

ESSAY

“The True and Only Bones of Columbus”: Relics, Archives, and Reversed Scenarios of Discovery

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The *menace* of mimicry is its *double* vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority.

—Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*

[I]

On 10 September 1877, during repairs in the cathedral of Santo Domingo, two construction workers broke through a wall in a vault situated just beneath the altar and came across what seemed to be a metal case. Aware of the potential significance of this finding, the cathedral rector sent for Roque Cocchia, bishop of Orope and apostolic envoy of the Holy See in the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, and Haiti. Cocchia rushed to the scene and gave instructions to leave everything in place and lock the building. He then summoned all the civil and military authorities and the diplomatic envoys of Germany, Italy, Spain, France, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and the United States. Hours later, in the presence of these dignitaries and a crowd of onlookers, the bishop ordered the excavation to continue. After the removal of an unmarked tombstone, the workers recovered a leaden urn and handed it to the bishop. Visibly moved, Cocchia held it in his hands, took it in procession inside the church for everyone to see, and opened it. Then, turning to the audience, he solemnly announced that the urn contained the remains of “el Ilustre Genovés, el Grande Almirante Don Cristóbal Colon, Descubridor de la América” (“the illustrious Genoese, the great

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admiral Don Christopher Columbus, the discoverer of the Americas”; “Acta notarial” 30).¹

The news was celebrated with a twenty-one-gun salute by the artillery of the plaza, the tolling of all the cathedral and church bells, and the strains of martial music. Once its contents were examined and recorded, the urn was taken in procession to the church of Regina Angelorum, where it would remain until the repairs were completed. The procession was “triumfalmente acompañada de las tropas veteranas de la capital, baterías de Artillería, música y cuanto podía dar realce y esplendor á tan solemne acto, para lo que se hallaba preparada la población como se notaba del gran gentío que llenaba el templo y la plaza de la Catedral” (“accompanied in triumph by the experienced troops of the capital city, artillery battery, music and everything that could provide grandeur and splendor to such a solemn act, for which the population was ready, as could be ascertained by the great size of the crowd that filled the temple and the square of the cathedral”; “Acta notarial” 32).

By all accounts, the discovery of Columbus’s remains in 1877 was an extraordinary event, if for no other reason than because they had purportedly been exhumed from the same cathedral and transferred to Havana in 1796, after Spain ceded the eastern two thirds of Hispaniola in exchange for the territories occupied by the French army during the War of the Pyrenees (1793–95). Hence the reaction of the Spanish government, which forcefully denied the authenticity of the claim calling it a “farce” (qtd. in Schmidt-Nowara 71), while the Royal Academy of Spanish History accused the Dominican religious and civil authorities of staging the finding with the goal of declaring a national commemoration (Colmeiro 2).² The fact that for several years afterwards Dominicans celebrated the *hallazgo* (“finding”) of the bones with religious ceremonies, political speeches, and poetry readings lends some credence to this interpretation. Dominican authorities further ritualized the memory of the event by reenacting the ceremonies of 10 September 1877 whenever the circumstances required opening the urn believed to contain the admiral’s remains. Spectators of these reenactments were asked to

sign a logbook stating that they had seen “the true and only bones of Columbus” (De Forest Day 261). The signatories included such prominent figures as the black American abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the Caribbean anticolonial fighters José Martí, Eugenio María de Hostos, and Ramón Emeterio Betances.³

Unlike the construction of the Columbus Lighthouse in Santo Domingo (1986–92), which has received considerable critical attention since its inauguration in 1992, the transatlantic debate surrounding the events of 1877 has been largely overlooked.⁴ Christopher Schmidt-Nowara is a notable exception. Schmidt-Nowara discusses the controversy at length in his book *The Conquest of History: Spanish Colonialism and National Histories in the Nineteenth Century* (2006). However, he looks at the subject mostly through a Spanish lens, paying scant attention to the Dominican perspective. Michel-Rolph Trouillot examines the monumentalizing of Columbus’s memory in his account of the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago, but he makes no mention of the archaeological discovery that took place in Santo Domingo. Moreover, arguing that Latin America adopted the admiral by way of the United States, Trouillot claims that Latin American leaders had “neither the means nor the will” to dispute Spain’s claim over Columbus’s legacy (135). As far as the case of Santo Domingo is concerned, the evidence suggests that the opposite is true. Nineteenth-century Dominicans had both the means and the will to transform Columbus into a cultural icon of their own, and they did it in the most dramatic way possible: by reappropriating the explorer’s body. Building on Diana Taylor’s theoretical framework, I look at the ceremonies of 10 September 1877 as social performances that facilitated the transmission of deeply rooted cultural memories. Whereas the procession from the cathedral to the church repeated the ritualized gestures prescribed for the discovery and transfer of relics, the ceremony that took place in the cathedral harked back to a different “scenario of discovery”—the one enacted by the Spanish conquerors when claiming possession of a new territory. In a country that had recently fought a war of independence against Spain (1863–65), the ceremonies provided

an opportunity for Dominicans to perform their new-found political and cultural agency on the global stage, as they turned Columbus's body into the centerpiece of their country's national archive.

The dispute between Spain and the Dominican Republic points to the larger question of the role of archival and embodied practices in the transmission of cultural memory. As Wendy Muñiz states, the emergence of Columbus's remains in the cathedral of Santo Domingo was "a pivotal event in the history of the nation's archives"—a history marred by a manifest lack of documental sources (3).⁵ Elaborating on the connection between the discovery of the urn and the birth of a national consciousness, Muñiz calls attention to the way in which the scarcity of sources shaped archival practices in the Dominican Republic. Placed under intense scrutiny at the height of the dispute, these practices hint at a notion of archive far removed from the "accumulation or surplus" articulated by European thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault (32). Muñiz's analysis focuses on the role of oral tradition and other "unofficial archives" as sources of historical legitimacy. To these, we could add social performances like the ones enacted both in the cathedral and in the streets of Santo Domingo. A close reading of texts from both sides of the controversy reveals that, in the absence of documentary evidence, claims to historical truth in postcolonial societies often relied on the system of transmission of knowledge that Diana Taylor calls the "repertoire."

