

Common Fantasy

Carolina Alonso Bejarano

GUMDROPS BY C.A.B. & PETER QUACH



Black feminist, warrior-poet Audre Lorde asserts that poetry is not a luxury, but instead 'give[s] name to the nameless so it can be thought.' For me, in this poetic possibility, the fantastic and the utopian converge – fantasy becomes a medium through which feminist, anti-capitalist worlds can be revisited, reimagined and realized.

However, I have come to understand, as an *artista Colombiana* teaching about race, gender and the law in the US and in the UK, that the fantastic also operates to

maintain the status quo. Fantasy is used to preserve white male supremacy and the myth of neoliberal democracy in our patriarchal/statist/capitalistic/colonial world.

Gumdrops is a serial one-to-four-panel webcomic that Peter Quach and I have cocreated about our lives since 2014. In this Gumdrops (published on Tumblr and Instagram on April 26, 2023), Peter and I refer to historical evidence of the horrors of the British Empire. We expose as fantastical the idea of the 'Commonwealth' of Nations, and show just how the Commonwealth's lands, peoples and aspirations have fared in having 'anything to do with Britain.'

I moved to the UK in 2020, and this is our first Gumdrops about my experiences and realisations here. We decided to focus on my recent trip to Scotland with my parents, and the actual words used by our tour guide describing the Commonwealth. Peter (a Vietnamese American cartoonist from NYC who has also lived in Britain) suggested that we illustrate this tour moment along with four images from the colonial archive. This made sense to me as a lawyer trained to believe in the power of the forensic – taught to point to 'the evidence' when attesting to anything, including the genocidal nature of the British colonial project.

Learning with and from my students about colonialism and coloniality (the power structures that remain in place after the end of formal colonialism) has revealed to me the fantastical notion of mutual benefit implicit in the idea of Empire and its successor, Commonwealth; a fantasy ground into the minds of white Europeans and (neo)colonial subjects alike in the UK through schooling and mainstream media. This Gumdrops responds to that fantasy; a juxtaposition of the myth of a benevolent British Empire with a photo, two historical paintings and an illustration that separately and together reveal the brutal consequences of having 'anything to do with Britain' – a differentiated yet systematically executed project of slavery, dispossession, policing and genocide across the globe.

From this perspective, Gumdrops offers the forensic and the fantastic as oppositional: the former dispels the latter. Yet, this opposition is not always or necessarily the case. Lorde famously tells us that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house' and, indeed, the fantasies of benevolent colonialism and (neo)liberal economics have been legitimized and upheld throughout modern history using a manifold of scientific and forensic methods. We need to create our own alignments of the forensic and the fantastic. Thus, circling back to the utopian/fantastic as the poetic gateway into the cocreation of worlds otherwise, I believe that we must look outside the limits of our

narrow Western modes of knowledge production if we are to search for visions of the anti-colonial worlds Lorde foretold.

Carolina Alonso Bejarano

Born and raised in Colombia, Carolina Alonso Bejarano (aka Rataprincess) is a scholar-activist, cartoonist and DJ living in London and Brooklyn. With a PhD in Women's and Gender Studies, she teaches Law at the University of Warwick. As a researcher and organizer, her interests lie at the intersection of art and the law in relation to reproductive justice in the Americas and the immigrants' rights movement in the US. As a DJ, Carolina produces beats, remixes classics and has performed across the world from Medellín to Berlin to Goa. She has produced multimedia events on activism and community organizing the UK and the US, and her work has appeared in *Feminist Formations*, *The Believer*, *Revista BLAST*, *Jadaliyya* and elsewhere.

Along with fellow New Jersey immigrants' rights activists, Carolina co-wrote, produced and performed the play *Undocumented/Unafraid* (2015) about the rights of undocumented immigrants. Her book, *Decolonizing Ethnography* (2019), was co-written with her field collaborators – women community organizers in New Jersey – about the liberatory possibilities of ethnographic research. Forthcoming projects include

Undocu-Artivism, a book portraying the artworks of undocumented activists, and *Binh & Libertad*, a graphic novel, with creative partner Peter Quach, about an intercultural couple living in NYC.

A recording of this text can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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