than formulaic, "[I]ike any book about the future should be, it has more questions and potentialities than answers" (Salas Rivera, 2020). Nonetheless, the right questions guide thinking about Caribbean futurity in nondeterministic ways. Salas Rivera's radical proposal appears in poetic glimpses, flashes, and images that seem ephemeral but aspire to critical material resonances. Consequently, the collection contributes to the long and revolutionary effects of nurturing seeds of radical change, using instability as a moving concept that does not

imply disappearance but possibilities of a future otherwise. Each page becomes a geopolitical site of imagination that destabilizes and redefines values previously commodified by predatory neoliberalism. Importantly, this book presents two distinct collections: one in Spanish and the other in English, translated by Salas Rivera himself. Instead of offering the translations next to each other in a facing-page format, the book presents each language separately, effectively creating two distinct books for two different audiences. These operations mirror the island's and the poet's linguistic realities. It is worth noting that self-translation allows the poet to assign values and exchange words while escaping conventional norms. In his work, he has used this linguistic strategy systematically to critique "the material colonial extractive exchanges" (Murray-Román, 2020, p. 77) taking place in Puerto Rico through distorted economic exchanges, such as the debt. Additionally, the book urges readers to abandon complacency and comfort and read "actively" more than once, back and forth, and simultaneously. He explains that "confusion is a way of getting close" (Salas Rivera, 2022a, p. 3). This is also evident in the four sections that structure the book, each with different topics and distinctive formal experimentations. Each section has epigraphs from different provenances that foreground the volume's conversation with poetic and theoretical—at times disjointed—traditions related to formal and thematic preoccupations, such as William Shakespeare, Rubén Darío, and Frantz Fanon.

Delving into this rich project, I first analyze one poem from each of the four sections to map the book's trajectory and identify the various mechanisms through which Salas Rivera speculates the future of Puerto Rico by bending its chronotropics. From the sections "volcano" and "island," I have chosen the pieces "the poet defends his right to a future and demands its immediate redistribution" and "caliban to his friends," respectively. I find in them the cultivation of affective eco-literacies as a unique mode of futuring. From the remaining sections, the poems "the independence (of puerto rico)" and "waitilyousee" represent instances of speculative scenarios in which futures expand beyond plantation logics. I dedicate a more extensive analysis and close reading to these two poems due to their embodiment of future-making practices. Lastly, I offer a broader reading of the book as a transecological project, especially interpreting the poem "we dream we span a river in one stride." I consider how the collection evokes processes of transformation towards independence for both the nation and the body through the figure of the volcano.

Cultivating Affective Eco-Literacies through *island* and *volcano*

The first section, "volcano," opens the book with vivid descriptions of colonial violence's toll on the island's ecology and inhabitants. Reflecting on imperialism's false promises

and demanding locals' access to a healthier environment, this poignant section articulates the need for a different future in Puerto Rico. Importantly, the section introduces the poet's role in such futurity, especially in the poem or sub-section (it can be read as one long poem or group of poems) provocatively titled "the poet defends his right to a future and demands its immediate redistribution." With this title, Salas Rivera summarizes the book's proposal, indicating that futurity has been coopted, perhaps by generalizing narrative fictions, tech corporations, and governments that collude to exclude other forms of "doing" the future and, consequently, other voices. By rejecting this cooption, the poet reclaims—and its utterance alone asserts—the right of other actors to participate in building the future, this time with narratives, language, and their bending as the best tools in the arsenal.

What do redistributed futures look like? The ensuing subheadings hint at the possibility of finding them by acknowledging the right of self-determination of the subjects deemed as other. Embracing this otherness, the future is demanded in terms of rights such as the "right to be a stone," "right to burn one's mouth," "the right to crack a compass," "the right to impossibility," "the right to madness," and "the right to barbarism." The evocation of these elements recognizes that markers such as mad, barbarian, and impossible are violently attached to both colonial and queer bodies to ensure their dispossession. As a counteracting operation, the poet renegotiates their agency, showing the present and future as collapsing temporalities that actually belong to the subjects they have been denied to. In the sub-poem "the right to impossibility," he writes:

future,
you said, satisfied.
impossible future,
discarding the attempts,
and you confessed it was difficult
to imagine a world that was yours,
but i too am difficult
because i imagine the now,
and it's yours all
this time
even if you don't know you know.
(2022a, p. 20) [emphasis in original]