In her seminal study of cultural memory in the Americas, Taylor posits a gulf "between the archive of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, bones) and the so-called ephemeral repertoire of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)" (19). Like other cultural theorists before her, she identifies the archive with hegemonic power, the meaning-making paradigms of the educated elite, and the exclusionary practices of imperial, colonial, and national projects. Her approach, however, departs from Eurocentric views of the archive in that it invites us to pay closer attention to embodied behaviors as alternative ways of preserving and transmitting cultural memory. As Taylor explains, Western

scholars have long privileged documents and artifacts as primary sources of knowledge and have associated embodied practices with that which disappears. However, cultural memory and identity are also preserved and transmitted through the body, activating a "process of selection, memorization or internalization, and transmission [that] takes place within (and in turn helps constitute) specific systems of re-presentation" (21).

One implication of Taylor's approach is that the repertoire can be used as a means of resistance. Since embodied actions allow illiterate and subjugated groups the possibility of preserving a sense of communal identity, it is in the repertoire that one can better trace the memories that have been silenced or erased from the official narratives. This is not to say, however, that all performances are intrinsically subversive.⁶ Taylor herself warns that the tendency to associate the repertoire with antihegemonic forms of knowledge can be misleading, since "embodied performances have often contributed to the maintenance of a repressive social order" (22). I would submit that the ability of social performances to sustain or resist repressive hierarchies depends to a large extent on the subject position of the actors involved. In the case of the Dominican Republic, those resisting were neither illiterate nor subjugated but members of the religious and cultural elites. Moreover, the performances surrounding the discovery of Columbus's remains exposed their privileged position relative to the majority of the local population. Yet, from the perspective of the Spanish colonizers, these same individuals were seen as lacking political and cultural agency. Their performance, therefore, embodied both continuity and fracture, repetition and difference.

[II]

Before delving into the intricacies of the controversy over Columbus's remains and its bearing on Dominican cultural memory, it would be helpful to outline the complex historical context in which the controversy played out. Santo Domingo was the site of the first European colonial settlement in

the New World and remained under the control of Spain until Prime Minister Manuel Godoy ceded the Spanish portion of the island to France in a treaty that ended the War of the Pyrenees, on 22 July 1795. When the Spanish authorities completed the transfer of power in 1796, they took the colonial archives and an urn allegedly containing Columbus's remains to Havana, since Cuba was still a Spanish colony. The French occupation ended in 1809, after an eight-month British naval blockade that facilitated the recolonization of Santo Domingo by Spain. In 1821 Dominicans separated from Spain with the goal of joining Gran Colombia, a South American republic that encompassed present-day Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, and Ecuador.⁷ However, those plans did not materialize, because the Haitians unified the island in 1822. Twenty-two years later, on 27 February 1844, a separatist group known as La Trinitaria proclaimed independence from Haiti and the creation of the Dominican Republic. The Haitian government made several attempts to regain control of the eastern part of Hispaniola, prompting some members of the Dominican ruling class to seek the protection of a foreign power. At the invitation of the Dominican president Pedro Santana (1801–64), Spain recolonized the Dominican territory in 1861. The War of Restoration (1863–65)—a two-year conflict between Dominican nationalists and Spain—ended this new occupation but left the country in a state of extreme political instability and “did much to undermine faith in Dominican sovereignty” (Mayes 18). Forty years after initial separation from Spain, the country still lacked a sense of national identity.

The first calls for the creation of national archives in the Dominican Republic emerged in the aftermath of the Spanish-Dominican conflict, a sign that the local elites linked the survival of their nation to the existence of a shared memory of the past. An unsigned article published in 1867, attributed to the prolific poet, novelist, and playwright Francisco Javier Angulo y Guridi (1816–84), asserted that shortly after annexing the Dominican Republic the Spanish forces destroyed the national archives in a deliberate attempt to erase Dominicans' historical memory and their claim to nationhood.⁸ The author

of the article presented the destruction of the archives as evidence that in Spain's view Dominicans lacked humanity; they were just slaves and therefore were not entitled to write their own history: “Los esclavos no deben tener historia, porque la sociedad civil les niega todo derecho, porque no tienen existencia propia, porque no son hombres sino cosas muy insignificantes” (“Slaves should not have history because the civil society denies them all rights, because they don't have their own existence, because they are not men but meaningless objects”; “Para la historia” 5). The article concluded that, since there could be no nation without history, in destroying the archives Spain had effectively denied the Dominican Republic the ability to exist as a sovereign state.

The dispute over Columbus's remains offered Dominican nationalists a unique opportunity to build their archival memory and assert their sovereignty on a global stage. The legitimacy of their claim relied not on the abundance but on the glaring lack of documentary evidence regarding the admiral's burial place. Columbus died in Valladolid, Spain, on 20 May 1506. In 1513, his remains were reportedly transferred to the Cartuja Monastery of Santa María de las Cuevas, in Seville, where they were kept until his daughter-in-law, María de Toledo, was granted permission to bury him in the cathedral of Santo Domingo, in Hispaniola, fulfilling Columbus's wishes. The exact date of this reinterment is a matter of debate because the archives of the cathedral were burned during Francis Drake's raid of the city in 1586. However, a royal decree by King Charles V that reprimands the ecclesiastical authorities of Santo Domingo for not having as of yet complied with his instructions to bury Columbus under the altar indicates that the remains were already on the island by 1540.⁹

A similar uncertainty surrounds the exact location of the burial, since no tombstone or monument marked the graves of Columbus or of any of his family members. The liberal writer and politician Emiliano Tejera (1841–1923) speculated that the markers were probably removed during renovations performed in the sixteenth century to enlarge the presbytery of the cathedral.¹⁰ Other observers

interpreted the absence of markers as yet another sign of Spain's ingratitude toward the man who placed the New World at the feet of the Spanish crown. Among these was Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry (1750–1819), a French colonist from Martinique who visited Santo Domingo in 1783. Having requested information from the Spanish authorities as to the exact location of the grave, Moreau de Saint-Méry learned that during construction work performed two months earlier in the cathedral, a leaden urn had been discovered that bore no inscriptions but that allegedly contained the admiral's remains. Dismayed, the visitor lamented what he perceived as humankind's disregard for the remnants of the past: "Oh! supine indifference for all that is truly noble! not a mausoleum, not a monument, not even an inscription, to tell where they lie!" (132).