The difficulty in imagining futures as “ours” in the context of the tropics, so exoticized in the imagination of powers centered elsewhere,⁸ becomes one of the hindrances to its possible materiality. Therefore, reactivating a recognition of the knowledge and agency within bodies launches the magma of this “volcano” section, altering the status quo and creating emerging soils, soon transformed into “islands.” Perhaps the epitome of the external exoticization that the tropics have suffered for centuries is William Shakespeare’s early depiction of a generalized Caribbean in the often-revisited theatre play *The Tempest* (1623). This is precisely the background for the second section under the title “island,” where the poet reclaims the old figure of Caliban. Imagined in the original play as a savage, this character is often reinterpreted as a postcolonial symbol of the Caribbean rebellious and untamable spirit.⁹

This section follows such traditions, departing from a reenacted speech in which Caliban reclaims his stolen territory and decries contemporary toxic relations and infrastructures of destruction. If Salas Rivera, in his previous collections, criticizes the absurdity of the colonial debt and how it upends values (Murray-Román, 2020), in “island,” the poet critiques the devaluation and marginalization of archipelagic spaces by creating fragmented but self-sufficient linguistic islands. In this section, island-like poems conversate with each other and establish a chronotropic that emphatically breaks with colonial temporalities, represented in the figure of Prospero as the European settler and “master,” according to Shakespeare’s story. The evocation of nature’s cyclicity establishes the need for severance and separation between the island and the metropole, enacting a rejection of Prospero’s time. The poems then undermine the colonial project by showing it as doomed to disappear due to its own unsustainability. The poet poignantly writes, “cruise ships carry extinguishers/ because, even when surrounded by water, /we can still be consumed by fire” (Salas Rivera, 2022a, p. 26). Hence, he warns about the upcoming collapse of colonial infrastructure built for predatory purposes.

Similar operations occur within the poems’ configurations when the poet negotiates power and agency by shifting to whom the poems are addressed. Sometimes intentionally ambiguously, sometimes very specifically, the reader finds messages for different addressees: to Caliban, to Prospero, to Ariel, to himself, and to the *Tempest* itself. It is the poem “caliban to his friends” which more explicitly reveals community as another dimension of a future centered through the affective. The island/poem succinctly reads: “don’t be afraid /those aren’t noise, /they are songs” (p. 31). The field of affect theory (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010) reminds us that music and bodily resonances are crucial

⁸ See concept of “porno-tropics” in Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* (2013).

⁹ A famous example is theorist Roberto Fernández Retamar’s *Caliban revisitado* (1986).

epistemological forms; this is proven right through long Caribbean traditions of embodying musicality.¹⁰ While Caliban primarily symbolizes an Indigenous figure, the histories of the African diaspora that became naturalized in this territory are also interwoven into this narrative. The drums' sounds were a vital communication medium for enslaved people, transferring information and seeding rebellion in the oppressor's face (or ears). Perhaps these are the "songs" that Salas Rivera alludes to, creating an Indigenous and Black alliance to break from colonial oppression. A reader from the Caribbean or familiar with its history can quickly "feel" those sounds and decode their message. With this succinct form, the poet tells fellow oppressed people to attend to the apparent cacophony illegible on colonial pentagrams and to turn to each other as sources of wayfinding. There is an echo of the sub-poem "the right to impossibility" attended to earlier, celebrating the immense potential of finding futures for and from the tropics, within and among ourselves. I find in both poems the cultivation of affective eco-literacies for the future, as they urge us to listen carefully to inner and outer soundscapes to redress damaged landscapes and relations. The poet then becomes Caliban, sharing songs that can sometimes land as noise but are confident in their rhythm, performed as exhortations or incantations. In doing so, he offers concrete visions of bringing islands together to face Prospero's legacies and irradiating multiple futures in the explosive image of the volcano.

a multiverse Branching Out: The Chronotropics (of puerto rico)

Following the display of the rebellious figure Caliban, we find in the series "the independence (of puerto rico)" the most radical proposals of the collection and of Rivera's work so far, becoming a fully articulated moment that was hinted at in his previous work:

Something else I wanted [before island...] to address was the independence of Puerto Rico. Sometimes we discuss it in ways that are abstract. Rather than situate that independence in a cut-off future, I wanted to bring that future more solidly into the present. The model for this was the Puerto Rican anarchist Luisa Capetillo, who argued that the utopian exists in our everyday lives. Similarly, in our everyday lives, Puerto Ricans can find a decolonial future (Salas Rivera, 2022b).