The absence of markers on Columbus's grave is indeed surprising, considering the elevated position the Genoese explorer would come to occupy during the nineteenth century, when several nations on both sides of the Atlantic scrambled to adopt him as a founding figure. Columbus was incorporated into the myth of the origins of the United States, where his name came to embody the values of liberty and individualism, shortly after the signing of the American Declaration of Independence (Bushman 53–55; Bartosik-Vélez 66–67). For their part, Spanish American Creoles at the turn of the nineteenth century compared their lot with that of the admiral, whom they considered a victim of Spain's ingratitude (Bartosik-Vélez 107). Spain's own efforts to keep Columbus's legacy can be traced to the decision to transfer his remains to Havana before the cession of Santo Domingo to France.¹¹ In a display of patriotic sentiment, Gabriel de Aristizábal y Espinosa, the lieutenant general of the Spanish Royal Army, gave instructions to exhume the admiral's bones with the intention of taking them to Havana for fear that they would be profaned by the French (Cárdenas Chacón and Sayas Santa-Cruz). Santo Domingo's municipal authorities, the archbishop, military officers, and other notables participated in the ceremony, performed on 19 January 1796. According to the

affidavit written that day, the unmarked vault contained some sheets of metal and "pedazos de huesos como de canillas ú otras partes de algún difunto" ("pieces of bones that resembled shinbones or some other parts of a deceased"; "Acta de exhumación" 172), a remark that would become a major point of contention.¹² The remains were removed from the cathedral, carried in procession to the port, and shipped to Havana, where they were honored with funeral rites worthy of a head of state.

The funeral of 1796 was the first in a series of performances associating Columbus's bones with the memory of a community. In the account published by the city council of Havana under the title *Relación del funeral, que hizo la muy noble y leal ciudad de la Havana a las cenizas del gran descubridor de las Américas Don Cristobal Colon* (*An Account of the Funeral Performed by the Very Noble and Loyal City of Havana for the Ashes of the Great Discoverer of the Americas, Christopher Columbus*), which describes the event as "el espectáculo mas lucido y vistoso, que pudieron registrar los ojos de sus habitantes" ("the most magnificent and splendid spectacle that the eyes of its dwellers had ever seen"; Cárdenas Chacón and Sayas Santa-Cruz), the city council members boasted that the funeral represented the finest expression of the city's gratitude for the admiral's deeds. However, this homage was deemed incomplete unless it was known around the world: "á ella le pareció, que no llenaba todo su deber, si dexando encerrada dentro de su recinto una representacion tan plausible no trataba de pasarla á la noticia, y admiracion de todo el mundo: por eso acordó en su Cabildo de ocho de enero darlo á la prensa con toda exáctitud" ("The city was under the impression that she had not fulfilled her duty if she left a representation so worthy of acclaim held within its precinct, instead of making it public to inspire the awe of the whole world; therefore, in a meeting on 8 January the city council determined to publish an accurate account in the press").

One conclusion that can be drawn from the council's account is that the ceremony officiated in Havana in 1796 was no less a spectacle than the one carried out in Santo Domingo decades later.

From the authors' perspective, the theatrical nature of a performance did not diminish its significance. Far from it; the splendor displayed during the funeral rites, which they interpreted as evidence of an innate disposition to honor the past, rendered visible the moral character of the city. But visible to whom? The passage implies the existence of two different audiences: the inhabitants of the city, who saw the funeral as "the most magnificent and splendid spectacle," and the outside world, which would read about it in the press. These two audiences align with the two systems of production, preservation, and transmission of memory identified by Taylor as the "repertoire" and the "archive." One produced and transmitted the memory of the event through the reenactment of "forms handed down from the past [that] are experienced as present" (Taylor 24); the other called for those forms to be narrativized and disseminated in writing. If the ceremony was deemed incomplete without the aid of written words, it was because in the eyes of Havana's educated elite the value of a social performance depended not only on the capacity of archival practices to preserve and reproduce the memory of said performance but also on the legitimating power of an external gaze.

Given Spain's efforts to turn Columbus into a national symbol, it is not surprising that the Spanish political and intellectual community would take the Dominican *hallazgo* as an affront to its national pride. The urgent response that the news prompted is captured in a telegram dated 24 October 1877 in which Cánovas del Castillo, then the minister of Ultramar, instructed the general governor of Cuba to determine whether the remains found in Santo Domingo were in fact Columbus's and, if that was the case, to take all necessary steps to obtain them (Schmidt-Nowara 71). It did not take long for Spanish authorities to launch a vigorous campaign to discredit the Dominican claim, even though the consul of Spain in the Dominican Republic, José Manuel Echeverri, was among the signatories of the statement drafted in Santo Domingo.¹³ In a separate message sent to Havana a month later, Cánovas del Castillo suggested that the whole affair was "a farce concocted by some Italians" with the

intention of negotiating the transfer of Columbus's remains to Genoa (qtd. in Schmidt-Nowara 71); therefore, he requested that the local authorities of Havana dispatch a historian to conduct an investigation in Santo Domingo. The captain general of Cuba Joaquín Jovellar y Soler chose Sebastián González de la Fuente to carry out this mission "con la más prudente reserva" ("with the utmost tact and discretion"; qtd. in Lugo 323). In his official report of 7 December 1877, González de la Fuente declared that, after careful examination of the evidence and numerous conversations with the witnesses, he was persuaded that the remains found in Santo Domingo were indeed Columbus's (298–99). Seemingly displeased with these findings, Jovellar commissioned Antonio López Prieto, a Spanish historian living in Cuba, to conduct a second investigation.

López Prieto was the author of an article published shortly after the events of 1877, in which he had argued that the Dominican case lacked the authority of archival documentation. His methodical approach in that work evinced the Rankean assumptions that documents and other artifacts speak for themselves and that historical truth is accessible through the objective examination of primary sources. Yet his language sometimes displays the kind of subjective engagement with the archives that marked the emergence of scientific historiography in the nineteenth century (Blouin and Rosenberg 25). The article begins with a poignant reflection in which the discovery of Columbus's bones is portrayed as yet another calamity brought upon the explorer's memory. "La vida de los grandes hombres," López Prieto observes, "es la historia del dolor en el mundo" ("The life of great men is the story of pain in the world"; "Los restos" 318). Struggle, suffering, and martyrdom are the price of greatness. But in the end, a great man's pain will be rewarded, for good always triumphs over evil and error.

López Prieto adopts a similar approach in the report he submitted to the Royal Academy of History after his investigation. He laments the fate of Spanish conquistadors such as Francisco Pizarro, Diego Velázquez, Hernán Cortés, Alonso de Ojeda,

and Rodrigo de Bastidas, whose whereabouts continued to be unknown centuries after their deaths (*Informe* 8–9). He goes on to state that, although Columbus was not a Spaniard, his deeds on behalf of the Spanish empire made him a national hero. To safeguard “una gloria que tan injustamente se quiere arrebatar á España” (“a glory that some people wanted so unjustly to snatch from Spain”; 10) was, therefore, “una gran obra patriótica” (“a great patriotic undertaking”)—one that López Prieto sets out to fulfill wholeheartedly, “como Español y como hombre honrado” (“as a Spaniard and as an honest man”). After this impassioned declaration of purpose, the historian proceeds to give an account of the work he carried out in the Archivo General de la Havana and in the cathedral of Santo Domingo, promising, in contradictory fashion, to treat the subject, “ageno á toda pasion, en el Santuario de la verdad, sin profanar la augusta magestad de la ciencia . . . sin que lo debiliten de una manera inoportuna vanos alardes de patriotismo” (“oblivious to all passions, in the sanctuary of truth, without desecrating the majesty of science . . . without undermining it, inappropriately, with futile displays of patriotism”; 11). In short, to be objective.

Wavering between emotional rhetoric and an avowed commitment to scientific rationality, between a sense of patriotic duty and a pledge to impartiality, López Prieto’s mission was complicated by the scarcity of documents necessary to support the Spanish case. Although López Prieto never examined the bones,¹⁴ he was certain that the true remains of Columbus were housed in Havana. The problem was that, by López Prieto’s own admission, there was no written evidence to be found in the archives. The few documents that had been saved from the destructive forces of history could not refute the Dominican claims (*Informe* 20).

Undermining the credibility of the Dominican finding required bridging the gap between the historical truth for which López Prieto was searching and the actual contents of the archive. To meet this challenge, he renounces the protocols of scientific methodology for the affective power of the poetic imagination. This becomes apparent in his reconstruction of the ceremony that took place in

1796, when the Spanish authorities transferred what they believed to be Columbus’s remains to Havana. López Prieto writes that as he walked toward Santo Domingo’s cathedral, he thought he could hear the murmur of the people waiting to see the coffin passing by, the sound of the funeral carriages, the commanding voices of the captains, and the prayers of the monks congregated under the temple’s vault (21–22). He also imagined the religious orders in the empty naves of the church, ready for the procession, the archbishop with the Santo Domingo cathedral chapter, the councilors, the magistrates, and the military ranks, salvaging the “reliquias” (“relics”) of the man who had brought so much honor to the Spanish fatherland. He then relates the rush of emotions he experienced upon seeing the Spanish national emblem that crowned the main altarpiece:

La situacion de mi ánimo, no podia ser otra, dadas las circunstancias que en mi concurrian, y al fijar la vista en el retablo del altar mayor y ver aún en su alto remate el escudo de España, ¿como no olvidar un momento los ochenta y dos años de triste devastacion que por la histórica Catedral han pasado desde que se efectuó el acto á que me contraigo? (22)

The state of my spirit could not have been any different, given the circumstances in which I found myself, and upon laying my eyes on the retablo of the main altar and seeing the emblem of Spain, how not to forget for a moment the eighty-two years of sad devastation that the historical cathedral had suffered since the ceremony I am referring to took place?

The empty spaces of the archive are thus filled by the historian’s ability to conjure up the spirits of the dead and to reenact the cultural performances of bygone days, projecting onto material remains of the past the shadows cast by the political struggles of the present.

Although López Prieto’s report gave an unfavorable assessment of the Dominican case, the historian refrained from accusing the Dominican Republic of perpetrating a fraud. Other commentators, however, were not as gracious. A separate

report to the Spanish Royal Academy of History portrayed the discovery of the remains as a ploy devised by the religious and political leaders of the Dominican Republic with the specific aim of establishing “una fiesta nacional” (“a national holiday”) and indicted Cocchia for being the “actor principal en todas las escenas que al caso se refieren” (“main actor in all the scenes related to this case”; Colmeiro 2).¹⁵ In a study published in Caracas in 1881, the Cuban scholar Juan Ignacio de Armas argued that the “falsificacion” (“forgery”; 5) was meant to strengthen the case for canonizing Columbus. The allegation stemmed from the fact that Cocchia had been among the more than four hundred cardinals, patriarchs, archbishops, and bishops who supported the canonization proposed by the archbishop of Bordeaux, Ferdinand Donnet, on 20 June 1876. After the discovery, Cocchia sent samples of the remains to Pope Leo XIII (Camilo González 93).

Unlike López Prieto, whose arguments targeted the perceived contradictions and anachronisms found in Dominican sources, De Armas sought to undermine the Dominican case by challenging the legitimacy of the rituals performed inside and outside the cathedral. He recounts the flurry of activities that took place in preparation for the ceremony: the thousands of people that convened and vied for access to the temple, the loading of cannons in all the fortresses, the presence of the brass band. De Armas describes how, at the stipulated time, began “una de las escenas más penosas” (“one of the most shameful scenes”) that human nature could devise:

Se abrió una bóveda sin lápida legible, cuyo contenido era imposible que lo supiese nadie, a ménos de no haberla abierto ántes; i sin cuya prévia apertura era áun más imposible que ningun hombre sensato hubiera convocado a millares de personas i hecho tantos preparativos. De ella se sacó una urna de plomo, que ántes de abrirla se hizo circular en torno, como circula en el teatro un sombrero, o una de esas cajas que los prestidijitadores llaman *sin preparacion*, para que el público las vea ántes de sacar de dentro lo que todos créen que se encuentra en otra parte. (7)

They opened a vault that had no readable tombstone, and whose content could not possibly be known by anyone, unless they had placed it there in advance, and which without having opened it before it was even less possible for any sensible man to summon thousands of people and make so many preparations. Out of the vault they extracted a leaden urn that they passed around the audience, the way it is done in the theater when they pass around a hat, or one of those boxes that prestidigitators call *unprepared*, for the audience to see before they pull out of it what everybody thinks is somewhere else.

In sum, De Armas was convinced that Cocchia’s actions had been a well-orchestrated ploy. The illusionist analogy casts doubt on the bishop, who appears to produce rather than discover the bones. The size of the crowd and the preparations made in advance are seen as indications that the events were staged—that Cocchia already knew what he was going to find inside the vault because he was the one who placed the metal box with human remains there. De Armas also finds it suspicious that the announcement was celebrated with a gun salute, music, fireworks, and balloons, and he criticizes the festive mood of the procession carried out that evening:

Luego se estendió el acta del descubrimiento i salió la urna en procesion por las calles, con acompañamiento de músicas, vivas, cohetes, globillos iluminados por el aire, i otras manifestaciones preparadas para el caso; sin que se elevase al cielo, en aquel momento histórico, ninguno de los cantos que prescribe la iglesia para el oficio de difuntos. No más que globos subieron. (8)

Then the affidavit of the discovery was written and the urn went in procession throughout the streets, accompanied by music, cheering, fireworks, and other manifestations prepared for the occasion, without, in that historical moment, any of the hymns that the church prescribes for the Office of the Dead ascending to heaven. Only balloons ascended.