The everyday, in its familiarity and repetitiveness, becomes a site of information about the future. Mimicking this, we find that all the poems in the section have the same title, "the independence (of puerto rico)," as if "repeating" themselves but, in reality, conveying variations and distinct articulations, becoming, as the subheading claims, "a multiverse!"

¹⁰ Both Brathwaite's "tidalectics" and Benitez-Rojo's "repeating islands" exemplify this.

(p. 37). In this section, the poet creates scenes of a free Puerto Rico where locals can finally enjoy their immediate environment. Using irony as a tone that simplifies the overly complicated rhetoric underpinning the colonial control over the island, the poet reflects that, to the radical ideas of independence, some predictable resistance would emerge: “won’t it be lonely/ (some may ask)/ to have only your crops growing, /only your beaches to visit, /only your mountains to drive up/ until the road is a cliff” (p. 43). The poet creates a distance in this hypothetical dialogue, introducing the obtrusive figures trying to discourage the islanders from imagining their island otherwise as “some may ask,” indefinite and almost dismissed in its parenthetical form. More generally, the repetition of conditional speculative structures “if,” “won’t it be...?” “won’t you...?” also becomes abundant in the entire section.

However, repetition is used here to stop repeating paralyzing platitudes that shy away from ideas of independence. Other tropes that are ubiquitous within the text are returns: “a people outside a people. /move away (but come back)” (p. 48), used almost as pleas, indicating that the structural repetitions are actually returns and cycles. They form, rather than mere repetitions that hinder paths for moving onward, the organic flow suggested by Kamau Brathwaite’s “tidalectics.” Even though Benitez Rojas’ articulation of the “repeating island” encompasses nuanced variations within repetitions, such metaphor risks essentializing the Caribbean as a tautological place. Salas Rivera aims to break free from this conception of history, paradoxically using repetitions as a linguistic operation. Writer Luis Negrón (in Salas Rivera, 2022a, p. ii) summarizes the way the poet breaks with ideas of the Caribbean as doomed to fail when he writes:

We are an archipelago built with borrowed words, plagued by the myths and archetypes of the always insipid but effective Eurocentrism. *The temptation to baptize our misery as mythological* is masterfully answered by ... Salas Rivera, whose poetic makes use of all those voices, our voices, sometimes epic, playful, scathing or rendered simple beauty or just the good argument of an honest intelligence and the steadfast forcefulness of the politically just. [my emphasis]

The poems titled “the independence...” address fears about the uncertainty of change, evoking this time the “independence” of the body in taking decisions that break “normality,” as undisciplined and unruly subjects that defy normativity in all its forms. These decisions are not about cognitive but affective responses, in familiar attitudes, like “if you ever loved against should” or “if you avoided the doctor and went to the beach” (Salas Rivera, 2022a, p. 47) Here lays emancipatory strength to fight or even imagine

independence: in desire.¹¹ These images are an elaborate and poetic way of simply formulating the questions “why not?” and “what else could be worse?” They show how bodies and ecosystems are polluted by the empire that “gave you a natural death” (p. 48), considering the trauma of the abandonment before and after Maria (González, 2022). The poet then does not aim to create an ode to futurity but instead articulates complex and compossible futures (Chattopadhyay, 2021), although decidedly incompatible with extractive and positivist colonial endeavors.

Figure 1. “*la independencia (de puerto rico).*”

la independencia (de puerto rico)

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© Roque Raquel Salas Rivera *before island is volcano/antes que isla es volcán* (2022).
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¹¹ On the roles of desire in activism and action, see works by Audre Lorde, Syrus Marcus Ware, adrienne maree brown, among many other Black and Queer Studies scholars and activists.

Language needs to be broken and re/fused to achieve these aspirations; therefore, the signifiers “Puerto Rico” and “independence” appear merged in the last lines of the section, stretching, constraining, and flexing. This visual proposal mirrors a multiplicity of possible futures forged in the materiality of the island, the reason for which I have chosen the original version in Spanish in *Fig. 1*. The poet rejects the teleological dimension that offers a future truncated even before imagined, with a singular, unique, and linear narrative that endlessly reproduces the structuring principles of the plantation. The poetic experimentation is an invitation for social and political experimentation, this time in the island’s best interests. With the portmanteau “theindependenceofpuertorico” (p. 56) that closes the section, all aspirations collapse into this one claim that, in 2022 and today, results in one of the most directly radical and decolonial aesthetic proposals in contemporary Caribbean literature.