Implicit in De Armas’s criticism is the idea that the way the ceremony was enacted should be the

criterion by which to measure the authenticity, or lack thereof, of the remains. We should note that the title of the sworn statement signed on 10 September, "Acta notarial levantada para constatar la autenticidad de los restos del Almirante Colon" ("Notary Act to Confirm the Authenticity of the Remains of the Admiral Columbus"), links the notion of *autenticidad* to the authority of the written word. The sworn statement was created with the expressed purpose of declaring that the remains were indeed authentic. However, the *acta notarial* in and of itself could confirm only that the ceremony took place. Since the act of writing and signing the affidavit was already scripted in the performance, it was not the archive but the repertoire that had the power to invest the bones with legitimacy. As De Armas suggests, for the remains to be considered authentic, the ceremony had to follow a certain pattern and it had to be performed in accordance with certain cultural expectations. The point of contention, therefore, was not whether the rites held in the cathedral and the celebrations that ensued could endow the bones with meaning, but whether such performances were appropriate for the occasion. Judging by De Armas's words, the Cuban and Spanish authorities believed the occasion called for the Office of the Dead, a cycle of prayers recited on the Feast of All Souls and in funeral services. Dominicans had done something entirely different. Participants in the festive parade through the streets of the old city enacted the kind of gestures and movements scripted for the translation of relics of patron saints.

[III]

The rituals performed in the streets of Santo Domingo drew on a readily available repertoire of paraliturgical practices that had been in place in the western Mediterranean world from the late fourth century, when material remnants associated with the martyrs of Christianity began to be seen as embodying the presence of the holy.¹⁶ Relics, according to Peter Brown, were "the greatest blessing that a late-antique Christian could enjoy" (88). Their discovery in the midst of a community was a

sign of God's approval, which explains the celebratory mood that accompanied such events. A yearning for proximity with the saints drove pilgrims to embark on long travels to distant shrines. But pilgrimage was not the only way of overcoming the distance separating the believer from the relics. These were also paraded from town to town and welcomed with rituals modeled on the triumphal *adventus*, a Roman ceremony performed to welcome the emperor's arrival at a city. Designed to foment feelings of solidarity and concord, such ceremonies involved all members of the community: "Each separate category within the city—young and old, men and women, tradesmen and nobility, foreigners and locals—had its rightful place in the ceremony of welcome" (98).

Dominicans welcomed Columbus into their community with the theatrical demonstrations of joy expected of the *adventus*. That is to say, the "relics" discovered in the cathedral of Santo Domingo and transferred in triumph to the church of Regina Angelorum were not those of Columbus the conqueror but those of Columbus the martyr.¹⁷ The explorer's candidacy for sainthood was based on his reputation as the leading figure in the expansion of Christianity and was bolstered by stories of his suffering at the hands of an evil power.¹⁸ His reemergence in Santo Domingo, decades after being supposedly transferred to Havana, was nothing short of a miracle and, in the eyes of the proponents of his canonization, a sign that God was on their side. Cocchia, for one, suggested as much in a pastoral letter to the Dominican clergy: "¡Quién sabe si mientras que prelados y laicos emplean sus cuidados y sus plumas para ver introducida la Causa de este insigne Varon cerca de la Santa Sede, la Providencia ha permitido oportunamente el descubrimiento de sus reliquias!" ("Who knows if, as prelates and laymen employ their efforts and their pens to introducing the cause of this distinguished man in the Holy See, providence has opportunely allowed the discovery of his relics!"; "Carta pastoral" 72). The bishop invited all members of the community to share his jubilation and ordered the priests to celebrate the momentous event with a general tolling of the bells. The priests were also

instructed to sing a *Te Deum* “en accion de gracias al Todopoderoso” (“in thanksgiving to the Almighty”), and to repeat this ritual each year on 10 September to commemorate the finding.

In addition to the use of the term *reliquias*, the traces of the cult of saints can be discerned in the procession held that same evening. We saw earlier that the authors of the affidavit written to record the ceremonies stated that the procession was “trunfalmente acompañada” by Dominican soldiers, employing an expression that in the Spanish language means to carry, to bring outside, or to welcome a person amid cheers. In his response to the report published by the Spanish Royal Academy of History, Cocchia makes a more direct connection to the Roman triumph. The procession “resultó un verdadero triunfo” (“became a veritable triumph”), Cocchia writes, cautiously adding that it was “espontáneo, improvisado” (“spontaneous, improvised”; *Los restos* 113). The bishop goes on to depict the scene as follows:

La caja puesta en unas andas y cubierta de un tapiz, fué llevada por los Sres. Cónsules y otros señores, alternando; las autoridades seguían, los veteranos de la Capital rodeaban, yo con el clero precedía; y en verdad si no pude entonar un cántico de alegría, no tuve valor para empezar un salmo fúnebre: todo lo dejé al regocijo público, animado por las armonías de la música, por el estampido del cañon y por el tañido de las campanas. (113–14)

The box, lying on a platform and covered by a tapestry, was carried in turns by the consuls and other gentlemen, followed by the [civil] authorities; the veterans of the capital city surrounded them. I led [the procession] with the clergy; and, to tell the truth, even if I could not intone a song of joy, I did not have the courage to begin a funeral psalm. I let the public joy take over, moved by the harmonies of music, by the thunder of the cannon, and by the tolling of the bells.

Cocchia, therefore, admits he had the option of intoning a funeral psalm, an implicit recognition that the Office of the Dead would have been an appropriate ceremony in this context, but he

exonerates himself from the responsibility of making the decision by deferring to the community’s spontaneous response. We need not doubt the sincerity of Cocchia’s words about the improvised nature of the celebrations. However, the disposition of people’s bodies, the roles assigned to each person, and even the unconscious outburst of enthusiasm—which, as Cocchia indicates, was instigated by the sounds of music, bells, and cannon shots—bear the marks of a highly scripted spectacle, a reenactment of past behaviors preserved and transferred from one generation to the next in endless repetitions. Drawing on the rituals of Roman Catholicism, the celebrations conveyed at once feelings of solidarity and notions of authority, evincing the “double preoccupation with concord and the exercise of power” that characterized the translations of saints (Brown 98).

The Dominican educated elite saw the celebrations as an opportunity to transcend the tribal warfare that plagued their society and unite the population under a shared sense of national and civic identity. Intellectuals across the political divide came together in defense of the Dominican cause against their critics from Cuba and Spain. The authors of a series of poems published in the literary journal *El Estudio* (*The Study*) turned to the *hallazgo* to assert their cultural independence, characterizing Spain’s attempts to challenge the authenticity of the remains as motivated either by imperial arrogance or by sheer jealousy. Josefa Perdomo (1834–96), an earlier proponent of reannexing the country to its former colonial power, now accused Spain of unjustly attacking the Dominican Republic:

I por más que la Iberia anhela, injusta,
Disputar á mi patria la victoria,
I el brillo de su gloria,
Con tanto empeño oscurecer desee,
La Primada de América, los restos
De su inmortal descubridor posee.

And as much as the unfair Iberia wishes
To contest the victory of my fatherland
And the brilliance of its glory,
As much as it tries to overshadow it,
The first city of America possesses
The remains of the immortal discoverer.

On the other side of the political spectrum, the acclaimed poet Salomé Ureña (1850–98) urged her nation to stand majestically in the face of the slanders that were thrown at it and to celebrate the event, paying no attention to Spain's "alarde / de insensato poder" ("bravado / of senseless power"; 69). Similarly, in a poem of nearly two hundred lines that recounts key moments of Columbus's life, Federico Henríquez y Carvajal (1848–1952), the president of the literary society Amigos del País and one of the most influential Dominican intellectuals of the post-Restoration period, hailed the "hallazgo venturoso / De los restos del mártir" ("fortunate discovery / Of the remains of the martyr"), declaring that if Spain could claim the glory of Columbus's enterprise, Santo Domingo had the honor of holding his body (85).

But perhaps the text that best captures the way Dominican poets recontextualized the finding to unite their fellow citizens under the umbrella of a shared cultural identity is a poem by the lesser-known writer and educator José Dubeau (1856–85) titled "Con motivo del hallazgo de los restos de Cristoval Colon" ("On the Occasion of the Finding of Christopher Columbus's Remains"). In the opening stanza, the poet appears at first exasperated by a commotion of unknown cause:

Huya de aqui la odiosa gritería
Que turba mis sentidos; mas ¿qué pasa
Que miro la alegría
Asomada en los rostros
Con su color de grana,
I escucho vocería
I música i clarin, i la campana
Echase á vuelo con sonar alegre?
Qué pasa en la ciudad que al regocijo
Se entregan todos con afan prolijo? (107)

Begone, the irritating noise
That disturbs my senses; but what's the matter?
Why do I see joy
Coloring everybody's faces?
And I hear loud voices,
And music and bugle, and the bell
Tolling with a joyful sound?
What's happening in the city

That inspires everyone
To rejoice with great zeal?

The poem quickly turns into the celebration of the "suceso feliz" ("fortunate event") that embellished the "páginas tristes" ("sad pages") of national history. Dubeau invokes the sun, asking for "esa misma luz que presenciaste / Esa nuestra alegría" ("that same light that witnessed / Our happiness") to enlighten him, so that he can share the news with the whole universe. But even as he celebrates his country's good fortune, the poet is keenly aware of the challenges that lie ahead, since Columbus's bones are coveted by "cien naciones afanasas / De su gloria i honor siempre celosas" ("a hundred untiring nations / Ever jealous of her glory and honor"). Behind the exhilaration that the text displays, one can detect a trace of the anxiety that Dubeau and many of his fellow citizens must have experienced at Spain's reluctance to recognize the legitimacy of the finding. Yet he remains defiantly upbeat and even appears to delight in the furor that the news caused once it reached the Iberian Peninsula:

Cruza los mares venturosa nueva;
Lleva doquier tus gritos de victoria;
I al escuchar de Atlántico el bramido
En su opuesta ribera,
Cimente nuestra gloria
Hasta en las brumas del confin perdido
Justo, el rencor de la nacion Ibera. (107)

Go across the seas, fortunate news;
Take everywhere your cries of victory;
And upon hearing the bellow of the Atlantic
In its opposite shore
Strengthen our glory
Even in the haze over the edge of the world
The justified rancor of the Iberian nation.

Dubeau reminds us that this is the same Iberia that, moved by greed, supported the explorer's expedition, "I aclamóse despues dueña de un mundo. / El mundo de Colon!" ("And called herself the owner of a world. / Columbus's world!"; 108). After narrating the story of Columbus's first voyage,

Dubeau draws a parallel between the hero and the Dominican Republic based on the theme of the ingratitude with which Spain rewarded them for their accomplishments. Addressing Columbus directly, Dubeau asks:

Será quizás que te darán por premio
La cárcel pavorosa? qué! tan fiera
Ha de mostrarse la nacion Ibera?
Cuánta injusticia! cuánta, qué vileza
Registrará la historia
Para eterna memoria!
Mas, la ignominia a tu grandeza estraña,
Baldon será para la injusta España. (108)

Is it possible that the reward for your services
Will be the horrific jail? What? Can
The Iberian nation be so fierce?
How much injustice! How much vileness
Will be recorded by history
For eternal memory!
But ignominy, which is foreign to your greatness
Will be an affront to the unjust Spain.

Spain's callousness is thus countered by the satisfaction that Columbus's deeds (and by implication the deeds of the Dominican Republic) would be recognized by posterity. In the final section, the poet returns to the present and decides to join the people's celebrations. The poem thus comes full circle, and Dubeau takes the general mood as an opportunity to leave behind the hostility that has torn his nation apart:

Acude, pátria mía;
Depon el ceño airado
I huya la fiera que tu seno cría
Discordia ponzoñosa
Mui mas horrible cuanto mas briosa.
Huya la fiera impía,
I acude sin temor, olvida un tanto
De tu pasado la memoria fría. (108)

Come, my fatherland;
Dispel the angry frown
And shoo away the beast that dwells within
your heart,
The venomous discord,

Which is as dreadful as it is strong.
Shoo away the cruel beast
And come without fear, forget for a moment
The cold memory of your past.

The poem ends with a call to national unity, as if the feelings of joy triggered by the possession of Columbus's remains, which conjured the mythical origin of the nation, had the power to dispel the memory of the Spanish annexation and the war that pitted Dominicans against one another and undermined their sense of belonging. Columbus's "return," in a text that establishes a profound connection between his remains and the Dominican Republic, heralds the rebirth of the fatherland. Now that the remains have been restored to their legitimate owners, Dominicans can forget the divisiveness of the war and forge a new nation.