The poet returns to portmanteaus in the last section, “sea of the poem,” drawing from their accumulative power to build strength as they become calls for unity, collective resistance, and courage. To create futures together, we must “lose all respect for the state” (p. 62), considering how oppressive (hetero)normativity has thwarted the flourishing potential of the island (Bonilla, 2020). All this is presented in the poem “waitilyousee,” whose first part centers on “bad” feelings of loneliness, jealousy, depression, and scarcity, next to the detrimental material conditions resulting from the colonial status. This is juxtaposed with the radiance of the poem’s second half, which announces the immense potential of Puerto Rican people when he writes:

if you think it’s something to climb a tree,
waitilyousee us grow a garden;
waitilyousee us grow a forest;
waitilyousee us growing together and eating our/ fill;
waitilyousee us lose all respect for the state;
waitilyousee us climb a forest and touch the sky.”
(Salas Rivera, 2022a, p. 62)

Here is the collective “us” that can reverse the conditions stated in the first half. The presence of natural elements to build this momentum is neither fortuitous nor mere metaphor. The island is a “whole,” an ecological site where environmental and social life are not only intertwined, but one.

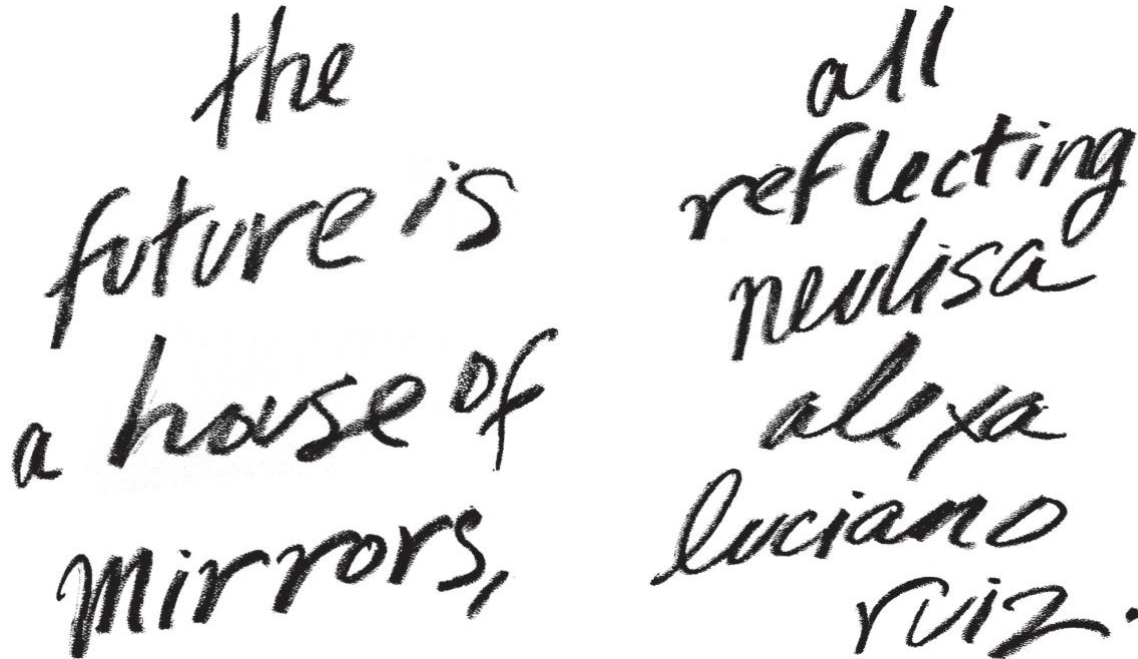
Moreover, in these verses, Sylvia Wynter’s (1971) elucidations about an ecological alternative to the plantation are creatively expanded as the plot grows into a forest and emphasizes the collective character and extent of such ecological revolutions. These

agroecological metaphors also connect Salas Rivera's work to a tradition of Caribbean eco-poetics that, as literary scholar Hannah Regis puts it, continues planting "seeds of reform and activism in the trail of environmental destruction" (2020, p. 151). The repeating "waitilyousee" points towards futures full of agency. Moreover, the attention to the beauty of the project—equated with the very physical and fulfilling experience of climbing a tree—makes clear that we need affective encounters to enact meaningful change. The affective also accumulates, threatening to burst at any minute, reorienting rage into action and hopeful joy. Puerto Rican people have already displayed the power of Caribbean excess, expelling the island's corrupt government by dancing against corruption in the "perreo combativo" of 2019 (Guerrero, 2022). Similarly, Salas Rivera rhythmically builds up a call for liberation that emphasizes the sensorial and pleasurable. This is the true promise of Puerto Rico: climbing, instead of a tree, a full forest to touch futures that, like the sky, offer infinite possibilities of transformation.

Learning Futurity with Trans Bodies and Islands

In this multidimensional battleground, trans voices point towards alternate ways of futuring, informing images, affects, and responses to social and ecological injustice. The collection's last poem, "we dream we span a river in one stride," embraces this centrality. Using a picture of a handwritten poem instead of conventional printed typography reproduced on the paper (*Fig. 2*), the personal and bodily buttress the poem's content. The format gives the immediate impression of a message left with lipstick on a mirror, and the poignant text reads: "the future is a house of mirrors, all reflecting neulisa alexa luciano ruiz" (Salas Rivera, 2022a, pp. 66-67). The name evokes a critical moment in Puerto Rico's history when the murder of transgender woman Neulisa Luciano Ruiz, also known as Alexa Negrón Ruiz, in 2020 revealed the latent transphobia in the country (Abadía-Rexach, 2021). Hence, the poet affirms that political and environmental futures that reclaim autonomy and self-sustenance freed from colonial tethers cannot be conceived without gender justice. This premise requires hard work and dealing with complexities, which is moreover underpinned by the title "we dream we span a river in one stride." It signals that although it is comforting to see change as merely a happening, immense amounts of labor push every change. To cross the river, we must think and feel intersectionally, with the premise of not leaving anyone behind and nurturing radical care practices.

Figure 2. “we dream we span a river in one stride.”



the
future is
a house of
mirrors,

all
reflecting
neulisa
alexa
luciano
RVIZ.

© Roque Raquel Salas Rivera *before island is volcano/antes que isla es volcán* (2022).
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Another important element that links trans and ecological conversations is the overall idea of the book itself: volcanos transformed into islands, same as bodies in transitions, and the Puerto Rican island’s fight for sovereignty. Similar to scholar Rosamond King’s (2014) analysis of the propinquity between islands and trans bodies, I consider how bodies and islands are in constant transmutation in Salas Rivera’s work. I also find inspiration in Nicole Seymour’s analyses of authors that “place gender within larger timescales than the neat mainstream narrative of transitioning often suggests” (2022, pp. 101-102)¹² to think about conversations on deep time next to trans bodies. The stanza that prompts the collection’s title reads: “todo es hermoso y violento,/ todo se angustia por pan,/ y todo, como la tierra,/ antes que isla es volcán” (Salas Rivera, 2022a, p. 65), which I translate as “everything is beautiful and violent, in angst searching for bread, and everything, like the land, before island, is volcano.” Contrary to the rest of the poems, this one appears

¹² Here and on other occasions, Seymour has her transecological frameworks reading the poet of Puerto Rican descent Oliver Baez Bendorf. This demonstrated Caribbean practices’ relevance for these ecocritical articulations.

repeated in the English part of the book in its original Spanish. The poem begs no translation; its audience is a very specific one.

The poem's title, "versos complejos" (complex verses), is inspired in format and theme by Jose Martí's well-known "versos sencillos" (simple/free verses). This connection reaffirms the strong revolutionary impulses behind the book in this homage to one of the most important poets and politicians in C19 Latin America and a relentless fighter for Cuban independence. More significantly, in this book, the link between transgender reclamation for ending gender violence is directly paired with Puerto Rico's claim for independence. The poet declares that "we are insularly sufficient" (p. 53) to reject the colonial status, suggesting that land and bodies are agentic, not broken but changing and sustaining themselves through their interconnections and surrounding ecologies. Such an idea of sufficiency could seem at odds with bodies' entanglements with other nonhuman elements since, as trans studies scholar Susan Stryker reminds us, "embodiment is always technologized embodiment, that soma and techné never really have an 'and' between them" (Stryker quoted in Seymour, 2020, p. 192). Whereas these paramount considerations are aimed first and foremost at depathologizing transgender bodies, Salas Rivera's work confirms all this but additionally brings "sufficiency" as an antiimperialist critique, highlighting how colonial dependency reduces relationality to extraction and neglects the care necessary for everyone and everything to flourish with integrity.