[IV]

Like the "Acta notarial" written to confirm the authenticity of the remains of Santo Domingo, the poems published in *El Estudio* transferred the religious and secular performances of 1877 into the archive to preserve the memory of the events for future generations but also to foreground their political implications. In the process, they exorcised the rituals practiced by the Spanish colonizers when taking possession of new territories, best exemplified in the accounts of Columbus's first landing in the Americas. Traces of these secular performances can be found, rather unexpectedly, in the ceremony that took place inside the cathedral the morning of the finding. Indeed, the embodied practices involved in these rituals displayed the theatricality of a "scenario of discovery"—a series of gestures meant to facilitate the transfer from the unknown to the known, from "the not-ours to the ours" (Taylor 54).¹⁹ According to Taylor, the scenario of discovery "activates the new by conjuring up the old—the many other versions of the discovery scenario that endow it with affective and explanatory power" (54). The structure of such a scenario is evident in Bartolomé de Las Casas's summary of Columbus's journal:

They reached a small island of the Lucayos, which is called in the language of the Indians "Guanahani." Immediately they saw naked people, and the admiral went ashore in the armed boat. . . . [He] brought out the royal standard, and the captains went with two banners of the Green Cross, which the admiral flew on all the ships as a flag, with an F and a Y, over each letter of their crown. . . . The admiral called the two captains and the others who had landed . . . and said that they should bear witness and testimony how he, before them all, took possession of the island, as in fact he did, for the King and Queen, his Sovereigns, making the declarations which are required, as is contained more at length in the testimonies which were there made in writing. Soon many people of the island gathered there.

(qtd. in Taylor 55–56)

In her analysis of this passage, Taylor calls attention to the theatrical nature of the ceremony: the participants recite official declarations, supported by the display of visible signs of authority, in the presence of "authorized" and "unauthorized spectators," "those who through this act of transfer become the dispossessed, potential slaves and servants" (57). The Dominican scenario of discovery followed a similar pattern. The ritual officiated by Cocchia, surrounded by visible signs of authority, facilitated the transfer of the remains from the unknown to the known. Declarations about the contents of the urn were made in public, in the presence of "authorized" and "unauthorized spectators." The utterances enacting the appropriation of the explorer's bones were put in writing, in a statement signed by civil and religious officials, as well as by representatives of the legitimating powers of France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, the United States—and even Spain. What was thought to be in possession of the former colonizers had now been transferred to the young republic. The irony, of course, is that the body passing from "the not-ours to the ours" was that of the discoverer himself. The roles had been reversed, and this reversal has clear implications for the symbolic order. This time the dispossessed were not the local inhabitants of the territory—now proud citizens of an independent nation—but the waning Spanish empire. It was the

scenario of discovery turned upside down: the same gestures that facilitated the conquest signaled the return of the lost archives, laying the foundation for the emergence of a national history.

The Spanish-Dominican controversy invites us to think about the archive and the repertoire as constituting and sustaining each other. Writing, the archival gesture par excellence, is present both in Columbus's act of taking possession of the inhabitants and territories of the Caribbean and in its reenactment—the act by which the inhabitants of a former Spanish colony took possession of Columbus. Without writing, these performances would have lacked any claim to legal authority. The archive, therefore, legitimates the repertoire. On the other hand, the records that endowed both acts with legitimacy would not have existed without the ceremony of which they are an essential part. Consequently, the archive too needs the repertoire. Products of embodied behaviors, written sources exist with the sole purpose of preserving the memory of other embodied behaviors, other reenactments. Furthermore, the ceremonies reveal the extent to which social performances are never mere repetitions. In the process of reenacting behaviors handed down from the past, a performance can deviate from the scenario and become invested with meanings that are as unscripted as they are unpredictable. It is in the space between the scenario and its multiple reenactments that postcolonial subjects exercise cultural agency.

Reversed scenarios of discovery provide a template for the appropriation and resignification of past behaviors in a way that highlights the profound ambivalence of postcolonial acts of memory. Nowhere is this ambivalence more evident than in the ceremonies surrounding the discovery of Columbus's remains. The irony that a newly independent nation would turn the ultimate representative of imperial ideology into a symbol of anticolonial resistance is thrown into sharp relief when read against the backdrop of the violence of Columbus's exploits in the New World. After all, the admiral's legacy, as Dixa Ramírez points out, is "an affirmation and celebration of a violent patriarchal and Eurocentric hierarchy" (123). Moreover, the state-sponsored myth of Columbus as "the (white) founding father" of the nation was later used to naturalize a racist representation of

Dominican identity (Krohn-Hansen 180). This *colonofilia*, however, should be placed within the larger context of Spanish American nationalist discourse. To members of the Creole elite such as Simón Bolívar and Francisco de Miranda, Columbus was not a cruel conquistador but “a hero who devoted himself to Spain, brought Christianity to the New World under its aegis, and then was neglected by its kings” (Bartosik-Vélez 107). Dominican poets and nation builders also shared this view and saw the 1877 finding of the bones as divine retribution for the injustices the Spanish empire inflicted on them. Whether other segments of society embraced this origin myth is an open question. Most likely, the mass of illiterate peasants who made up the majority of the Dominican population at the time did not even know who Columbus was, let alone why they should remember him. And those who did probably refrained from mentioning his name, which in Dominican popular culture is believed to bring bad luck.²⁰

Reflecting on the process by which an event becomes historical, Trouillot writes that as “chronology replaces process,” narrativization places the event in a single line and context fades out (113). Stripped of context and isolated from the amorphous mass of surrounding affairs as a single historical “fact,” the event can then be summoned in acts of commemoration, as “a product of power whose label has been cleansed of traces of power” (114). However, as the transatlantic controversy over Columbus’s bones demonstrates, the traces of colonial power can never be completely erased. They are everywhere, from the moment the event is legitimized in a ritual act of possession to the moment it enters the archive in written form. The Spanish-Dominican dispute took place in a field littered by traces of previous power struggles. Who found the bones, where were they found, and who could claim the legitimate right to own them were all questions that mattered because the answers, and even the possibility of asking such questions, were expressions of power.