Hence, he calls instead for nonhierarchical, archipelagic, and rhizomatic forms of communion in which "no predatory rootstock tak[es] over permanently" (Glissant, 1997, p. 11). Moreover, the volcano that births the island through eruptions also represents a burst of energy and revolutionary movement, offering a geological allegory for understanding social processes of transformation and justice from a Marxist lens. The poet reveals himself as part of the magma, turning poems into political projects that reflect, refract, invite, reclaim, and ultimately participate in activist struggles for the present and the future. Salas Rivera makes a powerful intervention reclaiming islands' fluidity and interconnections—contrary to ideas of rock neutrality and inertia (Pugh, 2013), transitioning from volcanos to islands and reaffirming geological and gender transition as "natural." This operation is what transecology scholar Eva Hayward (2008, p. 76) calls trans-speciation, the creation of metaphors and kinship with the natural world to uplift relationality and ecological solidarity. This trans-speciation between transgender bodies and Caribbean islands contributes to expanding the definition of chronotropics, showing the multiple possibilities in transing other imaginaries of futurity.

Conclusions: Towards more Transecological Futures

Salas Rivera's collection *before island is volcano* articulates a transecopoetics of futurity through images of a decolonial Puerto Rico. Examining the several operations throughout the book, namely, portmanteaus, bending time, trans-speciation, excesses, etc., I have argued that his poems configure new ways of envisioning futurity guided by affective and ecological entanglements. These linguistic interventions emphasize the material changes needed in Puerto Rico's political ecologies and enact chronotropics that challenge linear time and teleologies of suffering. With the term affective eco-literacies, I emphasize the poet's reclamation of the epistemologies of marginalized bodies, feelings, and communities as guiding categories to feel the future. His work further demonstrates that contributions from transgender theory, theorists, and creators are crucial to expanding and inspiring discourses around sustainability and futurity. It also confirms that poetry, with the affective encounters it facilitates, can contribute to revolutionary forms of future-making. This unique proposal writes together trans bodies and island ecologies, calling for trans liberation and ecological healing, as the poet explicitly places both as central to the future. He evokes the capacity of transformation in the figure of volcanoes turned into islands, especially underpinning the material relationalities between trans bodies and the islands they inhabit. More than contemplations and speculations, these articulations reveal a call for activism in the efforts to build new futuring practices in the Caribbean.

Salas Rivera's decolonial aspirations refer to the possibility of creating communities where locals can interact with their surroundings in healthier, safer, and more sovereign ways. Decolonizing Puerto Rico also means cleaning its waters, demilitarizing its territory, and making it safe for vulnerable populations. In these revolutionary disruptions/eruptions, trans authors show new "plots" that escape the plantation logic, embracing Caliban and shunning Prospero. They create maroon poetics of anti-heteronormativity, anti-racism, and anti-ecocide, aiming to create "livable lives" (Lloréns, 2021) outside "imperial ruination" (Bonilla, 2020) or upon the "ruinate" (Chwala, 2019, p. 147). In Salas Rivera's work, the Caribbean is the "ground from which to improvise new futures" (Moulton, 2024, p. 5). Acknowledging the many venues still open for discussion in this groundbreaking author's poetic multiverse—for instance, how gender- and genre-bending narratives show novel intersectional approaches to environmental crises, or how other configurations of affective eco-literacy can contribute to envisioning sustainable paradigms and strengthen and materialize decolonial demands with preventive ecological work—I conclude that Roque Raquel Salas Rivera's decolonial and speculative transecopoetics launches the Caribbean chronotropics towards futures more centered on ecological and social justice.

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Ysabel Muñoz-Martínez is a PhD candidate in Environmental Humanities in the Department of Language and Literature at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, where she works with the transdisciplinary project *Narrating Sustainability*. She holds a bachelor's degree in Letters from the University of Havana (2017), and in 2020, she received a Chevening Scholarship to complete the *MLitt. Environment, Culture and Communication* at the University of Glasgow (2021). She has received complementary education across Europe and the United States in institutions such as the KTH Environmental Humanities Laboratory, Cornell University, and the University of Miami. Her research interests include Caribbean culture, post/decolonial studies, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, transecology, futures, and futurisms. She writes about sustainability in the Caribbean context and now dreams of Caribbean Futures from the Nordics.