We do not have to look hard to find comparable expressions in our own times. As I submitted this essay for publication, protesters across the United

States were tearing down statues of Columbus and other historical figures in the wake of the widespread movement for racial justice that swept the country after the killing of George Floyd. Although beheading a statue in Connecticut or throwing another into Baltimore’s Inner Harbor may seem incompatible with celebrating the finding of Columbus’s remains in a former Spanish colony, these actions have one thing in common: they were carried out by people who self-identified as targets of injustice. Both the protests of today and the nineteenth-century ceremonies I have discussed can be interpreted as performances meant to exert cultural and political power—the power to claim ownership of the past in order to shape the future.

NOTES

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1. All the translations from Spanish are mine unless otherwise stated. I have kept the orthography and punctuation used by the authors of all the primary sources. For a discussion of the inscriptions found on the urn, see Tejera 30–35; Cronau 74–82.

2. The remains taken to Havana in 1796 were transferred to Seville after the US invasion of Cuba in 1898—an indication of the degree to which Columbus’s bones continued to be subject to power struggles long after the 1877 controversy. A Spanish forensic team announced in 2006 that DNA tests of the bones held at the cathedral of Seville matched those of Columbus’s brother Diego, also buried there, which in their view proved that those were the remains of the explorer (Lavender 248). Dominican authorities dismissed the claim, arguing that members of the same family would share DNA, and refused to allow testing of the remains in their possession (González Díaz).

3. Several scholars were also allowed to examine the remains in the years leading to the fourth centennial of the discovery, including the German historian Rodolfo Cronau and the US ornithologist and traveler Frederick Ober, who tried to borrow them for the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago.

4. The construction of a lighthouse in Santo Domingo to honor Columbus’s legacy, a dream of Latin American *hispanismo* since the mid-nineteenth century, was inaugurated in time for the quincentennial celebrations of the “discovery” of America.

5. The historian Roberto Cassá attributes the lack of documental sources to the shortcomings of the colonial administration, the raids carried out by Spain's enemies during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the humid climate, insects, wars, the Haitian Revolution, and the change of colonial rulers at the end of the nineteenth century (16).

6. Connerton's work on performative memory sheds light on the ability of commemorative ceremonies not only to transmit official versions of the past but also to convey authority (74). We could also mention Foucault's analysis of the penal system, which makes evident that the modern state relies on embodied behaviors as means of social control (25).

7. Created in 1819 by the foremost revolutionary leader Simón Bolívar, the Republic of Colombia, today referred to as Gran Colombia, inspired independence movements in Santo Domingo, Cuba, and Puerto Rico. The state was dissolved after the secession of Venezuela and Ecuador in 1830.

8. On the attribution of authorship to Angulo Guridi, see Moreno Hernández (543).

9. See appendix II, "Cédulas de Carlos V" ("Decrees by Charles V"), in Cocchia, *Los restos* 276–79.

10. The precise date is unknown, but according to Tejera the renovation took place after the temple became the Metropolitan Church of the Indies in 1547 (13).

11. For a detailed discussion on Spain's campaign to turn Columbus into an imperial and national symbol, see Schmidt-Nowara, ch. 2.

12. The language of the affidavit would become one of the main arguments in favor of the Dominican case, since it never states that the "deceased" was indeed Columbus.

13. For this reason, Echeverri was removed from office and subjected to "calumnias, duros ataques i cruda censura" ("slanders, bitter attacks, and harsh reproofs") in the Spanish press (Echeverri 8). In a pamphlet intended to dispel the cloud that enveloped his conduct in the Santo Domingo affair, the disgraced public servant candidly insisted that he was convinced of the authenticity of the remains, as were the other diplomatic envoys in the Dominican Republic.

14. According to Lugo, López Prieto left Santo Domingo on 2 January 1878, the day before the remains were scheduled for examination (325).

15. Cocchia emphatically denied the charges, arguing that "no hubo escenas de ninguna especie: hubo el acto mas solemne y serio, hubo ademas aquel justo tributo de afecto y de júbilo que la noble Nacion española habria prestado á las cenizas del inmortal Descubridor, si estas hubieran sido descubiertas en Madrid" ("there were no scenes of any kind: there was the most solemn and earnest ceremony, there was also the just tribute of affection and joy that the noble Spanish nation would have paid to the ashes of the immortal discoverer, had they been found in Madrid"; *Los restos* 8).

16. In this respect, nineteenth-century Dominican society was no different from other societies across the globe. As Walsham puts it, "forms of remembering the revered dead tend to follow 'inherited scripts' deeply rooted in the soil of the Christian

tradition even where the latter has been repudiated as the opium of the people" (23–24).

17. The word *reliquias* appears often in Cocchia's writings, but also in other sources related to the finding. For examples, see "Resolución" 45; Alfonseca 79.

18. As Schmidt-Nowara points out, "critics of Spain, such as the Dominican Emiliano Tejera and the Catholic advocates of Columbus's canonization, Cocchia and Roselly de Lorgues, harped on the country's supposedly harsh and ungrateful treatment of Columbus in life and death" (76).

19. The agreement with the Catholic Monarchs required Columbus to make a solemn declaration claiming the land on behalf of the Spanish Crown "and to record those words for posterity by writing them down" (Seed 184). Morales Padrón has traced these traditions back to Germanic and Roman laws (328).

20. The Columbus curse, known as *fukú*, is described in Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007): "*Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, *fukú*—generally a curse or doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the *fukú* of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims; despite 'discovering' the New World the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (dique) divine voices. In Santo Domingo, the Land He Loved Best . . . the Admiral's very name has become synonymous with both kinds of *fukú*, little and large; to say his name aloud or even to hear it is to invite calamity on the heads of you and yours" (1). For nonfictional accounts of misfortunes commonly attributed to *fukú*, see Wucker 68–76; Rodríguez Juliá 107–08.

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Abstract: This essay examines the ceremonies surrounding the 1877 alleged finding of Christopher Columbus's remains in the cathedral of Santo Domingo. The act of exhuming a body believed to be in Spain's possession posed a challenge for the former colonial power, which was in the process of turning Columbus into a national symbol. The Spanish government forcefully denied the legitimacy of the Dominican claim, calling it a "spectacle" contrived by the nation's religious and civil authorities. Building on Diana Taylor's theoretical framework, the essay looks at the 1877 ceremonies as social performances that facilitated the transmission of deeply rooted cultural memories. Whereas the procession of the remains from the cathedral to the church repeated the ritualized gestures prescribed for the discovery and transfer of relics, the performance enacted in the cathedral upended a different "scenario of discovery"—the one enacted by Spanish conquerors when they took possession of a new territory.